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WUTHERING HEIGHTS AS A CHILDLIKE FAIRY TALE¹

BY PIER PAOLO PICIUCCO

Many of the difficulties we experience in understanding Wuthering Heights are removed when it is regarded as a fairy tale. Yet, even then, the novel does not fit the standard structures proposed, for example, by Vladimir Propp. Some of the difficulties which have prevented previous critics from seeing fairy-structures as central to an interpretation of Wuthering Heights are removed when we combine this perspective with the well-established narcissistic framework of the story. Kristin Wardetsky's practical study of fairy tales written by children, and especially by girl-children, may prove to be the crucial link enabling us to see the fairy tale as the pervasive structure, rather than as an incidental feature, in Wuthering Heights.

Keywords: Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë, Fairy Tales, Vladimir Propp, Kristin Wardetsky, Narcissism

It should hardly surprise us that a novel whose innermost significance gravitates around a nonsense — the famous, overquoted ‘Nelly, I am Heathcliff!’ — poses serious problems of interpretation. What is surprising, instead, is that, of the huge mass of critical contributions written on this crucial book that I examined, only a single scholar, Elliott B. Gose Jr.,² analysed this fantastic novel from the perspective of the fairy tale.

Readings directly, or indirectly, relating to the mythical structure of this novel have had noteworthy weight in the vast critical panorama. For instance, in her *Looking Oppositely: Catherine Earnshaw's Fall*, Sandra Gilbert³ overtly refers to a mythic palimpsest which, through recurring symbolic implications, magic events and initiation rites, permits a feminist interpretation of Emily Brontë's masterpiece. By tracing a thought-provoking parallel with the legend of Psyche, Stevie Davies⁴ instead focuses her attention on the childish behaviour of Catherine when, shortly before her (suicide-like) death, she devotes herself to the meaningless task of sorting the feathers that have come out of a pillow. Jacqueline Simpson demonstrates how Emily Brontë was familiar with the world of folk ballads:

[i]t is interesting to examine the characters in *Wuthering Heights* in terms of their belief in the supernatural and the degree to which folklore figures in their thoughts, and it will be seen that those who command Emily Brontë's fullest sympathy are also those in whom these elements are strongest.⁵

As if the situation were not complicated enough, we should keep in mind that these variegated responses generally correspond to readings of *Wuthering Heights* as a single literary work. Many interpretations of this novel, however, have it split in two sections,

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the first of them relating to the love-triangle formed by Heathcliff–Catherine–Edgar, the second part instead spotlighting the story of Hareton–Cathy–Linton. Yet even critics who agree on this split do not agree on the genres employed. According to Terence Dawson, for instance, ‘the Catherine plot has the properties of a Bildungsroman, the Cathy plot, the characteristics of a myth’;⁶ on the other hand, Dorothy Van Ghent tags the first part a ‘mythological romance’ while ‘[t]he second action, centred in the protracted effects of Heathcliff’s revenge, involves two sets of young lives and two small ‘romances’’.⁷

The aim of this paper is not to devise a magic formula that would enable us to unify the various interpretations put forward, but rather the opposite, that is, that of heightening, if possible, what David Sonstroem has aptly termed the ‘conceptual wuthering’⁸ around the novel by considering the fairy tale as a key for reading the oddities and eccentricities in this uniquely fascinating work. While this perspective has rarely been crucial to analyses of *Wuthering Heights*, allusions to fairy tales are far from rare in essays and critical debate. Joyce Carol Oates, for instance, argues that in the first part of the novel ‘with fairy-tale inevitability, a ‘gypsy’ foundling, named for a dead son, usurps a father’s love’,⁹ while Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s arrival at (or escape to) Thrushcross Grange as the loss of their innocence, a ‘sinister ritual of initiation, the sort of ritual that has traditionally weakened mythic heroines from Persephone to Snow White’.¹⁰ Again, Sandra Gilbert justifies their fleeing because Hindley and Frances ‘are as oppressive as the step-parents in fairy tales’.¹¹ Reading *Wuthering Heights* from the point of view of the fairy tale will, therefore, put us on a critical path that is more frequented than might appear. What distinguishes my approach to the topic, however, is that I consider these fairy-tale elements in the novel in the context of the regressive narcissism of its main characters.

