

The Post-Romantic Way to God: Personal Agency and Self-Worship in *Wuthering Heights*.

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The majority of critics envision a secular conception of passion in *Wuthering Heights*. As early as a year after its publication, reviewers, such as H. F. Chorley in the *Athenaeum*, described the novel as imbued with “passionate ferocity” (Allott 39). Modern scholars also identify a similar passion in *Wuthering Heights*: Martha Nussbaum, for instance, envisions a despondent view of passion in the novel, describing it as an animal instinct, governed by emotions (365). In this world, in which people are controlled by instinctive passions, God remains inaccessible, as J. Hillis Miller has famously pointed out (184). Other critics identify a more religious basis for passion in *Wuthering Heights*. Marianne Thormählen, for instance, views Catherine and Heathcliff’s passionate love in *Wuthering Heights* as a means through which the life beyond the grave reaches across into this life—the means through which the hauntings occur (*Brontës and Religion* 115). Emma Mason reads *Wuthering Heights* in a Christian/Methodist framework, arguing that the intense emotive language expressed in the novel is caused by religious enthusiasm, rather than romantic passion (“Some God of Wild Enthusiast’s Dreams” 263). Although both Mason and Thormählen acknowledge the religious passion that dominates the text, both critics view the novel as concluding in a manner that casts away a Christian framework.

Rather than dispensing with a Christian framework, I argue that God’s position remains ambiguous throughout the text, in which the road to salvation is only possible through a process of determined striving and intense experiences; thus, encapsulating a spirituality grounded in suffering—a Post-Romantic spirituality. This type of spirituality occurs through the idolatrous nature of Catherine and Heathcliff’s interaction, which in effect replaces God. Through Steven Vine’s notion of “self-splitting,” Catherine and Heathcliff’s devotion to one another can also be seen as an intense devotion to themselves. Self-splitting refers to the complex identity dynamic that occurs between the two protagonists—a claiming of one another’s identity, making it impossible to exist apart from one another. The experience of being forcefully separated induces a violent passion in Catherine and Heathcliff, a religious ecstasy that casts away all earthly concerns. Thus, this complex identity dynamic enables a crossing over between the physical and spiritual worlds, and allows Catherine and Heathcliff to reach the Romantic sublime—a state of elevation that is aspired to by Romantic poets. In Brontë’s novel, this state of elevation culminates in a re-visited, and haunted, afterlife. The troubled nature of this afterlife, its “unquiet slumbers,” positions the text within a Post-Romantic conception of the world in which the relationship to the sublime is difficult and contested. The ambiguity of the divine captures a vision less bleak than a godless world, but a world in which spirituality is complex and difficult.

Romanticism: The Sublime

The conception of God in *Wuthering Heights* reflects the Romantics’ pantheistic view, with God being seen in nature, and conceptualised through the sublime. Samuel Taylor Coleridge,

in particular, argues in his public lectures that nature is the symbolic language of God, portraying “the bright impressions of the eternal mind” (“Lectures 1795” 94).¹ This concept is also reflected in Coleridge’s writing, in which God’s proven order and purpose can be found in nature (“Reflection” 137). The Romantic poet seeks to approach nature, and reach for the metaphysical force that is beyond the natural world.

The sublime is a state of elevation, with the imagination viewed as the vital component to this sublimity (Luenberger 80). During this state of elevation, according to William Wordsworth and Coleridge, the sublime produces a profound unity between mind and nature. According to Wordsworth, the sublime is interconnected with emotions, in which nature raises the Romantic poet to an “elevated profound passion” (Wordsworth 81). Philip Shaw describes the sublime as an object or event, in which “points of comparison disappear”—when the poet reaches something beyond thought and language (2). The sublime is also often associated with the transcendent, which John Millbank defines as engaging with an unknowable, infinite force that remains a point that finite beings can “hover” over (211). The Romantic poets reach for what lies beyond language, and this place of transcendence can be discovered in nature. This highly ordered manner of achieving the sublime is not a feature of Post-Romanticism.

