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*'The Afflicted Imagination': Nostalgia and Homesickness in the Writing of Emily Brontë*

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PhD Thesis

Department of English

University of Durham

2015

*Abstract*

This thesis discusses homesickness and nostalgia as conditions that 'afflict' to productive ends the writing of Emily Brontë. Homesickness and nostalgia are situated as impelling both Brontë's poetry and *Wuthering Heights*. To elucidate these states, close attention is paid to Emily Brontë's poetry as well as *Wuthering Heights*, in the belief that the poetry repays detailed examination of a kind it rarely receives (even fine work by critics such as Janet Gezari tend not to scrutinise the poetry as attentively as it deserves) and that the novel benefits from being related to the poetry. Building on the work of Irene Tayler and others, this thesis views Brontë as a post-Romantic, and particularly post-Wordsworthian, poet. Much of her writing is presented as engaging in dialogue with the concerns in Wordsworth's poetry, especially his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'; her poetry and prose eschew Wordsworth's 'simple creed' and explore 'obstinate questionings'. In so doing, they follow his own lead; Brontë brings out how complex the Romantics are.

Chapter one focuses on the idea of restlessness as stirring a search for home. Chapters two and three, on Catholicism and Irishness respectively reflect on ways in which Emily Brontë used contemporary national debates in exploring imaginatively states of homesickness and nostalgia. The conceiving of another time and place to find a home in these chapters is developed in chapter four. This chapter considers Brontë's internalisation of a home in her imaginative world of Gondal and argues for Gondal's relevance. An imaginative home formed in childhood leads into chapter five which discusses Emily Brontë's presentation of childhood; the chapter contends that Brontë imagines the child as lost and homesick, and rejects any 'simple creed' of childhood. Chapter six, which starts with the abandoned child in *Wuthering Heights*, focuses on the the novel as stirring a longing for home. The inability to find home, and particularly the rejection of heaven as a home, leads into a discussion of the ghostly as an expression of homesickness in the final chapter.

*Note on Texts Used*

This thesis makes a number of claims for literary influences on Emily Brontë's writing. Therefore, I have endeavoured to refer to editions that she could have read. For Wordsworth's poetry, I have used the Cornell edition to enable checking of variant readings. For Shelley, Coleridge, Keats, Byron and Moore, I have used editions that could have been available to the Brontë family. While I have drawn on scholarship concerning what editions Emily Brontë may have read (Christine Alexander's article in the *Oxford Companion to the Brontës* is particularly helpful), information concerning the totality of books both in the Brontë household and libraries they were known to visit is incomplete. Bob Duckett's two articles in *Brontë Studies* explain this further.

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my grateful thanks to my supervisor, Professor Michael O'Neill for his time and many valuable insights.

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Marie Quinnell.

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## *Introduction*

### *Articulating Nostalgia and Homesickness*

*Nostalgia* as a term was coined by the Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer, as part of his dissertation written in 1688 and he describes it evocatively as ‘denoting a spirit perturbed against holding fast to their native land’.<sup>1</sup> Having named the disease, he states that there is no remedy ‘other than a return to the homeland’.<sup>2</sup> In support of this assertion, he cites a case study which involved a country girl who, after having an accident, was taken to a hospital away from her home. Hofer describes how ‘immediately homesickness took hold of her; she spat back the foods and medicaments, of which she stood in need against the great loss of her strength. Especially she wailed frequently, groaning nothing else than “*Ich will heim...* [I want home]’”.<sup>3</sup> Hofer concluded that simply the return of the girl to her home was enough for her to be cured.

Since the publication of Hofer’s thesis, *nostalgia* has come primarily to mean a longing for the past. This primary meaning is reflected in the second of two senses given in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (the first sense, gesturing more towards space than time, is an ‘acute longing for familiar surroundings’).<sup>4</sup> However, *nostalgia* has also, since its coining by Hofer, come to be inflected more widely. For example, a derivative term, *nostos*, is used in literary criticism to denote a work that has as its main theme that of homecoming such as *The Odyssey* of Homer. Writers have also appropriated *nostalgia* to inflect it in ways that gesture to the mental fight to be expended in finding home: for example, Novalis described

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Hofer, ‘Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688,’ Trans. Carolyn Kiser Anspach, *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, (2.1934): 376-391, p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> Hofer, p. 382.

<sup>3</sup> Hofer, p. 383.

<sup>4</sup> ‘nostalgia’, Def. 1 and Def. 2, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2003.



philosophy as a form of homesickness when he wrote that ‘Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh – Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein (philosophy is the drive to be at home everywhere)’.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of nostalgia in literature has been traced by M. H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*. There, Abrams considers how the homecoming motif in classical texts such as *The Odyssey* was allegorised by early Christian writers such as Augustine to illustrate the soul’s progress from exile back to God. He then argues how this idea of being an exile in the world was used by Romantic poets to articulate their sense that they did not belong in their ‘oppressive and crisis-ridden age’.<sup>6</sup> However, Abrams brings to the fore the influence of German philosophy on Romantic poets with their sense that a state of exile is paradoxically necessary to find home. To quote Schelling as used by Abrams: ‘Without the ‘original separation... we would have no need to philosophize’, and ‘true philosophy’ sets out from the primal separation ‘in order to annul and sublimate that separation forever’.<sup>7</sup> So awareness of separation is needed to ultimately find home; I shall reflect on this awareness of separation as restlessness in the next chapter.

In a study of nostalgia in the British novel, Tamara Wagner explores how nostalgia energises the writing of Charlotte Brontë. Wagner illuminates a contrast in the finding of home between *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*; her case is that, while the former stays within the domestic sphere, the heroine in the latter departs ‘from England, from the cozy spaces of the sickroom, and from the dreams of love in the cottage’.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the constraints of space dictated so, but the omission of any mention of Emily Brontë in Wagner’s consideration of nostalgia is surprising; when one considers any published biography of Charlotte’s younger

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<sup>5</sup> Novalis, *Schriften: Das Philosophie Werk II*, Eds. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968). p. 434.

<sup>6</sup> M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> Abrams, p. 182.

<sup>8</sup> Tamara S. Wagner, ‘Longing: narratives of Nostalgia in the British Novel, 1740-1890’, (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2004), p. 165.

sister, homesickness emerges as a prominent theme. However, what is often considered as a biographical side-line in discussions of Emily Brontë's writing, I propose in this thesis to situate as an energising preoccupation. This emphasis moves in the opposite direction to Jane Stabler who, in a recent study of Romantic poets exiled in Italy, states in her conclusion that her aim has been to correct a teaching of Romanticism that is dominated by 'mythic, sublime, obscure homelessness, rather than the historically grounded, geo-politically specific deracinations of war-torn Europe and America'.<sup>9</sup> While Stabler contends for the need to consider the literal state of Italian exile among Romantic poets, this thesis argues that the seam of metaphorical homesickness in Romantic poetry rewards attention in Emily Brontë's writing. Hofer's description of the girl refusing her food in the case study cited above evokes Catherine rejecting nourishment against a backdrop of longing to be back at Wuthering Heights.<sup>10</sup> She seeks to undertake her own homecoming and, arguably, achieves such a nostos as the ghost knocking at the bedroom window of Wuthering Heights. Staying with the example of Catherine, Hofer's diagnosis of a nostalgic state where 'someone is sent forth to foreign lands with alien customs' and such persons 'do not know how to accustom themselves to the manners of living nor to forget their mother's milk', can be applied to the circumstances of Catherine's convalescence at Thrushcross Grange; her removal is the occasion for a profound nostalgia.<sup>11</sup>

However, a problem with *nostalgia* as a term lies in its journey from 'romantic pathology to modern sentiment'. This quotation, taken from Linda Austin's article, 'Emily Brontë's Homesickness', expresses the idea that *nostalgia* nowadays connotes schmaltzy sentimentality about the past rather than a medically-diagnosed illness of longing for a place

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013). p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the thesis, the older Catherine shall be referred to by her full name, the younger by the abbreviated Cathy.

<sup>11</sup> Hofer, p. 383.

as discussed by Hofer.<sup>12</sup> It was Immanuel Kant who initially challenged Hofer's conception of *nostalgia*. Kant contends that linking *nostalgia* to place is wrong. He argues that when the Swiss followed their nostalgic longing and returned home, they were 'greatly disappointed in their expectations and so cured' because 'they cannot relive their youth there'.<sup>13</sup> This is because, for Kant, the longing is for a past state rather than geographical entity: place and time are conflated. Austin argues that Brontë anticipates the modern meaning of *nostalgia* in four poems written when she was away at school near Halifax; I argue that the way Brontë treats nostalgia is more adequately described by Hofer's description of it, in his thesis, as an 'afflicted imagination'.<sup>14</sup>

In this thesis, *nostalgia* will be used when the longing to get back to an imagined past is under discussion. However, the problem remains that *nostalgia* nowadays connotes rose-tinted gushing concerning the past. *Homesickness*, a term less problematized with sentimental connotations, will also be used. It points more clearly to place and was used by Kant to separate longing for past from longing for place.<sup>15</sup> In the early nineteenth-century, like nostalgia, it was regarded as an illness, hinted at by the use of the definite article in the following citation from the *OED*: 'A cat is as subject as a mountaineer to *the* home-sickness' (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, despite over a hundred years separating the article cited in the *OED* from Hofer's dissertation, both nostalgia and homesickness were linked with the mountain-dwelling Swiss and this connection was possibly in Emily Brontë's mind when she

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<sup>12</sup> Linda M. Austin, 'Emily Brontë's Homesickness', *Victorian Studies* (44.4.2002): 573-596, p. 574.

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View*, Trans. Mary J. Gregor, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 53-54.

<sup>14</sup> Hofer, p. 381.

<sup>15</sup> See Kant, pp. 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> William Frend. 'Patriotism, or the love of our country; an essay, illustrated by examples from ancient and modern history'. *The Annual Review and History of Literature*. (3 1804): 235-241, p. 235. Cited in 'homesickness', *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2011.

refers to the ‘mountaineer’ who ‘all life long has loved the snow’ in ‘To a Wreath of Snow’ (21/2).<sup>17</sup>

Nostalgia and homesickness are illuminating ideas for Emily Brontë’s poetry. In ‘Loud without the wind was roaring’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Loud without’) – a poem written when she was at Law Hill – Brontë describes the experience of exile. When considering how to articulate her response to heather that reminds her of home, she describes the strength of her feeling:

But not the loved music whose waking  
 Makes the soul of the Swiss die away  
 Has a spell more adored and heart-breaking  
 Than in its half-blighted bells lay – (59-62)

Her reference to ‘bells’ recalls the idea of homesickness being provoked in Swiss mercenaries by hearing the sound of cow bells and Hofer’s idea that the Swiss were particularly susceptible to nostalgia.<sup>18</sup> Where she would have found this association of the Swiss with homesickness, one can only conjecture but it underpins her conception of ‘Loud without’ as a poem of homesickness; it is the sense of exile which gives the poem its vitality.

