

# ON *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*\*

ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

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The book that most thoroughly shook and staggered me, owing to the intensity of its passion and its psychological accuracy in the handling of a couple of human beings who live throughout their lives at white heat, was Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, which I read with bated breath; which I have read many times since; and which, at every fresh reading, I have admired more and more.

Here was a book which to my mind outclassed everything, French, English, or German, that I had so far read. I could not believe that anyone who had really understood it could have handed it to me in the cool and detached way Wright<sup>1</sup> had done when he first told me to read it. Nor to this day, in spite of all the reading I have meanwhile done, have I found any reason to depart from the opinion of this work which I held when I was nineteen.

When, however, I turned, as I soon did, to every source of information I could find about the authoress, her masterpiece, and the reception it had been given by the so-called authorities of the day, I was shocked at finding no one, male or female, who had shown the faintest sign of having grasped the meaning of this stupendous work. Indeed, I discovered that *Wuthering Heights* had not only been misunderstood and condemned by Emily's own sister and many of the established literary celebrities of the day, but also that even those who had praised it most highly had always added some reservation or saving clause which indicated that they had missed the essential qualities of the book.

In my opinion, *Wuthering Heights* is not merely, as Clement Shorter maintained, "a monument of the most striking genius that nineteenth-century womanhood has given us"; it is not merely, as Sir William

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\* From Anthony M. Ludovici, *Confessions of an Anti-Feminist: The Autobiography of Anthony M. Ludovici*, ed. John V. Day (Atlanta: Counter-Currents, 2008), ch. 3, "My Education, Part 1," pp. 59–69. Unless otherwise indicated, all notes are by Ludovici. John V. Day's notes are marked JVD, and additional notes are marked TOQ.

<sup>1</sup> S. H. Wright was one of Ludovici's teachers (*Confessions of an Anti-Feminist*, 57).—TOQ.

Robertson Nicol declared, the work of “the greatest woman genius of the nineteenth century,” it is the greatest work of fiction by any man or woman Europe has produced to date—and I am writing in the year 1961. Let it be remembered, moreover, that, if even those of its champions who praise it most highly cannot refrain from implying some disparagement of the authoress’s choice of characters and of the situations in which she displays them in action, it is because in England there is no adequate yardstick, no set of scales, by which such characters and situations may be measured and their quality assessed.

The English are a deeply Socratized<sup>2</sup> people who tend instinctively to judge everything at the first hasty glance from a moral point of view, and as their long democratic tradition has conditioned them to passing snap judgments on all things, no matter how complex and unfamiliar, their hasty and superficial is usually their final and lasting judgment.

Thus, if in a story one or more characters, especially the leading and prominent ones, deviate conspicuously from the accepted pattern of what they consider “decent” and “respectable” behavior, the story itself, together with its principal characters, is straight away dismissed as “satanic” or, more usually, as “morbid.”

In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, such an attitude is more particularly conducive to error, because, besides being narrated throughout by an ignorant serving-woman, who has not the ghost of a notion with whom she is concerned in the persons of the elder Catherine and Heathcliff, and who therefore constantly misrepresents and denigrates them, these two same characters are cruelly maimed and mutilated before even the evidence of their “satanic” or “morbid” traits is presented to the reader. What is more, the history and causes of their injuries are essential to the plot. Unless, therefore, we understand the extent of these injuries and their cause, we miss the purport of the narrative. We are like people who, coming upon two victims of a mishap that has metamorphosed their natures, ascribe their distorted minds to their inherited constitutions and not to their unfortunate accident. And among the pitfalls which make it difficult for the unalerted reader to discount the effects of the traumata they have suffered, per-

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<sup>2</sup> Following Nietzsche, Ludovici uses “Socratism” to designate a dualistic view of the relationship of the soul and the body along with the belief that the soul is superior to the body, implying that a noble soul can exist in an ugly or unhealthy body.—TOQ.

haps the most important consists in the reiterated condemnation of the hero and heroine of the story by most of the other characters, including the serving-woman who is the narrator.

Thus, the two magnificent personalities around whom the action of the story takes place—the elder Catherine and Heathcliff—are called wicked and devilish by Ellen Dean, Hareton Earnshaw, Isabella, Edgar Linton, and Catherine junior. Isabella asks, “Is Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?” Hindley Earnshaw calls him “the hellish villain.” Edgar Linton dubs him “a degraded character . . . a moral poison,” etc.