Post-Romanticism: The Sublime

In contrast to Romanticism, the means by which the sublime is achieved in Post-Romanticism is through suffering. No clear definition exists for Post-Romanticism; critics who explore Post-Romanticism focus on the Romantic poets and their position as the elect, as well as the conception of the self in relation to nature. Michael O’Neill considers Matthew Arnold’s poetry as Post-Romantic through a vigorous analysis of how Arnold’s work demonstrates a move away from Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. O’Neill argues that Post-Romanticism, as demonstrated in Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach,” confronts a personal landscape of struggle and confusion (120). The Post-Romantic poet accepts his defeat, and confronts the reality of no longer having access to a power beyond oneself that will ease one’s discontent. As Terry Pinkard argues, the Post-Romantic poet does not seek the place of transcendence, but reconciles himself to the contingencies of life (402). The God-like position of the poet is re-conceptualised as a position that is not only uncertain, but unabashed about uncertainty. In this sense, Post-Romanticism is a Victorian literary condition of loss, and the consciousness of having lost, the figure of the poet as prophet. Christopher Ricks suggests that Victorian verse was ill-fated, because it suffered the loss of three poets, and geniuses, who were often referred to as the second generation of Romantic poets—Byron, Keats, and Shelley (xxvii). These poets could have been the figurative fathers of the next generation of poets, but all of them died untimely deaths. Filling the void of their literary paternal figures, the Victorian poets were left to fashion a new type of poetry and, thus, capture a more complex view of the world. As opposed to the imagination being the means to the sublime, the Post-Romantic poet reaches the sublime through a much more complex journey. The Post-Romantic or Victorian position is, therefore, less optimistic, and riddled with complexities, reflecting a posture of alienated modernity.

¹ Coleridge’s poetry also communicates a strong sense of God in nature. See, for example, “Frost at Midnight”: “The lovely shapes and sounds of the intelligible / Of that eternal language which thy God/Utters” (59-61).

In this way, Post-Romantic spirituality enacts a connection with the spiritual world that may take place in nature, but involves a more difficult journey to the spiritual. Often, suffering is central to the journey of the Post-Romantic soul. This type of suffering is conceptualised through passion that can be compared with the passion of the saints and martyrs of the early Christian church. Passion fashions Catherine and Heathcliff into martyrs, inducing a conversion experience, which can be seen as inspired by Methodism and evangelicalism.

Emily Brontë and Spirituality

Emily Brontë was the daughter of an Anglican Churchman, and her hometown, Haworth, included a significant number of Dissenters (those who split from the Anglican Church over doctrinal disagreements); the Methodists and the Baptists were the two main Dissenting groups in Haworth. Patrick Brontë chose to work in harmony with the Dissenters, and was influenced by Wesleyan Methodism, particularly the focus on God's grace as allowing individuals to choose what they believe. From a young age, Brontë was exposed to a posture of openness to ideas about God and the individual, both through a tolerant father, and access to the great thinkers of the age (Burstein 434).

Brontë had access to a breadth of theological reading, several translations of the Bible, an extensive range of devotional literature, and access to religious magazines. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine* included the theological debates of the time (Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion* 49). Views about religion and spirituality, were severely splintered in the Victorian age, evident from the internal divisions identified by W. J. Conybeare as Low, Broad, and High Church (Schlossberg 2; Parsons 33).² There was a vast diversity of opinions prevalent concerning religion, particularly personal authority in relationship with God (Hoppen 497). Thinkers such as Thomas Arnold attacked the notion that worship needed to be mediated, and argued that access to God is, and should be seen as, open to all people (14). High Church Tractarians opposed Arnold's views strongly, with John Keble maintaining that scripture could only be interpreted in the context of Church community. His revival of the High Church fought against ideas of personal authority in interpreting the scriptures (Pereio 66). Views about institutionalised religion were continually contested, and personal responsibility in faith was increasingly reiterated in evangelical and Broad Church conceptions of the individual's relationship with God.

