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# The Critics of Wuthering Heights

Paul M. Reigstad

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By

Paul M. Reigstad

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E. H. Castetter
DEAN

5/22/1956
DATE

Thesis committee

C. V. Wicker.
CHAIRMAN

George Arms

Norton B. Crowell

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# INTRODUCTION

An examination of the criticism of Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights reveals that from 1847, the year of its publication, until the last quarter of the century, when Swinburne came to its rescue, the novel was considered by most readers to be worthless and by others to be evil and even contemptible. A few discerning critics saw in it a work of genius, but their voices were not strong enough to awaken an intelligent critical interest in the minds of the majority, who had already consigned it to the ranks of the ignoble. However, with the last quarter of the nineteenth century came a rediscovery of Wuthering Heights, and a wave of new and honest critical interest acknowledged the author to be, in the words of Clement Shorter in his preface to the complete edition of the works of Emily Brontë, "the most striking genius nineteenth-century womanhood has afforded us."

The publication of Emily Brontë's novel caused so little stir that almost no mention of it can be found in the newspapers and periodicals of the day. In fact, except for the widely-publicized comments of Sydney Dobell and Charlotte Brontë, both of whom defended Wuthering Heights vigorously,

the modern reader has little chance to be acquainted with the critical judgments of the novel by Miss Brontë's contemporaries. This study surveys most of the early reviews in English that are known to exist, a relatively simple task in view of the lack of interest in the novel. It also attempts to show that the influence of Evangelical morality in the nineteenth century was a powerful factor in the continued refusal of critics to accept the novel as a work of art. It has been necessary to present a cross-section of the available criticism from 1850 on, but the selection has been carefully made to include material which would reveal the gradual emergence of Wuthering Heights from obscurity to a position of world fame.

This study, "The Critics of Wuthering Heights," will deal with a history of criticism of the novel from 1847 to the present time with special emphasis on contemporary attitudes which explain the unreasoned damnation under which it was smothered for so many years.

## CHAPTER I

## LITERARY TASTES IN EARLY VICTORIAN ENGLAND

While Emily Brontë was at her desk in cold Haworth parsonage struggling with the elemental and violent forces which peopled her little-known world of Wuthering Heights, many of her contemporaries in early Victorian society were secluded in the privacy of their bedchambers, devouring the latest novel -- a situation considered by some in those days not unlike a clandestine rendezvous with a forbidden lover. For though the great English masses were reading more than ever before in the nation's history, and though Sir Walter Scott had lent considerable respectability to the novel, the form was still considered intolerable by many, and certain religious groups thought it induced an intoxication second only to strong wine. The Evangelicals and Dissenters, particularly, frowned upon novel reading and interpreted any association with novels as consorting with the devil.

In order to understand the tastes of the great mass of readers at the time of the publication of Wuthering Heights, it will be well to consider the tremendous growth of reading which, by this time, was not limited to privileged groups but was a pastime enjoyed also by the great

working class. Two phenomena which occurred almost simultaneously were perhaps responsible for this growth: the use of steam power, which changed the processes of manufacturing, and the extension of popular education. Ashley Thorndike in Literature in a Changing Age notes that on

> . . . September 28, 1814, the London Times was first printed with steam power at the astounding rate of eleven hundred impressions per hour, and it justly proclaimed the fact as 'the greatest improvement connected with printing since the discovery of the art itself.' The era of cheap books and modern journalism had begun.[1]

Thorndike adds that the circulation of the Times increased from 5,000 daily in 1814 to 50,000 in 1855.

The extension of popular education, brought about primarily by the great Sunday School Movement and the growth of the day schools, owed much to the use of steam power in printing and to the consequent lower cost of printed material. By 1828, according to Thorndike, there were more than 900,000 Sunday School pupils; this number was increased toward the middle of Queen Victoria's reign to over 3,000,000. Schools for adults had been established and were flourishing, and although the students were not taught to write (some authorities feared this accomplishment would manifest itself in a wave of forgeries if granted to the lower

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[1] Ashley H. Thorndike, Literature in a Changing Age (New York, 1920), p. 32.

classes), they were taught to read.

Archibald Constable (1774-1827), the Scotch publisher of the works of Sir Walter Scott, was convinced that his country was acquiring the reading habit. Thorndike tells us that at a conference with Scott in May, 1825, Constable discussed his plans for putting "a good library into every decent house" by printing books in such large quantities, "ay, by millions," that they could be sold cheaply. He died before he had accomplished this scheme, but to us who live in the era of cheap books and cheap-book clubs, his words are prophetic.

The growth of literacy encouraged the advent of the tract, a term which came to be synonymous with moral stories, religious instruction, and missionary work. The tracts had a tremendous influence on the average new reader, whose acquaintance was primarily with religious literature. (Thorndike notes that in 1830, out of an annual output of 10,000 books, 3,000 were devoted to theology.) Because religious literature was inexpensive and available, the new reader read whatever came his way. In 1844 the Religious Tract Society alone published 15,367,676 tracts, many of which were distributed from house to house. These became an important item in the literary diet of the average British reader at the time of the publication of Wuthering Heights.

Though men of moderation were suspicious of the "enthusiasm" resulting from the Evangelical insistence upon personal conversion and from the emotional element in their religion, by the beginning of "the Victorian era Evangelical morality affected not only the great majority of middle-class people but most of the great leaders as well, whatever their doctrinal beliefs."[2] Hence many people throughout the entire Victorian Age were taught in childhood, as was the London journalist William T. Stead (1849-1912), that the worst and deadliest time-wasting amusements were the theater (Devil's chapel), cards (Devil's prayer book), and the novel (Devil's Bible). Samuel Warren's cleric in Ten Thousand a Year (1839) had told his congregation about Miss Snooks, "who kept a circulating library and, plunging still deeper into sin, went on one unhappy Thursday to a theater. She was taken ill on Friday, and 'was a lifeless corpse when the next Sabbath dawned.'"[3]

In Victorian Prelude Maurice Quinlan cites Hannah More's Coelebs in Search of a Wife (1809) as a novel typical of the temper of the early Victorians. It was Miss More's

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[2] Samuel C. Chew, The Nineteenth Century and After, Vol. IV, A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York, 1948), p. 1287.

[3] Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Books (London, 1935), p. 67.

tracts dealing with the reformation of the poor ("Village Politics" and "Repository Tracts") that led ultimately to the founding of the Religious Tract Society. Though the novel dates from early in the century, the "high" tone of it appealed to those readers of later generations whose literary tastes continued to be strongly influenced by Evangelical morality. The author, who herself objected to novel reading, said she wrote the book because as long as people patronized lending libraries, there was a need for the sort of thing she offered. It is the story of a young man in search of a wife. He meets several girls who for various reasons fall short of his standards: some are not domestically inclined, some waste time reading novels, some lack knowledge of religion, some dress in "transparent and scanty clothes." Finally Coelebs meets a quiet, modest young lady who is silent except when she expresses her views on religion, morals, or manners. One of her services to humanity is visiting the poor, and when Coelebs discovers her reading the Bible to a poverty-stricken woman on her deathbed, he knows he has found the morally ideal mate.

Two popular novelists writing about the middle of the nineteenth century were Elizabeth Sewell and Charlotte Yonge, both strongly influenced by the Evangelical morality of their time. Amy Herbert (1844), by Elizabeth Sewell,

compares the lives of religious and worldly people. The novels of Miss Yonge offered a greater appeal. They showed plainly the reward of virtue and of steadfast clinging to the church. The villains of her stories are non-church characters; and the malevolent action, aside from the wickedness of these villains, results usually from neglect or misuse of church privileges. The ideal heroine for a novel, in the opinion of these church groups, was a strong and devoted church-woman, the perfect blend of spiritual and intellectual passion expressed in a sweet serenity of conviction.

Though the power of Evangelical morality was seriously weakened by political, social, economic, and scientific advances in the Victorian Age, it continued to dominate the thinking of many people, particularly of those who sought refuge in the past or were determined to maintain the status quo. The Reverend Mr. William Hale White (Mark Rutherford), whose "special province is that of the religious-minded-fundamentalists who are shaken in their faith by the new ideas of science and the new criticism of the Bible,"[4] wrote in The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford (1881) of the literary tastes of his congregation. One evening when it came his

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[4] Chew, p. 1489.

turn to read aloud at a Dorcas meeting, he read from The Vicar of Wakefield. After several chapters a sanctimonious deacon approached him and requested that the project be abandoned,

> 'Because, you know, Mr. Rutherford, the company is mixed; there are young leedies present, and perhaps, Mr. Rutherford, a book with a more requisite tone might be more suitable on such an occasion.' What he meant I did not know, and how to find a book with a more requisite tone I did not know. However, the next time, in my folly, I tried a selection from George Fox's Journal. Mr. Snale objected to this too. It was 'hardly of a character adapted for social intercourse,' he thought; and furthermore, 'although Mr. Fox might be a very good man, and was a converted character, yet he did not, you know, Mr. Rutherford,belong to us.' So I was reduced to that class of literature which of all others I most abominated, and which always seemed to me the most profane, -- religious and sectarian gossip, religious novels designed to make religion attractive, and other slip-slop of this kind.[5]

If the Church had strong ideas about what sort of contemporary literature her people could read, it had equally strong ideas about what was good and bad in the classics. Dr. Thomas Bowdler in 1818 issued his Family Shakespeare from which he had deleted all that was inconsistent with Evangelical morality. Later James Plumptre cleaned up Shakespeare with three aims in mind: to remove objectionable ideas, to delete offensive expressions, and to introduce a recognizable moral purpose. But there were within the church narrow minds

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[5] Mark Rutherford, Autobiography (London, 1936), pp. 36-37.

which objected to Shakespeare even when purified. Sir Edmund Gosse (1849-1928) as a child heard an address at a religious conference in London in which the speaker said, "At this very moment there is proceeding unreproved a blasphemous celebration of the birth of Shakespeare, a lost soul now suffering for his sins in hell."[6]

Books prescribing the conduct of young ladies grew in favor and strongly influenced the new reader in the early years of the nineteenth century, according to Quinlan. These books taught what literature to read and what clothes to wear and warned of the dangers lurking in the world of fashion. To the readers and writers of such edifying works, the ideas Mary Wollstonecraft had expressed in her essay "Rights of Women" (1792) were heresy. Her belief that women should cultivate their intellects shocked many timid traditionalists who believed in the superiority of the male and in the danger of overeducating the female. One feels that Mary Wollstonecraft was the very sort of woman whom Coelebs would have found to be lacking in womanly dignity. Quinlan cites an article called "Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex" in which the author exhibits this particularly morbid prudery: "Every undertaker should employ women for the

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[6] Thorndike, p. 70.

express purpose of supplying the female dead with those things which are requisite. How shocking is the idea of our persons being exposed, even after death, to the observation of a parcel of undertaker's men."[7]

Reports of tremendous advances in science during the nineteenth century brought profound shock to many readers, particularly to those whose reading had been supervised by the Church. A book like Robert Chambers' Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844), which maintained the theory of organic evolution in animal life, brought a great cry of protest from press, pulpit, and university; for many readers, like Theobald in The Way of All Flesh, had never doubted the truth of a single word in the Bible and had never met anyone who doubted and had never read anything that was contrary. As a result Chambers apologized for having dared to shock their sensibilities.

It seems obvious that the spirit of Evangelical morality was pervasive throughout the age and that the average person was strongly influenced by it. Wuthering Heights appeared at an extremely inopportune time. The years 1832 to 1848 were extremely restless and economically insecure as contrasted to later nineteenth century prosperity due

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[7] Maurice J. Quinlan, Victorian Prelude (New York: 1941), p. 154.

to free trade and increased industrialism. The spirit of Evangelical morality certainly helped to awaken the social conscience of the period. Such books as Nicholas Nickleby (Charles Dickens, 1839), Sybil: or the Two Nations (Benjamin Disraeli, 1845), Mary Barton (Mrs. Gaskell, 1848), Yeast (Charles Kingsley, 1848); and such poems as "The Cry of the Children" (Mrs. Browning, 1843) and "The Song of the Shirt" (Thomas Hood, 1843) caused the reading public to be aware of the need for reform of social injustices.

Had Wuthering Heights been inspired by a newly-awakened social conscience or been conceived in the spirit of Evangelical morality, it would have had a better chance to be noticed. But it was so completely out of keeping with the spirit of the times that it won little sympathy. It is significant that the first sensitive review of the novel was by a poet, Sydney Dobell; for the poet, not the sociologist, is concerned with the human soul. Emily Brontë is neither reformer nor moralist, and the spirit of her novel is so distant from the mainstream of contemporary thought that one is not surprised it was scarcely noticed and that when it was noticed, it was condemned as immoral.

## CHAPTER II

## THE CONTEMPORANEOUS CRITICS OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

According to Charlotte Brontë in her preface to the second edition of Wuthering Heights, when Emily's novel was published in December, 1847, the "immature but very real powers revealed . . . were scarcely recognized; its import and nature were misunderstood; the identity of its author was misrepresented; it was said that this was an earlier and ruder attempt of the same pen which had produced Jane Eyre." The two hundred copies printed lasted until 1850, at which time this second edition appeared.

In the three years that elapsed between the first and second editions, most critics ignored the book. Those who reviewed it were inclined to agree that though there were evidences of an immature power, it was doomed to failure. There were exceptions, of course, notably the review by the poet Sydney Dobell, which will be discussed later; but most contemporary critics shared the estimate of Lady Eastlake (who began her career in 1836 with an unfriendly article on Goethe) that Wuthering Heights was a study of animals in their native state, a book in which the aspect of the characters was

". . . too odiously and abominably pagan to be palatable to the most vitiated class of novel readers. With all the unscrupulousness of the French school of novels it combines that repulsive vulgarity in the choice of its vice which supplies its own antidote."[8]

The critic writing for Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine regretted that he lacked space to discuss Wuthering Heights thoroughly. He did recommend "all our readers who love novelty to get this story, for we can promise them that they never have read anything like it before. It is very puzzling and very interesting . . ."[9]

A review in The Atlas (1848) commended the story for the power of the general tone, scenes, and characters, but it deplored the lack of sunshine and the presence of certain despicable personages.

> Wuthering Heights is a strange, inartistic story. There are evidences in every chapter of a sort of rugged power--an unconscious strength--which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage. The general effect is inexpressibly painful. We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity. Jane Eyre is a book which affects the reader to tears; it touches the most hidden sources of emotion.

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[8] Lady Eastlake, "Vanity Fair -- and Jane Eyre," Quarterly Review, LXXXIV (1848), 175.

[9] Charles Simpson, Emily Brontë (London, 1929), p. 173 (citing Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine, 1848).

> Wuthering Heights casts a gloom over the mind not easily to be dispelled. It does not soften; it harasses, it exenterates. . . . [It] is a sprawling story, carrying us with no mitigation of anguish, through two generations of sufferers--though one presiding evil genius sheds a grim shadow over the whole, and imparts a singleness of malignity to the somewhat disjointed tale. A more natural story we do not remember to have read.[10]

The reviewer praises Emily Brontë's remarkable accomplishment in capturing the "reality of unreality," but concludes that the final effect is dismal; for "even the female characters excite something of loathing and much of contempt."

Among the papers found in Emily's desk after her death were the two reviews quoted above and the following notice from Britannia (1848). Excepting Dobell's criticism, the Britannia review is the most discerning appraisal of Wuthering Heights by a contemporary critic. The writer is aware of a savage wildness in nature and in the chief characters and their actions, and he realizes that wildness is as vital to life as tranquility and as worthy of experience. Rugged rocks and gnarled roots, the dank ground, overhanging foliage, the cry of wild birds and beasts, the slithering of a snake -- all these primeval aspects of nature fascinate the mind though they do not charm. So it is with Wuthering Heights.

> The uncultured freedom of native character presents more rugged aspects than we meet with in educated society.

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[10] Ibid., pp. 175-76 (citing The Atlas, 1848).

Heathcliff can be found "so near our own dwellings as the summit of a Lancashire or Yorkshire moor."