The likelihood of misunderstanding a hero and heroine thus maligned by those about them is shown by the universality of the misunderstanding in question. No English critic of *Wuthering Heights* has escaped this snare—not even Somerset Maugham, who discussed the book at length and appeared to have no understanding of its fundamental theme.<sup>3</sup> All of them tend to ascribe to the hero and heroine’s original dispositions, to their inborn natures and not to the calamities of their lives, the wildly unconventional traits they display. It is true that these traits would hardly have been evoked, even by the very same calamities, in people less passionate and less capable of deep feeling, but here again is a pitfall which no critic seems to have escaped.

Hence Charlotte Brontë’s silly comment: “Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know; I scarcely think so.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, too, Aldous Huxley’s similar silliness in classing Heathcliff with Cain and Dostoyevsky’s Stavrogin as a “satanist,” and adding that he is also a “figure of fun.”<sup>5</sup> Even Clement Shorter’s unstinted praise of the book is marred by his reference to “its morbid force and fire,” whilst Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in a letter to William Allingham in 1854, says of *Wuthering Heights*, “The action is laid in hell—only it seems places and people have English names there.”

Reread *Wuthering Heights*, however, in the light of the remarks I have made about its two deeply ardent leading characters and their disfigurement through suffering, and the novel will assume a new complexion. But, before discussing what I believe to be the explanation

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<sup>3</sup> *Sunday Times*, 19 September 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Editor’s Preface to new edition of *Wuthering Heights*, 1850.

<sup>5</sup> Aldous Huxley, “Baudelaire” in his *Do What You Will* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929).

of the fiendish behavior of the hero and heroine, let me briefly summarize the essential features of the plot.

The whole book is concerned with the burning mutual love of the elder Catherine and Heathcliff. They are shown as having grown up together and, from their early childhood, as having been so passionately attached to each other as to have formed that composite or entire human being which Aristophanes imagined and described in Plato's *Symposium*.

This exceptionally passionate attachment endured long after their youth and adulthood; so much so that, as a nubile young woman, the elder Catherine, speaking of Heathcliff, tells Nelly Dean (the illiterate narrator of the story): "he shall never know I love him . . . he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his mind and mine are the same. . . . Nelly, I am Heathcliff."<sup>6</sup>

When, owing to the hatred felt for him by Hindley Earnshaw—Catherine's brother, who, on the death of his father, Hareton Earnshaw, who was Heathcliff's foster-father, inherited Wuthering Heights—Heathcliff suffered persistent and degrading humiliations and was reduced to little more than an ill-used drudge at the farm, Catherine was so cruelly afflicted that, disastrously as it turned out, she conceived the desperate plan of giving herself in marriage to a wealthy local JP, Edgar Linton, for whom, despite his ardent attentions, she cared not a rap, in order, as she said, "to aid Heathcliff to rise and place him out of my brother's power."

This marriage she eventually effected. Meanwhile, however, because he had overheard only misleading snatches of her explanation of this plan to Ellen Dean, and had failed to hear what would have put it in its proper light, Heathcliff, profoundly shocked and wounded, fled from the house. In vain did Catherine, in frantic distress, spend the whole of a wet and stormy night out on the moors looking for him; he was nowhere to be found, and he remained a fugitive from Wuthering Heights for three whole years.

During these years, Catherine, always hoping he would return—indeed, feeling certain he would do so—carried out her plan, married Edgar Linton and went to live at Thrushcross Grange as its mistress.

When Heathcliff at last came back, we are not told what he did during his absence or how he acquired the means he now appeared to

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter 9.

possess, but we learn that he “had grown a tall athletic well-formed man,” beside whom Edgar Linton “seemed quite slender and youth-like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance . . . looked intelligent and retained no marks of former degradation . . . and his manner was even dignified.”<sup>7</sup> Later on, Ellen Dean says that “he would certainly have struck a stranger as a born and bred gentleman.”<sup>8</sup>

To cut a long story short, when, after much maneuvering, Heathcliff with Ellen Dean’s help at last succeeds in having an interview with his former idol, now Mrs. Linton, both recognize with horror the desperate situation they are in, and in the course of a harrowing scene Heathcliff tells Catherine the bitter life he has led since he last heard her voice, and that all his long struggle had been only for her.