Brontë's novel and poetry are often drawn on in attempts to infer the nature of Brontë's faith. Little is known about her religious beliefs, except that she identified with no formal religion. Her faith, as her friend Mary Taylor stated, was between her and God (Winniffrith 63). This statement, being the only known reference to her faith, suggests that Brontë erred on the Romantics' side of God and His creation—the individual does not need any mediation to determine a relationship with God. *Wuthering Heights* depicts a diversity of opinions regarding spirituality. Similar to Victorian Britain, the community of *Wuthering Heights* is fragmented in terms of the approaches to spirituality and religion, which are focalised through different characters.

² W. J. Conybeare's article "Church Parties," published in the *Edinburgh Review* xcvi (October 1853):273-342, is frequently cited as a source for these terms. Although "high church" and "low church" date back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the term "broad church" is mid-nineteenth-century.

The fragmentation of the Church in Victorian England is mirrored in the lack of any monolithic representation of faith in *Wuthering Heights*. The Brontë novels rarely contain any positive portrayal of orthodox religion, and this can be seen through the condescension from the main churchgoing figure in *Wuthering Heights*. The most pronounced portrayal of religion in *Wuthering Heights* is, of course, the imperious Joseph, branded as the figure of Calvinism in the novel (Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion* 82). Sanctimoniousness marks him as a figure of institutional judgment, representing the oppression of the Church; however, Joseph should be viewed beyond his satirical function, as a character who presents the less imaginative perspective in a situation, enacting a tension between the Romanticism of the principal characters and a less spiritual, less enchanted, view of the world (Wiltshire 25). After Catherine's dramatic sobbing out in the storm, Joseph dismisses her as a silly girl, chasing after men—"Running after t'lads, as usual!" (87). Everyone around Joseph is condemned in his eyes, especially Heathcliff; his comment on the latter's death is that the "devil's harried off his soul" (335). Joseph sees Catherine and Heathcliff as irredeemable sinners, and his preaching fails to compel them to turn to God. Nelly passes judgment on Joseph's kind of faith, commenting that "He was, and is yet most likely, the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible" (42). Nelly can be seen as the figure of Anglican propriety, judging Joseph as a bible-bashing Dissenter, and viewing Catherine and Heathcliff as outsiders in relation to the Church and God.

Both Catherine and Heathcliff are positioned as Romantic outcasts from conventional views of God and spirituality. Catherine and Heathcliff's violent intensity is beyond Nelly's narrow understanding of the world with the Anglican Church at its centre. Both Catherine and Heathcliff are presented as outsiders from this worldview, as children of the moors:

They both promised to grow up as rude as savages . . . it was one of their amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and stay there all day . . . The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again . . . and many a time I've cried to myself to watch them growing more reckless daily, and I not daring to speak a syllable for fear of losing the small power I still retained over the unfriended creatures. (46)

The unfriended outsiders are also strangers to the traditional understanding of God and spirituality, maintaining a close relationship with the landscape. Catherine and Heathcliff appal Nelly with their intensity, and their violence. A possible separation from Heathcliff sends Catherine into a frenzy of self-violence, bashing her head against the arm of a sofa, causing her lips to bleed (118). Similarly, Heathcliff experiences an intense and rapturous passion when Catherine dies, sobbing for Catherine to haunt him, rousing him to slam his head against a tree trunk, with "splashes of blood" staining the bark (169). The intense passions displayed in these passages arise from intense suffering, which is physically manifested through the blood that both Catherine and Heathcliff spill. These displays of passion "appalled" Nelly, leaving Heathcliff with the comment: "He was beyond my skill to quiet or console!" (169) Nelly generally expresses alarm when she is around Catherine and Heathcliff, describing them as a "strange and fearful picture" during their exchange before Catherine's death (160). Her sense of alarm and incomprehension at Catherine and Heathcliff's violence, and intensity, initiates a tension between a narrow view of the world with the Church as spiritual centre, and a view of God or the divine that is more extensive, as being found outside the walls of a church. Catherine and Heathcliff's undisciplined spiritual experience, I argue, casts them as outsiders from orthodox Christian religion, as a couple of

revivalists, claiming spiritual authority traditionally belonging to the Church. Brontë promotes an approach to religion and spirituality that comes with a posture of openness, rather than a narrow conception of God and the individual. This posture of openness is represented most clearly through the spirituality of Catherine and Heathcliff's connection.

