

# *Wuthering Heights*



Emily Brontë

*With an Introduction by Daphne Merkin*

*Notes by Tatiana M. Holway*

George Stade  
Consulting Editorial Director



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS  
NEW YORK

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# Table of Contents

[From the Pages of Wuthering Heights](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Emily Brontë](#)

[The World of Emily Brontë and Wuthering Heights](#)

[Introduction](#)

[A Note on the Text and Dialect](#)

[Genealogy](#)

[Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell](#)

[EDITOR'S PREFACE to the new \[1850\] edition of 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS'](#)

[Chapter I](#)

[Chapter II](#)

[Chapter III](#)

[Chapter IV](#)

[Chapter V](#)

[Chapter VI](#)

[Chapter VII](#)

[Chapter VIII](#)

[Chapter IX](#)

[Chapter X](#)

[Chapter XI](#)

[Chapter XII](#)

[Chapter XIII](#)

[Chapter XIV](#)

[Chapter XV](#)

[Chapter XVI](#)

[Chapter XVII](#)

[Chapter XVIII](#)

[Chapter XIX](#)

[Chapter XX](#)

[Chapter XXI](#)

[Chapter XXII](#)

[Chapter XXIII](#)

[Chapter XXIV](#)

[Chapter XXV](#)

[Chapter XXVI](#)

[Chapter XXVII](#)

[Chapter XXVIII](#)

[Chapter XXIX](#)

[Chapter XXX](#)

[Chapter XXXI](#)

---

[Chapter XXXII](#)

[Chapter XXXIII](#)

[Chapter XXXIV](#)

[\*Endnotes\*](#)

[\*Inspired by Wuthering Heights\*](#)

[\*Comments & Questions\*](#)

[\*For Further Reading\*](#)

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## *From the Pages of Wuthering Heights*



A perfect misanthropist's heaven: and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. (page 3)

He'll love and hate equally under cover, and esteem it a species of impertinence to be loved or hated again. (page 6)

'I'm now quite cured of seeking pleasure in society, be it country or town. A sensible man ought to find sufficient company in himself.' (page 28)

'Proud people breed sad sorrows for themselves.' (page 56)

'I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.' (page 79)

'Heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy.' (page 80)

'He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.' (page 80)

'If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day. And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have: the sea could be as readily contained in the horse-trough as her whole affection be monopolised by him.' (page 148)

'I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out the entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.' (page 151)

I don't know if it be a peculiarity in me, but I am seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the

chamber of death, should no frenzied or despairing mourner share the duty with me. I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter—the Eternity they have entered—where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. (page 163)

‘And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers. I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—driven mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!’ (page 165)

‘He said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening on the bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bluebells and the larks singing high up overhead, and the blue sky and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly.’ (page 239)

I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth. (page 326)

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# Emily Brontë



Reserved and reclusive by nature, Emily Jane Brontë remains a figure whose life and personality are largely shrouded in mystery. She was born on July 30, 1818, at Thornton in Yorkshire. Her father, Patrick, was the curate of Haworth, and her mother, Maria Branwell Brontë, died of cancer when Emily was three. Two of Emily's older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, died of consumption when she was just seven. The surviving Brontë children—Charlotte, Patrick Branwell, Emily, and Anne—were brought up by a maternal aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, who came to live in their father's parsonage. She read to them from newspapers, and the children kept abreast of political debates, such as the question of Catholic emancipation and the aftermath of the French Revolution. They also had free reign of the father's library, where they encountered such writers of their time as Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Wordsworth, along with William Shakespeare and Aesop. Two of their favorite books were John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Paul Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). In June of 1826 Patrick Brontë gave Branwell a set of twelve wooden soldiers, and the four siblings began to create a fantasy world. Ascribing names and personalities to the toy soldiers, the Brontës wrote and performed a number of plays. Later, Emily and Anne created the Gondal saga, which centered on the inhabitants of an imaginary island in the north Pacific. These "Gondal chronicles," the inspiration for some of Emily's most passionate poems, occupied her thoughts and writings throughout most of her life, even after Anne had tired of the fantasy.