The idea of homesickness as a galvanising force in Emily Brontë’s writing also resonates with wider literary and social currents. William Wordsworth articulated his feelings of unease at the world around him when he wrote that, ‘We have given our hearts away’ in the sonnet, ‘The world is too much with us; late and soon’ (4). Published as part of *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807, Wordsworth exclaims how he would rather have lived in a former time: ‘– Great God! I’d rather be / A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn’ (9-10).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> All references to Emily Brontë’s poems taken from: Emily Brontë. *Emily Jane Brontë: The Complete Poems*, Ed. Janet Gezari, (London: Penguin, 1992). Line numbers included in body of the text.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example Immanuel Kant’s comments on homesickness in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p. 53

<sup>19</sup> All references to poems in *Poems, in Two Volumes* taken from: William Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes, and other poems, 1800-1807*, Ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983). Line numbers given in body of text.

Here, the Romantic Wordsworth's desire to escape a world still soured by his disappointment at the failed ideals of the French Revolution anticipates the Victorian Tennyson's lack of faith in the 'purblind race of miserable men' in *Idylls of the King* (1842) and Matthew Arnold's despair at the 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' of old certainties in 'Dover Beach' (1867).<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Carlyle, writing with the bombast of an Old Testament prophet to an industrialising Great Britain, expresses his nostalgia in terms similar to Wordsworth with an urgent 'Post-Romantic ... questioning of the vigour of a departed heroism'.<sup>21</sup> Writing in *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, he states that 'Hero-Gods, Prophets, Poets, Priests are forms of Heroism that belong to the old ages'.<sup>22</sup> Later on, Carlyle drinks from his favourite stream of Germanic literature in a line written in his characteristic Carlylese idiosyncratic and clanking style: 'The living TREE Igdrasil, with the melodious prophetic waving of its world-wide boughs,... has died out into the clanking of a world MACHINE'.<sup>23</sup> Wordsworthian exclamation and Carlylean capitalisation join forces to express a feeling of disdain at the world of their contemporaries.

This disdain resonates and finds an echo in the poetry of Emily Brontë, as in these lines from 'To Imagination': 'So hopeless is the world without; / The world within I doubly prize' (7-8). Her poetry, like *Wuthering Heights*, spurns the world of her contemporaries. The result is a relentless restlessness which gives her writing its vitality. This energy is released by the poet's quest for her home, expressed most eloquently by Catherine Linton shortly before her death:

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<sup>20</sup> References taken from: Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, Ed. Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 1989) and Matthew Arnold, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, Ed. Kenneth Allot (London: Longman, 1965). p. 762 and p. 242 respectively.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell, Matthew, *Irish Poetry under the Union, 1801-1924*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013) p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 1841, Eds. Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin and Mark Engel, (Berkeley: California UP, 1993) p. 133.

<sup>23</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 147.

The thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it and in it. (197) <sup>24</sup>

T. S. Eliot stated that Tennyson's faith in *In Memoriam* is 'a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience'.<sup>25</sup> In a similar way, this thesis will explore how Emily Brontë's writing is impelled by the quality of its yearning rather than the joy of an arrival. A more Brontëan word than yearning is *wearying* which is a more energetic inflection of the word than the world-weary tiredness of Wordsworth and Carlyle's *wearying*. What is behind this *wearying* is the homesickness that irritates an 'aching heart' for a 'glorious world' of which Catherine only has dim intimations 'through tears'. Behind this longing is the promise of in St Paul's letter to the Corinthians: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face'.<sup>26</sup> However, it is unlikely that the 'glorious world' that Catherine expresses hope for is the one that would have been familiar to Patrick Brontë's congregation. Instead, in Emily Brontë's writing, home takes on the hues of imaginative freedom, attachment to earth with a concomitant rejection of heaven, longing for the past, embracing of the bleak and, paradoxically, a choosing of a state of homesickness arising from a desire not to be found in an inauthentic home. Beth Torgerson gestures towards this idea when she argues, in an illuminating study on the place of illness in the Brontës' fiction, that illness is the consequence of Catherine choosing a home with Edgar: Catherine's illness prevents her settling in an inauthentic home; indeed, it is the natural consequence of her choice.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> All references to *Wuthering Heights* taken from: Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Eds. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976). Page references given parenthetically in text

<sup>25</sup> T. S. Eliot. 'In Memoriam' in Frank Kermode ed. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1975). p. 245.

<sup>26</sup> I Corinthians 13:12. All references taken from the King James Version. Future references given in text

<sup>27</sup> Beth E. Torgerson, *Reading the Brontë Body: Disease, Desire and the Constraints of Culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). p. 97.

*Inflecting Nostalgia and Homesickness in Emily Brontë's Writing*

Chapter one focuses attention on the precondition for nostalgia or homesickness: a state of restlessness. Its placement as the opening chapter reflects the idea that restlessness is the affliction that activates the facets of nostalgia and homesickness considered in subsequent chapters. Inability to know, name or predict as states that affect Emily Brontë's lyric speakers will be discussed. The relationship between the poems' present and past will be illuminated to place Emily Brontë's early poems as nostalgic in their orientation. This opening chapter will also situate Brontë's poetry as wrestling with the same concerns as Wordsworth's 'Ode'. Both poets' attempts to name their nostalgic troublers will lead into considering the nature of nostalgia and homesickness in subsequent chapters. However, this chapter will highlight that the inability to pin down origins for nostalgia is an integral part of the affliction.

Chapters two and three illuminate nostalgic longings for past states as they reflect how nostalgia is primarily understood. Chapter two considers one such provoker of restlessness: the Catholic past of England. Victorian England had not come to terms with its Catholic history as is shown most clearly through the debates raging about Catholic emancipation: debates which were followed avidly in the Brontë household.<sup>28</sup> The poetry of Wordsworth, as a microcosm of an England that had not buried its Catholic past as irrevocably as it hoped, shows undercurrents of attraction to a Catholic past. In this respect, as throughout the thesis, I shall explore how Emily Brontë was Wordsworth's heir. The exploration situates Wordsworth and Brontë as moving beyond gazing on dissolved abbeys to longing for connection with the community, past and present. Drawing on recent scholarship concerning how the Romantics made sense of the spectre of Catholicism, as well as Charlotte

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<sup>28</sup> For example, Patrick Brontë wrote three letters to the *Leeds Intelligencer* within a month, John Lock and Canon W. T. Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow: The Life, Letters and Times of the Rev. Patrick Brontë*, (London: Nelson, 1965), p. 352.

Brontë's attitudes to Catholicism, I use the idea of Catholic imagination to study a key form of nostalgic longing in Emily Brontë's writing. Charlotte Brontë made her views on Catholicism relatively clear; Emily, as in most other areas, was silent on the subject. The purpose of this chapter on Catholicism is not to tease out Emily Brontë's views on the subject of Catholic emancipation, but to explore currents in her writing that evoke the covert, troubled longings for a departed Catholic world found in the poetry of William Wordsworth, longings which were never fully imaginatively emancipated: this relationship with Catholicism is part of her Romantic inheritance and is, by the nature of the Post-Reformation world that both poets wrote in, the source of an unquiet, uneasy nostalgia.

Chapter three discusses a necessary concomitant to nostalgic longing for a departed Catholicism: the place of Ireland in Emily Brontë's imagination. In Victorian England the two words certainly belonged together; 'to the English Protestant the faith of the Irish was simply an extension of their nationality' to borrow the words of Diana Peschier from her illuminating study of Charlotte Brontë's attitudes to Roman Catholicism.<sup>29</sup> However, unlike Catholicism, the place of Ireland has been much mulled over in criticism on Emily Brontë, especially of *Wuthering Heights*, most famously in Terry Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*. The first part of chapter three considers this criticism, arguing that much writing about a supposed essential artistic Irishness in the Brontës' writing is shaped by British Victorian conceptions of Irishness. Nevertheless, Emily Brontë uses these ideas about Irishness, articulated by writers such as Thomas Moore, to imaginatively explore the nostalgia of an exile. Taking as their starting point speculations about the origins of Heathcliff, there have been efforts to claim an Irish muse for Emily Brontë which, almost without exception, have fallen into biographical sentimentality. However, the idea of nostalgia is a useful lens through which the pervasive sense, in *Wuthering Heights* especially,

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<sup>29</sup>Diana Peschier, *Nineteenth Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 2.



of a world that has irrevocably passed away (much like the Catholicism in the previous chapter) can be brought into the light of day. Feeding into this belatedness are currents that Emily Brontë would have picked up from the Waverley novels and, indirectly, from Ossian, of a defeated race condemned to exile. What writers such as Sir Walter Scott and Wordsworth saw as historical necessity, Emily Brontë transforms into tragedy.<sup>30</sup>

To further explore a sense of Irishness in her writing, as well as to consider another facet of it as nostalgic longing, Emily Brontë's poems will be compared with the melodies of Thomas Moore, another poet in 'whom appears to run the instinct of song'; the way in which, in the words of a reviewer of the Brontës' *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (1846) they stage a 'rising... into an inspiration' will be considered.<sup>31</sup> Exploration of her poems in the light of Moore's *Irish Melodies* will cast light on how Moore's conception of Irishness helped Emily Brontë to express her own nostalgic longings through imagining an elsewhere that she could call home.

Chapter four moves away from the discussion of nostalgia as Emily Brontë's imagination being 'afflicted' with longing for a past condition, to a desire for an imagined spatial elsewhere to call home. Due to this orientation towards space rather than time, I will use *homesickness* rather than *nostalgia*. This chapter considers the energising force of Gondal as a means for Emily Brontë to create an imaginary home. Gondal was a home that Emily Brontë struggled to leave. On an excursion to York with Anne, when Emily was 26, they visited York Minster. While Anne was awed by the architecture, Emily's priorities were elsewhere. Writing in her diary paper a month later on her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday, Emily explained

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<sup>30</sup> See Fiona Robertson's introduction to Sir Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, (Oxford: OUP, 1991) p. xvii: 'Ravenswood's son, Edgar, Master of Ravenswood, however, is torn between an emotional tie to the old system of feud and vengeance and an intellectual acceptance of the new'. Note David Brown's comments on Bailie Nicole Jarvie in *Rob Roy*: 'Even Jarvie's nationalism is progressive...[he] sees the Act of Union as an opportunity', David Brown *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1979) p. 102. Also note Wordsworth's comment in 'The Convention of Cintra': 'Who does not rejoice that former partitions have disappeared, - and that England, Scotland and Wales are under one legislative and executive authority', William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, Vol. 1, (Oxford: OUP, 1974), p. 323.