The reviewer is disturbed not to be able to find any intention on the part of the author in the drawing of Heathcliff or any obvious moral. There are, he says, certain rough dashes at character which succeed, and the book certainly avoids the commonplace and affectation. But the language is not always appropriate, and the evil of Heathcliff seems inconsistent with his tender love for Catherine. The reviewer, concluding that this must be a first book, hopes that the author will produce a second one,

> . . . giving himself more time in its composition than in the present case, developing his incidents more carefully, eschewing exaggeration and obscurity, and looking steadily at human life, under all its moods, for those pictures of the passions that he may desire to sketch for our public benefit. It may be well also to be sparing of certain oaths and phrases, which do not materially contribute to any character, and are by no means to be reckoned among the evidences of a writer's genius. We detest the affectation and effeminate frippery which is but too frequent in the modern novel, and willingly trust ourselves with an author who goes at once fearlessly into the moors and desolate places, for his heroes; but we must at the same time stipulate with him that he shall not drag into light all that he discovers, of coarse and loathsome, in his wanderings, but simply so much good and ill as he may find necessary to elucidate his history. . .[13]

Another consideration of the novel appeared in 1848 in The American Review; it had the typical approach of

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[13] Review of Wuthering Heights, The Examiner (1848), 21-22.

Humility can be found too near our own dwelling, on the summit of a dingy, or Yorkshire moor.[3]

The reviewer is astonished not to be able to find any intention on the part of the author in the writing of Heathcliff or any obvious moral. There are, he says, certain rough designs or sketches which suggest, but the book wrongly avoids the responsibilities and attractions. But the language is not always inappropriate, and the skill of Heathcliff seems inconsistent with his tender love for Catherine. The reviewer, concluding that this was her first book, hopes that the author will produce a better one.

. . . Living thereafter more than in the generation which in one pressed, saw, developed his industrious work curiously, enjoying contemplation and observing, and loving strongly as human life, unsure, all its moods, on those places on of the peasants that he saw, daring to express for our public benefit. It may be well also to be aware that on a fresh n-the phrases, which do not materially contribute to any other type, and are by reason to be increased among the wilderness of a writer's genius. We desire the effective and effectively expressive property which is not frequent in the modern novel, and willingly trace consistency with an author who goes at once forcefully into the rooms and dwelling places, for his honesty but we must as the work that situations with his that he shall not drag into light all that he discovers, of course and shadows, in all warmth and, but, a reality as much good and ill as he may find necessary to plume down his history. . . .[3]

Another consideration of the novel appeared in July in The American Review; in her the lyrical appreciation of

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[3] Review of Wuthering Heights, The Examiner (1848), 21-22.

Evangelical morality, the writer condemning primarily the coarseness and vulgarity which permeate the story and which, he feared, would have a bad effect upon young ladies and gentlemen. The swearing is inexcusable and indicates the baseness of the author. For what, he asks, is worse than swearing in writing when the author reveals his own inherent coarseness? The reviewer finds that Ellis Bell has "got the maggot in his brain" that bad language is stronger than refined language, that bad manners are more natural than good. He cites a conversation between Cathy and Isabella which he considers indelicate and improper, cautioning young ladies never to use such scalding vituperative language.

Throughout his essay the reviewer is concerned with moral wrongs. He mentions specifically the moral wrong involved in Cathy's marrying Edgar when she loves Heathcliff. The greatest moral wrong is found in the scene where Cathy, pregnant with Edgar's child, sees Heathcliff after his return. There is not a page of the review which does not contain some objection to the coarseness and immorality of Wuthering Heights. The writer feels that it is his duty to caution ladies

> . . . against it simply on account of the coarseness of the style. . . . The book is original; it is powerful, full of suggestiveness. But still it is coarse. The narrative talks on in a way that if an attempt to imitate it be ever made in a parlor, the experimenter should

> be speedily ejected. It ought to be banished from refined society, because it does not converse in a proper manner. Setting aside the profanity, which if a writer introduces into a book, he offends against both politeness and good morals, there is such a general roughness and savageness in the soliloquies and dialogues here given as should never be found in a work of art. The whole tone of the style of the book smacks of lowness. It would indicate that the writer was not accustomed to the society of gentlemen, and was not afraid, indeed, rather glorified in showing it.[14]

Developing his argument against coarseness, the reviewer observes that a person may be unmannerly because he lacks delicacy of perception or because he wants to be; unfortunately, the author of Wuthering Heights is unmannerly for both reasons.

> His rudeness is chiefly real but partly assumed. . . . The following is put into the mouth of a young boy telling how his playmate was bitten by a dog.-- 'The devil had seized her ankle, Nelly; I heard his abominable snorting. She did not yell out--no! She would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow. I did, though; I vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom; and I got a stone and thrust it between his jaws, and tried with all my might to cram it down his throat.[15]

The reviewer admits that there is a strange power in the story from which the reader cannot escape, even after he has laid the book aside. As a result it is difficult to estimate its merits with confidence.

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[14] G. W. Peck, Review of Wuthering Heights, The American Review, VII (1848), 573.

[15] Ibid., p. 574.

> We have been taken and carried through a new region, a melancholy waste, with here and there patches of beauty; have been brought in contact with fierce passions, with extremes of love and hate, and with sorrow that none but those who have suffered can understand. This has not been accomplished with ease, but with an ill-mannered contempt for the decencies of language, and in a style which might resemble that of a Yorkshire farmer who should have endeavored to eradicate his provincialism by taking lessons of a London footman.[16]

Some have been heard to say, he continues, that Wuthering Heights is next to Shakespeare for depth of insight and dramatic power. Be that as it may; some cannot get through it at all. Everyone agrees that it is morbid, that it communicates a feeling of sickliness to the reader. When the book has been read, one has the feeling of "passing from a sick chamber to a comfortable parlor."

The reviewer decided that Ellis Bell writes so coarsely and cruelly because he has "suffered, not disappointment in love, but some great mortification of pride." Evidently his position in society prevents him from associating with those among whom he thinks he has intellect enough to associate. Certainly he is ignorant of the habits of polite society. The greatest fault in the book, next to its coarseness and immorality, he concludes, is its exaggeration and untruthfulness. It deals with extremes of passion, and there is scarcely a scene which does not place the actors in as

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[16] Ibid., p. 572.

painful a situation as is possible.

> The characters are drawn with dramatic force and made to seem alive, yet when we lay the book aside, they collapse, they die, they vanish; and we see that we have been cheated with illusory semblances. The children know too much about their minds and too little about their bodies. . . . The grown-up characters are the mere tools of fixed passions. Their actions and sayings are like those of monomaniacs or persons who have breathed nitrous oxide. When they hate, they swear and fight and pull out each others' hair. When they are grieved, they drink themselves to madness. . . . Agony is heaped on agony, till the deficient mass topples down headlong. The fancy gives out, and like a tired hound, rushes reeling to the conclusion.[17]

In this "coarse extravagance" may be perceived genius and ability; art, however, is lacking. Consequently it will die and be forgotten. "Cathy's ghost will not walk the earth forever; and the insane Heathcliff will soon rest quietly in his coveted repose."

This review has been quoted fully because it is typical of the unfriendly criticism leveled at Wuthering Heights upon its appearance as well as during much of the last half of the nineteenth century; it vividly exposes the literary tastes of critics as well as of readers at that time. The influence of Evangelical morality on the development of the reading habit is obvious. The critic quoted above probably spoke for the average reader who demanded of literature those proprieties mentioned in the introductory chapter. Wuthering

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[17] Ibid., p. 579.

Heights is not an "inspirational" novel; its characters are not admirable church members who eagerly profess their faith. Its language is not of the drawing room, nor are its young ladies modest and reserved. Furthermore, to an age which believed that if God had not been indelicate when he created men and women, at least he had done something which one should not discuss, the insistence on the passion of love brazenly acknowledged its potentialities at the same time that it violated the code of respectability.

An English critic in 1848 also chided the author for having allowed his characters to do some of the bad things they did. But this same critic was gratified to discover a moral which, though it was probably not the author's intention, did justify somewhat the existence of the novel.

> Mr. Ellis Bell, before constructing his novel, should have known that forced marriages, under threats and confinements, are illegal, and parties instrumental thereto can be punished. And second, that wiles made by young ladies' minors are invalid.
>
> The volumes are powerfully written records of wickedness and they have a moral--they show what Satan could do with the law of entail.[18]

The amazing fact about these unfriendly early reviews, which pretend to be critical, is that they completely lack a sense of what is to be expected of great literature and, more

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[18] Review of Wuthering Heights, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, XV (1848), 140.

particularly, a sense of what qualities of Wuthering Heights deserve admiration. Most of them approach the subject from one point of view: Is the work morally acceptable to the tastes of the readers, and does the author tell them what they want to be told and are used to being told?

It remained for Sydney Dobell to recognize the triumph of Emily Brontë, to realize that Wuthering Heights (which he too mistakenly considered an early novel by Charlotte), whatever its faults, was the work of a genius destined for immortality. He said that there was not anywhere in the novel a place or a person that did not bear the stamp of genius. When one has read the novel, he looks

> . . . back at the whole story as to a world of brilliant figures in an atmosphere of mist; shapes that come out upon the eyes, and burn their colours into the brain, and depart into the enveloping fog. It is the unformed writing of a giant's hand . . . the large utterance of a baby God. . . . The thinking out of some of these pages is the masterpiece of a poet, rather than the hybrid creation of the novelist. The mass of readers will probably yawn over the whole; but, in the memory of those whose remembrance makes fame, the images in these pages will live--when every word that conveyed them is forgotten--as a recollection of things heard and seen. This is the highest triumph of description.[19]

Mr. Dobell knew well the tastes of the mass of the people of his day and spoke the truth when he predicted that the

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[19] E. M. Delafield [pseud.], The Brontës: Their Lives Recorded by Their Contemporaries (London, 1935), pp. 134-35 (citing Palladium, 1850).

average reader would yawn over the book. His praise is not only prophetic of the fiery enthusiasm of later readers; it is also one of the few reviews before 1875 which acknowledge Wuthering Heights to be a well-planned work of art, something more than the frenzied imaginings of a fevered brain.

The second edition of Wuthering Heights (1850) was scarcely noticed. One review appeared in 1851, and the writer's judgment was no more sensitive than the judgment of earlier critics. He found the novel to be

> . . . one of the most repellent books we ever read. With all its talent--and it has much--we cannot imagine its being read through from any fascination in the tale itself. The powers it displays are not only premature, but are misdirected. The characters sketched are, for the most part, dark and loathsome, while a gloomy and sombre air rests on the whole scene, which renders it anything but pleasing.[20]

The critic then discusses the background of the story with its strong and convincing pictures of nature, which he finds admirable; however, he cannot approve of the dramatis personae.

> Such a company we never saw grouped before; and we hope never to meet with its like again. Heathcliff is a perfect monster, more demon than human. Hindley Earnshaw is a besotted fool, for whom we scarce feel pity; while his son Hareton is at once ignorant and brutish until, as by the wand of an enchanter, he takes polish in the last scene of the tale, and retires a docile and apt scholar. The two Catherines . . . are equally exaggerations, more than questionable in some parts of their procedure, and

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[20] Review of Wuthering Heights, Eclectic Review, XXIV (1851), 182.

> absurdly unnatural in the leading incidents of their life. Isabella Linton is one of the silliest and most credulous girls that fancy ever painted; and the enduring affection and tenderness of her brother Edgar are so exhibited as to produce the impression of a feeble rather than of a virtuous character. Of the minor personages we need say nothing, save that, with slight exceptions, they are in keeping with their superiors.[21]

He concludes that the incidents are as unattractive and improbable as the characters, entirely lacking in truthfulness or in harmony with the natural world. The work has no more power to move our sympathies than some of the extravagances of the Middle Ages, "or the ghost stories which made our granddames tremble."

Most of these criticisms have admitted that the writer has uncommon talent. They admit the presence of a strange pervading power, but in their estimation these are virtues of negligible value in the face of the absence of moral instruction and commonplace characterization. Because Wuthering Heights is different, it is not acceptable, even as Mr. Fox was not acceptable to Deacon Snale in Mark Rutherford's Autobiography because he was not "one of us."

According to Walter Murdock in The Victorian Era: Its Strengths and Weaknesses, sin to the early Victorians meant breaking a conventional code rather than disregarding the fundamental decencies of life. The moral code was based on

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[21] Ibid.

repression, and decorum was mistaken for morality. Decency meant ignoring the fundamental functions of life. Words such as "delicacy," "refinement," "coarse," "improper," and "indelicate" were popular in many a respectable person's vocabulary as can be seen from the examination of early reviews of Wuthering Heights. Those who accepted this view of sin and indecency were horrified upon the appearance of Emily's novel by its violence and passion, its unconcern for decorum and respectability. Could any novel have been less suited to the palates of readers who were concerned with manners rather than emotions, with delicacy rather than honesty?

Peter Bayne, the Scotch critic, writing in The Edinburgh Review found Wuthering Heights "unquestionably and irremediably monstrous," while at the same time (1855) Matthew Arnold eulogized Emily Brontë in "Elegy in Haworth Churchyard" as one "whose soul / Knew no fellow for might." Bayne said that a work like Wuthering Heights serves only to brutalize and blunt the mind, and he prophesied that it would survive only its generation and then be forgotten. Arnold said that the world had had nothing like Emily Brontë since Byron died.

## CHAPTER III

## THE REDISCOVERY OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

As is true of a great many works of art, Wuthering Heights appeared in advance of its time, and the sneering critics helped to remove it from public notice. Some of them had found it interesting and unusual, the work of misapplied genius, while others had dismissed it with disgust; nearly all agreed that it lacked permanent value. Then in 1873 the silence was broken by a review in Galaxy. The writer defends Wuthering Heights from what he considers hasty and unfair judgment based solely on the somber and gloomy atmosphere pervading the novel.

> Though every page of that work bears the stamp of true genius, its sombre and lurid coloring, and the gloomy and repellent qualities of its leading characters, have procured for it so decided a prejudice that it has been only once or twice candidly criticized and fairly judged. . . . Indeed its faults are too prominent to admit of either glazing or concealment. No amount of sophistry would persuade any one that Heathcliff was a noble nature, warped by adverse circumstances; or that the elder Catherine was anything but fierce, faithless, and foolish; or that such a swift succession of acts of coarse cruelty was probable or even possible in any Yorkshire manorhouse, however isolated. . . . Though a brutal, it is not a sensual book; though coarse, it is not vulgar; though bad, it is not indecent. . . . Full of savage ferocity as the whole story is, it contains some exquisite pictures of childlike simplicity and innocence . . . and there are

> bits of moorland, and dimly lighted and quaint interiors, and here and there a grand outline of distant hills, and grander stretch of sky, which are drawn by a master hand.[22]

Even in a frankly sympathetic review like this, we find that the writer cannot accept the elemental qualities which later critics have decided explain the peculiar genius of Wuthering Heights. Certainly the imaginative and sensitive mind could not agree that

> . . . such a character [as Heathcliff] could not exist; and the longer we analyse it the more powerfully we are convinced that he is no man, but the peak of a fine though fevered fancy, in that fancy's infancy. . . . When a woman's imagination possesses virile fire and power, it is apt in its first essays to project itself as far as possible from the beaten track of feminine grace and refinement, to delight in the sombre and the lurid, and to indulge in displays of strength which are too often uncouth and savage, because unmeasured and uncontrolled. There is a 'sowing of wild oats' in art and literature as well as in life.[23]

This aversion to the savage and brutal and to unrestrained passion is the same attitude revealed so clearly in the contemporaneous reviewers, some of whom refused to admit the existence of such elements. However, in the love of Cathy and Heathcliff this critic finds not only power but also reality.

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[22] "The Life and Writings of Emily Brontë," Galaxy XV (1873), 229-230.

[23] Ibid., p. 233.

> In the absorbing intensity of this passion which sees nothing beyond or beside itself, which disdains all consolation other than the supreme joy of consummated union, which limits all hope and all desire, all existence, and all futurity, within the narrow bound of a single being, we are reminded of some of those brief but marvellous poems in which Heine, with a dramatic power unsurpassed in the whole range of German literature, and with a passion almost unequalled, has compressed the tragedy of a human life and love. . . . Emily Brontë stands alone among female poets, and Robert Browning excepted, alone among the English poets of the present century, in this peculiar power, the power of concentrating into a small space a profound psychological study, and a complete history of human life and love, and of expressing it with a rare simplicity and strength of diction.[24]

Another review appeared this same year (1873) which has the distinction of being one of the first to assign a place of permanence in English literature to Wuthering Heights. G. Barnett Smith said that Emily Brontë

> . . . enjoys the distinction of having written a book which stands as completely alone in the language as does Paradise Lost or The Pilgrim's Progress. . . . Wuthering Heights shows massive strength which is of the rarest description. Its power is absolutely Titanic; from the first page to the last it reads like the intellectual throes of a giant. In Heathcliff, Emily Brontë has drawn the greatest villain extant, after Iago. He has no match out of Shakespeare. The Mephistopheles of Goethe's Faust is a person of gentlemanly proclivities compared with Heathcliff . . . Wuthering Heights is a marvellous curiosity in letters. We challenge the world to produce another work in which the whole atmosphere seems so charged with electricity, and bound in with the blackness of tempest and desolation.[25]

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[24] Ibid., p. 232.