Narcissism, in fact, is a frequently recurring term¹² to describe Catherine’s behaviour, especially when her inability to understand that she cannot be married to a man and remain intimate with another fosters tragedy. Critics’ voices in this sense seem to be quite unanimous, the more so if we take into account that when they do not explicitly refer to this pathology, they anyhow consider Catherine’s conduct egotistical, selfish, infantile or immature, all of which are side-effects of narcissism. A perceptive analysis has been put forward by Stevie Davies,¹³ who examines Catherine’s mental dynamics in her crucial phase as regressive, an instinctual, shielding attitude typical of narcissists.¹⁴ Similarly, when Heathcliff declares his right to act as an agent of nemesis because of the loss he had suffered in his youth, he is also showing narcissistic qualities. His inability to cope with Catherine’s (self-centred) decision to marry Edgar, and his taking Catherine’s act as a personal outrage to justify his merciless revenge (thus making it clear that he places himself on a plane next to that of a God) make his vengeance another clear manifestation of narcissist behavioural dynamics. This trait has been noted a number of times in literary criticism, even though we should add that Heathcliff’s narcissism has received less attention than Catherine’s, if only because that Heathcliff’s wildness in the novel can be more easily justified.

In the strict relation of cause–effect, a narcissistic inclination represents a defence attitude excluding external agents in subjects who have endured painful experiences in their early lives. Emily Brontë’s loss of her mother when she was two may represent the sorrowful episode which, having remained unresolved in later stages of her development,

set in motion those psychological defences typical of narcissism. In this sense *Wuthering Heights*, with its total absence of mother figures (only somewhat supplied by the mother-surrogate Nelly Dean) can be read as a symptom of an uncontrollable deep-rooted grief which the author was probably never able to face. In this context, the fairy-tale elements of the novel can be seen, not as a conscious choice on the author's part, but as the instinctual defensive regression of an adult narcissist taking refuge in the literary genre best expressing the fears and desires of a childlike mind. This reading is consistent with that of Irving Buchen when he maintains that '*Wuthering Heights* is essentially a novel about children'.¹⁵

Although *Wuthering Heights* may seem to lack the social representativeness characteristic of a fairy tale, its narrative voices skilfully amalgamate feminine and masculine traits, oral story with diary entry, an eye-witness's with an outsider's point of view, a rational and an unreflecting, naive outlook, a bourgeois and rural with an aristocratic and cosmopolitan stance, a hard-working and a lazy nature. A simple assessment of the attributes of the two main voices already presents an extremely complicated picture which, however, is not complete because the story is also narrated by a victim (Heathcliff in Chapter 6 is not yet the ruthless destroyer), a scientist (Mr. Kenneth becomes an eligible speaker only when medical expertise, or a post-mortem, is needed), an illiterate country-woman with rough manners (Zillah), and a capricious young woman instantly turned mature (Isabella). The complete prospect therefore seems to be the result of an entire choir of totally dissimilar voices whose ultimate goal seems to be that of representing each possible nuance of social layer, class, extraction and differentiation: in other words, readers may also imagine they have come across a story which is the product of an entire people instead of only two opposed characters, a fact which encourages readings of *Wuthering Heights* as a popular legend, a myth, a ballad, an epos, as well as a fairy tale.

