

- Harcourt Brace, 1929], p. 102). Certainly the imaginative power Coleridge describes does not sound 'man-womanly' in Woolf's sense.
- 7 Shelley, 'A Defense of Poetry.' Keats to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 February 1818; *The Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 121.
  - 8 See E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 305, 306. For further commentary on both Curtius's 'The Symbolism of the Book' and the 'Book of Nature' metaphor itself, see Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 15–17.
  - 9 'Timon, A Satyr,' in *Poems by John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 99.
  - 10 Bridget Riley, 'The Hermaphrodite,' *Art and Sexual Politics*, ed. Thomas B. Hass and Elizabeth C. Baker (London: Collier Books, 1973), p. 82. Riley comments that she herself would 'interpret this remark as expressing his attitude to his work as a celebration of life.'
  - 11 Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 134.; John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest. Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 163. Irwin also speaks of 'the phallic generative power of the creative imagination' (p. 159).
  - 12 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 11, 26.
  - 13 All references to *Persuasion* are to volume and chapter of the text edited by R. W. Chapman, reprinted with an introduction by David Daiches (New York: Norton, 1958).
  - 14 Anne Finch, *Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea*, pp. 4–5.
  - 15 Southey to Charlotte Brontë, March 1837. Quoted in Winifred Gérin, *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 110.
  - 16 Finch, *Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea*, p. 100. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 286. This sentence is part of an extraordinary passage in which Weininger asserts that 'women have no existence and no essence; they are not, they are nothing,' this because 'woman has no relation to the idea . . . she is neither moral nor anti-moral,' but 'all existence is moral and logical existence.'
  - 17 Richard Chase speaks of the 'masculine élan' throughout 'The Brontës, or Myth Domesticated,' in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William V. O'Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), pp. 102–13. For a discussion of the 'female eunuch' see Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970). See also Anthony Burgess, 'The Book Is Not For Reading,' *New York Times Book Review*, 4 December 1966, pp. 1, 74, and William Gass, on Norman Mailer's *Genius and Lust*, *New York Times Book Review*, 24 October 1976, p. 2. In this connection, finally, it is interesting (and depressing) to consider that Virginia Woolf evidently defined herself as 'a eunuch.' (See Noel Annan, 'Virginia Woolf Fever,' *New York Review*, 20 April 1978, p. 22.)
  - 18 Rufus Griswold, Preface to *The Female Poets of America* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1849), p. 8.
  - 19 Roland Barthes, *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), p. 182; Hopkins, *Correspondence*, p. 133.
  - 20 Finch, *Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea*, p. 5.

CAROL OHMANN

'Emily Brontë in the Hands of Male Critics',  
*College English*

The pseudonyms all the Brontës chose for their joint volumes of poems and for their novels were, Charlotte reported, deliberately selected to admit of ambiguous interpretation. They did not wish to choose names avowedly masculine; they would not call themselves, for example, Charles, Edward, and Alfred. On the other hand, as Charlotte wrote afterwards, 'We did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine" — we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.'<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary reviews of *Wuthering Heights*, all five found in Emily Brontë's writing desk and others as well, referred to Ellis Bell as 'he.' 'He' had written a book which, give or take certain differences of emphasis, was declared to be powerful and original. Although an occasional review acknowledged that it was a story of love, its essential subject was taken to be a representation of cruelty, brutality, violence, of human depravity or wickedness in its most extreme forms. Its lack of moral statement or purpose was taken to be either puzzling or censurable. It was awkwardly constructed. But, even so, in spite of the degree to which the reviewers were, variously, displeased, inclined to melancholy, shocked, pained, anguished, disgusted, and sickened, a number of them allowed the novel to be the work of a promising, possibly a great, new writer.