<sup>31</sup> Miriam Allot, ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 61.

that ‘during our excursion we were Ronald Macelgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Augusteena, Rosobelle Esraldan, Ella and Julian Egramont Catherine Navarre and Cordelia Fitzaphnold escaping from the Palaces of Instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans’.<sup>32</sup> What is interesting here is Emily Brontë’s writing over of the physical landscape with her psychical landscape; this process was reversed when she prepared her poems for publication and overwrote Gondal.

Chapter four shall discuss the ways in which critics have disagreed over the importance of Gondal for an understanding of Emily Brontë’s art; in a thesis that considers homesickness as an energising preoccupation in her writing, Gondal takes on a new resonance and provides a world in which homesick yearnings can be expressed and explored. The premise of this chapter is that, in Gondal, Emily Brontë conceived of an elsewhere to make a home; it provided her with an imaginative safety net. Often, her poems that make explicit references to Gondal characters or locations reveal a strong sense of homesickness. However, to argue, as the thesis does, that taking due cognizance of Gondal is important for aiding understanding of Emily Brontë’s work does not commit it to the argument maintained in Fannie Ratchford’s *Gondal’s Queen* that the world of Gondal constitutes an all-explaining plot.

Creating any form of alternative imaginary world, whether a childhood country or a political utopia, implies a discontent on the part of the creator with the world in which they are placed. This chapter considers Gondal as an expression of nostalgia and homesickness. Poems that refer to Gondal places or people will be considered as articulating homesickness. In Gondal, Emily Brontë was creating at a safe remove from the world in which she was placed and its influence is felt in *Wuthering Heights*, not only in the evolution of Augusta into Catherine, but in the creation of a fictional Gimmerton as an answer to the real-world

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<sup>32</sup> Juliet Barker, *The Brontës*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), p. 451.

London and Liverpool. Gondal's imprint is felt in the way that the world of *Wuthering Heights*, despite being that of a recognisable Yorkshire landscape, feels like a world out of time.

A consideration of juvenile worlds that cannot be left behind in adulthood flows naturally into a discussion of the state of childhood, the disappearance of which is felt as a searing loss. Chapter five will continue to consider the Gondal poetry but from the point of view of the lost child. I will argue that, as part of her 'negotiation with Wordsworthian Romanticism', Emily Brontë resists the consolation held out in Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (hereafter 'Ode').<sup>33</sup> However, I contest that this is only to give Brontë the imaginative room to more deeply explore the nature of Wordsworth's 'Obstinate questionings' voiced towards the end of the 'Ode'. Developing Irene Tayler's insight about the differences in the two poets' 'respective "recollections of childhood"', namely how Emily Brontë resists Wordsworthian consolation, I argue that Brontë chooses nostalgia instead through foregrounding 'obstinate questionings'.<sup>34</sup> This is because, as stated earlier, she fears the choosing of an inauthentic home (the issue that the crisis in *Wuthering Heights* is predicated on).

The chapter will also consider how there are two situations that lead to nostalgic longing: the state of childhood as one that cannot be returned to and the eschewing of the idea of the child 'trailing clouds of glory' (64) that is found in Wordsworth's 'Ode'.<sup>35</sup> The child in Emily Brontë's poetry does not come from 'God who is our home' (65); they are fundamentally homeless. *Wuthering Heights* is more Wordsworthian in its presentation of childhood: Nelly Dean, when she comments after the death of Mr Earnshaw concerning Heathcliff and Catherine that 'The little souls were comforting each other with better

<sup>33</sup> Francis O'Gorman ed. *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 219.

<sup>34</sup> Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1990), p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> All references to the 'Ode' taken from William Wordsworth. *Poems in Two Volumes, and other poems, 1800-1807*, Ed. Jared Curtis. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983). Line numbers given parenthetically.

thoughts than I could have hit on' (54) echoes the situation in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' where the child's perception outshines the adult. However, the nostalgia both for childhood and of the child in Emily Brontë's poetry contains little comfort or compensatory recompense. If the nostalgic yearnings of Romantic poets were, to some degree, born out of disappointment in the failure of the French Revolution and succeeded earlier hopes, the nostalgic yearnings of Emily Brontë's children were present from the moment of their birth.

The story of *Wuthering Heights* opens with a child knocking at a window and the story is framed at beginning and end by a homeless boy and a ghost trying to get home. The sense of lostness that is found in Emily Brontë's poems about childhood will be examined in her novel through chapter six that discusses *Wuthering Heights*. In this chapter the novel will be considered as a poem and, in so doing, will situate Emily Brontë as a poet more so than a novelist. Barbara Hardy's comment, in her essay on 'The Lyricism of Emily Brontë' of the novel's 'refusal to tell' and 'refusal to develop' contain the kernel of my argument concerning how Emily Brontë's poetic powers pervade *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>36</sup> Emily Brontë's refusal to 'make linear patterns of cause and effect' cause some passages in her novel to exist in the lyrical present of a poem.<sup>37</sup> The ways in which the intense poetic passages of monologue - which, as Virginia Woolf puts it, cause the novel to be a 'struggle... to say something through the mouths of her characters which is not merely "I love" or "I hate", but "we, the whole human race" and "you, the eternal powers lifts"'<sup>38</sup> - evoke nostalgia and longing will be considered. This consideration will show that *Wuthering Heights* is impelled more by restless homesickness than by a thwarted love plot.

I shall argue that this homesickness is also intensified by the positioning of the narrators in relation to the reader. Ellen Dean is the custodian of a way of being that has

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Hardy, 'The Lyricism of Emily Brontë', *The Art of Emily Brontë*, Ed. Anne Smith, (London: Vision, 1976). p. 96.

<sup>37</sup> *The Art of Emily Brontë*, p. 96

<sup>38</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, 1929). p. 202.

completely departed (this focus on a way of life that has gone builds on the consideration of this topos in the Irishness and Catholicism chapters); this sense of being cut off from the past stirs homesickness even from the reader as the expansive emotional landscape brought into the world of *Wuthering Heights* by Heathcliff has spent and exhausted itself. Any response that privileges the marriage of Hareton and Cathy over the tumultuous relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine is, to rework the image that Heathcliff uses to compare Catherine to Edgar, to ‘plant an oak in a flower-pot’ (187). There is, despite the reader’s better judgement, a longing for the larger than life world of Heathcliff and Catherine that Cathy and Hareton can never satisfy.

Finally, consideration of how homesickness energises *Wuthering Heights* will focus on how the novel expresses attachment to Earth as a home. Cathy articulates this attachment in the recounting of her dream to Nelly in terms of her fall to earth from the heaven that ‘did not seem to be my home’ (99). There is some imagining of heaven in the novel, from Linton and Catherine’s comparisons of their heavens to Heathcliff’s yearning after his redefined heaven as well as the Christian heaven of Nelly Dean. Yet Emily Brontë rejects heaven for earth as an expression of somewhere she can call home. It is at this point in the thesis that the first glimmers of a potential home become possible (though, as will be considered in the conclusion, exile is a state she ultimately chooses as home to avoid the entrapment of inauthentic homes). However, Emily Brontë prevents at-homeness through interposing a narrator between the events of the novel and the reader. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, where the reader is with Jane until the end of the novel, Heathcliff is placed at one remove from the reader.

The themes developed in chapter six, of a rejection of heaven and attachment to the earth, naturally progress into chapter seven on how the presentation of ghosts in the writing of Emily Brontë inflects homesickness and nostalgia; this emphasis will build on the exploration of ghosts in the context of the Catholic imagination. It will also be presented as

the necessary concomitant of a longing that manifests itself as the restlessness examined in chapter one. Catherine rejects the idea, when scornfully stated by Heathcliff, that she will be at rest while he is suffering as she will die when she is away from home. The starting point of this chapter is the common folkloric belief about ghosts as spirits who have not found a resting place or a home. I develop the comment of Rachel Trickett that *Wuthering Heights* is the story of a haunting and explore how this statement has resonance for the poetry as well as the novel.<sup>39</sup> As with previous chapters, Emily Brontë will be situated as Wordsworth's poetic heir in that she presents as ambiguous the reality of the ghostly in *Wuthering Heights* (this treatment of ghosts is a development of their status as real entities in her poetry). The ambiguous status of the ghost inspires nostalgia in the way that it promises the connection imagined in a pre-Reformation commerce between the living and the dead without satisfying it. Yet, the figure of the ghost for Emily Brontë is compensatory, elegiac and healing. The restlessness of the spirit is the promise of a future rest for the living and a home; this is the desire that lies behind Heathcliff's prayer for Catherine's spirit to haunt him. The function of the ghost in *Wuthering Heights* is to ensure that Heathcliff will never settle for an inauthentic home and it is Catherine's spirit that robs him of any ability to enjoy the fruits of his revenge. Finally, in the consideration of the relationship between ghosts and nostalgia, just as Wordsworthian influences are considered, so will be Gothic influences that Emily Brontë would have encountered in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Criticism of *Wuthering Heights* has frequently pointed out that it is 'probably the finest Gothic novel ever written' without considering how Brontë swerved from the genre.<sup>40</sup> In the novels of Ann Radcliffe and Monk Lewis, the ghost is a figure of terror but, as has already been stated, for Emily Brontë the ghost is a figure of comfort. The attempts of Heathcliff and Catherine to raise the ghosts in

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<sup>39</sup> Rachel Trickett, 'Wuthering Heights: The Story of a Haunting', *Bronte Society Transactions*, (16.5.1975): 338-347, p. 338.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Prickett, 'The philosophical-intellectual Context', *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). p. 227.

the graveyard are searches for possibilities of connection in a world that has cast them out of the house and left them to wonder homeless on the moor. More widely in Emily Brontë's writing, the ghost is a poignant expression of nostalgia but is also the promise of a home that the child could never find.

