

Notes: *Wuthering Heights* was initially published under the ambiguous pseudonym of "Ellis Bell" so many early reviewers believed it to be written by a man. Some also believed that Currer Bell (Charlotte) and Ellis Bell (Emily) were the same.

The book was first published in December 1847.

Reviews marked with \* were found in Emily's desk after her death.

Publication: **Spectator** Date: **18 December 1847** Reviewer: **Unknown**

An attempt to give novelty and interest to fiction, by resorting to those singular 'characters' that used to exist everywhere, but especially in retired and remote places. The success is not equal to the abilities of the writer; chiefly because the incidents are too coarse and disagreeable to be attractive, the very best being improbable, with a moral taint about them, and the villainy not leading to results sufficient to justify the elaborate pains taken in depicting it. The execution, however, is good: grant the writer all that is requisite as regards matter, and the delineation is forcible and truthful.

Publication: **Athenaeum** Date: **25 December 1847** Reviewer: **H F Chorley**

In spite of much power and cleverness; in spite of its truth to life in the remote nooks and corners of England, 'Wuthering Heights' is a disagreeable story. The Bells seem to affect painful and exceptional subjects: – the misdeeds and oppressions of tyranny – the eccentricities of "woman's fantasy". They do not turn away from dwelling upon those physical acts of cruelty which we know to have their warrant in the real annals of crime and suffering, – but the contemplation of which true taste rejects. The brutal master of the lonely house on "Wuthering Heights" – a prison which might be pictured from life – has doubtless had his prototype in those ungenial and remote districts where human beings, like the trees, grow gnarled and dwarfed and distorted by inclement climate; but he might have been indicated with far fewer touches, in place of so entirely filling the canvas that there is hardly a scene untainted by his presence.

Publication: **North British Review** Date: **about 1847** Reviewer: **James Lorimer**

Here all the faults of *Jane Eyre* (by Charlotte Brontë) are magnified a thousand fold, and the only consolation which we have in reflecting upon it is that it will never be generally read.

Publication: **Unknown** Date: **about 1847** Reviewer: **Unknown**



This is a work of great ability, and contains many chapters, to the production of which talent of no common order has contributed. At the same time, the materials which the author has placed at his own disposal have been but few. In the resources of his own mind, and in his own manifestly vivid perceptions of the peculiarities of character in short, in his knowledge of human nature—has he found them all. An antiquated farm-house, a neighbouring residence of a somewhat more pretending description, together with their respective inmates, amounting to some half a dozen souls in each, constitute the material and the personal components of one of the most interesting stories we have read for many a long day. The comfortable cheerfulness of the one abode, and the cheerless discomfort of the other—the latter being less the result of a cold and bleak situation, old and damp rooms, and (if we may use the term) of a sort of 'haunted house' appearance, than of the strange and mysterious character of its inhabitants—the loves and marriages, separations and hatreds, hopes and disappointments, of two or three generations of the gentle occupants of the one establishment, and the ruder tenants of the other, are brought before us at a moment with a tenderness, at another with a fearfulness, which appeals to our sympathies with the truest tones of the voice of nature; and it is quite impossible to read the book—and this is no slight testimony to the merits of a work of the kind—without feeling that, if placed in the same position as any one of the characters in any page of it, the chances would be twenty to one in favour of our conduct in that position being precisely such as the author has assigned to the personages he has introduced into his domestic drama. But we must at once impose upon ourselves a task—and we confess it is a hard one—we must abstain (from a regard to the space at our disposal) from yielding to the temptation by which we are beset to enter into that minute description of the plot of this very dramatic production to which such a work has an undoubted claim. It is not every day that so good a novel makes its appearance; and to give its contents in detail would be depriving many a reader of half the delight he would experience from the perusal of the work itself. To its pages we must refer him, then; there will he have ample opportunity of sympathising,—if he has one touch of nature that 'makes the whole world kin'—with the feelings of childhood, youth, manhood, and age, and all the emotions and passions which agitate the restless bosom of humanity. May he derive from it the delight we have ourselves experienced, and be equally grateful to its author for the genuine pleasure he has afforded him.

\*Publication: **Examiner** Date: **8 January 1848** Reviewer: **Anonymous**

This is a strange book. It is not without evidences of considerable power: but, as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable; and the people who make up the drama, which is tragic enough in its consequences, are savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer. With the exception of Heathcliff, the story is confined to the family of Earnshaw, who intermarry with the Lintons; and the scene of their exploits is a rude old-fashioned house, at the top of one of the high moors or fells in the north of England. Whoever has traversed the bleak heights of Hartside or Cross Fell, on his road from Westmoreland to the dales of Yorkshire, and has been welcomed there by the winds and rain on a 'gusty day', will know how to estimate the comforts of Wuthering Heights in wintry weather....