Most of the reviewers simply assumed without comment that the writer's sex was masculine. Two American reviewers did more: they made much of the novelist's sex and found plain evidence of it in the novel itself. Percy Edwin Whipple, in *The North American Review*, found in *Jane Eyre* the signatures of both a male and a female mind.<sup>3</sup> He supposed that two persons had written it, a brother and a sister. To the sister, he attributed certain 'feminine peculiarities': 'elaborate descriptions of dress'; 'the minutiae of the sick-chamber'; and 'various superficial refinements of feeling in regard to the external relations of the sex.' He went on to assert, 'It is true that the noblest and best representations of female character have been produced by men; but there are niceties of thought and emotion in a woman's mind which no man can delineate, but which often escape unawares from a female writer' (356).

From the brother, Whipple derived the novel's clarity and firmness of style, all its charm, and its scenes of profanity, violence, and passion. These scenes, he was virtually certain, were written by the same hand that wrote *Wuthering Heights*. Turning to *Wuthering Heights*, Whipple concentrated on the novel's presentation of Heathcliff, whom he found quintessentially bestial, brutal, indeed monstrous. He did allot a few lines to Heathcliff in

love, but without mentioning Catherine. He scored the author of *Wuthering Heights* for 'coarseness' and for being a 'spendthrift of malice and profanity' (358).

George Washington Peck, in *The American Review*, did not overtly theorize on the sex of the author of *Wuthering Heights*. He assumed it to be masculine, then elaborated on the assumption in a rush of comparisons. The novel's language might be that of a Yorkshire farmer or a boatman or of frequenters of 'bar-rooms and steamboat saloons.'<sup>4</sup> He cautioned young ladies against imitating it, lest American social assemblies come to resemble certain scenes in Tammany Hall. The novel's author Peck likened to a 'rough sailor [with] a powerful imagination' (573). He is like a friend of whom one is fond and yet by whom one is continually embarrassed. He is not a gentleman. He would embarrass you with his *gaucheries* whether you were walking down Broadway with him or across the fields of Staten Island or dropping into a shop or store anywhere. Among his eccentricities or faults is a disposition to believe that he understands women. But he does *not* understand them. *He cannot see them as they are. He can only see them as he is, and then, just slightly, refine them.*

There are not so many reviews of the second edition of *Wuthering Heights*. But there are enough, I think, to show that once the work of Ellis Bell was identified as the work of a woman, critical responses to it changed. Where the novel had been called again and again 'original' in 1847 and 1848, the review in the *Athenaeum* in 1850 began by firmly placing it in a familiar class, and that class was not in the central line of literature. The review in the *Athenaeum* began by categorizing *Wuthering Heights* as a work of 'female genius and female authorship.'<sup>5</sup> The reviewer was really not surprised to learn that *Jane Eyre* and its 'sister-novels' were all written by women. The nature of the novels themselves, together with 'instinct or divination,' had already led the reviewer to that conclusion, which was now simply confirmed by Charlotte Brontë's 'Biographical Notice.' The review quotes a great deal from the 'Notice': Charlotte's description of the isolation of Haworth, her discovery of Emily's poems, the silence that greeted their publication in *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, and the deaths of both Emily and Anne. It is on Emily Brontë's *life* that the review spends most of its 2,000 words. References to *Wuthering Heights* are late and few, and then it is grouped not only with *Jane Eyre* but also with *Agnes Grey*. All three are 'characteristic tales' — characteristic of the Bell, that is to say the Brontë, sisters, and, more generally, of tales women write. A single sentence is given to *Wuthering Heights* alone: 'To those whose experience of men and manners is neither extensive nor various, the construction of a self-consistent monster is easier than the delineation of an imperfect or inconsistent reality. . . .' The review ends there, repeating still another time its classification of the novel. *Wuthering Heights*, with its 'Biographical Notice,' is a 'more than usually interesting contribution to the history of female authorship in England.'

I don't mean to suggest that this is the first time a reviewer for the *Athenaeum* was ever condescending; the particular terms of the condescension are my point. Emily Brontë the novelist is reduced to Emily

Brontë the person, whose fiction in turn is seen to be limited by the experiential limitation of the life. *Wuthering Heights* is an addition to the 'history of female authorship in England.'