The conclusion considers a poem that finishes with the abandonment of a child. I see the open-ended nature of this poem as indicative of Emily Brontë's resistance of closure. 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?' is, apart from a fragment of a revised beginning, the last poem in the *Gondal Poems* notebook. It is also the last known dated poem and is a much messier finish to her poetic career than the tidier ending that Charlotte made by claiming 'No Coward Soul is Mine' as her final words. Building on Irene Tayler's idea that 'Why ask' is an 'invitation to apocalypse' I argue that the poem resists apocalypse with its offer of closure.

<sup>41</sup> Emily Brontë's 'God within my breast' resists the ending of death much as the present continuous movement in her earlier poem, 'High Waving Heather' resists stasis. The conclusion will consider the poetry's determination to keep wandering and searching. Thus, at its close, the thesis completes the circle to chapter one on the idea of restlessness. Emily Brontë presents no point of arrival or home and, through a consideration of her two last poems her resistance to ending and the choosing of a state of homesickness will be discussed.

The main concern throughout this thesis is to pay close attention to Emily Brontë's writing. Historicist, Psychoanalytical, Feminist and Marxist readings of her work are frequently discussed; however, this is as an *aperitif* to analysis of the work itself. Nevertheless, this is not to imply that Emily Brontë's writing was uninfluenced by wider currents. Indeed, study of her poetry and prose has been bedevilled by a conception of her as an isolated genius. I take Harold Bloom's statement, in *The Anxiety of Influence* about the study of poetry as finding 'the hidden roads that go from poem to poem' as my starting point

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<sup>41</sup> Tayler, p. 108.

to illuminate the influence of Romantic precursors, particularly Wordsworth, upon Emily Brontë's work.<sup>42</sup> My consideration of influence is also shaped by John Hollander's study of literary influence: *The Figure of Echo*. His image of a text is as a 'cave of resonant signification' where influencing voices can be heard.<sup>43</sup> Through discussion of literary context possibilities of allusion in Brontë's poetry will be brought to the surface. Hollander comments on how intertextual allusions may be lost: 'When such access is lost in a community of reading, what may have been an allusion may fade in prominence; and yet a scholarly recovery of the context would restore the allusion'.<sup>44</sup> The two aims of this thesis are to develop recovery of a Wordsworthian context for Emily Brontë's writings and, through deliberate wide-ranging in discussion of her poems, more firmly situate her as a poet.

At this point I must acknowledge my two main influences. Irene Tayler's *Holy Ghosts* sparked my thinking concerning Wordsworth's influence on Emily Brontë. I develop Taylor's insights concerning how, despite Brontë's affinities with Wordsworth, she was ultimately unable to make his conclusions hers'.<sup>45</sup> His rejection of the state of being 'Housed in a dream', expressed in *Elegiac Stanzas*, was one to which Emily Brontë was more imaginatively hospitable. Janet Gezari's study of Emily Brontë's poetry, *Last Things* fed my thinking about individual poems. Also, Gezari's key idea, that Emily Brontë's resisted endings, aids my argument that Emily Brontë actively chose homesickness as a state.<sup>46</sup> Her work, which is the first book-length study of Emily Brontë's poetry, breaks new ground in terms of the range of Brontë's poetry considered. This thesis broadens again the range of Brontë's poetry studied including a number of Gondal lyrics.

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<sup>42</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 96.

<sup>43</sup> John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*, (Berkeley: California UP, 1981), p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> Hollander, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Janet Gezari, *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), p. 6.



The choice of nostalgia and homesickness is the preference for a state of visionary longing over what Emily Brontë saw as a compromise with the world of reason. It is a very complex choice: it is no expression of preference for the glories of Heaven over the privations of the earth or the moors of Haworth over the schoolroom of Brussels. Nostalgia was a chosen state of being, a way of living on the earth. In her writing Brontë does present moments, including passages in *Wuthering Heights* and poems such as ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’ that are harbingers of home but this fleeting release only serves to intensify the pain of being in the world in the return of ‘The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain’ (p179 line 88). The conclusion is really about the embrace of longing as a state of being which in and of itself betrays elements of a Romantic inheritance but Brontë has her own vein of stoicism that enables her to simultaneously stare reality in the face and long for another state, making her home in homesickness until she found the home that was hers.

*The ‘Loved Music’ of Nostalgia: ‘Loud Without the Wind was Roaring’*

‘Loud without’ is a useful poem to highlight strands of nostalgia and homesickness discussed in the previous section. The poem was composed while Emily Brontë was teaching at Law Hill School near Halifax. It is regarded by Edward Chitham as a ‘personal’ poem where Emily Brontë ‘recalls her childhood’ and situated as a poem of homesickness.<sup>47</sup> This simple biographical reading does not do justice to the multiple ways in which nostalgia is expressed. The poem opens with the observation of a stormy autumnal evening:

Loud without the wind was roaring  
 Through the waned Autumnal sky,  
 Drenching wet, the cold rain pouring

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<sup>47</sup> Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily Brontë*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) p. 114.

Spoke of stormy winters nigh.

All too like that dreary eve

Sighed within repining grief –

Sighed at first – but sighed not long

Sweet – How softly sweet it came!

Wild words of an ancient song –

Undefined, without a name –

‘It was spring, for the skylark was singing.’

Those words they awakened a spell –

They unlocked a deep fountain whose springing

Nor Absence nor Distance can quell.

In the gloom of a cloudy November

They uttered the music of May –

They kindled the perishing ember

Into fervour that could not decay

Awaken on all my dear moorlands

The wind in its glory and pride!

O call me from valleys and highlands

To walk by the hill-river’s side!

It is swelled with the first snowy weather;

The rocks they are icy and hoar  
And darker waves round the long heather  
And the fern-leaves are sunny no more

There are no yellow-stars on the mountain,  
The bluebells have long died away  
From the brink of the moss-bedded fountain  
From the side of the wintery brae –

But lovelier than corn-fields all waving  
In emerald and scarlet and gold  
Are the slopes where the north-wind is raving  
And the glens where I wandered of old –

‘It was morning; the bright sun was beaming.’  
How sweetly that brought back to me  
The time when nor labour nor dreaming  
Broke the sleep of the happy and free

But blithely we rose as the dusk heaven  
Was melting to amber and blue –  
And swift were the wings to our feet given  
While we traversed the meadows of dew.

For the moors, for the moors where the short grass

Like velvet beneath us should lie!  
 For the moors, for the moors where each high pass  
 Rose sunny against the clear sky!

For the moors, where the linnets were trilling  
 Its song on the old granite stone –  
 Where the lark – the wild skylark was filling  
 Every breast with delight like its own.

What language can utter the feeling  
 That rose when, in exile afar,  
 On the brow of a lonely hill kneeling  
 I saw the brown heath growing there.

It was scattered and stunted, and told me  
 That soon even that would be gone  
 It whispered, 'The grim walls enfold me  
 I have bloomed in my last summer's sun'

But not the loved music whose waking  
 Makes the soul of the Swiss die away  
 Has a spell more adored and heart-breaking  
 Than in its half-blighted bells lay –

The spirit that bent 'neath its power

How it longed, how it burned to be free!

If I could have wept in that hour

Those tears had been heaven to me –

Well, well the sad minutes are moving

Though loaded with trouble and pain –

And sometime the loved and the loving

Shall meet on the mountains again –

The poem describes the spell-like effect of the words of an ‘ancient’ song that mingles the ‘music’ of autumn and spring. ‘Without’, carrying the sense of being outside, echoes Emily Brontë’s contrast of the world of external reality with that of the imagination in ‘To Imagination’: ‘So hopeless is the world without; / The world within I doubly prize’ (7-8). However, in ‘Loud without’, the ‘without’ is the answer to, rather than the antithesis of, the ‘within’. Already boundaries are confused.

Competing states of hope and despair, joy and grief vie for supremacy in the opening two stanzas and give the poem its vitality. One reality overwrites another. Using the past tense to describe the sky as ‘waned’ suggests that the ‘repining grief’ has reached its nadir; the stage is set for the advent of visionary release (this scenario is re-enacted in a number of other poems). The signal for this is the ‘wild’ and ‘roaring’ wind which is the agent of change. It is the use of ‘repining’, though, that brings this poem into the orbit of nostalgia; the way it is used is closest to the sense given for ‘repine’ in the *OED*, ‘to long discontentedly for something’.<sup>48</sup> It is this ‘repining’ that brings the poem into being.

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<sup>48</sup> ‘repine.v.’, Def. 2, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2009.

In 'Loud without' the bringer of visionary intensity is language; it is a poem woven within a poem that answers the 'sighs' of the first few lines. The song comes out of the sighing: the 'sighed' becomes 'sweet' becomes 'softly' before rising to the crescendo of the sonorous 'wild words'. These words come from an 'ancient song'. The sense in the opening lines is that it comes unbidden as if the song were incubating, unnoticed, in the sighing. The relationship between the 'sighing' and the 'song' is active; the former gives birth to the latter: behind this is the motif of breath giving life. The use of the adjective 'ancient' with 'song' anticipates the 'Distance' in the third stanza: words that were inaccessible in the deep past have now been made present.

'Undefined, without a name' frustrates the making present of this 'ancient song' as it cannot be grasped. This intensifies a sense of longing and the glimpses of this song (two in the poem: lines 11 and 35) quicken nostalgia. The syntax of the extended second stanza evokes a sharp pang of longing, the fog clearing, yet the inability to fully make sense of what is happening. The dashes suggest interruption and an attempt to understand an experience that has come unbidden. The yearning is intensified through the repetition of 'sweet' and the questioning intensifier of 'how' as if the poet were straining to describe the experience.

In the third stanza, the foregrounding of 'Those words' immediately after revealing the first line of the ancient song ('It was spring, for the skylark was singing') accentuates the agency of language in performing the unlocking. What words awaken is a 'spell' - which is another linguistic form. It is strange that it is the spell which is awoken, rather than bringing about the awakening. What is brought into being is, in fact, more words. Already, the brightness of the music of May is being engulfed by the fogs of November's music. Working against this possibility of permanent entrapment in a linguistic prison, however, is the way in which the line of the song (11) locates the coming of Spring in the skylark's singing; what is important is the existential fact of its singing and not the *hearing* of it by any persona in the

ancient song: the line is not ‘for I heard the skylark singing’. The singing is immediate and immanent. A tug between language and direct experience is felt in the opening verses; it is as if language is trying to find its way home.