[25] G. Barnett Smith, "The Brontës," Cornhill Magazine, XXVIII (1873), 66.

With the publication in 1883 of Mary Robinson's biography of Emily Brontë, a new and vigorous interest in Wuthering Heights was awakened. If Miss Robinson's appreciation is lacking in vigor and understanding, if she herself is not fully aware of the artist with whom she is dealing, we at least owe her a debt for having blown the dust off the subject. Certainly she is less guilty of underestimating Emily's novel than Mrs. Gaskell had been some thirty years earlier in a biography of Charlotte and her sisters is which Wuthering Heights was scarcely noticed. In defending Wuthering Heights Miss Robinson replies to those who say that Emily taught nothing:

> . . . we find in her writing no belief so strong as the belief in the present use and glory of life; no love so great as her love for earth; earth the mother and the grave; no assertion of immortality, but a deep certainty of rest. . . . [She reveals] the unlikeness of life to the authorized pictures of life; the force of evil, only conquerable by the slow-revolving process of nature which admits not the eternal duration of the perverse; the grim and fearful lessons of heredity; the sufficiency of the finite to the finite, of life to life, with no other reward than the conduct of life fulfills to him that lives; the all-penetrating kinship of living things, heather-sprig, singing lark, confident child, relentless tyrant; and, not least, not least to her already in its shadow, the sure and universal peace of death.[26]

Algernon Charles Swinburne wrote an appreciation of Emily Brontë on the occasion of the publication of Miss

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[26] A. Mary F. Robinson, Emily Brontë (Boston, 1883), p. 211.

Robinson's biography. It is not strange that Swinburne admired and extolled Wuthering Heights. What May Sinclair later called Emily's "splendid paganism" would naturally appeal to this fellow-pagan who, as T. E. Welby said, appeared at the "rather agreeably tedious Victorian tea-party . . . leaping on to the sleek lawn, to stamp . . . [his] goat foot in challenge, to deride with . . . his screech of laughter the admirable decorum of the conversation."[27]

Swinburne first defends the atmosphere of the book which had been labeled sick, morbid, and unhealthy. On the whole he finds it high and healthy, though even he detects an occasional "savage note or the sickly symptom of morbid ferocity." However, he is most concerned with the same power that was apparent to the earlier critics, and he defines it as a "dark, unconscious instinct, as of primitive nature worship." What had previously been called dogged brutality or exaggeration of situation and characterization, Swinburne calls a dramatic intensity and power akin to that in King Lear.

> The whole work is not more incomparable in the effect of its atmosphere of landscape than in the peculiar note

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[27] T. Earle Welby, A Study of Swinburne (New York, 1926), p. 30.

> of its wild and bitter pathos; but most of all is it unique in the special and destructive character of its passion. The love, which devours life itself, which devastates the present and desolates the future with unquenchable and raging fire, has nothing less pure in it than flame or sunlight. And this passionate and ardent chastity is utterly and unmistakably spontaneous and unconscious. Not till the story is ended, not till the effect of it has been thoroughly absorbed and digested, does the reader even perceive the simple and natural absence of any grosser element, any hint or suggestion of a baser alloy in the ingredients of its human emotion than in the splendor of lightning, or the roll of a gathered wave.[28]

That there are faults of design or execution which "leap to sight at a first glance, and vanish in the final effect and unimpaired impression of the whole" Swinburne admits. But he believes that critics have spent too much time arguing the legality of certain procedures involved in the story, or criticizing the author's method of presentation, or lamenting the fact that a writer with such power and imagination should have chosen to deal with uncommon and dark characters. To Swinburne these objections are not valid in view of the total effect of Emily Brontë's imaginative fire and the intensity with which the book is pervaded. He cites the scenes of Cathy's dream about heaven and her last meeting with Heathcliff as her greatest achievements in the story.

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[28] Algernon Swinburne, "Emily Brontë," Athenaeum, I (1883), 763.

> It must surely be borne in upon us all that these two crowning passages could never have been written by anyone to whom the motherhood of earth was less than the brotherhood of man--to whom the anguish, the intolerable and mortal yearning, of insatiate and unsupressible homesickness, was less than the bitterest of all other sufferings endurable or conceivable in youth. . . . As was the author's life, so is her book in all things: troubled and taintless, with little of rest in it, and nothing of reproach. It may be true that not many will ever take it to their hearts; it is certain that those who do like it will like nothing very much better in the whole world of poetry or prose.[29]

By 1887 a critic writing for The Atlantic Monthly was able to say about Wuthering Heights that "it commands a cult, and is acknowledged to have founded a school."[30] But the novel was not accepted without reservations. Even such appreciative critics as Charlotte Brontë and Sydney Dobell softened their defense with apology. In the "Preface to the New Edition of Wuthering Heights" (1850) Charlotte had written that Emily's imagination, "which was a spirit more sombre than sunny, more powerful than sportive, found in [the terrible and tragic traits of the rude and rustic vicinage with which she was so intimately acquainted] material whence it wrought creations like Heathcliff, like Earnshaw, like Catherine. Having formed these beings she did not know what she had done." By way of justifying what

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[29] Ibid.

[30] "Girl Novelists of the Time," The Atlantic Monthly, IX (1887), 707.

Emily had done, Charlotte explained that sometimes the artist is not always master of his creative gift. Sometimes he breathes life into a being whom he cannot later control. That it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff Charlotte doubts; but once he was fashioned, no ropes could have held him.

To the modern critic Charlotte's apology is an indication of the extent to which the pervading genius of Wuthering Heights had been misunderstood; without Heathcliff, who is the essence of the elemental and the perverse in nature -- a primitive mixture of the highest and the lowest -- there would have been no struggle, and Wuthering Heights would have been no more than Anne Brontë's feeble The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. For Charlotte to assume that Emily did not know what she was doing when she created her characters is to say that this masterpiece happened quite by accident.

The writer who said in 1887 that Wuthering Heights had founded a school might have added that, although even as late as 1903 there are reviews protesting against the shocking of the reader's sensibilities, most critics no longer felt obliged to apologize for the peculiar genius of the novel. During the following fifty years Wuthering Heights gradually emerged from obscurity and took its

rightful place as one of the most important novels in English literature. Furthermore, many careful studies of plot and characterization yet to be discussed discredit the earlier ideas that the novel is structurally weak and incoherent and that the total effect is not convincing. The fact that the characters created over one hundred years ago are very much alive today speaks for itself.

One of the earliest defenses of the reality of Heathcliff appeared in 1887. The reviewer says that within the whole sphere of English fiction Heathcliff stands alone, whether regarded as a psychological mystery, as lover, as villain, or as a symbol of ill-luck. And the objections that he is unreal disappear except when he is viewed from a distance.

> But the characters of a book, like those in real life, must usually be judged of by the effect they produce on those with whom they come in contact, and whoever sits down to read about Heathcliff will find him not at all unreal--no chimera, but a very present and very astounding reality. We do not understand him. . . . Let us try to realize and accept the fact that there may be just one or two things yet left in heaven and earth not dreamt of by our philosophy. Heathcliff is by no means an impossibility to our minds; he is in complete harmony with his surroundings; no supernatural machinery is called in to cheat and disgust us; as we read we accept him, because we must; we feel that the brain which developed him was as sound as the genius which conceived him was extraordinary. . .[31]

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[31] J. F., Review of Wuthering Heights, Temple Bar, LXXXI (1887), 565-566.

The reviewer concludes that Heathcliff is too big for any stage but one, the stage of Wuthering Heights. The fiercest outlaw of the Waverly novels "must pale his ineffectual fire before this Titan apparition -- this creation of a lonely girl, or this goblin evoked by her from some crag or boulder . . . where she was wont to stray and commune with her own . . . fancy."[32]

This exuberant praise foreshadows Maeterlinck toward the close of the century; nevertheless, the reviewer is justified by his arguments. He discusses the unearthly quality that penetrates the darkest corners and is present even in the brightest sunlight on the moors; but this unearthliness is no less apparent in the characters themselves than in the setting. The one or two love passages between Heathcliff and Cathy "strike one as nothing earthly -- they are fire, flame, spirit, fury, but they are not love, as most mortals understand love."[33]

In the final analysis, he believes, one must consider the novel the most powerful and perhaps the most beautiful romance of the nineteenth century, though it will never be popular in the sense that Shirley, Villette, and Jane Eyre

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[32] Ibid., p. 566.

[33] Ibid., p. 567.

are popular. Wuthering Heights has more power and originality than any of them, but it is undoubtedly too grim, too terrific to achieve popularity. Critics have insisted too much upon its gloom and horror, forgetting the loveliness and tenderness which

> . . . if they appear but seldom, do nevertheless shine in their brightest beauty when we are permitted to see them. Had a writer of inferior calibre endeavored to mould the materials of which the story is composed, the result might have been disastrous. As it happened, not only did a great genius light upon them, but the right genius--the sympathetic, harmonious, appreciative genius, possessed herself of them, took and fashioned them; breathed the breath of life into them, and the result is grim, even overwhelming, but grand in no ordinary degree.[34]

Another review appearing this same year (1887) was less generous with its praise of Wuthering Heights, which the writer considered "absolutely original and absolutely lawless; a mixture of transcendent merits and glaring defects.[35] Again Emily Brontë is accused of being slavishly realistic, a reminder of the persistent objection of the average reader to the passionate and elemental qualities of the story.

Though nearly every critic has been aware of a strange power pervading Wuthering Heights, few have tried to explain that power. The following review (1887) attempts to analyze

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[34] Ibid., p. 562.

[35] "Girl Novelists of the Time," The Atlantic Monthly, LX (1887), 707.

the power at its source.

> Emily's genius revealed itself in uncouth, untamed, almost repulsive force, though it could sometimes be as gentle as an infant's lullabye. It needs a hardy reader to thoroughly appreciate her book; yet the power displayed is not that of French realism. No laws of decency are infringed; no social sewers are opened. The characters are few, the scene almost unvaried. It is a wild, rugged book, heaving and uptorn with primitive passions, frankly displaying much that is usually concealed; unveiling depths of the human heart, just when those depths were most stirred and sullied with tempest.[36]

In 1893 A. M. Williams defended the characterization in Wuthering Heights, which had been called exaggerated, impossible, and unreal in many of the earlier reviews.

> In Wuthering Heights we have the first novel of a young woman with little knowledge either of literature or of life, and yet the story is told with compactness and force, scenery is described with marvellous vividness and sympathy, characters are presented with amazing individuality, while . . . there is such power, both of personality and of treatment, as positively fascinates even when it terrifies. . . . The promise of the book is found not in the story (though what story there is is clearly told) but in the delineation of character.[37]

The review concludes with this objection which later critics have proved to be unjustified: "Its feeling for nature, its pensiveness, above all the grandeur of thought and the strength of soul in the finest passages, are in themselves

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[36] A. L. Salmon, "A Modern Stoic," Poet-Lore, IV (1887), 65.

[37] A. M. Williams, "Emily Brontë," Temple Bar, XCVIII (1893), 435-436.

attractive. The fatal defect is in want of form."[38]

Maurice Maeterlinck in Wisdom and Destiny writes with intense sympathy of Emily's harsh life of suffering which provided the raw material for her novel. He calls Emily Brontë as great a woman as was produced in the first half of the nineteenth century. The most astounding achievement in her novel, he believes, is her certain and incisive understanding of the inner realities of love.

> She has but little acquaintance with the external realities of love, and these she handles so innocently at times as almost to provoke a smile; but where can she have acquired her knowledge of those inner realities, that are interwoven with all that is profoundest and most illogical in passion, with all that is most unexpected, most impossible, and most eternally true? We feel that one must have lived for thirty years beneath burning chains of burning kisses to learn what she has learned; to dare so confidently set forth, with such minuteness, such unerring certainty, the delirium of those two predestined lovers of Wuthering Heights; to mark the self-conflicting movements of the tenderness that would make suffer and the cruelty that would make glad, the felicity that prayed for death and the despair that clung to life; the repulsion that desired, the desire drunk with repulsion--love surcharged with hatred, hatred staggering beneath its load of love.[39]

The poetical quality and the tragic elements of Wuthering Heights have often been overlooked in the reviews which have been discussed. Angus Mackay in 1898 claims for Emily

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[38] Ibid., p. 437.

[39] Maurice Maeterlinck, Wisdom and Destiny, trans. Alfred Sutro (New York, 1906), pp. 305-306.

Brontë the title "a remarkable poet," not so much because of her poetry as her prose.

> For Wuthering Heights, if we have regard to its essential qualities rather than its accidental form, is not a novel, but a tragedy. Emily's place is not with Scott and Thackeray, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, but with the poets; her prose drama links her with Shakespeare, as her affinities in her verse are with Coleridge and Blake.[40]

Wilbur Cross, in The Development of the English Novel (1899), considers Wuthering Heights important, not as a factor in the development of the novel, but rather as an example of the extreme to which the madness and terror of romantic fiction have gone.

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[40] Angus M. Mackay, "On the Interpretation of Emily Brontë," The Westminster Review, CL (1898), 211.

## CHAPTER IV

## CRITICS AFTER 1900

In 1900 William Dean Howells praised Wuthering Heights as a singular artistic achievement in spite of its defective narrative technique. That Howells, a champion of realism, preferring the commonplace and believing that fiction should deal with ordinary persons, everyday happenings, and well-known scenes, should have found Wuthering Heights with its romantic and sensational qualities so much to his liking is perhaps as fitting a tribute to its success as is possible. Seldom, he writes, has a great "romance" -- in general and in particular -- been worse contrived, but

> . . . the essentials are all there, and the book has a tremendous vitality . . . it endures like a piece of the country in which its scenes are laid, enveloped in a lurid light and tempestuous atmosphere of its own. Its people are all of extreme types, and yet they do not seem unreal, like the extravagant creations of Dickens' fancy. They have an intense and convincing reality, the weak ones, such as Heathcliff's wife and son, equally with the powerful, such as Heathcliff himself and the Catherines, mother and daughter. A weird malevolence broods over the gloomy drama, and through all plays a force truly demoniacal, with scarcely the relief of a moment's kindliness. The facts are simply conceived, and stated without shadow of apology or extenuation; and the imagination from which they sprang cannot adequately be called morbid,

> for it deals with brute motives employed without a taint of sickly subjectiveness.[41]

The author, Howells continues, remains superior to her material; consequently each of her characters has a distinct projection, as the creations of Charlotte Brontë do not; for Charlotte never could quite detach herself from her heroines and is obviously joined in sympathy to them, even partly identified with them. Howells believes that Emily's one book is as powerful as any in fiction and that she proved herself, in spite of a defective technique, a great artist "of as realistic motive and ideal as any who have followed her."

John Bell Henneman, editor of The Sewanee Review, attempted in 1901 to explain the development of Emily Brontë's genius by suggesting that it was a natural and inevitable outgrowth of the landscape which dominated her life.

> It is from the vivid realization of [the] harsh, tragic spirit of the moor and heathland that come the strange conceptions of Emily's Wuthering Heights, typical of the position of their own home at the top of the bleak hill amid its whitened tombstones subject to every wind and storm that blew.[42]

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[41] W. D. Howells, "The Two Catherines of Emily Brontë," Harper's Bazaar, XXXIII (1900), 2226.

[42] John Bell Henneman, "The Brontë Sisters," The Sewanee Review, IX (1901), 225.