If this book be, as we apprehend it is, the first work of the author, we hope that he will produce a second,—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—so much only as may be interwoven inextricably with the persons whom he professes to paint. It is the province of an artist to modify and in some cases refine what he beholds in the ordinary world. There never was a man whose daily life (that is to say, all his deeds and sayings, entire and without exception) constituted fit materials for a book of fiction.

\*Publication: **Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper** Date: **15 January 1848**  
Reviewer: **Anonymous**

*Wuthering Heights* is a strange sort of book,—baffling all regular criticism; yet, it is impossible to begin and not finish it; and quite as impossible to lay it aside afterwards and say nothing about it. In the midst of the reader's perplexity the ideas predominant in his mind concerning this book are likely to be—brutal cruelty, and semi-savage love. What may be the moral which the author wishes the reader to deduce from his work, it is difficult to say; and we refrain from assigning any, because to speak honestly, we have discovered none but mere glimpses of hidden morals or secondary meanings. There seems to us great power in this book but a purposeless power, which we feel a great desire to see turned to better account. We are quite confident that the writer of *Wuthering Heights* wants but the practised skill to make a great artist; perhaps, a great dramatic artist. His qualities are, at present, excessive; a far more promising fault, let it be remembered, than if they were deficient. He may tone down, whereas the weak and inefficient writer, however carefully he may write by rule and line, will never work up his productions to the point of beauty in art. In *Wuthering Heights* the reader is 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—even over demons in the human form. The women in the book are of a strange fiendish-angelic nature, tantalising, and terrible,

and the men are indescribable out of the book itself. Yet, towards the close of the story occurs the following pretty, soft picture, which comes like the rainbow after a storm....

We strongly 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, and if we had space we would willingly devote a little more time to the analysis of this remarkable story, but we must leave it to our readers to decide what sort of book it is.

\*Publication: **Atlas** Date: **22 January 1848** Reviewer: **Anonymous**

*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. *Wuthering Heights* casts a gloom over the mind not easily to be dispelled. It does not soften; it harasses, it extenterates.... There are passages in it which remind us of the *Nowlans* of the late John Banim but of all pre-existent works the one which it most recalls to our memory is the *History of Mathew Wald*. It has not, however, the unity and concentration of that fiction; but 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. Inconceivable as are the combinations of human degradation which are here to be found moving within the circle of a few miles, the *vraisemblance* is so admirably preserved; there is so much truth in what we may call the *costumery* (not applying the word in its narrow acceptation)—the general mounting of the entire piece—that we readily identify the scenes and personages of the fiction; and when we lay aside the book it is some time before we can persuade ourselves that we have held nothing more than imaginary intercourse with the ideal creations of the brain. The reality of unreality has never been so aptly illustrated as in the scenes of almost savage life which Ellis Bell has brought so vividly before us.

The book sadly wants relief. A few glimpses of sunshine would have increased the reality of the picture and given strength rather than weakness to the whole. There is not in the entire *dramatis persona*, a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible. If you do not detest the person, you despise him; and if you do not despise him, you detest him with your whole heart. Hindley, the brutal, degraded sot, strong in the desire to work all mischief, but impotent in his degradation; Linton Heathcliff, the miserable, drivelling coward, in whom we see selfishness in its most abject form; and Heathcliff himself, the presiding evil genius of the piece, the tyrant father of an imbecile son, a creature in whom every evil passion seems to have reached a gigantic excess—form a group of deformities such as we have rarely seen gathered together on the same canvas. The author seems to have designed to throw some redeeming touches into the character of the brutal Heathcliff, by portraying him as one faithful to the idol of his boyhood—loving to the very last—long, long after death had divided them, the unhappy girl who had cheered and brightened up the early days of his wretched life. Here is the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin—but it fails of the intended effect. There is a selfishness—a ferocity in the love of Heathcliff, which scarcely suffer it, in spite of its rugged constancy, to relieve the darker parts of his nature. Even the female characters excite something of loathing and much of contempt. Beautiful and loveable in their childhood, they all, to use a vulgar

expression, 'turn out badly'. Catherine the elder—wayward, impatient, impulsive—sacrifices herself and her lover to the pitiful ambition of becoming the wife of a gentleman of station. Hence her own misery—her early death—and something of the brutal wickedness of Heathcliff's character and conduct; though we cannot persuade ourselves that even a happy love would have tamed down the natural ferocity of the tiger. Catherine the younger is more sinned against than sinning, and in spite of her grave moral defects, we have some hope of her at the last....