In the next two lines, Brontë uses a confusion of tenses to create a subtle weaving of the past, present and future. The verb ‘unlocked’ describes an action in the past and the adjective, ‘deep’ is used of the fountain to evoke finality about the unlocking. However, the fountain’s action of ‘springing’, given in the present-continuous tense, evokes enduring confidence in the life-giving nature of the past (the confidence in this ‘fountain’ foreshadows the confidence in the ‘rock’ in ‘No coward soul is mine’). The inability of ‘Absence’ or ‘Distance’ to stop this fountain is felt in the phrase ‘can quell’. So the reality of the past, through the words of the ‘ancient song’, continues into the present and future.

The capitalisation of ‘Absence’ and ‘Distance’, with their implied personifications, give the terms agency in their efforts to prevent the springing of the fountain. Their inability to ‘quell’ is reinforced by the choice of verb; the *OED* gives one sense of quell as flowing and welling out.<sup>49</sup> The word that seemingly enacts repression has the opposite effect. The confidence in these lines, concerning the constancy of the ‘ancient song’ of the past, is palpable. It also fires the confidence in Emily Brontë’s poem ‘Now trust a heart that trusts in you’; this poem concerns a Gondal character who expresses faith that the constancy of the present will not lose its guiding power when it becomes the past: the moment of parting will become a ‘deep fountain’. *Wuthering Heights* is the recording of the failure of this sustaining vision. What is pertinent for the thesis in the current analysis is the idea of the past as a home.

The fifth stanza of the poem moves from assertion to invocation. The imperative ‘Awaken’ suggests confidence in visionary reality (the poet has been translated into another

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<sup>49</sup> ‘quell v.’, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2007.

place at this point); Brontë is calling on the wind to awaken and call her to the place that distance cannot quell. Here the wind is the messenger that is ‘roaring’ at the start of the poem. The passivity of the speaker is interesting in this verse; she waits for the call of the wind.

The sixth and seventh stanzas show familiarity with the ‘hill-river’s side’ as if it is present to her vision; we presume that the speaker is, in fact, indoors as she elicits this scene: her seeing is through the ‘inward eye’ with which Wordsworth recalls his encounter with the daffodils in ‘I wandered lonely as a Cloud’ (*Poems in Two Volumes* p.208 line 15). We are taken back to the source at the ‘moss-bedded fountain’ which has been ‘swelled’, a word that is suggestive of bounty; yet, what has caused it to swell is the ‘first snowy weather’. Winter with its attendant barrenness is also suggested by ‘icy and hoar’ and there is the absence in the disappearance of the bluebells. Yet, this is no Keatsian awakening to bleak reality ‘On the cold hillside’: the speaker has arrived home.<sup>50</sup> There is no repining; the music of May and November are in harmony: this section of the poem marks the confidence of the poet who is in full possession of visionary efficacy. Brontë is able to engage with what she sees on its own terms, with the maximum of statement and the minimum of explanation. In these two stanzas, there is no sense of regret and mourning, not even a resigned acceptance, but a quiet confidence that the fervour kindled will not brook decay.

The eighth stanza further explores this feeling of at-homeness in an inhospitable landscape during early winter. The tone of justifying a choice implicit in the ‘but’ at the start of the verse anticipates the reader’s incredulity that anyone would express a preference for such a place. Earlier, in stanza four, the poet, hearing the ‘music of May’ in the ‘gloom of a cloudy November’, leads the reader to expect an escapist fantasy; instead, what this ‘spell’ evokes is a moorland landscape in early winter that is ‘lovelier’ than the golden days of late

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<sup>50</sup> References to ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ taken from: *John Keats: The Major Works*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: OUP, 2001). I cite the version published in the *Indicator*.



summer. Keats' 'To Autumn' is a presence behind this poem but Brontë expands Keats' concession to autumn that 'thou hast thy music too' and grants it to winter.<sup>51</sup> In this section of the poem, Brontë is not coming to terms with the arrival of winter – she prefers it. The world of 'emerald and scarlet and gold' is eschewed in favour of one where the 'fern leaves are sunny no more'. The wind, presumably the same one that awakened the spell, is 'raving', suggesting wildness; the choice of the word seems calculated to make the reader wonder why the poet prefers this place. Brontë has been summoned by the wind, from a place of exile, to play in this inhospitable place.

The sense of freedom and finding home is emphasised as Brontë writes of 'the glens where I wandered *of old*' (emphasis added). The italicised phrase is Brontë drinking from the deep fountain. What is important about this vision of the 'slopes where the north wind is raving' is its situation in time: the past, rather than its situation in space: a barren moor at the start of winter. The 'music of May' is not so much the longing for the season of blossom as for a childhood home of freedom – hinted at by the carefree disposition in 'wandered'.

This brings to a close the first movement of eight stanzas; the second half, stanzas nine to seventeen repeat the pattern of the first: a line from the 'ancient song', an assertion, an invocation and then an expression of preference for the music of November as a wintry landscape. In stanza nine, we are told more about the effects of the spell: the wild words 'brought back... the time' in an expression of nostalgic yearning. 'Labour and dreaming' join 'Absence and Distance' as states that could 'quell' this 'spell'. What is strange about these stanzas is the way in which the diction in stanza ten, aided by words like 'blithely', 'amber' and 'dew', bring into being a summer paradise – which is at odds with the wintry home that Brontë made earlier in the poem. 'Sweetly' echoes the coming of the song earlier. In the use of 'blithely' there is a faint echo of Shelley's 'blithe spirit' in 'To a Skylark' and

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<sup>51</sup> *The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* (Paris: Galignani, 1829), p. 65. All references to Keats' poems (aside from 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci') taken from this edition. Future page references given parenthetically.

Brontë's poem evokes the same mood that is found in the bird's 'unbodied joy whose race has just begun'.<sup>52</sup> This light and fresh tone is evoked by the use of 'swift' and 'dew' respectively. The use of anapaestic rhythms in 'was melting to amber and blue' again echoes the rising feel of 'To a Skylark'.

The music continues to rise in the next two verses and this is the high point of the 'music of May'; the feel of the rising hills is evoked as they 'Rose sunny against the clear sky'. The fivefold repetition of 'For the moors', across the eleventh and twelfth stanzas, sounds simultaneously like a spell and a yearning. The use of the definite article in the vignette of the linnet 'trilling / its song on *the* old granite stone' (emphasis added) creates the sense of a place known and loved. The fact that this stone is 'old' also gestures towards the sense of a 'spell' drawing from the fountain of a past home. The treatment of this stone in the poem is one of many places in Brontë's writing where a Wordsworthian influence is discerned; Wordsworth frequently invests ordinary objects with deep significance gained through their connection with a human story. For example, in *The Excursion*, the pastor connects his story of the deaf man with a pine tree and states that, as a result of its situation over the deaf man's grave, 'It hath now its own peculiar sanctity'.<sup>53</sup> Brontë connects the 'old granite stone' in the same way as the pastor and one is also reminded of the sheepfold in *Michael* and the human story that it embodies. However, the isolation of the 'granite stone' is felt more powerfully in Brontë's poem; she is prepared to let it stand on its own, unadorned by human connection.

The poem's momentum continues to build with the lark, that becomes the 'wild skylark' – there is a clarifying and filling vision created by the music with which the bird is 'filling / Every breast with delight like its own'. This vision permits sympathy and

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<sup>52</sup> References to Shelley's poetry taken from: Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Poetical Works*, ed. Mrs Shelley (London: Moxon, 1839), 4 vol. Vol 3, p. 243.

<sup>53</sup> References to *The Excursion* taken from: William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, eds. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007), VII: 496. Future book and line numbers given in body of text.

identification; the delight of the skylark spills over into the world around it. The poem has reached satiety; a precarious position for any visionary. Whether this is Shelley's skylark that 'Ne'er knew love's sad satiety' remains to be seen.<sup>54</sup>

This point in the poem is the moment of supreme clarity. The movement is outwards, of one escaping from prison, hearing the call of the wind outside and then being in an expansive and rising landscape. This is the use of visionary experience to reach a dear home. However, from the experience of the skylark onwards, the movement of the poem is inwards; the rising anapaest sinks into the trochee. This familiar pattern of visionary abandonment from Emily Brontë's later poem, 'The Prisoner (a fragment)' however is mitigated here by the hope in the last lines that 'sometime the loved and the loving / shall meet on the mountains again'. Unusually, this poem does not mark the ultimate failure of visionary experience.

After the moment of supreme identification with the 'delight' of the skylark, language fails. It is as if, to take the words of T. S. Eliot, language 'cannot bear very much reality'.<sup>55</sup> The line 'What language can utter the feeling' does not evoke the despairing cry of a poet trying to grasp the ineffable, but rather one whose assuaging of homesickness is marked by the willing shedding of language; this evocation is effected by the trochaic rhythms evoking a falling off of words.

However, this moment of supreme identification is marred by an apparent falling off into exile. The 'brow of a lonely hill' echoes Keats' knight awakening on the 'cold hill side'. What both poets have in common is that they tussle with the very Romantic theme of the failure of visionary experience. There is an important distinction to highlight, however, when comparing 'Loud without' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci': the experience of Keats' knight is one of abandonment, but with Brontë this move into a harsher landscape is a deepening of

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Shelley, ed., Vol 3, p. 247.

<sup>55</sup> See 'Burnt Norton' in: T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*, (London: Faber, 1963), p. 190

visionary experience, rather than an awakening from it. Brontë's inability to escape the world of seasonal change causes her no regret; there is no complaining when the music of May changes key into that of November. She moves beyond expressions of Shelleyan hope that 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind' and, in 'Loud without', Brontë effects an escape from the cycle of hope and despair: May and November form part of one symphony.<sup>56</sup>

In the next verse the music of November rises in cadence. In contrast to the opening, where the sighing becomes the wind that leads to the open moor, here the heath is 'stunted', contained and dying. The heath as speaker is foregrounded here; its whispering lacks the boldness of the wind in the opening lines. Given the seasonal mood earlier, there is an incongruous tone of finality evoked in these lines: 'scattered' and 'stunted' do not go far enough for Brontë. The apparent stripping of consolation in the diction of 'soon even that would be gone' is rendered final with 'have bloomed in my last summer's sun'. 'Stunted' has connotations of a harvested crop (once again echoing 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci': 'And the harvest's done') which is a riposte to the 'corn fields all waving' earlier in the poem. The poem here seems to be taking on the aspect of a biblical lesson on mortality, illustrating the trope that mankind 'cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down' (Job 14:2). Indeed, Brontë is pushing this idea as far as it can go: the free-standing 'old granite stone' has now become the 'grim walls'. The visionary release now seems imprisoned and ending. However, a sleight-of-hand is found in the curious choice of 'enfold' to describe the action of the 'grim walls'; the maternal and protective connotations of the former word do not sit well with the harshness of the latter as even the 'grim walls' effect a kindly embrace. As has been the case previously, there is no sense of repining; existence is sustained by something other than human joy.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Ode to the West Wind', Mary Shelley, ed. Vol 3, p. 204.