Although she wrote quite extensively, Emily had little formal schooling. In 1835 she briefly attended Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, where Charlotte was a teacher; she left after only three months because she was homesick and made few friends, and as a result, her health was suffering. Around 1837 (the exact date remains in question) Emily taught at Law Hill School but remained there only a short time. In 1842 she and Charlotte studied in Brussels, where Emily was exposed to the writings of the French and German Romantics. It was at home on the moors, however, where Emily was happiest, and aside from limited travels for schooling, she spent her life in Haworth.

In the biographical notice Charlotte wrote for the republication of *Wuthering Heights* in 1850, she refers to her accidental discovery of a notebook of Emily's poems five years earlier: "My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character nor one, on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication." By Charlotte's persuasion, she did succeed, and in 1846 the three Brontë sisters, using pseudonyms, published *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*.

Emily is best remembered for her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, first published in 1847 to much less recognition than her sister's *Jane Eyre*. Only with its 1850 republication and with Charlotte's preface, which addresses some of the violence and nihilism of the novel, did *Wuthering Heights* begin to receive real recognition. Emily Brontë died on December 19, 1848.

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# The World of Emily Brontë and Wuthering Heights



**1818** Emily Jane Brontë is born on July 30. The fourth canto of Byron's *Childe Harold* is published.

**1819** The Reverend Patrick Brontë, Emily's father, is offered a lifetime curacy at Haworth.

**1820** The Brontës move to Haworth.

**1821** Emily's mother dies. Her sister, their Aunt Elizabeth Branwell, agrees to raise the Brontë children.

**1824** Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Emily are sent to the Clergy Daughters' school at Cowan Bridge.

**1825** Maria Brontë dies in May. Charlotte and Emily are taken out of school. Elizabeth dies in June.

**1826** The four surviving Brontë children use Branwell's toy soldiers to create make-believe characters. These soldiers, referred to by the children as the Young Men, are the source for numerous plays they write and perform.

**1827-1828** The Brontë children begin the play *The Islanders*; each picks an actual island and populates it with his or her favorite heroes. Having been influenced by their readings of *The Arabian Nights*, the Brontës see themselves as genii who have omnipotent power over the worlds they create. Emily selects Sir Walter Scott, his son-in-law, and his grandson as some of her heroes. Their aunt had earlier given the children a copy of Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* (1828).

**1831** Emily and Anne begin the Gondal saga, stories of the inhabitants of an imaginary island in the north Pacific.

**1834** Emily's earliest manuscript, a Gondal story, is dated this year.

**1835** Emily attends Miss Wooler's school, but she stays only three months because her health is failing. She recovers fully at Haworth.

**1836** Emily writes her earliest dated poem.

**1837** Around this time, Emily leaves Haworth to teach at Law Hill School near Halifax, but she remains there for only a short while. Branwell attempts and fails to be noticed by both Wordsworth and *Blackwood's Magazine*, a well respected periodical. Victoria becomes queen of England. Emily echoes the coronation with events featuring her own characters in

- 1837-1842** More than half of Emily's extant poems are written during this period. In 1839 Shelley's *Poetical Works*, edited by Mary Shelley, is published.
- 1842** Charlotte and Emily attend school in Brussels under the tutelage of M. Heger. Here she is first exposed to the writings of Hugo, Guizot, Bossuet, Hoffman, Goethe, and Voltaire. Emily writes essays in French and excels at her piano lessons. The two sisters are called back to Hawthorn by news of their aunt's sudden death.
- 1843** Emily is housekeeper of Hawthorn and caretaker of her father.
- 1844** Emily copies her poems into two notebooks, "Gondal Poems" and "E.J.B."
- 1845** Emily and Anne renew their enthusiasm for Gondal and work avidly on the saga. In October Charlotte discovers a notebook of Emily's poems. After much resistance from her sister, Charlotte convinces Emily to have them published. Emily begins work on *Wuthering Heights*.
- 1846** Shy of publicity and aware that, as Charlotte later writes, "authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice," the sisters publish under pseudonyms. Their work appears as *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. The three sisters work on novels; and in the evening, after all housework is done, they compare notes on their works in progress and read to each other from their latest chapters. Branwell, addicted to opium and alcohol, spends all his time at home. Charlotte grows to despise her brother.
- 1847** Unsold copies of *Poems* are sent to Wordsworth; Tennyson; John Gibson Lockhart, editor of the *Quarterly Review*; De Quincey; and Hartley Coleridge. The publisher T. C. Newby accepts Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* but delays their publication. *Jane Eyre* is accepted and published by Smith, Elder and becomes an immediate success. Now there is interest in the "Bell" writers, and Emily and Anne's novels are published in December under their pseudonyms.
- 1848** In January an *Examiner* review criticizes *Wuthering Heights* for being "coarse." Similar reviews follow. In September, Branwell dies, and at his funeral Emily catches a severe cold; it develops into a respiratory infection that ultimately leads to her death from pulmonary disease, or "consumption," as it was then termed.
- 1850** *Wuthering Heights* is reissued with a biographical notice by Charlotte, in which she depicts Emily's extremely reserved nature and isolated life. Charlotte also clarifies the identities of the Brontë sisters. Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell are now known as Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, respectively.