One of the most interesting of the reviews of Wuthering Heights was written by Walter Frewen Lord, a regular book critic for The Nineteenth Century. Lord confesses that he can not make sense out of the plot and that he can not tell one character from the other. Still he attempts to discuss the work and proceeds in the fashion typical of the earliest critics of the novel. His is the only opinion of the twentieth century to be discussed in this paper which protests violently against the effrontery of a rather tiresome young woman who strained to achieve an impossible effect and succeeded only in placing "her clods and dowdies" in a series of unbelievable circumstances. Whereas other critics of his time have recognized Emily Brontë as a great artist, Lord begins with the assumption that she is not only not a great artist, but that her novel is a miserable failure. He says that one of the greatest faults of Wuthering Heights is the profanity and coarse language. He reminds us that Stevenson wrote Treasure Island, a tale of high adventure, without a single instance of profanity. "The conclusion surely is that Stevenson was a great artist, and Ellis Bell not a great artist."[43] One does find, Lord admits, an abounding human sympathy and an

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[43] Walter Frewen Lord, "The Brontë Novels," The Nineteenth Century, LIII (1903), 485.

infinitely patient recording of humble details; yet the

> . . . authoress accepts her clods and dowdies as interesting people, which is a tribute to her own wide sympathy, but she expects her readers to find these people interesting merely because they are accurately produced. George Eliot could do this because she was a mighty artist, but one yawns over Wuthering Heights, because, although Ellis Bell's sympathies are wide, her style correct, and her intentions excellent, she is not a great artist.[44]

He then begs the reader's pardon "if I quote Sheridan's advice to a young writer when he bade him remember that 'easy writing is damned hard reading.'" The appeal of Wuthering Heights, he continues, is to most ladies, who are interested in the jargon of the peasant, who enjoy losing themselves in detail, and who do not mind the lack of anything resembling humor. Lord is depressed to think that all Emily's efforts were wasted because she had not had the severe training of Thackeray and Eliot although, of course, it was not entirely her own fault. Then he cites Agnes Grey by Anne Brontë as an example of true art, resulting from improvement in style:

> There could be no greater contrast to Wuthering Heights than Agnes Grey.
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> In the one case the machinery is lavish, the scenery startling, and there is a wild abandon of language, which, if license could effect anything, ought to result in a horrifying impression, but the impression

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[44] Ibid., 486.

is nil: in the other case we have nothing but the bread and butter of life and the impression is great.[45]

Although Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, writing in 1903, realizes that Wuthering Heights is a singular creation, she merely reiterates Mr. Lord's objections with greater restraint. Mrs. Freeman in her own right was a successful American writer of short stories with a sedate, simple, rural New England background. No greater contrast could be found than that resulting from a comparison of her few early contributions to Sunday School magazines with Wuthering Heights. It seems to her that there is little doubt that had

> . . . Emily Brontë lived, and had her genius been somewhat toned and crystallized, she might have surpassed her great sister Charlotte. . . . While the book is offensive, even repulsive, it has the repulsiveness of power. . . . There is in Wuthering Heights the pitilessness of genius, not only toward the sensibilities of the reader but toward those of the writer. All that Emily Brontë is intent upon is the truth, the exactness of the equations of characters, not the impression which they make upon her readers or herself. She handles brutality and coarseness as another woman would handle a painted fan. . . . She uses the scalpel as unflinchingly as the brush. She displays naked nerve and muscle unshrinkingly, and has no thought for graceful curves of flesh to conceal them. Had she lived longer she might have become equally acquainted with the truth and power of grace; she might have widened her audience; she might have attracted, instead of repelled; but she could not have written a greater book, as far as the abstract

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[45] Ibid., 487.

quality of greatness goes.[46]

According to W. J. Dawson (1905) it is not strange that the sentimental melodrama of Jane Eyre was more appealing to the taste of both critic and reader in 1847 than Wuthering Heights. Emily's book is one of those about which only two feelings are possible: either hearty dislike or intolerant praise. How, Dawson asks, could one who "is feebly endowed with poetic fiber, whose ideal of natural beauty is placid streams and green pastures" be expected to understand this violent, visionary prose poem? He discovers in the book

> . . . something almost unearthly--a thing wrought by wizardry, and capable of communicating a strange delight to those who once fall beneath its spell. In its passion for Nature it is unequalled. It is the intimate child of Nature, but Nature in her wildest moods.[47]

Saintsbury in The English Novel recognizes the strange and unfamiliar genius of Wuthering Heights but believes that, in spite of its merits, it is rather an ornament than an essential part of novel history. Until Forster in Aspects of the Novel classified Wuthering Heights among the prophetic books, most historians of the novel believed, as

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[46] Mary E. Wilkins, "Emily Brontë and Wuthering Heights," Booklovers' Magazine, I (1903), 514-516.

[47] W. J. Dawson, The Makers of English Fiction (New York, 1905), p. 143.

Saintsbury did, that it was a phenomenon whose roots were sunk in a soil such as had never been known before.

Since the turn of the century and reaching a climax with Somerset Maugham there has been a strong tendency to interpret Wuthering Heights through psychoanalysis of the author. Keighley Snowden is convinced that Wuthering Heights is the record of a woman who has lived through an experience of passionate lovemaking and subsequent doubt.[48] Augustus Ralli writes that the book is a record of Emily's personality problems, the chief of which was her shrinking from her fellow men and their power to shatter her bright world. He believes that this maladjustment makes the book a masterpiece.[49] An anonymous critic writing in The Academy and Literature (1903) decides after a dissection of the novel that it is obviously the work of a woman because she fashions the male characters "from the outside in," particularly Heathcliff and Mr. Lockwood. When Heathcliff "becomes specifically the spirit of the moors, dark, unrest, Emily herself, he is drawn from the inside out instead of from the

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[48] Keighley Snowden [James Snowden], "Enigma of Emily Brontë," Fortnightly Review, CXXX (1928), 195-202.

[49] Augustus Ralli, "Emily Brontë: The Problem of Personality," North American Review, CCXXI (1925), 495-507.

outside in."[50]

In 1912 May Sinclair's biography, The Three Brontës, appeared. If Wuthering Heights had established a "cult" of Brontë worshippers, Miss Sinclair is one of them. Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Robinson in their earlier biographies had not fully appreciated the genius with whom they were dealing. Miss Sinclair recognizes clearly that Wuthering Heights is an unchallenged masterpiece which

> . . . stands alone, absolutely self-begotten and self-born. It belongs to no school; it follows no tendency. You cannot put it into any category. It is not 'Realism,' it is not 'Romance,' any more than Jane Eyre: and if any other master's method, DeMaupassant's or Turgeniev's is to be the test, it will not stand it. There is nothing in it you can seize and name. You will not find in it support for any creed or theory. The redemption of Catherine Linton and Hareton is thrown in by the way in sheer opulence of imagination. It is not insisted on. Redemption is not the keynote of Wuthering Heights. The moral problem never entered into Emily Brontë's head. You may call her what you will--pagan, pantheist, transcendentalist, mystic and worshipper of earth, she slips from all your formulas. She reveals a point of view above good and bad.[51]

Most critics would take exception to Miss Sinclair's statement that the redemption of Catherine and Hareton was thrown in in "sheer opulence of imagination," believing that it is the inevitable result of human actions performed in

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[50] Review of Wuthering Heights, The Academy, LXV (1903), 333.

[51] May Sinclair, The Three Brontës (Boston, 1912), pp. 141-143.

harmony with nature. Miss Robinson in her biography of Emily Brontë explained it reasonably by pointing to the "slow revolving process of nature which admits not the eternal duration of the perverse." Miss Sinclair too is aware of the function of this principle in the novel, for she writes: "The whole tremendous art of this book is in this wringing of strange and terrible harmony out of raging discord. It ends on a sliding cadence, soft as a sigh of peace only just conscious after pain."[52]

Attempting to discover the source of the power in the story, Miss Sinclair explains that the action is almost entirely on the invisible and immaterial plane and consists in an earthly creature's being hunted to death by an unearthly passion.

> In Wuthering Heights we are plunged apparently into a world of most unspiritual lusts and hates and cruelties; into the very darkness and thickness of elemental matter; a world that would be chaos, but for the iron necessity that brings its own terrible order, its own implacable law of lust upon lust begotten, hate upon hate, and cruelty upon cruelty, through the generations of Heathcliffs and Earnshaws.[53]

Miss Robinson had found in Wuthering Heights a tragedy of inherited evil, but Miss Sinclair does not believe that Emily Brontë was concerned with the transmission of evil

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[52] Ibid., p. 252.

[53] Ibid., pp. 243-244.

through heredity. Rather her concern was with creating a world of spiritual affinities, with the passion of the soul rather than of the body. The book, Miss Sinclair concludes, is great in spite of its being "the worst-constructed tale ever written."

G. K. Chesterton compares Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights as human documents and finds that there is nothing human in Emily's book, that it might have been written by an eagle. There is no happiness in it and no hint even that happiness is possible. "It is because Jane Eyre has in it the whole human heart, the continual possibility of pleasure, as well as pain, that Jane Eyre is a better human document."[54]

Early reviewers who were shocked by the brutality and coarseness of Wuthering Heights would have been surprised to read an anonymous essay in the London Times (1915) emphasizing the lyrical quality of Emily Brontë's work.

> It is upon her capacity for experience, her intensity of life, her acceptance of its tragedies, that her lyrical power is found. The moorland air, with all that it has of sweet and wild, becomes a part of her poetry because it has already become a part of herself. Death, the memory of death, and what seems almost a preference for its associations, characterize her work for the same reason. And all is clothed in reconciling music, because

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54 G. K. Chesterton, Review of The Three Brontës, by May Sinclair, The Nation, XCVI (1913), 104.

the beauty of the world, answering the rectitude of her soul, compels her to music as the only satisfying statement of the truth of things.[55]

R. Brimley Johnson in The Women Novelists (1918) discusses Charlotte Brontë, whom he regards as superior to Emily as novelist, and dismisses Emily with the admission that many enthusiasts regard her "as greater than her more famous sister. . . . Her one novel, Wuthering Heights, is unique for the passionate intensity of its emotions and the wild dreariness of its atmosphere."[56]

Arthur Symons, poet and leader of the Symbolist movement, writes in 1918 of the tragic depth of Wuthering Heights, which he says attains the utmost limits. Along with this tragic depth there is an extreme sense "of the mystery of terror which lurks in all the highest poetry as certainly in her lyrical prose; a quality which distinguishes such prose and verse from all that is but a little lower than the highest."[57] Paraphrasing Swinburne on Tourneur's Revenger's Tragedy, he continues:

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[55] "An Unrecovered Poetess," The London Times, reprinted in Living Age, CCLXXXVI (1915), 221.

[56] R. Brimley Johnson, The Women Novelists (London, 1918), p. 181.

[57] Arthur Symons, "Emily Brontë," The Nation, reprinted in Living Age, CCXCIX (1918), 120.

> 'There never was such a thunderstorm of a novel as Wuthering Heights.' And it is blood-stained with the blood of the roses of sunsets; the heavy atmosphere is sultry as the hush and heat and awe of midnoon; sad visions appear with tragic countenances, fugitives try in vain to escape from the insane brooding of their consciences. And there are serviceable shadows; implacable self-devotions and implacable cruelties; vengeances unassuaged; and a kind of unscrupulous ferocity is seen not only in Heathcliff, but in one of his victims. And there are startling scenes and sentences that, once impressed on the memory, are unforgettable; as scarlet flowers of evil and as poisonous weeds they take root in one.[58]

Symons writes that Rossetti, after reading Wuthering Heights, remarked that it was the first novel he had read in an age and the best, as far as style and power were concerned, in two ages. But Rossetti called it a fiend of a book with the action laid in Hell. Symons admits that it is desolate, but he believes that "when gleams of sunlight or of starlight pierce the clouds that hang generally above it, a rare and sunny beauty comes into the bare outlines, quickening them with living splendor."[59]

Comparing Charlotte and Emily Brontë, C. E. Vaughan finds that they have certain points of resemblance: both sisters strike the note of passion, an accomplishment scarcely known before in English fiction; both produce the lyric outcry, in Emily generally heard as an undertone but

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[58] Ibid., p. 121.

[59] Ibid., p. 119.

in Charlotte heard as melody; and both revolt, Emily as the unquestioning and unquestioned rebel, Charlotte as the more cautious, deliberate rebel. The chief point in which Charlotte and Emily differ is in Emily's intenser spirit, which Professor Vaughan calls her great glory.

Emily puts her characters into situations ideal for development, Vaughan notes, and lets the conditions

> . . . work their will upon natures who, without them, would have remained the starved and stunted creatures that are within the experience of all of us. This is the privilege of the creative artist; the method by which the supreme poets have achieved some of the greatest of their triumphs--the method by which Milton created Satan: and Aeschylus, Clytemnestra, and Victor Hugo, Gilliatt or Jean Valjean. Emily Brontë is not on the same scale as these great figures, but she may claim the same defence.[60]

Some critics have insisted that Wuthering Heights is the result of Emily's supposed interest in the German romantics while attending M. Héger's school in Brussels. Actually there is no proof that she ever read a German romance. Roy Temple House, writing in 1918, saw no affinity in Wuthering Heights with the German romantics any more than with the scientific approach of the French naturalistic novels.

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[60] C. E. Vaughan, "Charlotte and Emily Brontë: A Comparison and a Contrast," Charlotte Brontë, 1816-1916: A Centenary Memorial, ed. Butler Wood (New York, 1918), p. 194.

> For all the unearthly poetry in Emily Brontë's nature, she is worlds removed from the sloppy chaos of the Tiecks and Hoffmans. Her work is free from the coarse frankness of modern scientific fiction because she was the daughter of an English clergyman. It lacks documentation, because she was very young and a recluse; but the spirit of the student and observer is here. . . . Wuthering Heights is not, it must be admitted, the 'rattling' good story Jane Eyre is, but it is a Titanic and extraordinary gripping thing which would repay even the frankly hedonistic seeker after thrills.[61]

In an essay in Education, H. Merian Allen is primarily concerned with the pure subjectivity of Emily Brontë's sources. He agrees with Howells that there is no trace of the "sickliness" that is apparent in Charlotte Brontë's sympathy for Jane Eyre.

> As one turns the pages of Emily Brontë's only novel and reads her few poems, he looks in vain for any concern in men and objects as correlative factors of the social fabric. As such she cared for them not at all. Human associations, outside of her immediate family circle, were neither sought nor encouraged. . . . [She] created entirely from intense subjective analysis, albeit the main theme of her great book was undoubtedly suggested by a love episode in the life of her brother. Passion peopled her world and sensation colored its scenery. . . . Emily comes closer to Edgar Allan Poe in temperament, conception, and spontaneity of utterance than any other who has ever written.[62]

John Masson's evaluation of Wuthering Heights (1919) is basically a restatement of G. K. Chesterton's ideas

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[61] Roy Temple House, "Emily Brontë," The Nation, CVII (1918), 169.

[62] H. Merian Allen, "Emily Brontë," Education, XXXIX (1918), 228.

expressed six years earlier. Both think Emily is inferior to Charlotte as an artist, primarily because they do not believe that she reveals Charlotte's broad love of humanity.

> As a novelist Charlotte stands infinitely above Emily. She draws real people; she has passion which is healthy and true; she has the geniality and breadth of sympathy which Emily has not; amid the terrible struggle of their lives she has saved the faith in goodness, the faith which Emily has lost; in short, Charlotte is by far the more human of the two.[63]

George Moore, curiously, believes Anne Brontë superior to her sisters as an artist. He calls Agnes Grey the "most perfect prose narrative in English literature."[64] He accuses Charlotte of plagiarizing Anne's Miss Murray from Agnes Grey to fill out her second volume of Villette. Had Anne lived, Moore writes, she would have taken her place next to Jane Austen, perhaps a higher place. Of Wuthering Heights he says that

> . . . the knotted and tangled threads . . . reveal the desperate efforts of a lyrical poet to construct a prose narrative. . . . [I do not think] that Emily, whose poems are above Anne's as the stars are above the earth, was intended by Nature to write prose narratives. . .[65]

In considering Moore's judgment of Emily's novel we are

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[63] John Masson, "The Brontës Through French Eyes," The London Quarterly Review, XVII (1919), 67.

[64] George Moore, Conversations in Ebury Street (New York, 1924), p. 257.

[65] Ibid., p. 256.

puzzled by his earlier statement in the same volume that the "best prose is usually written by poets."[66]

Wuthering Heights is more difficult to understand than Jane Eyre, according to Virginia Woolf, because Emily was a greater poet than Charlotte. Though Charlotte is concerned with the immediate problems of love, hate, and suffering, which exist on our own level, Emily is concerned with larger matters -- with cosmic dislocations. Miss Woolf writes, "The impulse which urged her to create was not her own suffering or her own injuries. She looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her the power to unite it in a book."[67] In Wuthering Heights there is a sense of the power that underlies the universe, a force beyond the "I," a force made up, as Miss Woolf says, of "'we, the whole human race' and 'you, the eternal powers . . .'"

It was not enough for Emily to utter a few lyric cries; she must recreate the world of her imagination in a novel, Miss Woolf concludes, and in the novel we reach summits of emotion "not by rant or rhapsody but by hearing a girl sing old songs to herself as she rocks in the branches

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66 Ibid., p. 118.