Idolatry and Passion in *Wuthering Heights*

In my reading of *Wuthering Heights*, idolatry is understood both in the context of Catherine and Heathcliff's worship of each other and the worship of themselves, conceptualised through the complex identity dynamic that occurs in their relationship. Idolatry is a violation of the Ten Commandments, which are central to the beliefs of the Judeo-Christian cultures and an essential part of the Christian religion (Old King James Version. Ex. 32.16). It is described by Saint Paul as a process in which the glory of God is exchanged for "vile passions" (Rom. 1.26). A broader understanding of idolatry that is helpful in approaching *Wuthering Heights*, comes from the *OED*, defining idolatry as an extreme "devotion" or "love" for a person or thing in the place of God (862). Thus, idolatry is a type of intense love, directed at anything other than God. We can say that idolatry points to the secular loves that can take the place of God in the human heart. Idolatry contains a paradoxical union of transgressive and sacred desire: yearning for a spiritual experience, yet seeking this experience from an artificial god, or idol. An idol can be both revered as a manifestation of the divine, and treated as an object to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

Idolatry in *Wuthering Heights* is usually associated with the passionate love of Catherine and Heathcliff, as an idolising of one another. Hillis Miller describes the worship in the Catherine-Heathcliff interaction as the passion that fills the void of no hope or God (186). Miller's secular focus reads idolatry as a sign that God is absent in the world of *Wuthering Heights*. In contrast, my reading views God not as absent, but missing as a clear guiding force, reflecting the increasingly secular world of Victorian Britain. *Wuthering Heights* does not retreat from the spiritual world in spite of this, but offers a hope through a journey of spirituality centered on individual agency.

The psychological notion of self-splitting that Steven Vine discerns in *Wuthering Heights* is helpful in identifying self-worship, if read in conjunction with the intensity of their passion, since this passion raises Catherine and Heathcliff above earthly concerns. Self-splitting is described by Vine as coming into being at the point of being dispossessed of being (348). In this case, one's identity is split, and morphed with another's. This means that Catherine and Heathcliff's interaction is not based on love, but on an unhealthy union. Vine also points out that self-splitting occurs in Catherine's infamous statement "I am Heathcliff!" (82), joining Heathcliff to her, and making it impossible for him to exist independently from her. This self-worship becomes more evident when Catherine seeks to have both Heathcliff and Linton as a part of her. Her desire to possess Heathcliff transcends any sense of duty or marriage, not yielding to Linton's requests that she should choose between him and Heathcliff (115). When Edgar does not respond in the manner she wishes him to, Catherine says to Nelly if "I were only sure it would kill him . . . I'd kill myself directly!" (121). Conversely, the apparently earthly concern of wealth does not spring from the desire to obtain wealth for its own sake, but as a means for Heathcliff of bending others to his selfish desires. His acquisition of money allows him to execute his mission of revenge on Hindley's descendants, adopting Hareton with the aim of turning him into a brute (188). It is through their intense engagement with passion, and the suffering their relationship produces, that Catherine and Heathcliff

possess a spiritual view of the world that is unknown and largely incomprehensible to the other characters. As Romantic outsiders to the Church, Catherine and Heathcliff do ultimately reach a place of transcending earthly existence, though the means through which they reach this sublime contrasts with the experience of the Romantic poet. Whereas the Romantics can reach the sublime through communion with nature, Catherine and Heathcliff reach this sublime through an intense self-devotion that raises them above the concerns of the world, but only through suffering.