...We are not quite sure that the next new novel will not efface it, but *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are not things to be forgotten. The work of Currer Bell is a great performance; that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one.

Publication: **New Monthly Magazine** Date: **January 1848** Reviewer: **Anonymous**

*Wuthering Heights*, by Ellis Bell, is a terrific story, associated with an equally fearful and repulsive spot. It should have been called *Withering Heights*, for any thing from which the mind and body would more instinctively shrink, than the mansion and its tenants, cannot be imagined. ...Our novel reading experience does not enable us to refer to anything to be compared with the personages we are introduced to at this desolate spot – a perfect misanthropist's heaven.

Publication: **Tait's Edinburgh Magazine** Date: **February 1848**  
Reviewer: **Anonymous**

This novel contains undoubtedly powerful writing, and yet it seems to be thrown away. We want to know the object of a fiction. Once people were contented with a crude collection of mysteries. Now they desire to know why the mysteries are revealed. Do they teach mankind to avoid one course and to take another? Do they dissect any portion of existing society, exhibiting together its weak and its strong points? If these questions were asked regarding *Wuthering Heights*, there could not be an affirmative answer given...

Mr Ellis Bell, before constructing the novel, should have known that forced marriages, under threats and in confinement are illegal, and parties instrumental thereto can be punished. And second, that wills 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.

Publication: **Paterson's Magazine (USA)** Date: **March 1848** Reviewer: **Anonymous**

We rise from the perusal of *Wuthering Heights* as if we had come fresh from a pest-house. Read *Jane Eyre* is our advice, but burn *Wuthering Heights*....

Publication: **Graham's Lady's Magazine (USA)** Date: **July 1848**  
Reviewer: **Anonymous**

How a human being could have attempted such a book as the present without committing suicide before he had finished a dozen chapters, is a mystery. It is a compound of vulgar depravity and unnatural horrors....

Publication: **North American Review** Date: **October 1848** Reviewer: **Edwin P Whipple**

The truth is, that the whole firm of Bell & Co. seem to have a sense of the depravity of human nature peculiarly their own. It is the yahoo, not the demon, that they select for representation; their Pandemonium is of mud rather than fire. This is especially the case with Acton Bell, the author of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and, if we mistake not, of certain offensive but powerful portions of *Jane Eyre*. Acton, when left altogether to his own imaginations, seems to take a morose satisfaction in developing a full and complete science of human brutality. In *Wuthering Heights* he has succeeded in reaching the summit of this laudable ambition. He appears to think that spiritual wickedness is a combination of animal ferocities, and has accordingly made a compendium of the most striking qualities of tiger, wolf, cur, and wild-cat, in the hope of framing out of such elements a suitable brute-demon to serve as the hero of his novel. [Heathcliff] is a deformed monster, whom the Mephistopheles of Goethe would have nothing to say to, whom the Satan of Milton would consider as an object of simple disgust, and to whom Dante would hesitate in awarding the honour of a place among those whom he has consigned to the burning pitch. This epitome of brutality, disavowed by man and devil, Mr. Acton Bell attempts in two whole volumes to delineate, and certainly he is to be congratulated on his success. As he is a man of uncommon talents, it is needless to say that it is to his subject and his dogged manner of handling it that we are to refer the burst of dislike with which the novel was received. His mode of delineating a bad character is to narrate every offensive act and repeat every vile expression which are characteristic. Hence, in *Wuthering Heights*, he details all the ingenuities of animal malignity, and exhausts the whole rhetoric of stupid blasphemy, in order that there may be no mistake as to the kind of person he intends to hold up to the popular gaze. Like all spendthrifts of malice and profanity, however, he overdoes the business. Though he scatters oaths as plentifully as sentimental writers do interjections, the comparative parsimony of the great novelists in this respect is productive of infinitely more effect. It must be confessed that this coarseness, though the prominent, is not the only characteristic of the writer. His attempt at originality does not stop with the conception of [Heathcliff], but he aims further to exhibit the action of the sentiment of love on the nature of the being whom his morbid imagination has created. This is by far the ablest and most subtle portion of his labours, and indicates that strong hold upon the elements of character, and that decision of touch in the delineation of the most evanescent qualities of emotion, which distinguish the mind of the whole family. For all practical purposes, however, the power evinced in *Wuthering Heights* is power thrown away. Nightmares and dreams, through which devils dance and wolves howl, make bad novels.

Original source: *Wuthering Heights* (Barnes and Noble)