67 Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader (New York, 1925), p. 225.

of a tree; by watching the moor sheep crop the turf; by listening to the soft wind breathing through the grass."[68]

Herbert Read believes that Wuthering Heights is typically tragic in the classic sense of the word, and not a romantic expression, as so many have believed. Pater, he says, saw in it more than in any of Scott's work the "really characteristic fruit" of the romantic spirit. But, Read says, from another point of view "Wuthering Heights, with its unerring unity of conception and its full catharsis of the emotions of pity and terror, is one of the very few occasions on which the novel has reached the dignity of classical tragedy."[69] Romance or tragedy, Read continues, "Wuthering Heights remains, the towering rock of Charlotte's metaphor, extremely definite, completely achieved, and of an amazing unity of tone."[70]

Maeterlinck had been confounded by the apparent contradiction in Wuthering Heights -- the child-like innocence interwoven with a knowledge of the inner realities of the passion of love. Herbert Read believes that

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[68] Ibid., p. 226.

[69] Herbert Read, "Charlotte and Emily Brontë," The Yale Review, XIV (1925), 738.

[70] Ibid., p. 735.

> . . . it is this quality of innocence that gives to Wuthering Heights its terrible and unique intensity. . . . She is one of the strangest geniuses in our literature, and her kinship is with Baudelaire and Poe. It is not merely that her imagination traverses the same sombre shadows, but also like these two anguished minds, she is forever perplexed by the problem of evil.[71]

In A Century of the English Novel (1925) Cornelius Weygandt says that Wuthering Heights will survive as a classic in spite of its "burden of absurdities" because it is fashioned with a singular dramatic intensity and enveloped in an atmosphere so eerie that it cannot be forgotten. The poetry of the book, he continues, has a northern flavor that reminds one of certain of the Icelandic tales. There is a passionate wildness about it; one is haunted by the primitive heart's-cries and the bleak settings. To find parallels to the lyric abandon of certain passages one must

> . . . turn to the great passages of lyric prose that distinguish the essay . . . to Sir Thomas Browne, to Carlyle and to Emerson. . . . There are moments in Wuthering Heights that for eeriness are unsurpassed in English literature since certain of the ballads, "The Wife of Usher's Well" and "Clerk Saunders" and "The Demon Lover"; and there is a tenderness along with this eeriness that, in the nature of things, is unknown to the ballads.[72]

Louis Cazamian says of Emily Brontë that there is no one after 1830 who expresses so completely the independence

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[71] Ibid., pp. 734-735.

[72] Cornelius Weygandt, A Century of the English Novel (London, 1925), p. 104.

in thought and spiritual life which the emancipation of Romanticism had set forth. Her verse reveals a sort of paganism, a rebellion against the tyranny of family, society, and religion. Her only consolation was in the sad and rough, but pure and beautiful, realms of Nature.

> Her powerful novel . . . is the work of an instinctive genius, that can divine the emotions of the most passionate souls. The figures which she has fashioned from the fabric of her dreams are worked out in wonderful relief, as if they had been borrowed from the most intimately known substance of reality. Her psychology, as naive as it is profound, is at the same time wholly imaginary, and astonishingly convincing.[73]

"Prophecy," writes E. M. Forster, ". . . is a tone of voice. It may imply any of the faiths that have haunted humanity -- Christianity, Buddhism, dualism, Satanism, or the mere raising of human love and hatred to such a power that their normal receptacles no longer contain them . . ."[74] According to this definition, Forster considers Wuthering Heights one of the great prophetic novels. He notes a distinct difference between the function of the emotions in the characters of Wuthering Heights and in the characters of other novels. In Emily's novel, the emotions surround Heathcliff and Cathy instead of being contained in them.

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[73] Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature (New York, 1938), pp. 1182-1183.

[74] E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1927), p. 182.

in Browne's and Griffith's life which the conventions of Romantic love set forth. Her terms describe a mode of passion, a spiritual energy, the dynamic of faith, society, and religion. Her only opposition was to be sad and empty, but pure and beautiful, a sign of living.

> Her powerful novel . . . is the work of an artistic genius, that can divine the secretes of the human heart, advance morals. The Barnes family should be analyzed from the family of her characters are drawn out in marvelous relief, as if they had been drawing from the most intimately known substrata of their history. Her language is native as it is powerful, in the very time that it is elegant, and astonishingly convincing.[73]

"Prophecy," writes E. M. Forster, ". . . is a form of voice. It may imply any of the fellow-feelings between humanity -- compassion, sympathy, admiration, sadness, or the mere relating of human love and hatred to such a point that their moral recognition no longer contains them . . ."[74] According to this definition, Forster's Howards End Holiday one of the most prophetic novels. To Forster, a distinct difference between the prophecy of the novel and the observations of Anthony Trollope and a too literalism of other novels. In Smiley's novel, the previous discussion Westcliff and Cathy learned of being romantic in a

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[73] Emily Dugdale and Jane Jackson, A Studies of English Literature (New York, 1940), p. 176-177.

[74] E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1927), p. 182.

> Wuthering Heights is filled with sound--storm and rushing wind--a sound more important than words and thoughts. Great as the novel is, one cannot afterwards remember anything in it but Heathcliffe [sic] and the elder Catherine. They cause the action by their separation: they close it by their union after death. No wonder they 'walk'; what else could such beings do? even when they were alive their hate and love transcended them.[75]

Forster points out the elaborately careful chronological and genealogical construction of the novel into which Emily Brontë projects the "muddle, chaos, tempest" of the central love affair, played against a background of violence and cruelty. She does this because she is a prophetess,

> . . . because what is implied is more important to her than what is said; and only in confusion could the figures of Heathcliffe [sic] and Catherine externalize their passion till it streamed through the house and over the moors. Wuthering Heights has no mythology beyond what these two characters provide; no great book is more cut off from the universals of Heaven and Hell. It is local, like the spirits it engenders, and whereas we may meet Moby Dick in any pond, we shall only encounter them among the harebells and limestone of their own country.[76]

One of the most perceptive studies of Emily Brontë and her novel was written by the Frenchman Ernest Dimnet. He attributes the romantic tendencies in Wuthering Heights to an excursion into German literature and believes that the only perishable part of the book is that tinge of romanticism, typified in Heathcliff. He defends the book against

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[75] Ibid., pp. 209-210.

[76] Ibid., pp. 210-211.

critics who have accused it of a dominant sexuality, believing that there is not a sensual thought in the book, even in the most intense and passionate scenes. To Emily love was not concerned with matter, but with soul -- the "unresistancy" of one soul which is attracted to another. Dimnet finds an easy strength in her lyricism and simplicity of diction, in her reaffirming of simple truths. Perhaps the true test of her genius lies in the fact that she masters every difficult situation she invents, e.g., a man speaking words of love to a dead woman lying in her open grave. In Wuthering Heights the simple and elemental are raised to their greatest power.

Dimnet admits that the novel is full of brutality, that is has certain scenes of revolting cruelty, and a rudeness, as in the northern dialect; but much more significant than this savagery and rusticity is the "wild passion whose violence makes us promptly forget the details of its background." There are improbabilities, impossibilities, crudities of all sorts. He too believes that there is a defect in the method of narration and in the childish simplicity of the idea of the book. These defects

> . . . are found somewhat shocking at a first reading; at the second reading they are set aside, and if the book has sufficiently impressed the reader to draw him back again, he no longer feels anything but its extraordinary charm. Wuthering Heights is one of those rare works of art from which art seems to have entirely disappeared,

leaving nothing but passion in its place.[77]

Wuthering Heights, Dimnet concludes, is not a novel but a sort of Homeric poem in which the reader perceives something unreal but true, nonetheless. However one looks at it, he must consider it a work of art in which there is a power attained only by the rarest genius. Beside it the compositions of George Eliot seem more literary and more feeble in composition.

Carl H. Grabo in The Technique of the Novel (1928) writes that Wuthering Heights is crude in many respects, particularly in regard to the point of view from which the story is told. The intrusion of Lockwood is unjustified and confusing in the mainstream of events because it is with Nelly Dean that we concern ourselves, and Lockwood serves to destroy the atmosphere and illusion that she has so carefully built up. Aside from this inadequacy in narration, the greatest weakness, according to Grabo, is the forced plotting.

> Isabel's infatuation for Heathcliff and her elopement with its subsequent misery are a bit hard to accept, though possible. Their chief purpose is to provide Heathcliff with a son to be utilized later in the story. This sub-plot, the marriage of Cathy and Linton, is forced; nor does it serve any particular purpose save to illustrate Heathcliff's avarice and harshness, already

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[77] Ernest Dimnet, The Brontë Sisters (London, 1927), p. 171.

> vivid enough. The whole story marks time at this point and the effect is of anti-climax after the tense and vivid episodes which led to the death of Catherine Linton.[78]

Grabo concludes that in spite of these faults Wuthering Heights is a profound and moving book.

Concerning Emily Brontë's position in literature, K. A. R. Sugden in A Short History of the Brontë's (1929) writes that she belongs "to that class of genius which reaches immortality spontaneously, without question, criticism, or hesitation, the class in which the name of Shakespeare heads all the rest."[79] Miss Sugden adds that the real riddle of the Brontës is Emily herself -- her poems, her novel, her strange genius, her life and everything that concerns her personality. From what sources, she asks, sprang "the epic greatness of the story of Heathcliff and Catherine, whence sprang the violence and morbid passion of her stupendous novel, whence the haunting melancholy and the philosophy of her poems?"[80] Miss Sugden does not agree with critics who have lamented Emily's lack of the severe training of an Eliot or

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[78] Carl H. Grabo, The Technique of the Novel (New York, 1928), p. 143.

[79] K. A. R. Sugden, A Short History of the Brontës (London, 1929), p. 111.

[80] Ibid., p. 116.

a Thackeray. Her genius was spontaneous and wild, flourishing "in a strange manner which weaker mortals cannot fathom," and the limits and confines of any regulation would have blighted it, she concludes.

## CHAPTER V

## CRITICS AND THE STRUCTURE OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

The dominant weakness of Wuthering Heights, in the opinion of most critics with whom this study deals, concerns the structure and form of the novel. They have objected to the story-within-a-story plan, but more specifically they have believed that the novel lacked a unifying central structure and organization. They would have us believe that Emily Brontë threw her characters and incidents together without benefit of careful plotting and that the result is an unrelated and confused whole. These objections are shown to be unreasonable in the light of C. P. Sanger's detailed examination of the structure of Wuthering Heights. He reproduces the flawless chronology of the novel on the basis of the three actual dates mentioned. The first word in the story is a date -- 1801. Chapter 32 has as its first word a date -- 1802. Nelly Dean mentions the year 1778 at one time. Working from these specific dates, intervals of time, ages of characters, the months, harvest moons, the last grouse, Sanger establishes such an elaborate chronology that it is possible to ascertain the year and in most cases the

month in which each event takes place. Thus we find that Catherine Linton was born March 19, 1784, at midnight on Sunday; that on Tuesday, March 21, 1784, Heathcliff puts a lock of hair in Catherine's locket; that on March 20, 1801, Edgar is too ill to visit his wife's grave.

In addition to the mathematical precision in placement of events to maintain proper chronology, Sanger shows how exact is Emily Brontë's knowledge of topography. Not once does the author contradict herself when stating the distance of one point from another or when giving directions. She tells how long it takes to walk from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange or from the Grange to Gimmerton Kirk. Her knowledge of botany is equally precise, and she mentions the day that buds were first noticed on an ash tree in the park at the Grange. Her knowledge of law is firm and extensive; even the most detailed examination of contemporary law does not indicate a single miscalculation in the action in spite of the fact that two estates and their changing owners have moved in a confusing cycle. Sanger concludes that it is hardly German romances that have been the source of her knowledge of English law. Swinburne had spoken of "the passionate chastity" of the book, but it seems to Sanger that "the extreme care in realizing the ages of the characters at the time of each incident which is

described [is] . . . a more unusual characteristic of a novel. It demonstrates the vividness of the author's imagination."[81]

Charles Simpson's biography of Emily Brontë appeared in 1929; in it he emphasizes what Sanger had earlier pointed out, that Wuthering Heights is not clumsily constructed but will stand up under an investigation that many narratives of real life could not survive. Simpson considers Emily Brontë an author of remarkably independent intellect, who refused to be submissive to any conventionalities, whose work has the humility and awe that are a part of mysticism. Charlotte Brontë knew this when she wrote that Emily's mind was strong, original, and full of a strange, somber power. This mystical quality, Simpson continues, expresses itself in

> . . . poetry that breathes like an overtone above the discordant notes through all the novel's tragic length. Hareton and the girl Catherine are elemental figures, even as the others, and their love is elemental as the love of man and woman in the morning of the world. The story's peculiar Titanic force is enhanced by this note, struck at the very end, of a wild, a primitive joy. At the last, the genius who conceived it sweeps away the stormy structure she had raised before this human impulse toward the simplest expression of happiness.[82]

The belief that Emily Brontë's novel reflects her own

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[81] C. P. Sanger, Structure of "Wuthering Heights" (London, 1926), pp. 19-20.

[82] Charles Simpson, Emily Brontë (London, 1929), p. 165.

unsuccessful love affair is wholly false, according to G. F. Bradby in an article in Nineteenth Century. He is annoyed by attempts to link Emily with a lover. He insists that Emily's being a poet enabled her to write passionately about experiences imagined only, and not necessarily felt in real life. In creating her characters, Bradby writes, she

> . . . had to draw upon her own imaginative experience of life, which is a very different thing from 'holding up the mirror to nature.' Most of her characters have the unreasoned loves, hates, and cruelty of children, and in Heathcliff are incarnate the loneliness and the yearning for a passionate yet almost sexless love which haunts her poetry. At any moment the story might become ridiculous; but there is a strange power behind it, which makes it always fascinating and sometimes terrifying.[83]

Bradby says that we are constantly aware of the genius of Emily Brontë, transforming the potentially absurd into the horrible or poignant. Her gift is heightened by her ability to create an atmosphere so convincing that we cease to ask, "Is this possible?" It does not matter, Bradby concludes, what house was the original Wuthering Heights; we know it as well as we know our own home. And "what Emily felt about the moors she has conveyed to us in a prose which, at its best, is unsurpassed in its effortless beauty."[84]

These critics who have insisted on a frustrated love

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[83] G. P. Bradby, "Emily Brontë," The Nineteenth Century, CVIII (1930), p. 540.

[84] Ibid.

affair for Emily agree that Heathcliff represents her lover and that Cathy represents Emily, even as Jane Eyre can be said to represent Charlotte. Aside from the fact that this assumption is impossible on the basis of what we know about Emily's life and her lack of interest in other people, the nature of the book itself does not indicate a "sickly subjectivity." Q. D. Leavis is convinced that Wuthering Heights is not an instrument of wish-fulfillment, but that it

> . . . proceeds from a stronger mind, a sensibility that has triumphed over starvation and is not at its mercy. The cries of hunger and desire that ring through the book do not distress by a personal overtone, the reader is not made to feel embarrassed by the proximity of the author's face. The emotion exhibited . . . has a frame around it . . . it is controlled and directed, how deliberately, the bare bones of the novel . . . show. Wuthering Heights is the best example in Victorian fiction of a total-response novel.[85]

The attack upon the "clumsy construction" of Wuthering Heights continues. E. F. Benson says in Charlotte Brontë that though it is among the greatest works of fiction, its composition and construction are extremely awkward because of the double-narrator method. Benson believes that Miss Brontë originally intended to "make a motif out of Catherine's beauty and Lockwood's complacent susceptibility"

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[85] Q. D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London, 1932), p. 238.

but that the intention was discarded. There are other indications of confusion, he says, including the transfer of the narration from Lockwood to Nelly Dean and Lockwood's becoming an audience while Mrs. Dean talks to him for eighty pages at a stretch, repeating verbatim long conversations, and at one time reading to him an eleven-page letter. "No single author," Benson concludes, "could have planned a book in so topsy-turvy a manner."[86] On this basis, Benson concludes that Branwell is responsible for the opening chapters, which he calls an awkward misfit with the rest of the book. He cites a number of hopelessly pretentious sentences in the opening chapters (such as, "I had no desire to aggravate his impatience previous to inspecting the penetralium"), sentences which reveal, Benson says, Branwell's pomposity as it also is revealed in his letters. When Lockwood takes up the narrative at the end of the story, might not the reader expect the same pretentiousness and pomposity? Indeed, he finds a lyricism untainted by any element of exaggeration or bravado. It seems obvious to Benson than Branwell wrote the opening two chapters and provided Emily with the material for her portraits of the rough, sullen country folk about whom she knew nothing except from hearsay.