Due to the secularisation of Brontë scholarship, recent publications focus upon more psychological readings of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship. Thomas Joudrey's study of selfishness, published in 2015, builds upon Marianne Thormählen's notion that Cathy and Heathcliff's devotion is a "manifestation of self-love" ("Christian Ethics in *Wuthering Heights*" 642), and argues that selfishness is the crux of all the characters in the novel (182). Joudrey's interpretation, however, is more secular than Thormählen's, as his study of selfishness is based on psychological manifestations of selfishness. The more spiritual manifestation of selfishness acknowledges Catherine and Heathcliff's lack of earthly interests, and their focus on transcendence; thus, self-devotion is the means through which a type of spirituality starts to form in the two protagonists.

Suffering and Spirituality

Suffering plays a significant role in *Wuthering Heights*, since the suffering of the flesh experienced by the two protagonists—the starving of the body—itself enacts a passion similar to the Christian martyrs. A common tenet of Christianity is that suffering in the flesh, the physical body, was the call of the Christian, in order to gain glory with God. Romans 8.13 helps to illustrate the relationship between suffering and God, in which the Christian is called to put to death the "deeds of the body" to gain life. That is, suffering in the flesh for Christ—any form of physical suffering for the sake of Christ—means the Christian will gain life through the Holy Spirit. Religious passion is best understood in the context of the Christian faith, in which pain and pleasure are interconnected, and provide a link to God. This correlation occurs through a pain experienced in the flesh to be glorified with God. In her reading of suffering for Christ's followers, Elaine Padilla argues that a strong correlation exists between suffering and pleasure; in this case, suffering creates in Christians a joy, since all that the Christian suffers is for the sake of God's glory (33). While Catherine and Heathcliff do not set out to suffer for the sake of Christ, the suffering they experience in their physical bodies draws them toward a state of the sublime.

When a separation occurs between Catherine and Heathcliff, the consequences are strange and chaotic. Heathcliff, after overhearing Catherine's infamous confession to Nelly, runs away from the Heights. Catherine's physical suffering commences shortly after Heathcliff's departure. To Nelly's conventional mindset, the unknown forces at work in Catherine are terrifying; she describes Catherine's behaviour in her bedchamber: "I shall never forget what a scene she acted, when we reached her chamber: it terrified me." Nelly diagnoses it as "the commencement of a delirium" (88). This frenzy and delirium is a form of self-destructive violence that involves physical suffering, causing Catherine to become ill. In the three years of their separation, Catherine suffers "seasons of gloom and silence"(92), though Nelly observes there is possibility of happiness for Catherine in her recent marriage with Edgar (93). However, when Heathcliff returns and Edgar demands Catherine's full fidelity, her idolatrous attachment becomes more intensely self-destructive, taking the form of self-

starvation. As the impossibility of union with Heathcliff becomes evident (118) her excessive attachment pushes her into a fast, refusing any food that Nelly pushes on her. Her body suffers some mysterious agony during her conversation with Nelly: “Oh, I’m burning! . . . Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words?” (125). Catherine is raised to a state of elevation, unaware of the earthly scenes around her. In spite of being starved for three nights, “gaunt and thin,” she overpowers Nelly:

I entreated, and finally attempted to force her to retire. But I soon found her delirious strength much surpassed mine (she was delirious, I became convinced by her subsequent actions, and ravings). (126)