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## Introduction



The first thing you will notice about Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*—right after you've noticed that two characters share a name (Catherine), two have first names that sound like surnames (Hareton and Hindley), and two have names that are used both as last names and as first names (Edgar *Linton* and *Linton* Heathcliff), thereby creating a confusion in the reader's mind—is that it is like no other novel ever written. It reads like the work of someone who had direct access to her unconscious—or, as the New Agers might put it, was able to “channel” her unconscious. Perhaps the most striking triumph of the novel is that although it is a very particular fever dream concocted by one very specific and overheated imagination, it manages somehow to take over and become your own fever dream (which is, in essence, what happens with all great novels), the exact contents of which are hard to recall once you wake up. Should you chance to read it a second or third time, *Wuthering Heights* comes at you afresh, in part because the novel seems to vanish into its own delirious origins once you've finished, leaving no footprints, and in part because it is a literary force of nature such as you've never encountered before. Whether this quality of being intractably unlike other novels—although various influences, especially that of the writer Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic poets (particularly Byron) have been teased out by diligent scholars as well as wildly imaginative critics—is a good or a bad thing is a puzzle that continues to engage the novel's readers every bit as much as when it was first published in 1847, causing, with a few exceptions, consternation and outright hostility among Victorian readers.

Emily Brontë was twenty-seven at the time she wrote *Wuthering Heights*. She was the second and least worldly of a triumvirate of immensely gifted writing sisters who had managed to overcome the vicissitudes of their childhood to burst forth, seemingly out of nowhere, with powerful and entirely unconventional works of the imagination. Misfortune lurked in every nook and cranny of the family history: The sisters' mother died when the oldest, Charlotte, was five, and within the next four years two elder sisters had died as well, at the ages of eleven and ten, as a result of the miserable conditions at a boarding school that would later be immortalized as the horrifying Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. Patrick Brontë, the girls' father, was the curate of Haworth, a remote Yorkshire village, and his four remaining children, who included a son, Branwell, grew up under strikingly isolated circumstances. Cut off from the local goings on by virtue of their not entirely secure social class (Patrick, who attended Cambridge on a scholarship, had risen from humble Irish stock) and looked after by a spinster aunt and a housekeeper named Tabby, they were thrown mostly on their own company. (Although Patrick may not have been quite the deranged character he was made out to be until fairly recently, when his image was refurbished in Juliet Barker's exhaustively researched 1994 biography *The Brontës*, he was undeniably on the peculiar side—preferring, among other habits, to take his meals alone.) The siblings entertained themselves by creating, in minuscule script on tiny scraps of paper, elaborate fantasy worlds, the most enduring of which were Angria and Gondal. Emily continued to be intensely engaged by Gondal well into adulthood, and the origins of her and her sisters' literary gifts are clearly to be found in their juvenilia.

Charlotte, whose *Jane Eyre* appeared the same year as both Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne

*Agnes Grey*, was the oldest and most enterprising of the three. She virtually dragged her young sisters out of their cloistered existence—the parsonage in which they lived fronted on a graveyard and looked out in back on the Yorkshire moors—into the light of print by dint of her tireless efforts to get their books published. It is difficult from the vantage point of today to envision the kind of perseverance it took for the sisters to continue with their scribblings in a house where writing, as one Brontë scholar has pointed out, was “very much a male domain” (Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 227; see “For Further Reading”). It is equally hard to imagine the kind of resistance Charlotte faced in trying to get a reading for her and her sisters’ work. Victorian England in the middle of the nineteenth century was high handedly patriarchal, harboring deep, even irrational misgivings about female creativity and self-assertion; and not the least remarkable aspect of the Brontë story is that Charlotte persisted in spite of her own anguished doubts and daunting rejection. (Among other people who had advised her against pursuing writing was the poet laureate Robert Southey, to whom she sent some of her poems while she was teaching at a boarding school. Although he conceded that she had “the faculty of Verse,” Southey saw fit to admonish her: “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life: & it ought not to be.”)