Some of the characters also owe a share of their outlandish portrayal to fairy-tale models, which may be why David Cecil describes Heathcliff and Catherine as 'more vivid than real'.¹⁶ Of the famous couple, Heathcliff seems to me to be the one who is more noticeably fashioned on the stock images of traditional fairy tales, possibly because from the narcissist's perspective he best represents the (male) projections of Catherine's secret desires, and probably inhabits a more imaginary territory than Catherine in Emily Brontë's fictional world. This conjecture is in line with Dorothy Van Ghent's acute observation that Heathcliff's role in the second part of the novel seems that of a 'paternal ogre'.¹⁷ His despotic, tyrannical and cruel attitude towards his legitimate son Linton, as well as to his two 'acquired' children, Cathy and Hareton, makes him an instance of that typical fairy-tale character, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a 'man-eater monster, usually represented as a hideous giant; hence, a man likened to such a monster in appearance and/or character'. In addition, the ogre lives in a ruined and sinister castle, in deserted and bleak areas where confused travellers and pilgrims lose their way. His character, associated in fairy tales with stories of lost or abandoned children, seems to have derived directly from the Greek deity of the afterlife, Hades, who is clearly associated with Death.¹⁸ The parallelisms between Heathcliff and the fairy-tale ogre – not least his associations with death for all those living around him, as well as for himself¹⁹ — are therefore striking.

Another fantastic interpretation of Heathcliff according to the imaginary world of fairy tales derives from the last section of the first part of *Wuthering Heights*, when he almost magically reappears on the scene to carry on his brutish vendetta up to the end of Chapter 17. Heathcliff's departure after Catherine's decision to marry Edgar is the most dramatic of several evolutions: 'uncomplaining as a lamb'²⁰ as a little child, wilder after his comradeship with Catherine and further exasperated by his step-brother so that Hindley's treatment 'was enough to make a fiend of a saint' [ch. 8 p. 102], and finally a terrifying monster. At the time of Heathcliff's abrupt disappearance, the reader may still sympathize with a character who is the victim of the situation: three years later, on his return a (seemingly impossible) transformation has totally modified him. Symptomatic of this alteration after his return is Catherine's warning to her (until then) well-loved sister-in-law Isabella: 'he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man'. [ch. 10 p. 163] His partly wolfish partly human nature has so far been quite underestimated, perhaps because interpretations of this novel have not been particularly sensitive to fairy-tale aesthetics. Yet this change seems to be quite a clear indication that he has turned into a werewolf, a fairy-tale identity which finds further clues disseminated in the course of that particular section of the plot. The first example is the scene when Heathcliff gives way to his grief for the loss of Catherine: '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 with knives and spears'. [ch. 16, p. 268, emphasis added] As is obvious, my interpretation differs from that generally adopted by critics because I do not give the text a figurative connotation but confer literal meaning on it. Further confirmation of this transformation into a wolfish man occurs in the following account, the tragic moments preceding Heathcliff's duel with Hindley: 'His [Heathcliff's] hair and clothes were whitened with snow, and *his sharp cannibal teeth*, revealed by cold and wrath, *gleamed* through the dark'. [ch. 17 p. 283, emphasis added.]

The werewolf of folklore is a half-wolf half-man fiend in stories with young protagonists. In children's stories he generally appears as a cruel, aggressive, greedy and wicked character with dark eyes and, as is the case of the ogre, with a hair-covered body. In terms of cultural sources, this imagined figure was associated in popular medieval superstition with the delirious form of lycanthropy to which a demonic origin and iniquitous actions were attributed. Another explanation of his nature, particularly interesting for my later argument, views this transformation from human to wolfish man as a voluntary act, either as a magic ritual performed by a witch-doctor or through demonic possession.²¹ The novel already suggests a number of reasons for Heathcliff's evil blackness of character: Heathcliff would be black because 'it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil' [ch. 4 p. 57], because, as Nelly conjectures, he may as well be the son of an Emperor of China and a Queen of India, and because, as Terry Eagleton²² persuasively argues, he would metaphorically represent the Irish people's wrath: if we accept his affinity with this fairy-tale monster, Heathcliff would be black because he is a werewolf.

