

Independent



THE INDEPENDENT
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29 OCTOBER 2008

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Heathcliff and me

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The Heights

Sam Taylor-Wood reveals how Heathcliff and the moors inspired



a series of wild and romantic photographs

I shot the new *Ghosts* photographic series, based on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, on the Harworth moors, Yorkshire, near the farmhouse ruins of Top Withens. This place has long been associated with the Earnshaws' fictional home in the novel, and the surrounding moors were a possible inspiration for it.

I hadn't read the book until last year, but I picked it up because I had it in my head that it would be fantastically romantic. I was at our second home in North Yorkshire at the time, not far from the moors, and it just seemed the right book to read on a November evening, in the howling winds.

Reading it made me want to get up there on the moors, with my camera, to experience the wild landscape, which was the only thing that felt redemptive in the whole novel. I wanted to feel the turbulent emotional weather of that book and the harshness of the landscape that had inspired her.

I set off in February, with my assistant, struggling unromantically across the wild moors, in heavy sleet, with lots of cameras, almost as if I intended to photograph the wind. I wanted to do something that didn't have people in but was peopled in its romanticism in our memory. It was the right time of the year to be going, in the freezing cold. I wanted to capture the sense of the unremitting weather there.

Filming was over about three days and we started work at 7am

to catch the dense mist that rolls in during the morning and typifies the Yorkshire landscape, and we worked right through until dusk.

Wuthering Heights is one of those books on a list of books that you should read in your lifetime. It is amazing when you read it that there is not one redeeming feature about any of the characters. It is just unremitting pain and relentless torture of each other throughout.

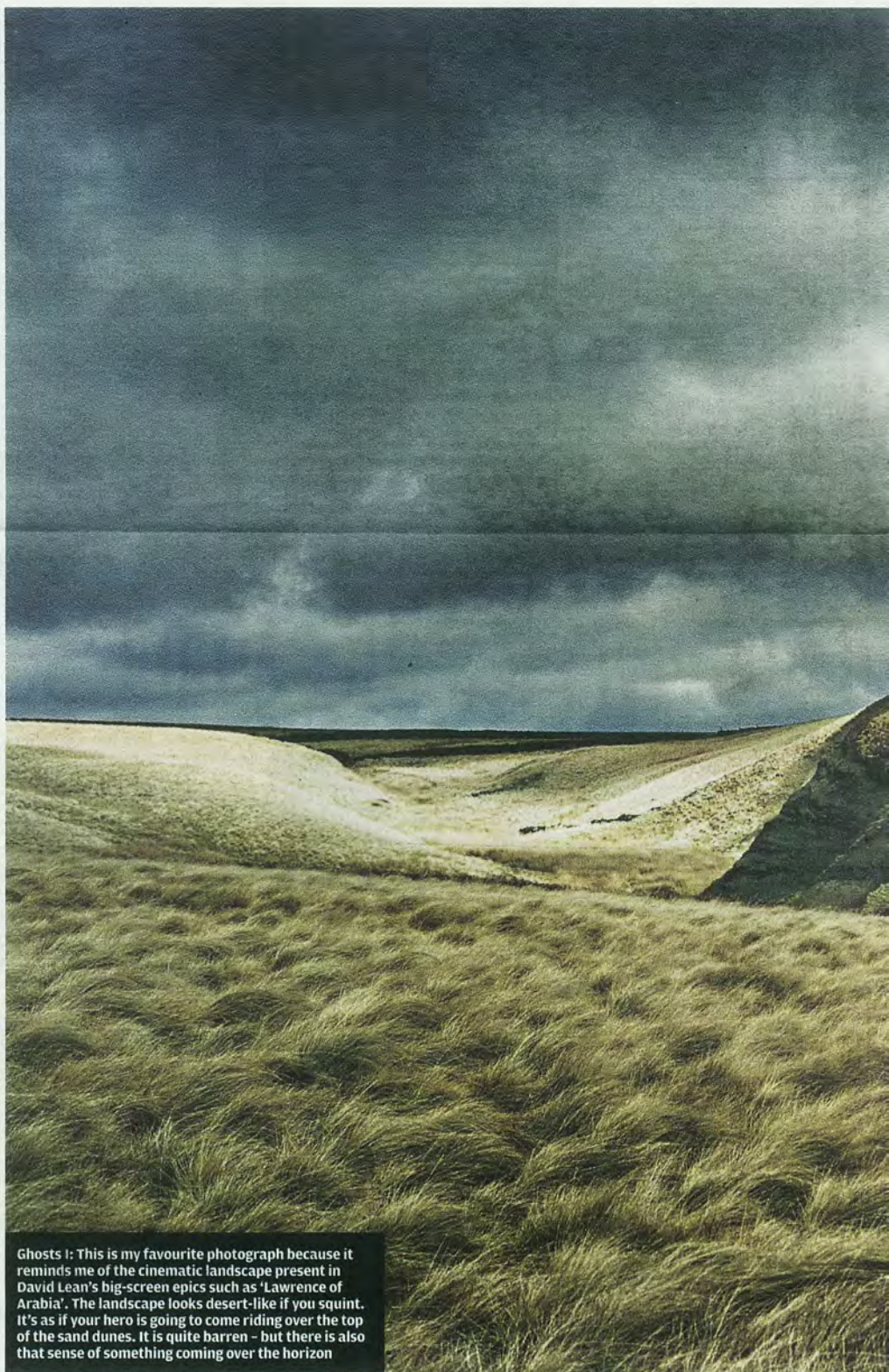
I was amazed at how Heathcliff has become such a romantic figure. There is an underlying, burning passion and love that holds them together, even though it is projected in pain and misery. But within the constantly sadistic relationships and the unremitting cruelty I was trying

“The wild landscape was the only thing redemptive in the whole novel!”

to find in my pictures some sort of redemptive quality in that landscape, as well as capture the bleakness that those characters are set against in Brontë's novel.

All the photographs were taken in a four-mile radius of where the fictional *Wuthering Heights* is supposed to be set. I don't think any of the pictures are too direct in their links to the actual book. *Wuthering Heights* served as a backdrop. I soaked up the landscape that Brontë's inspiration came from and then made it my own.

The 'Ghosts' series is part of the 'Yes I No' exhibition at White Cube, London SW1 (020-7930 5373) to 29 November, and No 1 The Piazza, Covent Garden, London WC2 to 5 November. Taylor-Wood's single 'I'm In Love With a German Film Star' is out now



Ghosts I: This is my favourite photograph because it reminds me of the cinematic landscape present in David Lean's big-screen epics such as 'Lawrence of Arabia'. The landscape looks desert-like if you squint. It's as if your hero is going to come riding over the top of the sand dunes. It is quite barren - but there is also that sense of something coming over the horizon

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See more images from the exhibition at
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of passion



Ghosts II: This picture of two leafless trees is one of the ones I call 'Cathy and Heathcliff' to myself. It feels like their roots are intertwined and they are inhabiting the same land. But everything is rumbling on beneath the surface and those two solitary figures are standing opposed to each other



Ghosts X: There is something about the vulnerability of the ram sheltering in among the grass and the landscape. I'd taken a photo of a ram called 'Bound Ram' a few years ago, so it felt like a continuation of a minor theme



Ghosts IV: My assistant and I walked for four hours in this unremitting sleet and finally we got to Top Withins, where the action of 'Wuthering Heights' is supposed to be set. Suddenly, the clouds parted and the sun came out - and then this picture was taken © SAM TAYLOR-WOOD & WHITE CUBE GALLERY