This declaration from the heath brings forth a passionate declaration from Brontë in the next verse. The mention of ‘the Swiss’ situates this poem explicitly as one of homesickness. It is unlikely that Brontë would have been aware of the thesis of Johannes Hofer, discussed at the start of this chapter, but she may have read Wordsworth’s ‘Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland’ in *Poems, in Two Volumes*. In this sonnet, Wordsworth mourns that the personified Liberty will not be able to hear the voice of ‘mountain Floods’ (12). The sounds that Liberty will no longer be able to hear are similar to the ‘loved music’ in ‘Loud without’.

Emily Brontë’s description of the music as ‘waking’ is important as we ask what it is that causes the music to wake. Its evocation is mysterious yet the music is described as ‘loved’ which suggests an intense familiarity. Earlier, the ‘Wild words’ conjure places dear to the poet, yet it is unknown what causes the metamorphosis of sigh into song. This haunting experience of nostalgia is at the heart of Brontë’s writing; it is intensely dear but, at the same time undefinable and unpredictable. It is an experience that ‘enfolds’ with all the tenderness of a mother but can seem like a ‘grim wall’ in its capriciousness. The contradictory nature of a song that is welcome yet unbiddable is expressed in the idea that the music is both ‘adored and heart-breaking’. So, if one adores one has to be prepared to have the heart broken. Yet Brontë finds beauty in the unlikeliest of places moving from the ‘loved music’ of the start of the stanza to the beauty she sees in the ‘half-blighted bells’ where ‘blighted’ mockingly echoes the ‘blithely’ earlier in the poem.

The way in which the half-dead bells are adored, points to something unique in Brontë’s poetic vision. As with ‘enfold’ in the previous verse, Brontë performs another sleight of hand where ‘half’ anticipates the last line of the poem. It is as if she is refusing to permit us the luxury of complete despair and the paradoxically secure closure that it brings with an enfolding like the ‘grim walls’. Like the prisoner whose eyes ‘a sudden lightning

hid' (110) in 'Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle', it would seem there is still life in those imprisoned heath-bells.

Brontë's blasted heath possesses a power that causes the poet's spirit to 'bend' awakening a longing and burning to be free; however, its impressionistic power is at odds with the wounded condition of the heath. 'Burned' reminds us of the 'perishing ember' that was 'kindled' earlier in the poem thus implying the possibility of renewal. Yet the 'if' in the following line reminds us of the inability of the vision to fully liberate the poet; the tears are still locked up. Here there is the interplay between joy and grief; longing expressed and half-fulfilled that have characterised the whole poem. There is a sense that, even in this relatively early poem in Brontë's career there is the inability to experience complete visionary release that characterises later poems such as 'The Prisoner'. Coming back is a problem.

In the final verse, 'Well' carries the sense of trying to settle accounts. The poet is trying to gather herself up and find some closure with 'well' being used in the resumptive sense, implying some acceptance of the situation. However, Brontë is preparing the ground for a final statement so the shifting of ground continues that has been a motif throughout the poem. 'Well, well the sad minutes are moving' on the one hand suggests a begrudging return to the world of time and mortality. However, the following line, 'Though loaded with trouble and pain' brings an ambivalent qualification. The apparent mourning of the onward march of time is modified into a rejoicing that this onward march is taking the poet through the moments of sadness and pain. It is the same sense in which Shakespeare's Macbeth muses that 'Time and the hour runs through the roughest day' (I.iii.146.).<sup>57</sup> Brontë performs another poetic sleight of hand here transforming what seems to be a pithy closing statement about human mortality into another occasion for hope. In this last verse, Brontë subverts her own rhythms of closure. Possibility opens out again with 'Sometime' with a promised meeting of

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<sup>57</sup> All Shakespeare references taken from Stephen Greenblatt, ed. *The Norton Shakespeare*. (New York: Norton, 2008). References given parenthetically.

subject and object. The ambiguity of ‘sometime’ grates against the certainty of ‘shall’ and what the poem ends with is a promised meeting. The ‘again’ and the dash say it all.

*The ‘Soothing and Stirring’ of Nostalgic and Homesick Songs*

Having considered ‘Loud without’ as a poem of homesickness, it remains to review the strands in this poem that will be considered in the following chapters. The first is the choosing of a state of nostalgia. The equilibrium with which the poet meets the music of November as well as that of May implies a rejection of the cyclical vision of joy succeeding by despair. This is what Brontë rejects in ‘Anticipation’, where she refuses to ‘Let my spirit tire / with looking for *what is to be!*’ (35/6). This seems like stoicism yet this philosophy does not do full justice to what Brontë is articulating which is that the place of exile is welcomed as a home. When the poet ‘kneels’ (suggesting reverence and adoration), she is in ‘exile afar’, but the tender way in which she speaks about the ‘half-blighted bells’ transforms this into a home. The longing is also the object of longing; the journey and the destination at the same time. November becomes May.

This close reading of ‘Loud without’ has touched upon the inflections of nostalgia and homesickness, outlined in the first half of this introduction, which will be considered in the coming chapters. The poem keeps moving so as to resist closure and keep possibility open. This effect is created by the modulations of May and November, the poetic sleights of hand in which Brontë seems to articulate one state of mind only to move to another, and the closing of the poem with ‘again’ which opens the possibility of renewal. This restlessness is energised by a longing for return.

Nostalgia is essentially retrospective and this involves a restless seeking out of the past: a ‘deep fountain’ to drink from and an ‘ancient song’ for solace. Different inflections

and possibilities for this ‘ancient song’ are considered through the idea of a Catholic imagination which provides Emily Brontë with a way of being with the dead and disassociating herself from the post-Reformation world of the nineteenth-century. This sense of an ‘ancient song’ will also be considered in the Irishness chapter where Brontë imagines the paradoxical joy of the exile in finding a home with November’s music as well as May’s. This is the choosing of nostalgia as the idea that will form the basis for the conclusion.

Consideration of Gondal as an inflection of homesickness is seen in the ability to imagine another world in ‘Loud without’. Ideas of a Catholic imagination and Irishness involve disassociation from the present in preference for a connection with the past; discussing Gondal highlights how backward-looking nostalgia can modulate into spatial homesickness: a disassociation from a current place of residence in preference for one that is imagined. This is what a biographical reading of ‘Loud without’ privileges in Brontë’s imagining away from the reality of Law Hill to Gondal. The chapter on childhood returns to nostalgia which, arguably, is the state that Brontë refers to when the ‘ancient song’ evokes ‘The time when nor labour nor dreaming / Broke the sleep of the happy and free’. The chapters on *Wuthering Heights* and ghosts will also inflect nostalgia as the response to the ‘ancient song’ and the desire to drink from the ‘deep fountain’.

This longing for the ‘ancient song’ as a desire for the past has antecedents in poems such as *The Aeneid*, which is itself a text powerfully energised by a longing for home where the fighting was in the name of finding ‘A house and home’ (11:130).<sup>58</sup> Aeneas’ longing for his mother, Venus, expressed when he angrily asks her ‘why can’t we clasp hands, embrace each other, exchange some words, speak out and tell the truth’ (1:496-497) anticipates Heathcliff’s words to the ghostly Catherine: ‘Cathy, do come. Oh do – *once* more! Oh! My heart’s darling! Hear me *this* time – Catherine, at last!’ (35). Even the choice of metaphor

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<sup>58</sup> All references to *The Aeneid* taken from: Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles, (London: Penguin, 2006). All page references given parenthetically.



for the Greeks clambering into the wooden horse, ‘burying back into the womb they knew so well’ (2:501) is recalled in Brontë’s nostalgic yearning to return to origins, the ultimate expression of which is the womb. Here, I draw on Tayler’s psychoanalytical approach in *Holy Ghosts* to situate longings for the womb as nostalgia and homesickness: ‘The joy of such mother-infant communion and the desolation of its loss both left their vivid marks on Emily’s imagination.’<sup>59</sup>

While I have stated my intention to trace nostalgic longing through close reading rather than biographical inference, it is appropriate that ‘Loud without’ was written while Brontë was away from home. In her biography of the Brontës, Juliet Barker writes that the poems that Emily wrote while away at Law Hill ‘included some of the best she ever wrote’.<sup>60</sup> The way that Barker writes about the poems that Brontë wrote during her time at Law Hill is also very apposite; they were ‘soothing as well as stirring up her longing’.<sup>61</sup> It is the ebb and flow tide of the soothing and stirring of homesickness and nostalgia that will be explored in the following chapters.

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<sup>59</sup> Tayler, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 296.

<sup>61</sup> Barker, p. 296.

*Chapter One: 'The Burden of the Strain'; Emily Brontë's Restlessness*

*Provoking a Search for Home*

In 'The Pulley', a meditation by George Herbert, Herbert sees God's withholding of the gift of rest as a means of driving humanity to seek him rather than resting complacent in the many other gifts that are given:

Yet let him keep the rest,  
 But keep them with repining restlessness:  
 Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
 If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
 May toss him to my breast.<sup>1</sup>

Rest is withheld as a way of ensuring longing and questing. It is, to use the terms of Emily Brontë's nostalgia, as defined in the introduction, a way in which God makes sure that all inauthentic homes are spurned until the real home is found.

This concern about the gift of rest causing someone to fall short of their true home is seen in *Wuthering Heights*. When Heathcliff and Catherine speak together for the last time before Catherine dies, Heathcliff accusingly says to Catherine that 'while you are at peace I shall writhe in the torments of hell' (196). Catherine's response is that 'I shall not be at peace' (196). This conversation is repeated after Catherine dies except this time it is with Nelly. Her pious statement about the dead Catherine lying 'with a sweet smile on her face' (204) is suggestive of Victorian ideas about a good death. Nelly's words that 'Her life closed in a gentle dream' (204) are Shakespearean in their cadence echoing Prospero's words from

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<sup>1</sup> George Herbert, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Tobin (London: Penguin, 1991), lines 16-20.