All three sisters published their novels under pseudonyms—they took the intentionally masculine sounding names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell—and when *Wuthering Heights* was republished in 1850 under its author’s real name, Emily was already dead. She had died at the age of thirty, less than three months after her younger brother, Branwell, who had once been considered the family genius, died from drugs and drink. The cause of her death was officially given as consumption, but it is clear to any reader of Emily’s biography that it was a form of passive suicide—that she had helped her end along by willing herself into the next world she so devoutly believed in, frequently exalted, and finally welcomed. Emily steadfastly refused medical care until she finally gave in to her two sisters’ pleas of what turned out to be the last day of her life. The doctor arrived at two in the afternoon after she had already, as Charlotte described it in a letter to her close friend Ellen Nussey, “turned her dying eyes from the pleasant sun” (Frank, *A Chainless Soul: A Life of Emily Brontë*, p. 261). The death-embracing side of Emily is discernible in her only novel, but it is even clearer in the poems she wrote, in one of which she characterizes life as “a labour, void and brief.”

It was Charlotte who suggested to her own publishers—she had by now “come out” to them as the celebrated author of *Jane Eyre*—that *Wuthering Heights* deserved to be reprinted and, as an added inducement, proposed to edit this second edition herself. As part of her program to render both herself and her sister more acceptably modest in spirit and less bold in thought than their fiction might otherwise suggest, Charlotte endeavored to make Emily’s novel more accessible by downplaying its stylistic oddities—standardizing her sister’s idiosyncratic punctuation and abrupt cadences. The second edition also came with a curiously apologetic preface that, advertently or not, paved the way for many apologetic interpretations to come. In it, Charlotte addressed the novel’s many critics by insisting on the untutored quality of her sister’s literary genius (Emily, like Charlotte, was in fact unusually well-educated) while at the same time admitting to her own consternation about the author’s impulses: “Whether it is right or advisable,” Charlotte wrote, “to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is.” She also appended a biographical note explaining to the reading public that she and her two younger sisters, Emily and Anne, were the authors, respectively, of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey*.

More than 150 years and many cultural upheavals later, Emily Brontë’s novel remains almost blindingly original, undimmed in its power to convey the destructive potential of thwarted passion



expressed through the unappeasable fury of a rejected lover. To paraphrase Shakespeare, age cannot wither it, nor custom stale its infinite variety. Every aspect of the novel—whether it be the writer's expert grasp of the laws pertaining to land and personal property, her meticulous rendering of local dialect, or her use of multiple narrators—has been put under microscopic study. And yet, despite the shelf after shelf of books that have been written in the attempt to understand the frail yet flinty-willed young woman—"the sphinx of literature," as she was called by Angus M. Mackay in *The Brontë: Fact and Fiction* (1897)—who wrote it, as well as the tragedy-struck, remarkably talented family from which she came, *Wuthering Heights* still presents a dark and fierce view of the world that is seeming without precedent.

The book's autobiographical components aroused interest from the start, especially given the original mystery surrounding its authorship. Lucasta Miller, in *The Brontë Myth*, gives an often spellbinding account of the ways in which the Brontës' "lonely moorland lives" (p. xi) lent themselves to the process of mythification even before the last sister had died. (None of them lived to see forty; Anne died within five months of Emily, at the age of twenty-nine, and Charlotte, the only one of the sisters to marry, was in the early months of pregnancy at the time of her death, at the age of thirty-nine.) But unlike Charlotte, who lived long enough to help shape the myth that would grow up around the Brontës, beginning with Elizabeth Gaskell's landmark *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which appeared in 1857 and for which she was the primary source, Emily wasn't around to answer for herself. "All Emily's biographers have had to cope with the absences surrounding her," Miller notes (p. 193). The baroque conjectures concerning her character were first introduced by Gaskell's *Life*, which included scenes that had Emily pummeling her disobedient bulldog into submission with her bare hands and dramatically cauterizing a bite from a strange dog with a red-hot kitchen iron. Gaskell's two-dimensional portrait of Emily as kind of savage force of nature, "a remnant of the Titans,—great-grand-daughter of the giants who used to inhabit earth," held sway for decades, drawing admirers like the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose own provocative impulses (which included a well-documented sadomasochistic bent) were stirred by the novel's almost pagan quality, its disregard for bourgeois niceties.