Tender and unaltered as are his passionate feelings for Catherine, Heathcliff is resolved to wreak his revenge against her brother, Hindley, and to this end settles down at Wuthering Heights, for which he pays his former tormenter handsomely, and by encouraging him to drink heavily, and steadily relieving him of all his money at cards, he succeeds in his object. In addition, in order to punish Linton for having deigned to marry Catherine, he contrives to win the affection of Linton’s sister, Isabella, whom he heartily dislikes, and very soon induces her to marry him. Eventually, Edgar Linton denies Heathcliff all access to Thrushcross Grange and threatens him with violence at the hands of his male servants if he dares to return there.

The insuperable difficulties thus brought about only increase the despair of the adoring couple, and Catherine, at last compelled to see the tragic hopelessness of their plight, asks only for her torment to end, even if death be the only solution. To hasten her release from the intolerable pain she is suffering, she deliberately exposes herself, almost naked, to the wintry blast blowing in at her bedroom window and, “careless of the frosty air that cut about her shoulders,” she “leant right out.”

Needless to say, she now fell seriously ill, and to Heathcliff’s consternation rumors of her condition reached Wuthering Heights. It was, however, in vain that he tried to persuade Ellen Dean, in defiance of her master’s orders, to contrive another meeting between himself and

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter 10.

<sup>8</sup> Chapter 14.

Catherine. She refused to be a party to any such treachery, and it was only when the seriousness of his threats thoroughly alarmed her, for she was too well aware of his recklessness, that she consented at last to smuggling him into the house and upstairs to Catherine's room. But she had to wait three days before a favorable opportunity presented itself, and then at a prearranged signal, whilst Edgar Linton was at church, Heathcliff was at last secretly admitted into the house and hurried into Catherine's presence.

In a stride or two [he] was at her side and had her grasped in his arms. He neither spoke nor loosed his hold for some five minutes, during which period he bestowed more kisses than ever he gave in his life before; but then my mistress had kissed him first, and I plainly saw that he could hardly bear, for downright agony, to look into her face—she was fated sure to die.

"Oh, Cathy! Oh my life!" he cried in despair, "how can I bear it?"

"How many years do you mean to live after I am gone?" Catherine asked him. "I wish I could hold you till we were both dead . . . will you say 20 years hence, 'That's the grave of Catherine Earnshaw. I loved her long ago and was wretched to lose her, but it is past' . . . will you say so Heathcliff?"

"Don't torture me until I am as mad as yourself!" he cried . . . "Are you possessed with a devil to talk in that manner to me when you are dying?"

Then, after reproaching her—mistakenly, as it happened, but he did not know that—with having been untrue to him, he added: "It is hard to forgive and to look at those eyes and feel those wasted hands . . . Kiss me again and don't let me see your eyes. I forgive what you have done to me. I love my murderer—but *yours*, how could I?"

Ellen then warns him that her master must be on the point of returning home, and he tears himself away.

Catherine died that same night, and when Heathcliff is told he goes mad with grief. Repudiating the possibility of living without her, he exhorts her not to hesitate to haunt him, if necessary, provided only that she remains by him. "I know," he cried, "that ghosts have wandered on earth? Be with me always—take any form—drive me 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!"

Then, Ellen Dean, tells us, "He dashed his head against the knotted trunk, and lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death. . . . He was beyond my skill to quiet or console."

For yet another eighteen years or so Heathcliff lived on, but he was hardly alive, scarcely aware of what happened about him or conscious of the least exacting duties he owed to his dependants. His mind concentrated only on the object of his inconsolable grief, and, his behavior to all men betraying by its indifference and harshness the ravages his one great and frustrated passion had wrought in his humanity and capacity for human fellowship, he lingered on, dreaming only of how he could become reunited with his idol.

Shortly before his death he told Ellen Dean that, night and day, his memory of Catherine disturbed him "incessantly – remorselessly, till yesternight; and yesternight I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping my last sleep by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers."