Character types are not, however, the only distinctive feature of fairy tales. Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*,²³ a sort of instruction manual for scholars engaged in studies of this genre, also identifies archetypal plot structures. When I tried to apply his theory to *Wuthering Heights*, however, it was far from easy to identify the various folktale functions with the sections and episodes in the novel. After carefully choosing from Propp's 31 functions, excluding those which were not applicable, I was able to

make a selection of those narrative patterns which basically structure the fairy-tale composition in *Wuthering Heights*. If we think about its plot and reduce the number of Propp's functions to the bare minimum, we obtain the following structure: *initial situation* > *interdiction* > *violation* > *departure* [of the hero] > *hero's reaction* > *struggle* > *victory* > *solution* > *transfiguration* > *wedding*. The linearity of Propp's theorization was nevertheless in contrast with a number of elements. In my 10-function scheme, for instance, I had to suppress a quite important ingredient, *return*, which in Propp's classification takes place after victory while in *Wuthering Heights* it occurs right after, or concomitant with, the hero's reaction. The difficulty of assimilating the plot of *Wuthering Heights* to Propp's scheme is not just a mechanical one, but seems to be related to the novel's conceptual complexity. In particular, the doubling of characters and the ethical ambiguity of *Wuthering Heights* prevent a simple mapping of the novel in Propp's terms. Heathcliff is, in fact, both the hero and the villain in the story or, to use a fairy-tale lexis, both a werewolf and a Prince Charming, a situation Propp does not even take into consideration in his detailed analysis.

An essay by Kristin Wardetzky²⁴ enabled me to explain this anomaly by referring to the childlike narcissism prominent in *Wuthering Heights*. Kristin Wardetzky is a sociologist who examines how the structure of folktales composed by children differs from those which Propp analysed, which were written by adult authors, such as the Grimm brothers. This alternative way of measuring *Wuthering Heights*'s potentiality as a fairy tale proved crucial to my study. As previously discussed, this extravagant romance is the literary product of an adult mind characterized by clearly regressive psychic traits: we may therefore regard this mind as both adult and infantile at the same time. Wardetzky's focus on children's fairy tales reveals that the moral ambiguity involved which plays a part in Propp's analysis is a typical trait in fairy tales written by children:

Characteristics of the protagonist which in the European magic tale would appear as weaknesses are either completely omitted or emphatically justified. This includes even those actions that an adult would find immoral. Everything the hero does is good and right, because the hero does it. This is not the articulation of a naïve morality, but of no morality at all.²⁵

Almost every study directed at evaluating the major motifs of *Wuthering Heights* noted how unorthodox ethics (or lack of any moral code) dominate and completely permeate this bizarre literary work. 'Hell is heaven, heaven, hell'²⁶ comments Sandra Gilbert in accounting for the chaotic and revolutionary ethical perspective used in the novel, while Dorothy Van Ghent asserts that 'Heathcliff is no more ethically relevant than is flood or earthquake or whirlwind'.²⁷ In the context of Wardetzky's research, however, the lack of a clear moral stance in *Wuthering Heights* would not indicate that it is not in the fairy-tale tradition, but would rather be a sign of the author's mental condition.

The relation between a lack of ethics and the appearance of a *Doppelgänger* is clarified by Wardetzky's analysis of the way in which the villainous character emerges in fairy tales composed by children. Four possible chances are delineated and the following is, in my opinion, the one which most nearly recreates the conditions in which *Wuthering Heights* was composed:

In the fourth variation, which is written almost exclusively by girls, the resemblance to animal bridegroom fairy tales is unmistakable. The heroine [*weibliche Hauptfigur*] is panic-struck when confronted by a prodigious monster, and fear initially paralyzes her capacity to respond. Eventually either the

monster or someone who advises the heroine begs her to rescue the monster by performing a daring deed to break the spell he is under. As is to be expected, the repulsive creature then becomes a Prince Charming.²⁸

A further mismatch with Propp's theory occurs at a later stage when the hero struggles or duels with the villain. With the defeat of the latter, great emphasis is given to the final victory of the protagonist both by the *punishment* of the villain and by the hero's *wedding*. If, in some way, the finale in *Wuthering Heights* suggests the re-union of the indissoluble lovers, no punishment is envisaged for the rogue. This ethical oddity is quite evident, and provoked David Cecil to comment on the strangeness of a situation in which an evil character goes scot-free in these terms: 'The conclusion of a conflict between good and evil, if it is to be happy, should entail either the discomfiture of the villain or his repentance. In *Wuthering Heights* neither happens. Heathcliff is not discomfited'.²⁹ An answer to Cecil's insuppressible sense that justice should be done, as well as to the lack of Propp's *punishment* function in the closing stages of Emily Brontë's masterpiece, can be found in Wardetzky's essay:

In the children's fairy tales the antagonist's demise also looks different from the way it appears in the Grimms' tales. If the protagonist has succeeded in escaping the antagonist's power, then the antagonist simply fades away and loses significance, disappearing from the plot as soon as it ceases to represent a danger to the hero or heroine.³⁰

Having widened the fairy-tale context for *Wuthering Heights* to include childlike as well as adult perspectives, we may consider afresh how the structure and the episodes combine one with another, and how its author manages to create an aura of mystery by omitting crucial details (and functions) in some of the most obscure episodes in the plot. In this combined perspective, Propp's theory will show how many affinities *Wuthering Heights* has with even an ordinary (adult) fairy tale, despite previous analyses.

The beginning presents a two-fold situation: the two children live very harmoniously together but their peaceful world is constantly challenged by external circumstances threatening their serenity and undermining their union. When Catherine finally falls, tempted by Thrushcross Grange's promise of social advancement, the hero resolves to take action to counter his misfortune and leaves home, according to the fixed formula found in folk tales. I would consider this as the first section of the fairy tale, because each character has a fixed role. Heathcliff is the hero, Catherine his target, and what I have called the 'external circumstances' represent the villain, therefore personified principally in the characters of Hindley and Edgar, the same characters against which Heathcliff's vengeful wildness will mainly be directed at as the novel progresses.

Contrary to what Propp theorizes, however, the hero-Heathcliff of the introductory section becomes the villain-Heathcliff in the second part of the novel, but this can be fully justified from the perspective of Wardetzky's theory. The way in which this radical transformation is accomplished needs closer scrutiny. Heathcliff's three-year disappearance, possibly the most unclear aspect in this mysterious literary work, has been explained in a variety of different ways. The two which nowadays find widest consensus among scholars are those which ascribe the change in Heathcliff's personality to his taking part in the War of Independence in the United States or his having completed university studies which had some affinities with those Emily Brontë's father actually did. Both these theories share the merit of substantiating their speculations on a rational

evaluation of the situation and, more importantly still, on textual evidence. This evidence, however, seems to me to have been purposely alluded to in order to sidetrack the reader's attention. Neither the former, nor the latter theory, in fact, can fully explain such a radical transformation in only three years' absence.

Since we are evaluating *Wuthering Heights* as a fairy tale, however, we may take the liberty of looking for solutions which are not necessarily pertinent to a rational or probable realm but may be considered as magic expedients. The novel, after all, abounds in hints in that direction. In *The Lunatic and the Devil's Disciple: The 'Lovers' in Wuthering Heights* Marianne Thormählen³¹ refers to a number of clues and details, explaining Heathcliff's drastic change as a pact with the devil. In my opinion, a Faustian pact, rather than university studies, is a better basis for such a modification and may explain Heathcliff's role-shift from hero to villain. This magic expedient will further allow us to deal with another divergence I first noticed when I tried to apply Propp's theory to *Wuthering Heights*. The Russian scholar's scheme in fact considers the donor, entering the scene after the hero's departure, as a crucial character: he seems to be a sort of symbol of hope for the hero in that, after meeting him, the hero gains courage, goes back to his village and challenges the villain/monster to a duel. It is essential to stress here that in the course of function 14, *receipt of agent*, the hero acquires the use of a magic agent or helper. This is totally in keeping with what was previously said about popular beliefs about the werewolf, whose half-beast physiognomy would be an index of a satanic identity acquired in the course of magic rituals or demonic possession. With Chapter 10, we therefore witness — although the best part of the show remains significantly out of the book — the transformation from hero to werewolf.³²

His subsequent transformation into an ogre is not due to a change in his nature but to external conditions: as Dorothy Van Ghent³³ acutely points out, his change of state from lover to father determines this variation in role. Heathcliff therefore manages to win his battle against his past enemies but, since he will become the villainous character, they are not punished. Nor is he punished, since moral rules are irrelevant in children's stories.