*The Tempest*: ‘We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep’ (IV.i.156-158). However, Heathcliff’s exclamation ‘may she wake in torment!’ (204) is a puncture to the bubble of the peaceful Victorian deathbed and the effort to stir Catherine out of the inauthentic home of a Victorian deathbed. As God does with his human creation, Heathcliff withholds the gift of rest from Catherine so that she will ‘weary’ (a word used both by herself earlier and by Herbert in ‘The Pulley’) to find her authentic home with Heathcliff. Heathcliff curses Catherine with, to quote Herbert, ‘repining restlessness’.

Restlessness is a necessary concomitant to homesickness. The spitting back of food and the wailings of the girl in Hofer’s study are as suggestive of this association as are the bedroom ravings of Catherine Linton in her final illness. Restlessness in these two situations, as well as in Herbert’s poem, is synonymous with a search for home. Thus far, this provocation has had overtones of violence: a curse or an angry resentment of being denied home. However, as well as denying ability to make a home, restlessness is also inability to conceive of the home that is the object of intense longing. This inability is voiced most eloquently when Catherine Linton, in what seems to be an expression of her desire to escape from her sickroom, exclaims ‘I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; *but really with it and in it*’ (emphasis added) (197). The approach of ‘that glorious world’, yet the inability to perceive it clearly is a powerful exciter of the metaphysical depths in *Wuthering Heights*. This same intensifying energy also frustrates the reader whom Brontë bars from a full apprehension of the world of which she allows some glimpses.

Brontë stirs restlessness in her writing though evoking a world that can only be half-grasped and glimpsed. In her poetry this evocation manifests as the advent of visionary bliss; in *Wuthering Heights* it is, as well as by the advent of bliss, provoked by the receding world

of the old Earnshaws at Wuthering Heights and Brontë's choice of Lockwood as her narrator intensifies this sense of a world slipping from the grasp of the reader. When Lockwood returns to the north to 'devastate the moors of a friend' (369), he overhears someone remarking on the lateness of the harvest at Gimmerton. This causes Lockwood to reflect that 'my residence in that locality had already become dim and dreary' (369). This sense of being unable to recall a previous experience is physicalized by his remark, as he walked down the valley to Thrushcross Grange that 'The grey church looked greyer, and the lonely churchyard lonelier' (369): it is as if the physical landscape is fading along with the memory. This observation foreshadows Lockwood's musings by the three gravestones at the end of the novel; his inability to imagine 'unquiet slumbers' (414) reinforces the sense of a world that has faded away. Lying behind this sense are words from Wordsworth's 'Ode': 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more' (9).<sup>2</sup> However, if loss of vision, for Wordsworth, was an occasion for mourning, for Lockwood it is a way of closing the story. This urge of Lockwood to keep the dead in their graves, demonstrated in his piling up of books against Catherine's ghost, is also present in his response to Nelly Dean earlier in the novel. In response to her question concerning whether Catherine could ever be happy in heaven, Lockwood refused to answer as Nelly's question 'struck me as something heterodox' (202). Lockwood is deeply uncomfortable attempting to imagine the state of the dead. He is content to let things fade from sight and to leave them in the world of shadow. This is despite his revisiting (itself a Wordsworthian impulse) of Thrushcross Grange being provoked by an experience of restlessness, a 'sudden impulse' (369).

Nelly Dean also experiences a 'sudden impulse' that leads to the interruption of her journey to Gimmerton; like Lockwood, it leads her to revisit a former residence. Her inability to explain is worthy of note: when she came to the guide stone, 'the sun shone

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<sup>2</sup> All references to the 'Ode' taken from William Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983). Line numbers given parenthetically.

yellow on its grey head, reminding me of summer; and I cannot say why, but all at once, a gush of child's sensations flowed into my heart. Hindley and I held it a favourite spot twenty years before' (133). This encounter with an object bears many of the hallmarks of Wordsworthian imagination as adumbrated by Geoffrey Hartman in his seminal study of Wordsworth's early poetry: 'A moment of arrest... a separation... from familiar nature; a thought of death or judgement... a feeling of loss or separation'<sup>3</sup>. Even the use of the word *spot* by Nelly Dean to describe the guide-post marks it as a Wordsworthian moment. In her discussion of the Brontës and the natural world, Enid Duthie makes this connection when she writes that, for Nelly, the guide-post is 'Like Wordsworth's "spots of time", landmarks in a spiritual landscape'.<sup>4</sup>

In situating these experiences of Lockwood and Nelly as Wordsworthian, I am interested in the restlessness they produce. Nelly and Lockwood's experiences resemble Wordsworth's experience when he meets the reaper. They cannot account for what has happened to them. Hartman's statement concerning Wordsworth's encounter in 'The Solitary Reaper' that 'an image has singled him out' resonates with Lockwood and Nelly's encounter with the farm hand and guide-post, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Hartman writes of the effect of the reaper's song on Wordsworth that 'stirrings may rise from almost *forgotten* depths' and that the 'imagination may be revived from an *unsuspected* source' (emphasis added).<sup>6</sup> Shelley illustrates this stirring with an anecdote in 'Speculations on Metaphysics'. He writes that, on beholding a 'common scene', during a walk with a friend, of a windmill among meadows, 'I suddenly remembered to have seen that exact scene in some dream...'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964) pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Enid L. Duthie, *The Brontës and Nature*, (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1986) p. 236.

<sup>5</sup> Hartman p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Hartman p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Speculations on Metaphysics' in Richard Herne Shepherd, ed, *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol II, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1897) p. 193.

Shadowy longings that create restlessness in Emily Brontë's writing highlight Wordsworthian affinities. The active ingredient in these longings is an inability to explain; both Wordsworth and Emily Brontë, to use the words of Nelly Dean quoted above, 'cannot say why'. The 'cannot' is a statement of intent as well as an expression of exasperation for the anticipated response of the reader is to exclaim, in words taken from 'The Solitary Reaper', published in *Poems, in Two Volumes*: 'Will no one tell me what she sings?' (p185 line 17). In the same way as Herbert conceives of God withholding rest to provoke longing, I argue in this chapter that Emily Brontë (as part of her Wordsworthian inheritance) engages in shadowy intimations that stir up as much as they assuage longing.

That this sense of a restless search is a Wordsworthian trait is borne out in Wordsworth scholarship. In *The Borders of Vision*, as part of a discussion of Wordsworth's early poetry, Jonathan Wordsworth writes that 'Feeling in this sense is for Wordsworth nothing less than the imaginative re-entry into past experience'.<sup>8</sup> This sense of Wordsworth probing and searching is also borne out in other Wordsworth scholarship. Stephen Gill conceives of the Lucy poems as trying to explain the unfathomable stirrings of the human heart when he writes that they were 'searching to express what every heart has felt in irreducible sparseness of form'.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Mark Sandy's discussion of the significance of the unfinished sheepfold in *Michael* illuminates Nelly's response to the guidepost: 'the unfinished structure is an inscrutable sign which extends the promise of communication – to speak of bonds of love, regret and pity – to any passerby, but then frustrates any healing process of a circulation of consolation'.<sup>10</sup> The guidepost reminds Nelly of her bonds with *Wuthering Heights* but any possibility of consolation is dashed when she arrives at the house. There is a restless energy in Wordsworth's poetry that is trying to account for stirrings that

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, (Oxford: OUP, 1990) p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory and Mourning*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 41.

are not accessible to reason; tracing this restless energy in Emily Brontë's writing situates her as a Wordsworthian poet.

The inability to explain is at the heart of the restlessness explored in this chapter and this means that it is not always possible to explain the origin of homesickness; the notion of an origin is pertinent when considered in the light of an original home. Being homesick without being able to conceive where home actually is, is a state that Lucy Snowe articulates in *Villette* when she says to Paul Emmanuel that 'To be homesick, one must have a home' (526).<sup>11</sup> This inability to account for the origin of nostalgic emotion is also touched on by Meg Harris Williams; in an essay on musical influences on Emily Brontë's writing she argues that 'Music requires us only to describe, not to explain, its emotive effect on us.'<sup>12</sup> As has been seen in the previous examples, a singing reaper and a guidepost at a crossroads single-out an individual and awaken in them an overpowering desire that defies explanation. This desire is homesickness.

### *The Restless Energy of Emily Brontë's Early Poetry*

Not easily explained stirrings are present in Emily Brontë's poetry. Something of the inability to capture the essence of an experience, as portrayed by Nelly Dean and Wordsworth's encounter with the reaper, is felt in the following lines:

I would have touched the heavenly key  
 That spoke alike of bliss and thee  
 I would have woke the entrancing song

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<sup>11</sup> All references to *Villette* taken from: Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984). Page references given parenthetically.

<sup>12</sup> Meg Harris Williams, 'The Hieroglyphics of Catherine: Emily Brontë and the Musical Matrix', eds. Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells, *The Brontës in the World of the Arts*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) p. 84.

But its words died upon my tongue  
 And then I knew that hallowed strain  
 Could never speak of joy again  
 And then I felt (29-35)

The desire intensified by the repetition of ‘would’, which ‘locates us in a place of struggle’, compounds the inability to wake the words of the ‘entrancing song’; yet the relentless pull of the ‘heavenly key’ is much like the draw of the ghostly Catherine on Heathcliff whose pull is ‘relentless’ (410).<sup>13</sup> Gezari views this fragment as the third part of a single poetic utterance along with two others on the same page of Emily Brontë’s manuscript which aligns them with the trajectory of her later poems where she expresses ‘her desire for a release that has not occurred’.<sup>14</sup>

The occasion for restlessness in this sequence of three fragments is a ‘flood of strange sensations’ which the vision, in the previous fragment to that quoted above, calls ‘Heralds’ (lines 26 and 28). The inexplicable ‘strange’ feelings are thus pointers to a state of visionary bliss and the assuaging of longing. Ultimately they prove spectral and impossible to grasp; this desire to embody the vision echoes the attempt of Jesus’ disciples to make tents for Moses and Elijah in response to their manifestation during the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-4). The paradoxical nature of these feelings is worthy of note; they result in ‘Grief deepening joy congealing’. This admixture of joy and grief is the experience of longing which is the answer to its own longing, the absence of which is a dull listlessness as in Coleridge’s ‘Dejection: An Ode’: ‘A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear’ (48). The pain is a price worth paying for experiencing visionary intensity. The restlessness is conceived of as a hallmark of authenticity; it will come when ‘The heart’s [real] feeling / Has entire unbiased sway’. These conflicting, and yet indivisible, states prefigure the paradoxical

<sup>13</sup> Michael O’Neill, ‘Emily Brontë, Arnold, Clough’, in O’Neill, ed. *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) p. 638.