The efforts to penetrate Emily's veils grew even more overheated in the wake of Freud, just as the textual analyses would become more and more exotic in the trail of the new French theories of narrative propounded by Derrida and Foucault. One 1936 biographer, who featured herself as having paid "especial and respectful" attention to primary sources, misread the title of one of Emily's manuscript poems as "Louis Parensell" instead of "Love's Farewell" in her zeal to bring new light on a hypothesized lost lover, and then went on to unearth another dark secret, proposing that Emily had been "a member of that beset band of women who can find their pleasure only in women" (Moore, *The Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë*). There were discussions as to how genuinely close Emily had been to her sisters Charlotte and Anne, or whether she in fact resented the older one and patronized the younger. Was she a domestic slouch, oblivious to all except her febrile imaginings and the wind howling over the moors? Or was she in fact something of a fifties housewife type, sweeping the floors, ironing the linens, and baking bread while her chronically depressed father took his meals in his room and her brother, Branwell, drank himself to death in the Black Bull tavern? Was her consuming interest in food and what was being prepared for meals by Tabby, the housekeeper, as evidenced by the few diary entries that have come down to us, a sign of a robust immersion in daily life or a clue to something more disturbing? (In *A Chainless Soul*, Frank makes a plausible case for diagnosing Emily as suffering an anorexic's death by starvation.)

Some of the more unrestrained speculations tended to focus on the elusive genesis of *Wuthering Heights*. Emily's ill-fated brother, Branwell, who had been earmarked within the family for artistic glory (money was scraped together to send him to London to pursue his artistic interests) but died ignominiously at the age of thirty-one, a hostage to gin and opium, was at the center of the theories that swirled around the decades-long disputed authorship of Emily's novel. The controversy began with an article, published in 1867 and written by an acquaintance of Branwell's, himself an amateur poet, which claimed that the author had once read a manuscript of Branwell's that contained a scene and characters similar to those of *Wuthering Heights* (Miller, p. 229). This controversy—or “great Brontë conspiracy theory,” as Miller describes it (p. 228)—was fueled largely by disbelief that a reserved young daughter of a rural clergyman could have written so volcanic a book, but also on the basis of Branwell's having shown early literary promise as a coauthor of the Brontë children's joint writing efforts, an all-consuming escapist pastime that Charlotte would later refer to as their “web of sunny air” (Frank, p. 57). It was quickly taken up by other of Branwell's friends, and although it was eventually demolished in Irene Cooper Willis's *The Authorship of Wuthering Heights* (1936), the idea has continued to intrigue scholars and biographers up until the present day.

But by far the most intense (and screwy) psychological scrutiny was reserved for the close relationship between Branwell and Emily. After Charlotte had given up on him as a bad egg, Emily continued to stand by her older brother, calming him down and getting him to bed during his drunken outbursts. This aspect of the Brontë family life led to speculations about a possible incestuous aspect to Branwell and Emily's relationship, especially in regard to its being the model for the relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. (One theory suggested that Heathcliff was in fact the bastard son of Mr. Earnshaw and thus Catherine's half brother.) Of course, this theory clashed with yet another view that saw Branwell as doomed by his closet homosexuality, which may or may not have emerged during the period he spent as a live-in tutor to a young boy, Edward Robinson; his employment ended in disgrace after Branwell was dismissed with the threat of scandalous exposure if he tried to get in touch with any of the family. Branwell later retailed this scandal as an adulterous affair he was having with his pupil's mother.