There are other consequences that attend the knowledge or the presumption that Ellis Bell is not a man but a woman. Sydney Dobell published a long essay titled 'Currer Bell' in the *Palladium* three months before he could have known on Charlotte's authority that her sister had written *Wuthering Heights*. But he already 'knew' from the intrinsic nature of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that they were written by women; indeed, he thought them written by the same woman.<sup>6</sup> Approaching *Wuthering Heights* with that conviction, he stressed the youthfulness of its author. And he likened her to a little bird fluttering its wings against the bars of its cage, only to sink at the last exhausted. Later, when it had more practice writing novels, it would fly freely into the heavens. Dobell stressed also the 'involuntary art' of the novel. (Whipple, you may remember, had said that female authors sometimes wrote well 'unawares.') Finally, Dobell saw the novel primarily as a love story, and for the first time made the heroine Catherine the major focus of interest, but only insofar as she was in love. With Heathcliff, Dobell contended, the 'authoress' was less successful.

It is clear, I hope, in these instances (and the same can be argued of other contemporary responses) that there is a considerable correlation between what readers assume or know the sex of the writer to be and what they actually see, or neglect to see, in 'his' or her work. *Wuthering Heights* is one book to Percy Edwin Whipple and George Washington Peck, who quarrel strenuously with its 'morals' and its taste, but another to the reviewer for the *Athenaeum*, who puts it calmly in its place and discourses on the life of the clergyman's daughter who wrote it. And Peck's rough sailor is born anew as Dobell's piteous birds with wings too young to fly.

## NOTES

- 2 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell,' *Wuthering Heights: An Authoritative Text with Essays in Criticism*, ed. William M. Sale, Jr. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 4. All quotations from *Wuthering Heights* are taken also from this edition.
- 3 'Novels of the Season,' *The North American Review*, LXVII (1848), 353. K. J. Fielding identifies the reviewer in 'The Brontës and "The North American Review": A Critic's Strange Guesses,' *Brontë Society Transactions*, XIII (1957), 14–18.
- 4 'Wuthering Heights,' *The American Review*, NS I (1848), 573. Additional reviews of the first edition consulted are the following: *The Athenaeum*, Dec. 25, 1847, 1324–25; *The Atlas*, XXIII (1848), 59; *Britannia*, Jan. 15, 1848; *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, Jan. 15, 1848; *The Examiner*, Jan. 8, 1848, 21–22; *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book*, XXXVII (1848), 57; *Graham's Magazine*, XXXIII (1848), 60; *Literary World*, III (1848), 243; *The New Monthly Magazine and Humourist*, LXXXII (1848), 140; *The Quarterly Review*, LXXXIV (1848), 153–185; *The Spectator*, XX (1847), 1217; *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, XV

- (1848), 138–140; *The Union Magazine*, June, 1848, 287; and an unidentified review quoted in full by Charles Simpson in *Emily Brontë* (London: Country Life, 1929). I am indebted for references to reviews of *Wuthering Heights* both to Melvin R. Watson, 'Wuthering Heights and the Critics,' *Trollopian*, III (1949), 243–263 and to Jane Gray Nelson, 'First American Reviews of the Works of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë,' *BST*, XIV (1964), 39–44. Nelson lists one review that I have not so far seen: *Peterson's Magazine*, June, 1848.
- 5 *The Athenaeum*, Dec. 28, 1850. All quotations are from pp. 1368–69.
- 6 'Currer Bell,' *Palladium*, I (1850). Reprinted in *Life and Letters of Sydney Dobell*, ed. E. Jolly (London, 1878), I, 163–186 and in *BST*, V (1918), 210–236. Additional reviews of the second edition consulted are the following: *The Eclectic Review*, XCIII (1851), 222–227; *The Examiner*, Dec. 21, 1850, 815; *The Leader*, Dec. 28, 1850, 953; *The North American Review*, LXXXV (1857), 293–329. The last review, later than the others, appeared in response to Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. It implies an apology for the first *North American* review of *Wuthering Heights*. Knowing the lives of the Brontës, the 1857 reviewer finds *Wuthering Heights* peculiar, but he also finds the novel easy to dismiss – its peculiarity or strangeness mirrors the 'distorted fancy' of the writer's life, lived in isolation and deprivation. The novel lies outside normal human experience; it would be inappropriate to bring moral judgment to bear on it. Virtually the same attitude is taken by the reviewer in *The Eclectic Review*. The review in *The Leader*, by G. H. Lewes, is probably the best of the contemporary ones. Still, it would not be difficult to trace in it the operation of sexual prejudice, although the argument would, I think, take more space than I have allotted to any single review here. Charlotte Brontë was quite alert to Lewes's bias, as she revealed in a letter to him dated Nov. 1, 1849. Allan R. Brick gives excerpts from the *Leader* review and comments revealingly on Charlotte Brontë's attitude toward it and toward other early reviews in 'Lewes's Review of *Wuthering Heights*,' *NCF*, XIV (1960), 355–359.