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[86] E. F. Benson, Charlotte Brontë (London, 1932), p. 175.

Charles Morgan, novelist and dramatic critic for the London Times, holds an opposite view, that the inspiration for the passionate poetry of the novel was a secret lover; he goes so far as to suggest that it might have been Branwell, though he admits there is no proof of it. He too believes that Branwell's hand in Wuthering Heights is obvious and indisputable. (See Irene Willis Cooper, The Authorship of Wuthering Heights, which is a comparative study of Wuthering Heights and of specimens of the writings of Branwell, rejecting the theory of his authorship of the novel.) There is no doubt that the licentious and erratic conduct of Branwell suggested to Emily many of the scenes of cruelty and drunkenness which took place at Wuthering Heights when Hindley was master, but to assume that Branwell was the author or co-author of the story on the basis of his drunken assertion of authorship in a tavern one night, at which time he flourished a part of the manuscript before a companion, is unwise.

Morgan does not insist that we accept his theories; whoever wrote it, he says, it is great,

> . . . not for its story, which is rash and confused; not for its drawing of recognizable or virtuous character . . . but for its power to communicate a vision and, in communicating it, to concede nothing to those who clamoured then--and clamour still when they cannot endure the ecstatic fire, the 'horror of great darkness'--for

> 'relief,' for 'glimpses of sunshine,' for 'increased reality.'[87]

Morgan concludes that the spirit of Heathcliff, which Charlotte said "seems breathed through the whole narrative," is responsible for the book's miraculous unity; for Heathcliff was drawn out of Emily's great soul.

Not only has the authorship of Wuthering Heights been assigned to Branwell; there are those who have sought to prove that it was written by Charlotte. John Malham-Dembleby in The Confessions of Charlotte Brontë compares similar passages in Charlotte's novels and in Wuthering Heights and concludes that their author was the same. May Sinclair in two appendices of her book has disposed of the claims of this writer and also of the theory that Branwell wrote Wuthering Heights.

Pelham Edgar, of the University of Toronto, writing in 1932, interprets Heathcliff as Emily Brontë's "Byronic demon-lover," though at times he represents her own tortured self. The book, he says, is full of minor flaws; e.g., Heathcliff would never have confessed his doings in the graveyard to Nelly Dean. Also, the complications in telling the story are very confusing. There is, he finds, a loss of

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[87] Charles Morgan, "Emily Brontë," The Great Victorians, ed. H. J. Massingham and Hugh Massingham (London, 1932), pp. 72-73.

interest when the elder Catherine dies, though the story does not fall apart "because the book came out of a deep spiritual or demonic experience." It is said, Professor Edgar continues, that Emily died standing up, leaning against a table in the parlor, having refused to go to bed. This incident

> . . . expresses Emily Brontë's resolute spirit, and reveals in her an almost unexampled capacity for suffering. It is these qualities that are transferred to her book, and make Wuthering Heights, if not supreme among English novels, still definitely unique. It is undoubtedly too morbid and humourless to reach the highest excellence, but it has had no predecessors, and can have no successor until another Emily Brontë appears. As a link in the chain of English fiction it has therefore much less importance than a later solitary and defiant book, Butler's Way of All Flesh, which propagated a multitude of novels of like kind but less power.[88]

Irene Cooper Willis calls Wuthering Heights a "Primitive" in literary art, whose power strikes from its primitiveness of both form and expression. Romanticism might possibly have influenced Emily's choice of plot; there is a similarity between Wuthering Heights and Hoffman's Die Majorat (The Entail). But there, says Miss Willis, the influence of romanticism stops; for the works of German romanticism were not realistic but theatrical in dialogue, emotions, and morals. Emily's novel, though the eerie setting has a sense of staginess, "introduced a note which

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[88] Pelham Edgar, "The Brontës," Queen's Quarterly, XXXIX (1932), 418.

was completely foreign to the taste of fiction readers of that time, a note of primitive passion which not even Charlotte understood."[89]

Miss Willis writes that Emily Brontë attempted to double stage her narrative -- to build as substantial a foreground (the affairs of Lockwood) as a background (the affairs of Heathcliff and Cathy). Although the attempt is not completely successful, it produces several effects that are indeed remarkable. First, the reader is reminded that what is now arousing his horror has been over for many years. Miss Willis observes that "Emily Brontë uses Time, much as Thomas Hardy uses it, to temper the spectacle of human passion, to impart to the reader a tenderness almost towards those who in life went so far astray."[90] And second, Mrs. Dean, whose business now is entirely with the present -- with caring for the invalid Lockwood, seeing that he gets his medicine and gruel on time -- always brings the reader back to the present when he has lost himself in the past. The events in the affair between Cathy and Heathcliff, which she relates to Lockwood, are not so immediate as to require tears, lost as they are in the almost-forgotten past.

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[89] Irene Cooper Willis, The Brontës (London, 1933), p. 110.

[90] Ibid., p. 115.

There is in Wuthering Heights, Miss Willis continues, a duality of outlook: one view expressing the vision of life of Mrs. Dean, a simple-minded, short-sighted view which was full of "violent impressions and . . . crude similes"; and the other view, essentially Emily's own view of life, based on a belief

> . . . in an all-loving, eternal Power who pitied human transgressions and granted rest, in the end, to all sinners. This deep, religiously felt tolerance of hers . . . took the place in her mind that a more scientific understanding of psychology of human beings takes in the minds of readers of today.[91]

Miss Willis discusses Emily's imaginative concept of love is comparison with Charlotte's more conventional view. In Shirley Charlotte had written that love was a "living fire brought from a divine altar." It is no wonder that in her preface to the second edition of Wuthering Heights she expressed dismay concerning the reckless and ravaging power of the love between Heathcliff and Cathy; to Charlotte the love seemed demonic rather than angelic. But Emily did not share her sister's idea of the divinity of love.

> For love, Emily might have said, is a very peculiar thing; intense, sacred, if you like to call it so, but when all is said, atrociously dangerous. Some of its mysteries can be brought to light but still there will remain something in the dark, mysterious, elusive and uncontrollable. . . . When we love, there are times

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[91] Ibid., pp. 119-120.

> when all our wisdom, all our previous consideration of love in the abstract, all our regard for social responsibilities, desert us, and we are helpless. We know in a powerless way that we ought to rule it instead of being ruled by it, but we do not, cannot always succeed.[92]

Wuthering Heights is one of the few great novels of the world, writes Virginia Moore in Distinguished Women Writers (1934). While Jane Eyre, an "incalculably inferior" novel, was being talked of all over England, Emily's masterpiece was ignored. Miss Moore detects a note of condescension toward Wuthering Heights in Charlotte's preface to the second edition. She was not aware that

> . . . Heathcliff exemplifies the warping of an individual by cruel early environment; that the redemption of his prototype Hareton by the warm love of the second Catherine is vicarious redemption, not only for Heathcliff but the Catherine who lay in her grave; indeed, that Heathcliff's evil is self-doomed and self-destroyed.[93]

Ralph Aiken, writing in South Atlantic Quarterly (1935), believes that Emily Brontë loved sadness, pain, and cruelty better than anything else in life. The scenes are painted, Aiken says, by one who obviously glories in imagining romantic cruelties, scenes from which she derives strong pleasure. Her favorite theme was torment because

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[92] Ibid., pp. 123-124.

[93] Virginia Moore, Distinguished Women Writers (New York, 1934), p. 118.

. . . her imagination was heroic and she conceived of tragedy on a grand scale . . . and whether the anguish was caused by imprisonment, by separation, by death, or by remembrance, she made of it something more than human."[94]

Methodist Good Companions (1935) by G. Elsie Harrison has a chapter dealing with the influence on the young Brontës of the "mad Methodist magazines," which were the most important item in the literary diet of the family. These magazines, according to Charlotte Brontë, were full of apparitions, miracles, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticisms. "It was Emily Brontë's violent reaction to the Methodist doctrine of sin that made her best poetry,"[95] Miss Harrison says.

E. E. Kellett writes in London Quarterly and Holborn Review of the Methodist magazines which the Brontë children read in their home and concludes that it was inevitable that

> . . . by attraction and repulsion, Methodism forced itself into their books--for their books are themselves--on paper. In the case of Emily, in particular, who was a born rebel, the influence was immensely powerful, and

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[94] Ralph Aiken, "Wild-Heart: An Appreciation of Emily Jane Brontë," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIV (1935), 210.

[95] G. Elsie Harrison, Methodist Good Companions (London, 1935), p. 133.

> she could no more keep Methodism out of her novel than George Eliot could keep Dinah Morris out of Adam Bede.[96]

W. Bardsley Brash [97] writes in the same issue of London Quarterly and Holborn Review that the genius of Wuthering Heights has not been explained by the suggestion either that Branwell wrote it or that the opening chapters are translated from the German. A more plausible suggestion, he agrees, is the influence of the Methodist magazines and the kind of religion represented therein, against which Emily protested. Her contempt for this religion is seen in the description of Joseph as "the wearisomest self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses to his neighbors.'"

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[96] E. E. Kellett, "New Light on the Brontës," London Quarterly and Holborn Review, IV-V (1935), 519.

[97] W. Bardsley Brash, "Emily Brontë," London Quarterly and Holborn Review, IV-V (1935), 521-523.

## CHAPTER VI

## RECENT CRITICS OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1936-1953)

Ernest Baker in The History of the English Novel (1937) calls Wuthering Heights one of the monumental achievements in English fiction. The character and tone of the novel, he says, remind one of some primeval myth or rude saga. Heathcliff and Catherine are of the same stature as the Gudruns, the Brunhilds, and the Sigurds of the ancient epic. Baker considers Wuthering Heights

> . . . a drama of elemental conflict and suffering that might have been played out on any stage. It is the story of a passion unfettered by the limitations of the world and the flesh; time and place, though so definitely particularized, are almost irrelevant; it is of any region and any age of mankind's perennial agony.[98]

Baker asks those who reproach Emily Brontë for her complicated method of narration whether the drama could possibly have unfolded itself so impressively had it been straightforwardly told.

> Its force is concentrated in a series of tremendous climaxes; the fire and fury of one scene gives momentum enough until the next. There are, it is true, intricate complications and obscurities in between; but,

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[98] Ernest Baker, The History of the English Novel, VIII (London, 1937), pp. 69-70.

> when the great moment arrives, the mental and moral situation is made clear enough by the actors themselves. Lucid order may be at a discount; but the lack of it is a trifling defect; for, as Swinburne pointed out, the alleged "confusion or incoherence' is only 'external and accidental,' not 'inward and spiritual.'[99]

A chapter is devoted to Emily Brontë in Early Victorian Novelists (1938) by David Cecil. He says that one of the reasons for the indifference with which Wuthering Heights was received is its non-conformity to the generally accepted standards by which the early Victorian novel was judged -- or any novel for that matter, an opinion to which Richard Chase later took exception. Emily Brontë, says Lord Cecil, writes about a strange and different world -- primitive, essentially unchanged from the time of Elizabeth, cut off from frequent communications. People in the story are possessed by the complex of the moors, and they live lives of confined interests and unbridled passions. Emily herself never contemplated the outside world, and her pictures were drawn only from what she saw about her. Like Blake, she does not ask, "How does it work, what are its variations?" Rather she asks, "What does it mean?" Consequently, she sees human beings, not in relation to one another or to society, but in relation to "the cosmic

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[99] Ibid.

scheme of which they form a part."

Nature plays a great part in the novel, and Lord Cecil mentions certain features of Emily's mystic philosophy of nature:

> The first is that the whole created cosmos, animate and inanimate, mental and physical alike, is the expression of certain living spiritual principles--on the one hand what may be called the principle of storm--of the harsh, the ruthless, the wild, the dynamic; and on the other the principle of calm--of the gentle, the merciful, the passive and the tame. . . . Each is the expression of a different aspect of a single pervading spirit; or they are the component parts of a harmony. . . . Emily Brontë does not see animate nature as Mrs. Gaskell does. She does not even see suffering, pitiful, individual man in conflict with unfeeling, impersonal, ruthless natural forces, like Hardy. Man and nature to her are equally living and in the same way. To her an angry man and an angry sky are not just metaphorically alike, they are actually alike in kind; different manifestations of a single spiritual reality.[100]

The source of conflict in Wuthering Heights is not between right and wrong but between like and unlike. Here Emily differs from Charlotte Brontë or Charles Dickens. Her outlook is not unmoral but premoral -- concerned not with moral standards "but with the conditioning forces of life on which the naive erections of the human mind that we call moral standards are built up."

A unique characteristic of Wuthering Heights is the

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[100] David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists (Indianapolis, 1938), pp. 162-163.

fierce, intense, elemntal quality of the emotions of the characters. These emotions are not awakened by the same external causes which awaken emotions in other Victorian novels. Catherine felt an affinity with Heathcliff because they were both a part of the same spiritual principle. A disregard of that fundamental principle can lead only to destruction.

Emily's concept of immortality, Cecil continues, is more than immortality in the Christian sense of the word. She believes in the immortality of the soul in this world. Her supernaturalism is not symbolic, like Hawthorne's, but a natural feature.

Lord Cecil believes that Wuthering Heights alone of all Victorian novels has retained its full power through the years; yet Emily Brontë has not been sufficiently appreciated.

> In her own time she was hardly appreciated at all, and though since she has slowly pushed her way to the front rank of Victorian novelists, she is still regarded, even by admirers, as an unequal genius, revealing some flashes of extraordinary imagination, but remote from the central interests of human life, often clumsy and exaggerated, and incapable of expressing her inspiration in a coherent form.[101]

Her intensity, freshness, and strength, Lord Cecil writes, enable her to forge a style "at once extremely

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[101] Ibid., pp. 157-158.

powerful and extremely delicate"; through it she achieved that rarest of literary triumphs, writing an old language so that it seems new. The rhythm of her sentences is one of the wonders of our literature.

Understanding the motivation in Wuthering Heights, Lord Cecil concludes, is dependent upon recognizing that like all the other characters, Heathcliff

> . . . is a manifestation of natural forces acting involuntarily under the pressure of his own nature. But he is a natural force which has been frustrated of its natural outlet, so that it inevitably becomes destructive; like a mountain torrent diverted from its channel, which flows out on the surrounding country, laying waste whatever may happen to be in its way. Nor can it stop doing so, until the obstacles which kept it from its natural channel are removed.[102]

Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée in their chapter on Victorian fiction in The Victorians and After (1938) explain in part the lack of interest in Wuthering Heights by contemporary reviewers on the grounds that the typical novel was written mainly for the masses. Composed often in parts for serial publication, it had to be thrilling, tear-compelling, melodramatic. Form was of no consequence so long as each part was exciting. When the public was offered a masterpiece of tense concentration in Wuthering Heights, it was rejected in favor of a "tear-compelling" fare.

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[102] Ibid., p. 175.

powerful and extremely delicate; through it are achieved that rarest of literary triumphs, writing an old language as then it sounds now. The flying of her sentences is one of the wonders of our literature.

Underscoring the motivation in Death from Malaria, Lord Goff concludes, in dropping upon vaccinating that like all the other characters, Martin-Lite

> . . . is a manifestation of natural forces acting involuntarily under the pressure of man and nature. But he is a human force which has been frustrated or its natural outlet, so that it inevitably becomes destructive; like a fountain current diverted from its channel, which flows out on the surrounding country, trying wherever man happens to be in its way. Man can stop during so, until the obstacle which keeps it from its natural course, is removed.[102]

Keith Berlowitz Conway works in their chapter on Waterloo fiction in The Victorians and Africa (1979) emphasize in part the lack of interest in writing fiction by contemporary reviewers on the grounds that the typical novel was written mainly for the masses. Composed often in parts for serial publication, it was to be truthful, entertaining, edifying, and moral. There was of no consequence as long as each part was selling. Even the profit was offered a masterpiece of some consideration in writing fiction, it was relegated in favor of a "page-turning" ware.

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[102] Ibid., p. 175.

In Wuthering Heights, Batho and Dobrée continue, the miracle of the era was achieved. With Vanity Fair it stands as one of only two great masterpieces of fiction. Though it has a hesitant beginning and is constructed somewhat awkwardly,

> . . . the book is a remarkably unified whole, a thing able to stand completely by itself, so integral are the passionate striving after the absolute, the fearlessness, the lack of sentimentality, the emotion which sweeps through the whole tortured scene, and somehow, by a still greater miracle, achieves serenity at the end, a feeling of reconciliation.[103]

Believing that the Brontë novels are largely autobiographical, Edith Ellsworth Kinsley in Pattern for Genius (1939) has attempted to reconstruct the lives of the Brontës by quoting extensively from their works. As a result, Heathcliff emerges as Emily herself and Cathy as Branwell, mirroring Emily's passionate fondness for her brother in real life.