The story line of *Wuthering Heights* is, on the sheer linear level of narrative, full of twists and turns so complex and unlikely as to verge on the tiresomely baroque when it is not being merely confounding. Truth be told, it is hard to remember the novel's actual sequence of events—the who, what, where, and when—even while in the midst of reading it, just as it is difficult to keep the various Catherines apart. (Early in the novel, when the eerie, otherworldly aspect of the story we are about to hear is made manifest, we are told that “the air swarmed with Catherines” (p. 20). The *why* of it is, in the first and last analysis, all that really interests the author, and eventually it becomes all that interests the reader. The *why*—the abiding dark force that is Heathcliff's motivation—cannot be satisfactorily answered and leads instead to other *whys*, as *whys* usually do: *Why can't he let go of Cathy? Why doesn't Cathy let go of him?* And, most important: *Why didn't they go off together in the first place?* Once one starts rooting around for reasons, the reasons never suffice, and one ends up frantically questioning everything. Everything swirls around this *why*; it is the vortex from which the novel erupts. This remains so in spite of the fact that Heathcliff's consuming animus is fairly implausible from the start—as is Catherine Earnshaw's equally consuming allegiance—and isn't elaborated so much as it is asserted as a precondition that informs everything else.

Virginia Woolf, who was a great admirer of both Charlotte and Emily Brontë and whose first published piece was about a pilgrimage she made to Haworth to see the museum of Brontë relics that had been created not far from the parsonage in which the sisters grew up, wrote a perceptive essay comparing *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. In it she concedes that the latter novel requires more than the usual suspension of disbelief on the reader's part and indicates the gratification to be had from doing so: "He [Heathcliff] is impossible we say, but nevertheless no boy in literature has a more vivid existence than his. So it is with the two Catherines; never could women feel as they do or act in their manner, we say. All the same, they are the most lovable women in English fiction." (One doesn't have to agree with Woolf's verdicts on these characters—I, for instance, would not think of describing either Catherine as "lovable," at least not in any recognizable sense of the word—to assent to her basic point that they are all cast from something other than lifelike material.)

Still, if one looks at *Wuthering Heights* from this perspective—the *donnée*, that is, of the novel's own unreal reality ("The truth," as one critic put it, "but not of this world"; see Muriel Spark's and Derek Stanford's *Emily Brontë: Her Life and Work*, p. 235), the plot begins to appear remarkably simple, even primitive. It is, after all, the age-old one of a soured romance, of childhood sweethearts who are foiled by the adult reality they grow into. Boy meets girl; boy falls in love with girl; boy loses girl. And then, if the boy in question happens to be Heathcliff with his "satanic nimbus," as one writer described it (Spark, p. 255)—the romantic antihero par excellence, the one who sets the standard for all Demon Lovers to come—all hell breaks loose. Whoever stands in the way of this vengeful fellow gets either brutally thrust aside or broken in two. The two exceptions are the "vinegar-faced" servant Joseph, and the shrewdly self-preserving housekeeper, Nelly Dean, who serves as a (possibly unreliable) narrator within a narrator and through whose eyes we see the grim and twisted—or as one Victorian critic put it, the "wild, confused, disjointed and improbable"—events of the story inexorably unfold (Frank, p. 237). Very little blood is spilled in the novel, but it is full of violent acts and even more violent feelings. And by contemporary standards, the book is modest to a fault, since everyone remains more or less dressed, though it is colored throughout by a kind of erotic hunger—propelled often as not by fury rather than love—that goes beyond the most relaxed of social conventions and the loosest of sexual proprieties.

It is undoubtedly this subliminal theme of unharnessed libidinal energy that alarmed the book's readers—especially at the time of its original publication, when the pseudonyms of all three Brontë women only fueled speculation as to whether the writers were male or, as some suspected, female. There were reviewers who were willing to grant *Wuthering Heights* its "rugged power" in spite of it being "coarse" and "vulgar" and others who were content to find it perplexing without performing a summary opinion: "It is difficult to pronounce any decisive judgment on a work in which there is so much rude ability displayed yet in which there is so much to blame" (Frank, p. 237). Still, others reacted with heated ambivalence in the form of radically conditional praise, as though they had been witness to a morally depraved spectacle that was all the more unsettling because its author was so obviously capable of writing about nicer things if he or she only cared to. These critics tended to sound unconsciously patronizing, like stalwart British nannies faced with inexplicably badly behaved charges. "It were a strange and distempered criticism which hesitated to pass sentence of condemnation on *Wuthering Heights*," declared one contemporary critic. "We have no such hesitation in pronouncing it unquestionably and irredeemably monstrous" (Miller, p. 224). Another reviewer conceded the book's mesmeric pull, only to then dismiss it as something to be fended off rather than embraced by the reader: "There seems to be a great power in the book, but it is a purposeless power