The conclusion of *Wuthering Heights* is clearly shaped according to the fairy-tale style, and this is probably why it has left entire generations of critics unsatisfied. After Heathcliff's revenge has been carried out, we may imagine Catherine coming to his rescue: again, the way in which this second crucial transformation takes place has left no traces in print, unless in the form of some extremely vague clues. Yet the contact, whatever its nature, between the two is clearly established and the lack of details in the story may authorize us to fill in the blanks by imagining that in some magic way Catherine will suppress the villain in Heathcliff. It is interesting to note that this appears to be a cliché in fairy-tales composed by children: 'The heroine's magic omnipotence corresponds to the hero's physical omnipotence'.³⁴ In *Wuthering Heights*, this division of powers is less evident in the Catherine-Heathcliff story but quite clear in the relationship between Cathy and Hareton, whose romance has its start where that of their illustrious ancestors ended. It is in fact worthy of note that at the beginning the girl is described by the disoriented Lockwood as a scornful black-magic adept, the boy as a sturdy youngster.

The conclusion of *Wuthering Heights* can thus be explained using Wardetzky's formula derived from tales devised by children: 'Female protagonists prove themselves not

in battle against an opponent, but in rescuing the bridegroom, brother, or male friend'.³⁵ And, of course, Heathcliff is, in one way or another, Catherine's bridegroom, brother and male friend. Part of the irresistible fascination of this novel is due to the unpredictability of the two protagonists' moves, with their roles undergoing frequent and radical modification, as some scholars have pointed out. 'Both Psyche's and Catherine's stories concern a metamorphosis,'³⁶ is Stevie Davies' perspicacious parallel between the famous Greek myth and *Wuthering Heights*: similarly, if we analyse the same novel from the perspective of the fairy tale, we witness Heathcliff's metamorphosis from hero to werewolf, to ogre, back to hero again, creating that cyclical movement through the entire story which has been often been noted by critics.³⁷

The story which relates most closely to *Wuthering Heights* in terms of Wardetzky's theory is *The Beauty and the Beast*, by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont,³⁸ a French-born author who moved to England in 1745 and gained great fame in her lifetime. Written exactly a century after *The Beauty and the Beast*, *Wuthering Heights* in some ways seems to be a dramatized version of the famous fairy tale. The coincidences between the two pairs of lovers are striking indeed but other details also recur in both stories. I was fascinated by Sandra Gilbert's explanation of *Wuthering Heights* in terms of a myth starting from Mr. Earnshaw's request to his children 'What shall I bring you?' when leaving for Liverpool (or wherever he may have gone). In *The Beauty and the Beast* Beauty is a merchant's daughter and when her father decides to leave for a short trip he asks his beloved child the fateful question: 'What will you have, Beauty?', and the (unconscious) wish for love on the heroine's part is manifest since she asks for a rose. Catherine, however, does not seem to be rigidly modelled on Beauty, a fact that is evident when we read in the folk tale that 'Beauty rose at four in the morning, and made haste to have the house clean, and dinner ready for the family' and that '[a]fter she had done her work, she read, played on the harpsichord, or else sung whilst she spun'. Again, this perplexing situation can be explained if we evaluate *Wuthering Heights* as the tale created by an author who was both adult and childlike at the same time: Wardetzky makes it clear that heroines in folk tales composed by children differ considerably from those one finds in the Grimm brothers' stories:

The girls' heroines do not in any sense resemble the Grimm image of the woman, which Bottigheimer and Tatar analyze critically (Bottigheimer 1987; Tatar 1987). On the contrary, they lack all trace of longsuffering patience, a trait that distinguishes the humbled and persecuted heroines of the Grimms' tales [...]. On the contrary, they have sharp tongues and are not even intimidated by the threat of torture. They suffer from no lack of self-confidence or readiness to act, but their means for asserting themselves differ from those of the boys. In particular, self-defense in tales by girls is less about eliminating an opponent than about winning a partner, principally a fiancé (less often a friend), and it is precisely here that the girls' heroines locate their confirmation of self.³⁹