Wuthering Heights, says Miss Kinsley, is told in two parts: the first revealing with grim reality, as Emily knew it, her own intensity of feeling for Branwell and his self-destruction through liquor and opium; the second attempting to offer some kind of solution. Emily kills herself and Branwell in the novel upon discovering that the

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[103] Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée, The Victorians and After (New York, 1938), p. 90.

problem is insoluble. Miss Kinsley believes that Nelly ". . . represented outside opinion, which never could comprehend the nature of the problem involved, the passions in conflict, nor the inevitable tragedy of the outcome. Place and circumstance were overtones in Wuthering Heights which conditioned the whole."[104]

Fannie Ratchford, after a study of the Brontë juvenilia, concludes that it is impossible that Branwell wrote or inspired any part of Wuthering Heights; his early genius failed of fulfillment and he produced nothing exceptional after his fifteenth or sixteenth year, she says.

> With even a partial reconstruction of Gondal, such as can be made from Emily's poems, disappears the last vestige of probability attaching to the theory that Wuthering Heights was written or inspired by Branwell Brontë, for what is there in the novel beyond the imaginative experiences of a woman who for half her life had ruled kingdoms, languished in prisons, led armies, wandered with outlaws, murdered ruthlessly, and ministered tenderly? Branwell had no part in Gondal; why should his hand be needed to explain Wuthering Heights?[105]

In The Patterns of English and American Fiction (1942) Gordon Hall Gerould writes that Wuthering Heights is the creation of an imagination which has been fed on the

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[104] Edith E. Kinsley, Pattern for Genius (New York, 1939), p. 316.

[105] Fannie Ratchford, The Brontës' Web of Childhood (New York, 1941), p. 247.

sentimental Gothic romances, a charge which has already been mentioned. Gerould too laments the clumsiness of the structure of the novel, which so many critics have considered one of its primary faults. In spite of these shortcomings, and what he considers to be unconvincing characterization, Gerould finds much in the book that is worthy of unreserved praise.

> We do not need to believe that such persons as Catherine and Heathcliff have existed or could exist; but we do believe that they show with compelling force the possibilities of overmastering human passion. When Catherine says 'I am Heathcliff', she is expressing something profoundly true, though she cannot herself understand it. Heathcliff feels with equal intensity the bond of union between them, and like Catherine is tortured by it, since for both there is more anguish than joy in the relationship. Love could not have saved them, even if circumstances had been different, because Heathcliff was too warped by nature and early experience to give or receive the love that brings with it kindness and mutual affection. . . . The whole appalling story is brought into true perspective at the end with the reconcilement of Hareton Earnshaw and the younger Catherine, which is by no means a conventional happy ending, but an essential clue to Miss Brontë's conception. The tragedy of passion has ended; normal life resumes its sway.[106]

Any mention of the Brontës, particularly Emily, suggests three contributions to English fiction, according to Edward Wagenknecht: romanticism, introspection, and passion. Wuthering Heights is not typical of the one-sided,

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[106] Gordon Hall Gerould, The Patterns of English and American Fiction (Boston, 1942), pp. 362-363.

terror-tale Gothicism, or the antiquarian romanticism of Scott, he says. Its passion for the elemental makes it unique in romantic fiction. "The imaginative power of Wuthering Heights is a thing the elder sister never matched. . . . [Emily] surrendered herself to her daemon with a complete self-abandonment, instead of pitting the conscientious scruples of a conventional religion against it, as Charlotte so often did."[107]

Ralph Fox calls Wuthering Heights a "cry of despairing agony wrung from Emily by life itself." It is, he continues, the novel become poetry, and one of the most extraordinary books ever produced. Emily's genius was heightened by her hatred of the tyranny of nineteenth century conventions and her discovery of the hypocrisy and fraud behind traditional morality. "The life of mid-Victorian England, experienced by a girl of passion and imagination imprisoned in the windswept parsonage on the moors of the West Riding, produced this book. . . . Catherine and Heathcliff are the revenge of love against the nineteenth century."[108] Wuthering Heights is the most frightful cry of human anguish which

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[107] Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York, 1943), p. 317.

[108] Ralph Fox, The Novel and the People (New York, 1945), p. 59.

was ever torn from a human being by life; the Victorian age produced no admission of greater suffering, Fox continues. In Emily's novel there is no compromise with romanticism, "that Victorian whore with the mock-modestly averted glance." The novel stands as a powerful indictment of the treachery of the times, and through it, ". . . with the grotesque and horrid echo of a chorus, runs the complaint of the farm-hand Joseph, the canting, joyless, hating and hateful symbol of the obscene morality of his age. . . ."[109]

Laura L. Hinkley is impressed by the fact that in Wuthering Heights each character, however minor, is superbly drawn. Three of the chief background characters -- Lockwood, Nelly Dean, and Joseph -- filter the atmosphere and root the story firmly in reality. Lockwood, inspired with Branwell's swaggering conceit, represents the outsider, the city world, skeptical but finally convinced not only of the truth of Nelly's tale but also of its passionate beauty. Nelly Dean represents the human norm, whose contacts with the main characters extend from the very beginning to the very end; but who is never assertive in the action and serves only to deepen further the revelation of the characters with whom she comes in contact. And finally Joseph,

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[109] Ibid., p. 60.

was over from from a human being by life; the Victorian age produced no education of primitive morality, for a thousand. In Emily's novel there is no conflict with romantic love, "what Valentin does with the mean-spirited mercenary planner." The novel stands as a convenient index of the treachery of the times, and through it, . . . with the grotesques and horrid some of a character, with the complicity of the Tree-Bound Tower, the Castle, Joylessness, Nature and material symbol of the obscure reality of old age. . . .

Dante L. Ultimly is impressed by this fact that in Wuthering Heights each chapter, however minor, is superbly drawn. Then, of the under backgrounds structure -- Lockwood, Ellen Dean, and Heathcliff -- Emily's characters are from the start Emily in reality. Lockwood, imagined with Brontëan's nudging insight, recreates the muddle, the city world, educated but Emily acquainted nor only of the truth of Emily's tale, but also of its passionate beauty. Emily Dean represents the human tone, where contrasting with the mere observation evolved from the very Dedlinsky to the very cant but who is never aggressive in the action and serves only to bring in mere the revelation of the characters with whom she comes in contact. The Emily through,

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139 Ibid., p. 80.

the masterful portrait of the cruelly self-righteous religion of the Brontës' experience, sets the overwhelming tone of frustration, despair, and hostility, which is not relieved till the end of the book.

Emily's chief concern in her novel, Miss Hinkley says, is not with the struggle between good characters and evil ones, but with the struggle between

> . . . one all-demanding love, itself contaminated with vindictive resentments, and several full-grown, full-fed hatreds in one man's soul. . . . Wuthering Heights deals with the highest of all themes. Although it is, and because it is, a straight, stern, powerful story of country lives and violent passions, it is also a drama of the soul in eternity. It is a Divine Comedy in epitome, Inferno and Purgatorio in one, with the faintest, far glimpse of Paradiso.[110]

Wuthering Heights is one of the most dramatic of English works, observes Bruce McCullough,[111] both in the manner of presentation and in content. As an inexperienced author, Emily was shy of adopting the omniscient-author technique and relied instead upon the familiar device of having an old family retainer tell the story to relieve herself of the difficulties of explaining things which were better left unexplained. Mrs. Dean does not pretend to

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[110] Laura L. Hinkley, Charlotte and Emily (New York, 1945), p. 343.

[111] Bruce McCullough, Representative English Novelists (New York, 1946), pp. 184-196.

understand the people she talks about or the things they do. She simply relates the tale to an interested listener. It is a story of terrible conflict, of human storms as elemental as the wild winds that gave to the farm the name Wuthering Heights. The struggle is not the same kind of struggle that one finds in Hardy's novels; for Emily the discord is not between man and nature but within nature. Because man is a part of nature, the discord is inevitable, and one can only wait for it to subside. In Wuthering Heights the path of the storm's fury is wide, beginning with the bringing of Heathcliff from Liverpool, progressing through the destructiveness of the Earnshaw and Linton families, and finally wearing itself out in a peace, which permits salvaging from the fury the love of Hareton and young Catherine.

Mr. McCullough emphasizes Emily Brontë's freedom from the traditional prejudices of the Victorian age. Catherine's confession of love for Heathcliff, though she is married to Edgar, and her subsequent defiance of her husband's wish that she cut herself completely off from Heathcliff constituted revolutionary actions in 1847. Emily Brontë's treatment of death, also, is in contrast to the sensational and sentimental treatment of death in many Victorian novels and is always legitimate and sincere, as

in the simply described scene of the death of Mr. Earnshaw.

In the essay "The Brontës, or, Myth Domesticated" Richard Chase attempts to show that the Brontës were not rebels against traditional morality, as has often been argued, but were essentially Victorian in their outlook. Chase believes that the happy marriages at the end of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights indicate the triumph of the sentimental point of view, and that "the moral texture of these novels is woven whole cloth out of the social customs of the day."[112] The view of these novels, Chase continues, is essentially a masochistic acceptance of the masculine insistence of Rochester and Heathcliff, or in real life, of Branwell and Patrick Brontë.

Chase emphasizes what Herbert Read has called Emily Brontë's "innocence," a quality akin to what Keats called negative capability -- "the ability of the tragic writer to retain an unbaffled, even uninquiring, perception of elementals in the midst of awful and confusing events."[113] Emily does not comment or moralize, as Charlotte does.

With Read's assertion that Emily Brontë is "perplexed

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[112] Richard Chase, "The Brontës, or, Myth Domesticated," reprinted in Forms of Modern Fiction, ed. William William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis, 1948), p. 118.

[113] Ibid., p. 113.

by the problem of evil" Chase disagrees; if she were "perplexed," she could not be "innocent." She recognizes the existence of evil and portrays it as an aspect of the universe, as she portrays terror and beauty. Though Miss Brontë is not perplexed, Chase continues, there is a central moral assertion in her novel; it exists in the scene in which Cathy realizes the terrible wrong she has done in marrying Edgar and denying the fulfillment of her passion for Heathcliff.

> The terrible recriminations which pass between the two lovers are the anguished utterances of human beings who are finally, because of the moral failure of Cathy, being dragged down into the flux of the dehumanized universe. Cathy dissolves into pure matter and force almost before our eyes (as Heathcliff is to do later) and while she yet retains enough of sensibility to make the experience articulate. Yet though this is the single moral assertion, the whole action of the book depends upon it.[114]

Emily Brontë's absolute devotion to death, says Chase, contributes to her sense of "innocence." He observes a Wordworthian influence in Emily Brontë's reference to infancy as a "glory," a "lost vision," and a "light." Cathy dies "like a child reviving." (Actually <u>before</u> death she "stirred, like a child reviving . . .") There is an attempt to solve the conflict between good and evil by escaping into the past, by detachment. But the attempt fails and there

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[114] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 114.

is no resolution, only a final escape into death.

Because she somehow freed herself from the moral and mental conventions and sluggishness of Charlotte and Anne, Emily is the greatest artist, according to Ernest Raymond. There are in Emily's work no personal antagonisms, no suggestions of outraged sensibility or of her own hurt. Emily was able to escape

> . . . from pietism and convention to the unhallowed simplicity of the moor. In the whole library of English Literature you will find no novel more completely 'undated' than Wuthering Heights; the book is untouched by the moral prepossessions of any age; its author is no more on the side of the conventional and commonsensible Nelly Dean than she is on the side of the pietistic Joseph, or the wild and amoral Cathy, or the evil but helpless Heathcliff; she is above and pitying them all; and the book is of no time and of all time. Charlotte's books are stamped with the impress of 1846.[115]

Byron and Emily Brontë "were affinities," Margiad Evans believes; their passionate language, their mysticism ("a singling out of the self among the Selves"), their spiritual philosophy gave them a twin-ness. Neither Byron nor she fought death, a further proof to Miss Evans of their twin-ship.

> Neither climate nor consumption was responsible for their deaths, but detachment. Nothing could have saved them or altered the fact. . . . It is as though

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[115] Ernest Raymond, In the Steps of the Brontës (London, 1948), p. 250.

> such people use some rarified chemical in them for their union with what they call God, or the Absolute or Brahman, which they cannot live without. So they die.[116]

In Manfred and Wuthering Heights, Miss Evans continues, one sees most sharply their affinity. Though Byron's mysticism was clouded with supernaturalism whereas Emily's is pure; though Byron's force is intellectual whereas hers is instinctive; yet both works are alike in theme and conception. Both dramas deal with perverted love and were conceived in "the earnestness of inmost inspiration." Miss Evans sees in them

> . . . as well as the parallel love theme, the solitude, the ego-projective loneliness of place, an identity of expression which is astounding. . . . Both works are the articulate vision of a tremendous earthly love bereaved in youth and left pursuing the lacking one until reunion and destruction.[117]

Miss Bentley's study of Wuthering Heights (1948) emphasizes Emily Brontë's skillful handling of character and heredity in the Earnshaw and Linton families. Though the characters in the novel are elemental beings, they are also strongly individual.

> . . . they are elemental because irrelevant circumstances have been refined away and their basic natures,

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[116] Margiad Evans, "Byron and Emily Brontë," Life and Letters, LVII (1948), 194.

[117] Ibid., p. 214.

> the element which is the core of their soul, has been distilled to its purest essence. In this nature and to the utmost limit of this nature they act, making their own inevitable fate.[118]

No character in Wuthering Heights, Miss Bentley observes, is completely sympathetic or odious. "Indeed Emily shows to her characters exactly that clear-eyed compassion which she shows when she declines to judge the hare and the deer for timidity, or mock the wolf for his wolfishness." Her compassion for her characters distinguishes her from her sisters, who blamed people for what they are and show strong bias in their animosity toward certain types of human beings.

> Not so Emily. She is able to detach herself from personal prejudice, she is no partisan; anticipating the work of modern psychologists she traces the nature of her characters to its source, understands that nature and rightly values its power for good or ill, its social use or harm, without blaming those who own ill natures for their involuntary possession.[119]

Wuthering Heights stands with Emily's finest verse, in both rank and quality, says Miss Bentley. In her novel and poems one discovers her fine vision and "space-sweeping soul," and the novel is filled with a wonderful landscape painting unexcelled in English fiction.

Miss Bentley believes that the complex mode of telling

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[118] Phyllis Bentley, The Brontës (Denver, 1949), p. 97.

[119] Ibid., pp. 99-100.

the story in Wuthering Heights -- the use of two narrators -- has obvious disadvantages:

> . . . it confuses, it cumbers, it limits, it strains the probabilities--when, for instance, Isabella relates accurately, in a letter, whole pages of conversation, we are conscious that in real life she would not do it so. But there are great advantages too. This method gives the reader a feeling of intense participation in the action of the story; is he not hearing about it from someone who was actually there? 120

In answer to critics who insist that the plot of Wuthering Heights is confused and its unfolding awkward, Miss Bentley replies that

> . . . its plot structure fulfils every demand which can be made upon the plot of a novel. The story springs wholly from the conflict of character of the people concerned, as all stories should. From the first introduction of Heathcliff, each happening leads on to the next; the chain of causality is firm and consistent, the march of the action inexorable. The tale abounds in excitement and suspense, which are skilfully heightened by the peculiar and complex mode of narration.121

Miss Bentley concludes her appreciation of the novel by saying that it does not "provide the Aristotelian purgation of the emotions by pity and terror." Rather than being raised to these warm emotions, we are raised to "the level of somber grandeur and intensity" which the story reveals. "What we receive from Wuthering Heights is a

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120 Ibid., p. 95.

121 Ibid., p. 96.

strengthening of our spirit, our vital core, through an austere contemplation of the quintessence of life which teaches us understanding and courage."[122]

Somerset Maugham believes that Wuthering Heights is very badly written in the "pseudo-literary manner." But he reminds us that this was Emily's first attempt at a novel; that is why she thought she must use grand words instead of simple ones. The main part of the story is told by a Yorkshire servant, Maugham says, who expresses herself in a way that no human being ever could.