which we feel a great desire to see turned to a better account. . . . In *Wuthering Heights* the reader shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity and the most diabolical hate and vengeance and anon come passages of powerful testimony to the supreme power of love” (Miller, 209). And some were nothing short of incensed, such as the female critic in the *Quarterly Review* who dismissed the author as of “no interest” and the novel as “too odiously and abominably pagan to be palatable even to the most vitiated class of English readers” (Miller, p. 238). Perhaps worst of all was the reviewer who suggested that the writer should have considered killing himself before letting the book complete its natural course, marveling at “how a human being could have attempted such a book as the present without committing suicide before he had finished a dozen chapters” (Frank, p. 237). Even more enlightened readers, such as the young D. H. Lawrence, who warned his girlfriend, Jessie Bernard, off it, approached the novel with a wariness bordering on fear.

Of course, the whole love-hate relationship that raged between Emily Brontë’s novel and its readers can be said to mirror, in its way, the love-hate relationship between Cathy (as the first Catherine comes to be known to us) and Heathcliff. Although the word *transgressive* is thrown around a lot these days, used to describe everything from Eminem’s lyrics to the ads for Victoria’s Secret, most of us grasp (as undoubtedly many sophisticated Victorians grasped) that there is no accounting for taste. What is irredeemably alien to one person might be perfectly normal to someone else; what is repulsive to one may be an irresistible draw to another. In a certain sense it might be said that the transgressive is harder to come by than one might think, even in our morally lax, gender-bending times. Pornography, for instance, is not in and of itself transgressive, because it is an established genre in which words and images for the express purpose of titillation can comfortably find their niche. It seems to me that in order for a cultural artifact to be truly transgressive, to sustain its shock value after the initial jolt, it must venture into uncharted psychological territory, one without signposts except those it chooses to put up as it plunges forward into the darkness.

I would like to suggest that *Wuthering Heights* remains as disturbing now as it was then—where Charlotte felt compelled to smooth the way for its reception with her explanations of her sister’s unself-conscious and almost unwitting talent—because its instincts are at heart profoundly transgressive ones. It speaks for the individual against the collective, for the claims of unreasonable passion against the rights of all that is civilized and sensible. Against our cherished Enlightenment convictions (so cherished that they are taken for granted as being empirically mandated rather than conjecturally posed) about the workings of free will and the legitimacy of the autonomous self—you choose whom you love, and, in the absence of genuine psychosis, you understand that for all your feelings of having stumbled onto your other half, you and your love object are not one and the same—Emily Brontë sets her beliefs in a relentless, even malign fate and the never far-off allure of symbiosis. How its young author, living quietly with her three siblings and father in a remote Yorkshire parsonage in circumstances that seem impoverished in their lack of distraction even for the first half of the nineteenth century, came to be on intimate terms with the savagely possessive nature of desire (not only does Heathcliff want to have Cathy for himself, he doesn’t want anyone else to have her), is part of the mystery of creative inspiration. Somewhere during her rambles over the stark and solitary landscape of her beloved moors, listening to the wind howl, Emily Brontë conjured up this extraordinary psychodrama of kindred souls, of two selves—Cathy and Heathcliff—who are one (“I *am* Heathcliff,” Cathy protests, in the novel’s most famous line [p. 82]), and who will not live or die in peace so long as they are separated. It is only at the novel’s end—in its very last paragraph, in fact—after Heathcliff gets his wish in death and is buried on one side of Catherine (her husband)

Edgar, whose presence during the novel is faint at best and is almost extinguished by this point, buried on her other side) that the turbulent atmosphere subsides and something approaching peace—perhaps it is merely an absence of the unharmonious and rancorous—descends upon the scene. The sky has turned “benign,” the moths are seen “fluttering among the heath and harebells,” and the wind has become “soft.”