Like Arnold, Catherine confronts the personal landscape of struggle and confusion (O’Neill 120), and through this struggle, experiences a passion akin to that of the martyrs. For the saints of Christianity, physical suffering spurred a stronger connection with God, and a taste of the eternal. Attempts to persecute early Christians only induced further devotion to God, and raised them above the earthly concern of bodily pain (Foxe 18). Catherine is raised above earthly concerns, not aware that she risks severe illness by hanging out of the window. In spite of Nelly trying to “force her to retire,” Catherine remains in her state of elevation, staring out of the window: “Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I’ll keep you. I’ll not lie there by myself . . . I won’t rest till you are with me” (126). It is Cathy’s separation from her idol/the other part of herself, Heathcliff, that motivates her religious ecstasy, raising her above any earthly awareness. It may seem odd to compare Catherine with the early saints, but it is through the paradoxical fusion of pain and pleasure that a strong association exists between her suffering and the suffering of the saints. The early Christian martyrs were overjoyed at being counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake (Foxe 26). As Catherine undergoes self-starvation, she can be said to experience what Elaine Padilla describes as a passion “for better things to come”—a type of supernatural joy at the prospect of what is to come in the afterlife—a joy at being united with God (44). The subliminal divine self is met in Catherine, and Nelly’s incomprehension foregrounds elements of the sublime, which marks the limits of reason, together with what could be beyond these limits (Shaw 2). Catherine’s behaviour is beyond Nelly’s limits of reason due to the sublime state of elevation she achieves. Catherine cannot see Nelly, but is merely focused on her idolatrous union with Heathcliff. To Nelly’s limited mindset, Catherine’s condition is explained as madness, though we should question how Catherine’s starving body is able to ward off an able-bodied woman such as Ellen Dean. That is, through the physical suffering she experiences, she also experiences a joy for life after death.

Heathcliff’s infamous monologue after he ceases his violent behavior towards other people highlights the strong correlation between suffering and spirituality in this novel. Heathcliff tells Nelly he is surrounded by Catherine’s image—a clear reference to his idolatrous attachments to Catherine. His devotion has led him to a place of “great pain, amounting to agony” (323).³ During this unsettling time for Nelly, she observes that Heathcliff experiences “both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes” as he stares at something unseen to earthly eyes (331). He can be said to experience the agony of the flesh and the joy of spirituality at the same time. For both Catherine and Heathcliff, their spiritual perspective can be seen as

³ In Exodus 20:4, idolatry is described in the Ten Commandments as an image: “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath.”

similar to the saints, who were also eternally minded, not concerning themselves with the bodily pain they would suffer as followers of Christ in the Roman Empire.

As well as a strong relationship with pain, spirituality also has a strong connection with nature in *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff's strange joy commences after his self-induced fast, and he returns in the morning after wandering in the moors all night. Young Cathy describes Heathcliff as "so different from his usual look" that she "stopped for a moment to stare at him" (326). When Nelly lays eyes on him, she observes the physical results of sleeplessness and starvation on him as he was "pale, and he trembled: yet, certainly, he had a strange joyful glitter in his eyes, that altered the aspect of his whole face" (327). Heathcliff appears to be in the process of achieving some type of elevated state, the sublime, though this takes full shape when his self-starvation commences. His joy can be seen as similar to the joy of the bishop of Antioch, in the face of terrible suffering for his faith; he was willing to "let the grinding of the whole body" come upon him only that he could win Jesus (Foxye 19). A type of joy is experienced by Heathcliff at the possibility of joining his idol in the afterlife.

Though Heathcliff certainly cannot be said to exhibit the moral qualities of a martyr—he causes great misery to others for his own gain throughout his life—he starts to gain a type of spirituality through his suffering. Though Heathcliff as a baby was described by Nelly as being as "dark as if it came from the devil" (36), it is when his self-starvation commences that he appears to Nelly as "a ghoul or vampire"; Nelly has a legitimate fear of Heathcliff when she enters his room to take supper to him—in an attempt to stop the fast—and screams in fear of him, sure that Heathcliff is "a goblin" (330). Though she knows it is absurd "to yield to that sense of horror" (330), she declines Heathcliff's entreaty to sit with him, telling him that "his strange talk and manner" frightens her (334). Nelly comes face to face with the sublime and trembles with terror. This state of the sublime continues as Heathcliff denies himself earthly gratifications, such as food and sleep. He increasingly becomes more and more detached from the mundane and connected with the supernatural; thereby enacting the same suffering early Christian martyrs underwent to gain access to God. The suffering of the martyrs links with Post-Romanticism through suffering and uncertainty; the source of spirituality in *Wuthering Heights* is uncertain, but the sublime is achieved. Instead of being discovered through nature, God is found only after suffering is experienced in nature. The Post-Romantic writer approaches nature, but can only reach the sublime through a spiritual journey of suffering that incorporates certain Christian principles of salvation, which sees spirituality as a journey of striving.