He believes that Emily poured herself into Heathcliff so that the novel is an intimate revelation of her extensive maladjustment. She gave to him

> . . . her violent rage, her sexuality, vehement but frustrated, her passion of unsatisfied love, her jealousy, her hatred and contempt of human beings, her cruelty, her sadism. . . . I think Emily loved Catherine Earnshaw with Heathcliff's masculine, purely animal love, and I think she laughed . . . when as Heathcliff she kicked and trampled on Earnshaw and dashed his head repeatedly against the stone flags, and I think she laughed when, as Heathcliff, she hit the younger Catherine in the face and heaped humiliations upon her; I think it gave her a thrill of release when she bullied, reviled and browbeat the persons of her invention because in real life she suffered such bitter mortification in the company of her fellow creatures; and I think, as Catherine, doubling the roles, as it were, though she fought Heathcliff, though she despised him, though she knew him for the

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[122] Ibid., p. 102.

> evil thing he was, she loved him with her body and soul, she exulted in her power over him, she felt they were kin (as indeed they were if I am right in supposing they were both Emily Brontë), and since there is in the sadist often something of the masochist too, she was fascinated by his violence, his brutality and his untamed nature.[123]

According to Samuel C. Chew, to turn from the novels of Charlotte Brontë to Wuthering Heights is to turn from the world of governesses, schools, and parsonages to the wild moorlands, from faulty novels which approach greatness to one which is supremely great. He believes that the novel is more than "an allegory of the intersecting relationship between the earthly and the divine plane of being." It is most importantly, Chew says, a study of the interpenetration of these two planes. Animating the world of Wuthering Heights are two powerful forces: dynamism and passivism, both of which are good. But when dynamism becomes diverted from its natural passage, as in the case of Heathcliff, terror and destruction result. This is the view which Lord Cecil earlier expressed. One of the fundamental laws of nature is that "like will to like." Catherine and Heathcliff, Chew explains, are affinities; but when ". . . Catherine marries Edgar Linton storm and calm are mismated and disaster follows. In the second generation

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[123] W. Somerset Maugham, Great Novelists and Their Novels (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 132-133.

the union of the dynamic characters is renewed upon the spiritual plane and the passive characters find happiness on earth."[124]

Chew says that many readers believe that the novel is clumsily constructed; and on grounds applicable to any other novel, Emily Brontë's method would be considered awkward. The first Catherine is already dead when the story begins, and in the first chapter her ghost flutters at the window in a storm, pleading to be admitted.

> To plunge, as Emily did, not merely into the midst of the action but into the very conclusion of the whole matter (for Heathcliff is near his death) was to challenge the laws of narrative. But Emily knew that it was impossible to lead the reader by degrees into the occult realm of her story; the fortress of incredulity must be taken at once and by storm. From this beginning at the end, the tale folds back, first in the narration by Nelly Deans [sic], afterwards in part by Lockwood, the intruder from the outside world to whom are allotted the immortal concluding words of the story.[125]

What Emily Brontë intended to be a work of edification in the grand passion of love ends as an instruction to Emily herself in the vanity of human wishes, according to Mark Schorer. Her intention was ". . . to dramatize with something like approval -- the phrase that follows is from

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[124] Samuel C. Chew, The Nineteenth Century and After, IV, A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York, 1948), p. 1377.

[125] Ibid.

Middlemarch -- 'the sense of the stupendous self and an insignificant world.' What her metaphors signify is the impermanence of self and the permanence of something larger."[126]

Schorer anlayzes her images to show that they are strongly elemental, bound to the fierceness of animal life, fire, wind, and water.

> Emily Brontë's metaphors color all her diction. As her epithets arecharged with passion . . . so her verbs are verbs of violent movement and conflict, both contributing to a rhetorical texture where everything is at a pitch from which it can only subside. The verbs demand exhaustion, just as the metaphors demand rest. And there is an antithetical chorus in this rhetoric, a contrapuntal warning, which, usually but not only in the voice of Nelly Dean, says, 'Hush! Hush!' all through the novel, at the beginning of paragraph after paragraph. At the end everything is hushed. And the moths fluttering over Heathcliff's grave and 'the soft wind breathing through the grass' that grows on it have at last more power than he, for all his passion.

Heathcliff and Cathy wear themselves out in a useless passion; and at the end, it is the voice of the country, Nellie Dean, which drones on. Emily did not intend that her novel should end on this note of homespun finality, Mr. Schorer says, but "her rhetoric altered the form of her intention." In the final peace, it is the soft, fragile things which

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[126] Mark Schorer, "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy,'" The Kenyon Review, XI (1949), 545.

[127] Ibid., p. 548.

endure.

Lawrence and E. M. Hanson point out several contrasts between the techniques of Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Emily is objective, concerned with actions and words, whereas Charlotte is subjective, concerned with human motives. Charlotte's work has the traditional Victorian moral tone, whereas Emily's work has strictly amoral treatment. Charlotte is concerned fundamentally with love in this life, whereas Emily

> . . . always looks out to a fuller life; death, to her, is neither an end nor a beginning but a metamorphosis, the freeing of a person's essence--a belief which she frequently expresses in her poems. Wuthering Heights is not in any real sense a love story, and the feeling between Catherine and Heathcliff has none of the intimate humanity of Jane's love for Rochester, or Lucy's for the Professor in Villette. It is scarcely possible to imagine Catherine and Heathcliff living together; easier, indeed, to imagine them disembodied, in the form of rough winds. Catherine's death is therefore artistically inevitable--it breaks the only barrier to the fulfillment of her affinity with Heathcliff.[128]

The Hansons deplore the tendency in criticism to emphasize the unreality of Heathcliff. Taken alone, he is difficult to accept, but Emily is always careful to present him in relation to characters whose reality is beyond doubt. The view that Heathcliff is the focal point of the story is not completely valid; it is true that he gives it

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[128] Lawrence and E. M. Hanson, The Four Brontës (London, 1949), pp. 232-233.

its unity, but it is the two Catherines who give it its human interest and vitality.

Another false impression of Wuthering Heights is that it is predominantly brutal. Actually, its more lasting quality is lyricism. The Hansons conclude that

> . . . Emily is one of the great English prose-writers. Her prose in Wuthering Heights has the mark of true genius; again and again her words sound as though she had that moment invented them. And she uses these words like the poet she is, with an economy, a rhythm, and a beauty that perfectly conveys the sense and feeling.[129]

Of all English novels, Wuthering Heights is the most difficult to analyze, says Dorothy Van Ghent, not because it is structurally weak but because it is so far removed from conventional moral and social reason. The figures which Miss Brontë uses suggest the attitude expressed in some great medieval Chinese paintings,

> . . . where the fall of a torrent from an enormous height, or a single wave breaking under the moon, or a barely indicated chain of distant mountains lost among mists, seems to be animated by some mysterious, universal, half-divine life which can only be 'recognized,' not understood.[130]

In Wuthering Heights there is a nakedness of familiar morality and manners, Miss Van Ghent continues, but a

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[129] Ibid., p. 548.

[130] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Functions (New York, 1953), pp. 153-154.

nakedness not quite complete, set off as it is against the conventional figures of Nelly Dean and Lockwood. Essentially the book exists "as a tension between two kinds of reality: the raw, inhuman reality of anonymous natural energies, and the restrictive reality of civilized habits, manners, and codes."[131] The first type of reality is exemplified by the conduct of Heathcliff and Cathy, the second by the "gossipy concourse of Nelly Dean and Lockwood" and also by the love affair between Hareton and Cathy.

The only possible ending for the book, says Miss Van Ghent, is the one which Emily created. Its inevitable rightness concludes a love so savagely irresponsible that

> . . . all we can really imagine for the grown-up Catherine and Heathcliff, as 'characters' on the human plane, is what the book gives them--their mutual destruction by tooth and nail in an effort, through death, to get back to the lost state of gypsy freedom in childhood.[132]

The windowpane is an important symbol in Wuthering Heights, continues Miss Van Ghent; it is the medium which separates the outside natural world from the inside human world, as in the scene in which the ghost of Cathy flutters at the window, pleading to be admitted. Throughout the book the window-symbol underlies and emphasizes the basic

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[131] Ibid., p. 157

[132] Ibid., p. 159.

struggle, as in Cathy's accepting the world of refinement which she sees through the window of Thrushcross Grange, while Heathcliff violently rejects it. In death Heathcliff's eyes, which have been called "the clouded windows of hell," do not close, thus symbolizing the final openness between "the daemonic depths of the soul and the limited and limiting lucidities of consciousness."[133]

Another striking metaphor which Miss Van Ghent calls attention to is the "two children" figure, a motif which is repeated three times in Wuthering Heights. She notes that the classic type of this figure is the boy with dark hair and shadowed brow and the girl with golden curls who will bring happiness to the sorrowful boy. But the traditional change does not occur; instead the dark boy is doomed to even greater darkness, a theme obvious in Wuthering Heights and also in Emily Brontë's poetry, as Miss Van Ghent shows.

Jaquetta Hawkes writing in The Spectator (1953) finds in Wuthering Heights a powerful contrast between two worlds, the dark moorland world of Wuthering Heights and its inhabitants and the bright, fair valley world of Thrushcross Grange and the Lintons. On another level, she says,

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[133] Ibid., p. 163.

> . . . the moorland forces represent the passions, the dark energy of the unconscious mind, the valley dwellers the light of intellect and civilisation. The blind clash between them is resolved only in the second generation of their lives, when the two 'half-cast' children, young Catherine and Hareton, find happiness together, while the protagonists of light and darkness, having destroyed one another, lie buried on the lip of the valley where the heather meets the grass.[134]

B. Scholfield objects to Miss Hawkes' theory on the grounds that Heathcliff does not represent the moorland because he came from Liverpool.[135] He believes that the moorland stands for light and for escape from the dark world of industrialism of the valley. (He might have added that Miss Hawkes is scarcely justified in calling the union of the young half-castes, Cathy and Hareton, a resolution of the conflict of light and darkness because Hareton is not a combination of dark-light [Earnshaw-Linton], as young Cathy is, but of dark and an unknown ingredient.)

Margaret Lane in The Brontë Story (1953) writes that Emily Brontë's concern in her poetry as well as in Wuthering Heights is not with men and women, of whom she knew little, but with good and evil, with God and the soul. Miss Lane says that Emily's view of the world is profoundly

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[134] Jacquetta Hawkes, "The Haworth Moors," The Spectator, CXC (1953), 600.

[135] B. Scholfield, "The Haworth Moors," The Spectator, CXC (1953), 678.

pessimistic, that she had little faith in humankind. This pessimism is the result of her having turned her imagination inwards and refusing to meet the demands of life. Accordingly the reader can expect to find in Wuthering Heights the revelation of the neuroses which profoundly disturbed Miss Brontë's existence, resulting from loss of love in childhood, of a fear that her love would be refused, or of some sense of inadequacy.

This escape into the imaginative world of Wuthering Heights, Miss Lane continues, came to suit her emotional as well as her imaginative needs. Her passionate and innocent experience

> . . . lay in a world which she alone controlled, and which was therefore safe. No rebuff, no loss of love could touch her on this level, where she demanded nothing that she herself could not satisfy. It is from states of mind like these that the recluse, the stoic, and often the hero are made; also the mystic, whose ecstasy lies in sole communion with God; and Emily Brontë contained elements of all these.[136]

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[136] Margaret Lane, The Brontë Story (London, 1953), pp. 198-199.

penalistic, that she had little faith in humankind. This pessimism is the result of her having turned her introspection inwards and refusing to meet the demands of life. Accordingly the reader can expect to find in *Wuthering Heights* the revelation of the purposes which profoundly disturbed Miss Brontë's existence, resulting from loss of love in childhood, of a fear that her love would be refused, or of some sense of inadequacy.

This escape into the imaginative world of *Wuthering Heights*, Miss Lane continues, came to suit her emotional as well as her imaginative needs. Her pessimism and incoherent experience

> . . . lay in a world which she alone controlled, and which was therefore safe. So rebuff, no loss of love could touch her on this level, where she dominated nothing that she herself could not satisfy. It is from states of mind like these that the revolver, the storm, and often the hero are made; also the mystic, whose ecstasy lies in sole communion with God; and Emily Brontë combined elements of all these.[136]

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[136] Margaret Lane, *The Brontë Story* (London, 1953), pp. 148-149.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION

In an essay which is intended to be a collection of opinions, the writer is perhaps justified for including his own estimate of Wuthering Heights. It seems probable that the sympathetic reader of the novel is likely to react to it in several distinctly characteristic ways upon successive readings. At first one is stunned by the tremendous power of its poetry; it is as though he has been caught in a violent electrical storm. When the last roll of thunder rumbles away, he is left breathless with awe and admiration; the bright sunlight and warmth and peace seem to deny the fury which earth has just endured.

When the reader enters the world of Wuthering Heights for the second time, it is to meet people who are no longer complete strangers to him; hence he is not overpowered so completely as at first by the explosive force of their actions and begins to see them more as people than as dehumanized tensions in nature. This second time he looks carefully about him, is aware perhaps that some of the passion is mere bombast, that many of the speeches are tedious, high-flown, unnatural. He has begun to be critical of aspects of the novel which he at first accepted completely,

as contributing to the book's supreme power. He does not leave the world of Wuthering Heights with any sense of disappointment, however, because as Swinburne pointed out, the faults dissolve before the magnificent dramatic and lyric power in the lives of these suffering, loving, dying country folk.

Upon a third visit the reader surveys the familiar scene -- the beauty of landscape and the presence of characters so real that their breath and heartbeat seem to be the reader's own -- and his spirit trembles before the perfection of this imaginative achievement. He knows better now what wonder her poetry has wrought: not only the creation of this magic language, but also the resolution of life's terrible tensions in a serenity so overwhelming that it can never be forgotten. It does not seem possible that one can understand easily -- but one must understand it in order to appreciate Wuthering Heights fully -- how inevitable it was that Cathy and Hareton should love, now natural and sublime is this resolution of the stress. Heathcliff's will to destroy is broken by the love which Catherine and Hareton share -- not the cruel, irresponsible self-love of Heathcliff and Catherine, which inevitably consumes; but tolerant, generous, sympathetic love which seeks first always the satisfaction of the loved one. This final love affair

is more than what May Sinclair called "sheer opulence of imagination"; it is Emily Brontë's assertion that man and nature are fundamentally good.

To summarize the criticism of Wuthering Heights is particularly difficult because the novel is as mystifying in some respects today as it has always been. Four obvious conclusions can be drawn, however, as points of agreement. Most significant of all is the fact that the opinion of contemporary critics of Wuthering Heights that the novel was immoral, grotesque, and badly written has given way to the judgment that it is a great work of art, probably greater than any of her sister's novels and certainly one of the masterpieces of English prose fiction. Secondly, two dominant strains can be detected running through the body of criticism: an emphasis on biographical interpretation since Mrs. Gaskell's study of the family, and a Freudian approach which seeks out the woman instead of the artist. Thirdly, the critics who have sensed power in the novel and imagined it arose from a kind of instinctive but untrained genius and who have believed that the novel was weak in structure and form have been refuted by studies which show the novel to be a technically skillfull projection of a poetic vision of life. Fourthly, though it is unfair to say that there exists any marked unanimity in judgment

of the ultimate meaning of the novel, most recent critics believe that Emily Brontë is concerned with a moral problem. Swinburne and May Sinclair among others believed that Wuthering Heights is an expression of Emily's "splendid paganism," that concern with morality was not in her mind. But as the Gondal poems have been better understood and their relationship with the novel revealed, the conclusion seems inescapable that Wuthering Heights reveals the clash between dynamism and passivism -- not between good and evil -- and shows the destruction which results when they are forced into opposition. The second generation of lovers represents the reconcilement of those forces and a return to the natural harmony of the universe.

Over one hundred years have elapsed since Emily Brontë wrote Wuthering Heights. In spite of the prophecies of contemporary critics that the novel would not survive its generation, the ghosts of Heathcliff and Cathy still walk the Yorkshire moors.

That a work of such tremendous beauty and vitality was born in the simple and uncultivated mind of the "Nun of Haworth" is strange; that the world failed so long to comprehend its genius is even stranger.

Perhaps Charlotte Brontë's disapproval of the spirit of Heathcliff, in a letter to Mr. Williams, expressed

Emily's supreme achievement long before Swinburne or Maeterlinck or any of the latter-day enthusiasts awakened succeeding generations to the fact that Wuthering Heights deserves a place among the immortal novels. Apologizing for the passionate, elemental nature of Heathcliff, Charlotte wrote: "The worst of it is some of his spirit seems breathed through the whole narrative in which he figures: it haunts every moor and glen, and beckons in every fir tree of the Heights."

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