And what had brought him this little tranquility at last? Merely that, when Edgar Linton had been buried some short time before, Heathcliff had succeeded in bribing the sexton to loosen one side of Catherine's coffin, and in pledging him to pull it away and then slide open one side of his coffin, too, so that he would be "dissolved with her." For he had contrived, by means which we need not enter into, to make sure of his own burial in the Linton grave, and to have his own coffin made in such a way as to allow for the removal of one of its sides, as he desired.<sup>9</sup>

Very soon after this, still happy at the thought of what he had done to be sure of rejoining her, he starved himself to death and was buried as he had wished. "He might have had a monomania on the subject of his departure," Ellen Dean comments here, "but on every other point his wits were as sound as mine."<sup>10</sup>

Now, what can be the secret message of this tragic story, all the *dramatis personae* of which, together with their impulses and sentiments, are so exotic in the English scene as to seem created *de toute*

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter 23.

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 33.

*pièce* by a foreign hand?

I suggest the following interpretation of the plot:

Emily Brontë, as her poems and the testimony of her contemporaries lead us to believe, was a young woman of noble character. She had never met a man who inspired her love, and her ancestral instincts and fertile imagination led her, as is often the case, to picture to herself the kind of man who would be her ideal mate.

As no mere catalogue of her desiderata could satisfy her, she lighted on the plan of revealing this lover as a character in a work of fiction and not as a husband—her artistic good sense made her eschew such unexplored territory—but as a worshipper in some way cheated of his chance to be united with her, cruelly robbed of his reward after having done more to win her than could be expected of any other man in his station of life.

Her instincts made her see him as one whose love could neither temporize nor suffer to be trifled with. He could not be her ideal if, after having failed to win her, he could be consoled, reconciled to his loss and resigned. He must be shattered, body and soul; and, more important still, he must not be the sort of man who is easily shattered. He must be of steel; the twists and dents the catastrophic blow inflicted must leave permanent and ineffaceable traces. No other kind of love was worthwhile.

The damage of a locomotive in collision varies as the square of the speed at which it is traveling. Likewise, if a passionate lover be hopelessly thwarted, the extent of his undoing will be commensurate with the depth of his feelings. Emily Brontë shrank from none of the implications of such a situation. At the risk of discrediting her hero in the eyes of superficial people, she faithfully recorded every detail of the damage he suffered as the result of his frustration; and, as a counterpart to the sour negativism which, through the violence of his calamities, slowly perverted his original positive nature, she made her heroine, who is surely herself, seek death in the frosty winter air at her casement window, when once the impossibility of becoming united with her lover could no longer be doubted. Except for Balzac's *Roman de deux jeunes mariées*,<sup>11</sup> this means of self-destruction is, I believe, unique in European literature.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Story of Two Brides*.—JVD.

<sup>12</sup> One or two suicides in fiction are similar. In D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, Gerald Crich walks off into the snowy mountains and dies, and in James Joyce's

Then, after falling mortally ill through her own act, without ever revealing to Heathcliff the true reason why she had not waited for him when he had fled from Wuthering Heights, she ultimately succumbed to her disease, and left him to the slow death of an inconsolable grief.

The reader may be wondering what this long digression about a great English novel has to do with the story of my own life. What justifies it in an autobiography? Strange as it may seem, the answer is that the reading of this masterpiece of fiction constituted a milestone along the road of my education. It taught me two lessons, opened my eyes to two truths, which, I believe, are of the utmost importance. At all events, their influence on my life was considerable, especially when, later on, I started to write about the relationship of the sexes and about woman in particular.

Apart from the intense beauty of the story and the daring and high-handed way in which the plot is unfolded — i.e., through the reminiscences of an ignorant serving-woman, incapable of understanding the people whose actions she is recording — the individual psychology of the leading figures, owing precisely to the narrator's inability to do more than relate (often with horror) all that she heard and saw, is so accurate, convincing, and consistent that the book might serve as a textbook illustrating the inevitable pattern of human behavior in certain well-defined situations. Its lessons are therefore extremely valuable, and among them the most essential I learnt from it over fifty years ago were, first and foremost, that, when her reproductive impulses are engaged and promise to be gratified, woman is always quite unscrupulous, lawless, and anarchical. In other words, as I pointed out in my *Woman: A Vindication*,<sup>13</sup> the purposes of life and its multiplication become the directing force, and every other consideration is not merely sacrificed, it is not even thought of. Hence the emphasis I have laid in all my works about woman on the anarchical character of the human female, a view which I subsequently found abundantly supported by James Corin in his *Mating, Marriage and the Status of Women*<sup>14</sup> and Dr. Fritz Wittels's *Die sexuelle Not*.<sup>15</sup> Hence, too,

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short story, "The Dead," Michael Furey walks in the winter rain and dies. —JVD.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony M. Ludovici, *Woman: A Vindication* (London: Constable, 1923; 2nd edition, 1929).