Young Cathy and Hareton seem to provide generational healing after the tumult of Catherine and Heathcliff. Though they show initial signs of brutality to one another, Catherine implores Hareton to forgive her, and they read together; from this point forward both characters endeavour to accept each other's otherness (314). Marianne Thormählen indicates that the Christian values of forgiveness and compassion can be found in the Cathy and Hareton relationship ("Christian Ethics in *Wuthering Heights*" 647). Nelly observes their tenderness towards one another, "an intimacy" with both minds "tending to the same point," the two sitting down and reading together in a spirit of unity (316). Young Cathy and Hareton's interactions take place in a domesticated setting and are figured as contrasts to Catherine and Heathcliff's intensity.

Salvation in *Wuthering Heights*

The question of whether or not Catherine and Heathcliff attain a kind of salvation can be better understood in the context of revivalism and nonconformity in Victorian England. Since the spirituality of both protagonists is grounded in suffering, their suffering moves them away from their godless indifference to salvation. Passion in *Wuthering Heights* fashions the two protagonists into martyrs, and incites a conversion experience of both Methodist and evangelical influences. Though evangelicals stressed intellectualism, the road to salvation often involved a series of intense and compelling experiences (Bradley 22). Methodists believed believers could reach perfection “through a process of determined striving, resting on faith alone” (Burstein 435).

God, in *Wuthering Heights*, is not the Judeo-Christian God, but a Romantic notion of God. The passion conceptualised in their interaction can be seen as a manifestation of the sublime, but it is the agony that the two protagonists experience that reflects more Christian characteristics of passion. Passion is not portrayed as a pleasant state, but is shown to be a state of agony, inciting a type of brutality. This type of agony can be seen in their stinging exchange before Catherine’s death. Catherine tells Heathcliff: “I shouldn’t care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn’t you suffer? I do!” (160) Heathcliff replies to her:

You know you lie to say I have killed you; and, Catherine, you know that I could as soon forget you, as my existence! Is it sufficient for your infernal selfishness, that while you are at peace I shall writhe in the torments of hell? (161)

These passages form a part of the intense and compelling experiences that are integral to their spiritual journey. Both protagonists can be said to undergo a process of striving, though they do not rest on faith in God. The component of Methodist spirituality that can be found in *Wuthering Heights* is the concept of salvation as a process—both a doctrinal and experiential salvation. This process involves intense experiences, as well as a process of suffering, encapsulating both Methodist and evangelical notions of salvation.⁴ These influences are consistent with Brontë’s unique background, as well as her secrecy about her faith. In this case, salvation is also open to the worst sinners, even Catherine and Heathcliff, which is consistent with Methodist tenets of salvation. In a Post-Romantic world, the poet faces many uncertainties, but *Wuthering Heights* sees an avenue for salvation through a journey of intense experiences and suffering. In *Wuthering Heights*, the writer as post-Romantic poet is focalised through the multiple narrators, who face many uncertainties.

⁴ In referring to Methodist and evangelical notions of salvation, I refer to a salvation that includes doctrinal orthodoxy, but also extends to a more experiential salvation. In the early days of Methodism, John Wesley’s religious rallies would often involve an intense conversion experience that would cause converts to fall to the ground (Mason, “Some God of Wild Enthusiast’s Dreams” 265). Evangelical salvation is more doctrinal, with salvation involving a process (Bradley 22). In an amalgamation of both the experiential and the doctrinal, Heathcliff’s salvation includes both Methodist and evangelical notions of salvation. Methodist and evangelical tenets of salvation also share the characteristic of personal authority in salvation. Heathcliff’s salvation remains solely between him and God, with no institutional reference, further emphasising a private interaction with God; moreover, the main component of Methodist salvation in Heathcliff’s possible redemption remains in the doctrine of grace—that salvation is a gift of grace accessible to all (Burstein 434).