As a sort of re-writing of *The Beauty and the Beast* from a girl-child's point of view, *Wuthering Heights* may seem to differ from its model in introducing the figure of the (first) husband Edgar, while Beauty seems to have no alternative choices; or rather, Beauty's love, before rescuing the Beast, is unmistakably directed towards her father. Again, in quite clear terms *The Beauty and the Beast* illustrates what we may call the sentimental education of a girl who, according to the Oedipal complex, makes her first choice for a husband of a father-like companion, and only afterwards she gives herself to a sexual partner. In this sense, I would argue that *Wuthering Heights* allegorizes this

situation by personifying Edgar and Heathcliff with the two available options. The parallel with *The Beauty and the Beast*, therefore, acquires a particular weight in that it would suggest an alternative reading of the two lovers' role; according to the dominant evaluation by the critics, in fact, Heathcliff would represent childish love, totally unaffected by social rules and behavioural codes while Edgar is Catherine's adult choice. It is my opinion, in contrast, that Edgar Linton, exactly because he is so caring and responsible (and why not? effeminate) a character, can in no way pose those threats that Heathcliff instinctually represents. He would therefore be Catherine's first instinctual choice in that he would be seen as the father-like companion, while Heathcliff would be (momentarily) put to one side because of his erotic allure. In such an ambiguous novel, at least we can count on the fixed rule that a peaceful and loving man–woman union is possible only on the condition that the man, be he Heathcliff, Hareton or Hindley, is deprived of his masculinity. This is why when Catherine finally manages to win Heathcliff back, he must first lose his masculine aggression.

Whether or not Emily Brontë knew *The Beauty and the Beast* is hard to say; surely the folk tale must have been known even in the narrow cultural environment in which Emily Brontë moved. In any case, my task was not to demonstrate that *Wuthering Heights* descends in direct line from that fairy tale, but rather to focus my attention on the likely parallel between ordinary fairy tales and this fascinating fairy-tale-like romance. What I hope to have demonstrated in this essay is that some of the difficulties which have prevented previous critics from seeing fairy-structures as central to an interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* are removed when we combine this perspective with the well-established narcissistic framework of the story. Kristin Wardetsky's practical study of fairy tales written by children, and especially by girl-children, may prove to be the crucial link enabling us to see fairy tale as pervasive structure, rather than as an incidental feature, in *Wuthering Heights*.

Notes

¹ This essay appears after one year of vibrant discussions with Dr. Michela Sacco, a psychologist and dear friend of mine. The evolution of ideas in this span of time makes it difficult to say whether some of the concepts I am going to deal with here are totally mine, or shared opinions. Whatever the case, my deep gratitude goes to her for making me a participant in these rewarding dialogues.

² Elliott B. Gose Jr., *Imagination Indulged: the Irrational in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. McGill-Queen's U P: Montreal and London, 1972.

³ Sandra Gilbert, 'Looking Oppositely: Catherine Earnshaw's Fall' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (ed. by H. Bloom) New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.

⁴ Stevie Davies, 'Baby-Work: The Myth of Rebirth in *Wuthering Heights*' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, Macmillan Casebook Series (ed. by Miriam Allot) London: 1970.

⁵ Jacqueline Simpson, 'The Function of Folklore in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*' in *Folklore*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Spring, 1974), p. 51.

⁶ Terence Dawson, 'The Struggle for Deliverance from the Father: The Structural Principle of *Wuthering Heights*' in *Modern Language Review* 84 (1989) p. 292.

⁷ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On *Wuthering Heights*' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (ed. by H. Bloom) New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, pp. 11–12.

⁸ David Sonstroem, 'Wuthering Heights and the Limits of Vision' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (ed. by H. Bloom) New York: 1987, p. 27.

⁹ Joyce Carol Oates, 'The Magnanimity of *Wuthering Heights*' <http://www.usfca.edu/~southern/jco.html>, Originally published in *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1983).

¹⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 273.