#### MARGARET ATWOOD

### 'Paradoxes and Dilemmas, the Woman as Writer', *Women in the Canadian Mosaic*

#### *Reviewing and the Absence of an Adequate Critical Vocabulary*

Cynthia Ozack, in the American magazine *Ms.*, says, 'For many years, I had noticed that no book of poetry by a woman was ever reviewed without reference to the poet's sex. The curious thing was that, in the two decades of my scrutiny, there were *no* exceptions whatever. It did not matter whether the reviewer was a man or a woman; in every case, the question of the 'feminine sensibility' of the poet was at the center of the reviewers' response. The maleness of male poets, on the other hand, hardly ever seemed to matter.'

Things aren't this bad in Canada, possibly because we were never thoroughly indoctrinated with the Holy Gospel according to the distorters of Freud. Many reviewers manage to get through a review without displaying

the kind of bias Ozick is talking about. But that it does occur was demonstrated to me by a project I was involved with at York University in 1971–72.

One of my student groups was attempting to study what we called 'sexual bias in reviewing,' by which we meant not unfavourable reviews, but points being added or subtracted by the reviewer on the basis of the author's sex and supposedly associated characteristics rather than on the basis of the work itself. Our study fell into two parts: (i) a survey of writers, half male, half female, conducted by letter: had they ever experienced sexual bias directed against them in a review?; (ii) the reading of a large number of reviews from a wide range of periodicals and newspapers.

The results of the writers' survey were perhaps predictable. Of the men, none answered Yes, a quarter Maybe, and three-quarters No. Of women, half were Yeses, a quarter Maybes and a quarter Nos. The women replying Yes often wrote long, detailed letters, giving instances and discussing their own attitudes. All the men's letters were short.

This proved only that women were more likely to *feel* they had been discriminated against on the basis of sex. When we got round to the reviews, we discovered they were sometimes justified. Here are the kinds of things we found.

i) *Assignment of Reviews*. Several of our letter-writers discussed the mechanics of review assignment. Some felt books by women tended to be passed over by book-page editors assigning books for review; others that books by women tended to get assigned to women reviewers. When we started toting up reviews we found that most books in this society are written by men, and so are most reviews. Disproportionately often, books by women were assigned to women reviewers, indicating that books by women fell in the minds of those dishing out the reviews into a special 'female' category. Likewise, women reviewers tended to be reviewing books by women rather than books by men (though because of the preponderance of male reviewers, there were quite a few male-written reviews of books by women).

ii) *The Quiller-Couch Syndrome*. This phrase refers to the turn-of-the-century essay by Quiller-Couch, defining 'masculine' and 'feminine' styles in writing. The 'masculine' style is, of course, bold, forceful, clear, vigorous, etc.; the 'feminine' style is vague, weak, tremulous, pastel, etc. In the list of pairs you can include 'objective' and 'subjective,' 'universal' or 'accurate depiction of society' versus 'confessional,' 'personal,' or even 'narcissistic' and 'neurotic.' It's roughly seventy years since Quiller-Couch's essay, but the 'masculine' group of adjectives is still much more likely to be applied to the work of male writers; female writers are much more likely to get hit with some version of 'the feminine style' or 'feminine sensibility,' whether their work merits it or not.