Spirituality and the Post-Romantic Sublime

The source of spirituality remains one of the novel's main ambiguities, and raises a number of unanswered questions. Heathcliff receives his wish—of being haunted after Catherine's death—which is granted to him from powers of the unseen. The issue of life beyond the grave was a great area of concern for the Victorians, and the concept that heaven might possibly exclude being reunited with loved ones after death was inconceivable (McAleavey 192). Brontë engages with this issue through the haunting of Heathcliff, and the issue of life after death. Marianne Thormählen indicates that the source of spirituality in *Wuthering Heights* remains ambiguous (*Brontë's and Religion* 109). The ambiguity is communicated through the multiple narrators, since they do not serve as reliable sources in the novel.

If Catherine and Heathcliff's suffering leads them to a place where finding God is possible, does it mean that they were possessed by the Holy Spirit—as the Christian martyrs were? Regardless of the ethical concerns of this spirituality, Heathcliff does experience a conversion experience through suffering, which is a type of conversion experience praised by Methodists. Nelly, in her limited view of the Christian, believes Heathcliff a condemned sinner, imploring him to see a minister who will explain the Bible to him. To Nelly, the individual's relationship is mitigated through the church. Heathcliff remains unredeemed in her eyes, rejecting this religion:

[Y]ou remind me of the manner I desire to be buried in—It is to be carried to the churchyard . . . No minister need come, nor anything be said over me—I tell you I have nearly attained my heaven. (333)

Heathcliff's heaven involves a personal mediation of spirituality. Continuing the thread of idolatry inherent throughout the novel, his devotion to Catherine foregrounds what Nelly sees as his blasphemy. Both Catherine and Heathcliff are presented as the irredeemable sinners. Yet, like Dissenters, they are on the outside, separated from the Church. In spite of his "godless indifference" (334), we cannot say for sure that Heathcliff is destined to languish in hell. The key moment of Heathcliff's spirituality is his last night on earth—no one is near him. Nelly hears him "groaning, and murmuring to himself" all throughout the night (334). Emma Mason argues that Heathcliff's death can be seen as a conversion experience, with his body bearing the signs of some type of change.⁵ Nelly finds Heathcliff's body "washed with rain . . . the lattice flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill" (335). His body is washed—as Mason points out—as if baptised ("Emily Brontë and the Enthusiastic Tradition" 11). Heathcliff has finally achieved his heaven, and the sexton controversially fulfills his final wish of being buried next to Catherine (336).

The narrators are key as figures of doubt in the novel, and Nelly's clash with Catherine and Heathcliff's views about spirituality casts further doubt on her account of the strange events at the Heights. Nelly believes the boy saw Catherine and Heathcliff's ghosts in the moors but concludes that he "probably raised the phantoms from thinking . . . on the nonsense he had

⁵ Mason draws a parallel between Heathcliff and a 1750 account in John Wesley's journal. In this entry, an Irishman tells the story of his dead son, who was obsessed with a dead woman. The son was in good health, but felt close to death. This son refuses to eat, wanders out of doors at night time, and is found dead the next day.

heard his parents and companions repeat.” However, she is not certain of her speculation, admitting to Lockwood, “I don’t like being out in the dark now” (336). Lockwood’s skepticism continues, yet nature seems to speak, before Lockwood does, almost suggesting the possibility of something more than what is said:

I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth. (337)

Lockwood’s conclusion is implicitly questioned here, and, as Anne Williams indicates, there is no reason to assume that Catherine and Heathcliff do not receive the spiritual afterlife in union they desire—being united with one another in nature (126). The exact nature of this afterlife, whether it is closer to hell or heaven as imagined by orthodox Christianity, remains unclear. Engaging with the debates of her time, Brontë becomes a self-fashioned Post-Romantic poet, presenting a complex picture of spirituality in which the individual can reach the divine through means other than formal religion or the Church. This paper argues that, through a shared self-idolatry and the intensity of suffering, Catherine and Heathcliff attain their own version of heaven in a type of re-imagined Post-Romantic afterlife.

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