<sup>14</sup> James Corin, *Mating, Marriage and the Status of Women* (London: Walter Scott, 1910).

the belief I have held, ever since my early twenties, that feminism, which ultimately means female dominance, would necessarily lead to an anarchical society—a belief which the last sixty years of English history, with the steady decline of discipline in every department of the national life, has proved to be only too well-founded.<sup>16</sup>

The second vital lesson I learnt from *Wuthering Heights* was that woman's major orientation is not and cannot be, as the sentimentalists of the nineteenth century supposed, to the child or children she bears, but to the male, to man. It is almost always forgotten, even by scientists aware of the facts, that in the evolution of the human race the relationship of the sexes to each other is immensely older than their relationship to their offspring—a fact to which I first called attention and supported with scientific evidence in 1927.<sup>17</sup> That this fact is really self-evident can be shown by simply comparing the duration of the Mammalia with that of the creatures that preceded them, among which the parental nexus was largely absent.

Thus, assuming that the Mammalia first appeared at the beginning of the Jurassic period, some 152 to 167 million years ago, and that the preceding reptiloid quadrupeds first appeared in the Cambrian and Ordovician periods, 430 to 510 million years ago, we see immediately that, for about 300 or more million years, sexual reproduction occurred without any serious concern about progeny. The egg-laying female enjoyed an independence and a freedom from bodily handicaps differentiating her much less from the male than the female mammal is differentiated. More important still, in respect of the depth of the impulses concerned, is that her inclination and attachment were directed solely to the male and had no competing objective. We may therefore justifiably assume that her orientation to the male must have deeper roots than her orientation to her offspring—roots owing their strength to hundreds of millions of years of seniority over those connected with offspring. Thus, it must be clear that the maternal has shallower foundations than the venereal instinct.

When, therefore, horror is expressed because some woman has forsaken her children to abscond with a man not their father, and when astonishment is felt that such an "unnatural" desertion should be at

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<sup>15</sup> Fritz Wittels, *Die sexuelle Not* [*The Sexual Need*—JVD] (Vienna: C. W. Stern, 1909).

<sup>16</sup> Ludovici wrote these words in 1961.—TOQ.

<sup>17</sup> See my *Man: An Indictment* (London: Constable, 1927).

all possible, it is well to remember the relative ages and strengths of the two sets of roots in question—those which for 500 million years have been concerned only with the male–female, and those which have been concerned with the male–female plus the parent–child nexus. Briefly stated, it is well to recall that the impulse to venery is deeper than that to maternity.

All this, however, applies with even greater force to man, in whom the love of offspring is much less deeply rooted than it is even in woman. Not only is it in him a recent acquisition, but even today it is also far more a conventional product than a naturally conditioned emotion. As Margaret Mead so truly remarks: “Man’s desire for children is learned, learned in perhaps all cases as a very small child.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, here again, the orientation of the sexes to each other is seen to be based on deeper impulses than the orientation to offspring, and in man, as Margaret Mead should have known, attachment to progeny is more often due to the support they give to his self-esteem as a potent male than to any conventions his society may have taught him.

Now, every fact I have stated about the relationship of the sexes may without effort be deduced from Emily Brontë’s great work, beside which the best novels of the later Victorians—Dickens, Thackeray, Blackmore, Hardy, Phillpotts, and, above all, Meredith—strike one as flat, timid, and tame. None of them grasped the fundamental truth that in a properly organized society, where disparities of character and type are neither too frequent nor too conspicuous, the completest happiness is to be sought in a sound partnership of male and female, with the relationship towards progeny felt only as a possible second-best. But, naturally, where men have lost their stamina and virility, this happiness cannot be realized, even if there are few disparities between a couple.

*Anthony Mario Ludovici (1882–1971) was one of the first translators and exponents of Nietzsche’s writings in the English-speaking world and an original philosopher in his own right. Ludovici authored nearly forty books, including eight novels, and hundreds of articles, essays, and reviews setting forth his views on metaphysics, religion, ethics, politics, economics, the sexes, health, eugenics, art, modern culture, and current events.*

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York: Dell, 1949), Part III, Chapter 11.