- ¹¹ Gilbert, 'Looking Oppositely' p. 90.
- ¹² 'It is a kind of love which finds its archetype in the myth of Narcissus, who died for love of his own reflection in a pool'. Patsy Stoneman, 'Catherine Earnshaw's Journey to Her Home among the Dead: Fresh Thoughts on *Wuthering Heights* and 'Epipsychidion'' in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 47, No. 188 (Nov., 1996), p. 523, while Harold Bloom speaks of an 'ambivalently narcissistic' sexuality in *Wuthering Heights*. [Harold Bloom, 'Introduction' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (ed. by H. Bloom) New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, p. 2.
- ¹³ Stevie Davies, 'Baby-Work: The Myth of Rebirth in *Wuthering Heights*' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, Macmillan Casebook Series (ed. by Miriam Allot) London: 1970.
- ¹⁴ For a parallel, simply consider the case of Conrad's Lord Jim, one of the most famous narcissists in English literature, and how many times he is called a child in the novel.
- ¹⁵ Irving Buchen, 'Emily Brontë and the Metaphysics of Childhood and Love' in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (June 1967), p. 66.
- ¹⁶ David Cecil, *Victorian Novelists*, Phoenix Books, Chicago: 1955, p. 181.
- ¹⁷ Van Ghent, 'On *Wuthering Heights*' p. 12.
- ¹⁸ My translation and adaptation from Carlo Laoucci, *Dizionario delle figure fantastiche*, Vallardi: 1991.
- ¹⁹ 'Brontë is a death-oriented poet; or, to put it more comprehensively, she is a poet of loss.' (Buchen, p. 63).
- ²⁰ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Ch. 4 p. 60. Electronic edition downloadable at: <http://www.planetpdf.com/>. In quotations from this electronic source I will facilitate the location by using both the chapter and the page number.
- ²¹ Again from Carlo Lapucci, *Dizionario delle figure fantastiche*, Vallardi: 1991.
- ²² Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. London & New York: Verso, 1995.
- ²³ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*. 1928. (2nd ed. 1968, trans. Lawrence Scott) Austin: University of Texas Press.
- ²⁴ Kristin Wardetzky, 'The Structure and Interpretation of Fairy Tales Composed by Children' in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 103, No. 408 (April-June, 1990).
- ²⁵ Wardetzky, p. 165.
- ²⁶ Gilbert, 'Looking Oppositely', p. 82.
- ²⁷ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*' in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Dec., 1952), p. 181.
- ²⁸ Wardetzky, p. 167.
- ²⁹ David Cecil, 'Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*: The Theme of *Wuthering Heights*' in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, Macmillan Casebook Series (ed. by Miriam Allot) London: 1970, p. 136.
- ³⁰ Wardetzky, p. 168.
- ³¹ Marianne Thormählen, 'The Lunatic and the Devil's Disciple: The 'Lovers' in *Wuthering Heights*' in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 48, No. 190 (May, 1997).
- ³² I disagree with Gose (*Imagination Indulged*) when he argues that 'Nelly takes the role of the helpful provider' (Gose, p. 63). Although the Earnshaws' maid is sympathetic to Heathcliff at a time when everybody turns their back on him, I would say that she does not prove crucial in concretely helping him, up to the point that he has to vanish for three years. Heathcliff's radical transformation cannot in any way be explained in terms of a form of support from Nelly.
- ³³ Van Ghent, 'On *Wuthering Heights*', p. 12.
- ³⁴ Wardetzky, p. 163.
- ³⁵ Wardetzky, p. 163.
- ³⁶ Davies, 'Baby-Work', p. 121.
- ³⁷ 'How this miraculous transformation comes about, *why* it must be grasped as inevitable, has to do with the novelist's grasp of a cyclical timelessness beneath the melodramatic action.' (Oates, 'The Magnanimity of *Wuthering Heights*').
- ³⁸ Le Prince De Beaumont, Jeanne-Marie. *The Beauty and the Beast*, electronic version downloadable at: <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/beauty.html>. All quotations are from this source.
- ³⁹ Wardetzky, pp. 169-70.

Biographical note

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