Before we get here, however, there is a harrowing road ahead of us. We will have seen and heard things that brush up against the internal, shockable censor in each of us that says “this far and no further,” anarchic emotions and implacable longings that take no heed of our discomfort or uneasiness with them. It oversteps, it trespasses, this *Wuthering Heights*. It throws off a strange, elemental light that seems to clarify nothing—indeed, if anything, only adds to the murkiness that underlies our seemingly absolute feelings of love and hate, or indifference. “We are lived,” the poet W. H. Auden wrote in “In Memory of Ernst Toller” (from *Another Time*, 1940), “by powers we pretend to understand: / They arrange our loves; it is they who direct at the end / The enemy bullet, the sickness or even our hand.” Emily Brontë, by way of her preternaturally developed, uncanny imagination, had dreamed up a novel the nihilistic forces of which we can only pretend to understand. Whether she herself understood them matters less in the end than that she succeeded in pushing the fiction through its envelope. The story she has written *goes too far*, and in so doing it was way ahead of its time—and perhaps, ahead of our time as well.

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## *A Note on the Text and Dialect*



*Wuthering Heights*, by “Ellis Bell,” was originally published by Thomas Newby in December of 1847 along with “Acton Bell’s” *Agnes Grey*. The two novels comprised a three-volume edition (or tripladecker), with the first two volumes consisting of *Wuthering Heights* (chapters 1 to 14 and chapters 15 to 34, respectively) and the final volume containing *Agnes Grey*. Because both novels appeared two months after the publication of “Currer Bell’s” *Jane Eyre*, speculation concerning the identity of the authors was immediately aroused, and many reviewers supposed that the three novels were the work of one pen—namely, that of “Currer Bell.” Charlotte Brontë sought to dispel this misapprehension. One such effort took the form of the “Biographical Notice” she wrote for new editions of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, which were issued by her own publisher, Smith, Elder, in 1850, after the death of Emily, in December of 1848, and of Anne, in May of 1849. In this new edition of *Wuthering Heights*, which included a selection of Emily’s poems, Charlotte also undertook to correct many of the textual errors that had marred the first edition, as well as to change punctuation, spelling, and usage where she saw fit. The present text follows Charlotte’s 1850 version.

The dialect that appears throughout *Wuthering Heights* is generally referred to as “Yorkshire,” although it includes components of other northern English and Scottish dialects as well. Where the purport of dialect is not self-evident, footnotes in the text provide glosses of passages, in parts or in their entirety.

—Tatiana M. Holway



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## *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell*



It has been thought that all the works published under the names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell were in reality, the production of one person. This mistake I endeavoured to rectify by a few words of disclaimer prefixed to the third edition of 'Jane Eyre.' These, too, it appears, failed to gain general credence, and now, on the occasion of a reprint of 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey,' I am advised distinctly to state how the case really stands.

Indeed, I feel myself that it is time the obscurity attending those two names—Ellis and Acton—were done away. The little mystery, which formerly yielded some harmless pleasure, has lost its interest, as circumstances are changed. It becomes, then, my duty to explain briefly the origin and authorship of the books written by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.

About five years ago, my two sisters and myself, after a somewhat prolonged period of separation, found ourselves reunited, and at home. Resident in a remote district, where education had made little progress, and where, consequently, there was no inducement to seek social intercourse beyond our own domestic circle, we were wholly dependent on ourselves and each other, on books and study, for the enjoyments and occupations of life. The highest stimulus, as well as the liveliest pleasure we had known from childhood upwards, lay in attempts at literary composition; formerly we used to show each other what we wrote, but of late years this habit of communication and consultation had been discontinued; hence it ensued, that we were mutually ignorant of the progress we might respectively have made.

One day, in the autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting. Of course, I was not surprised, knowing that she could and did write verse: I looked it over, and something more than surprise seized me—a deep conviction that these were not common effusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear they had also a peculiar music—wild, melancholy, and elevating.

My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication. I knew, however, that a mind like hers could not be without some latent spark of honourable ambition, and refused to be discouraged in my attempts to fan that spark to flame.

Meantime, my younger sister quietly produced some of her own compositions, intimating that, since Emily's had given me pleasure, I might like to look at hers. I could not but be a partial judge, yet I thought that these verses, too, had a sweet, sincere pathos of their own.

We had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors. This dream, never relinquished, even when distance divided and absorbing tasks occupied us, now suddenly acquired strength and consistency: it took the character of a resolve. We agreed to arrange a small selection of our poems, and, if possible, to get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under



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