<sup>14</sup> Gezari, ed. *Complete Poems*, p. 246. Also, Gezari, *Last Things*, p. 95.



‘darling pain’ (31) in Brontë’s later poem, ‘Plead for Me’ as well as the experience of ‘more glory and more grief’ (18) in ‘Often rebuked, yet always back returning’.<sup>15</sup> This highlights the paradox at the end of the fragment where the emptiness of the ‘hallowed strain’ (33) that was deserted by ‘joy’ (34) is followed by the final line: ‘And then I felt’ (35) as if the visionary force is seeking to tease the protagonist in the poem. In this line, the incompleteness of the thought and the failure of the line to reach its end play against what the line speaks of: the return of feeling.

In this early poem by Brontë is present the restlessness that stirs the metaphysical depths Heathcliff plumbs in his longing for Catherine during the final two chapters of *Wuthering Heights*. The protagonists are not allowed to rest; there is some visionary force that keeps driving them by awakening desire, providing a tantalising glimpse and then frustrating the full realisation of that desire.

Something that is partially revealed is also felt in ‘Alone I sat the summer day’:

Alone I sat the summer day

Had died in smiling light away

I saw it die I watched it fade

From misty hill and breezeless glade

And thoughts in my soul were rushing

And my heart bowed beneath their power

And tears within my eyes were gushing

Because I could not speak the feeling

The solemn joy around me stealing

In that divine untroubled hour

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<sup>15</sup> Current critical opinion favours Charlotte as the author of this poem; this fusion of contraries in the final verse, however, belongs more to Emily’s imagination.

I asked myself O why has heaven  
 Denied the precious gift to me  
 The glorious gift to many given  
 To speak their thoughts in poetry

Dreams have encircled me I said  
 From careless childhood's sunny time  
 Visions by ardent fancy fed  
 Since life was in its morning prime

But now when I had hoped to sing  
 My fingers strike a tuneless string  
 And still the burden of the strain  
 Is strive no more 'tis all in vain

Both this poem and the previous fragments are connected by the foregrounding of evening as the time for the advent of visionary experience. It is the 'awful time' (p. 57 line 24) where 'awful' connotes wonder and the numinous, used in its sense of 'sublimely majestic'.<sup>16</sup> Evening unlocks visionary experience. This unlocking is seen in the juxtaposition of the serenity of the first verse with the intense mental activity taking place in the second. This switch from outward calm to inward travail is also marked by the change of metre in the second verse to a rush of feminine rhyming from the graceful appositional balancing of the first. The metre increases in speed and becomes restless. It is clear that the process of

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<sup>16</sup> 'awful', Def. 3, OED.

dwelling on day as it fades provokes this visionary restlessness. The intentness of ‘I saw it die I watched it fade’ is strongly suggestive of the way in which the spectacle of waning light sparks off this mental turmoil.

Restlessness is not provoked by the absence of visionary experience but the failure to ‘speak the feeling’ to explain what is happening (Heathcliff feels this in *Wuthering Heights* when he says to Nelly Dean that ‘my confessions have not relieved me’ [395]). What is notable about this second verse is the relentlessness and almost merciless nature of this visionary advent which seems calculated to torment rather than comfort. The lack of control is felt in the fact that the thoughts are ‘rushing’ and their forcefulness is felt in how the speaker’s ‘heart bowed beneath their power’. This sense of power is also evoked by the use of the verb ‘stealing’ with its suggestion that this visitation came unbidden, yet the predominance of vowel sounds in ‘solemn joy’ and ‘untroubled hour’ give a gentler and more peaceful aspect to the visitation. However, the feeling of bliss is marred by the inability to speak it and this visionary intensity seems more likely to provoke nostalgic longing than to assuage them.

That the visionary experience, conjured in the second verse, results in the arousal of longing is explained in the third verse. In what could be argued is Romantic self-deprecation, Brontë bewails her inability to communicate this experience and so evokes longing on the part of her listener. This is an ingenious way of withholding in the same way that St Paul does when he writes that ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him’ (I Corinthians 2:9). The desired effect in both cases is to provoke a search, in the Biblical example for heaven and in Brontë’s poem, for the essence of the experience. Yet this search is frustrated by choosing to use language to describe a lack. What is interesting in this part of the poem is that the

‘divine’ is both the agent and the withholder of the experience. The ‘*divine* untroubled hour’ (emphasis added) becomes the ‘heaven’ that has ‘denied the precious gift’.

The tone of reaching after something that eludes definition (one remembers Catherine’s deathbed ravings) is articulated in more recognisably nostalgic tones in the last two stanzas of the poem. The sense of being worked upon by forces that are outside one’s control is evoked by the personified agency given to the dreams that have ‘encircled me’ (this line anticipates the Shakespearean closing of Catherine’s life in a ‘gentle dream’, alluded to above). ‘Careless childhood’ again recalls Catherine’s longings for the time when she was ‘laughing at injuries, not maddening under them!’ (153). A Wordsworthian vision of childhood is strongly present in this verse with the ‘Visions by ardent fancy fed’ where the easy accessibility of vision contrasts with the inability to find it in the final verse.

For a poem that bewails the inability to speak, linguistic acts are strongly present; the poet questions, states and sings in the third, fourth and fifth stanzas respectively. The final stanza moves beyond language into music as an attempt to reach, recalling the comments of Meg Herries Williams earlier, the essence of the experience. There is something crushing about the failure of the instrument to respond. The harsh consonantal *t* in ‘string’, ‘strain’ and ‘strive’ replace the flowing vowels at the start of the second stanza. Futile effort is also felt in the wordplay in ‘strain’ where the ‘burden of the strain’ suggests strain as a verb speaking of futile effort to reach something that is out of grasp (Heathcliff’s image of ‘bending back a stiff spring’ [395] is anticipated). The serene repose at the start of the poem has become pained restlessness of the end with a note of futility in the last line. The poem describes visionary force that provides a tantalising glimpse and then leaves the speaker bereft with nostalgic longing for the careless time of childhood. The fall of evening, like the reaper and the guide-post, has stirred depths within the beholder and provoked longings that cannot be fully explained. In the case of Nelly Dean, they literally set her on a journey, but

the despairing tone of the last line of 'Alone I sat' perhaps is calculated to dampen rather than provoke striving.

Elsewhere, Brontë's early poems contain an atmosphere of visionary hopefulness caused by dwelling on a natural object; restlessness and peace vie for supremacy:

The sun has set and the long grass now  
 Waves drearily in the evening wind  
 And the wild bird has flown from that old grey stone  
 In some warm nook a couch to find

In all the lonely landscape round  
 I see no sight and hear no sound  
 Except the wind that far away  
 Comes sighing o'er the heathy sea.

The mood of this poem is meditative and the situation is identical to that described in 'Alone I sat the summer day' (both poems were written within a few weeks of each other); in both poems, the speaker watches the progress of evening intently. The speaker focuses on 'that old grey stone' with the use of 'that' 'restricting the antecedent, and thus completing its sense'.<sup>17</sup> Its usage narrows the field of focus and invests it with a consequent significance in a stronger way than the relative pronoun 'the' would have done. This is highlighted in the fall of specificity from '*that* old grey stone' to '*some* warm nook' in the following line (emphasis added). The speaker in the poem is singling out (or has been singled out by) a particular object. That Brontë intends this stone to be invested with significance is felt in the line's change of rhythm where the monosyllabic words mirror the movements of the bird in visual onomatopoeia. The restlessness is felt in barely discernible envy that the bird may find

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<sup>17</sup> 'that', pronoun (2), Def. 1a, *OED*.

‘some warm nook’ (in much the same way that the speaker’s eye is trying to find somewhere to rest) while, in the second verse, the speaker is trying to find another object on which to rest their gaze and the tight focus of the first verse has been replaced by the vastness of the second. Emily Brontë is showing herself as the heir of William Wordsworth in the poetic work that she is able to create with an ordinary object.

The second verse subtly suggests an isolated voyager (perhaps by the use of ‘sea’ as the last word of the poem); the sense of complete isolation is created by the use of ‘all’ and ‘round’. The poet that cannot speak in ‘Alone I sat the summer day’, in this poem cannot find a ‘sight’ or ‘sound’ on which to rest. However, in this fragment there is a palpable difference of mood; the tortured despair of ‘Alone I sat’ contrasts with a quiet serenity. Even the wind, that traditional agent of visionary disruption in Brontë’s later poetry is ‘far away’; that this serenity is pregnant with a darker, nameless state is suggested by ‘sighing’. This suggestion is borne out by the grass that ‘Waves *drearly*’ [emphasis added]. That this fragment has a darker undercurrent is illuminated when it is seen as part of the poem that precedes it, which is one that describes the aftermath of a battle in Brontë’s imaginary world of Gondal, seeking to evoke calm after the storm. The description of Lake Elnor that ‘Waveless and calm lies that silent deep’ (23) sounds like it is begging to be disturbed. In the lines ‘The Deer are gathered to their rest / The wild sheep seek the fold’ is the sense of homelessness emphasised by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew: ‘Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head’ (Matthew 8:20). Intimations of restlessness and homelessness lie beneath the apparent serenity of the natural scene; the peaceful natural world is deliberately juxtaposed with the agitation of the human spirit.

Before moving on to consider the idea of restlessness as a Wordsworthian trait in Emily Brontë’s poetry, I will make one other observation that arises from considering these

poems together. I will also offer some concluding comments that bring to the fore the restlessness and consequent nostalgic homelessness that energises them. ‘The sun has set and the long grass now’, (along with the preceding poem: ‘The battle had passed from the height’) attain lyrical depths, in their ability to evoke the maximum of feeling from the minimum of statement, that ‘Alone I sat the summer day’ fails to plumb. Arguably, there is more of Romantic posturing in the latter poem, in its bewailing of the inability to speak poetry, whereas the former poems attain greater emotional depth through their lack of assertion. Emily Brontë wrote both of these poems in her late adolescence and the restraint with which she evokes strong emotion in the more explicitly Gondal lyric shows a more mature poetic muse when drawing on the resources of her own imagination than the literary tropes in some writing of the day.

The restlessness present in the last three poems is difficult for the respective speakers to articulate; what is felt in them is absence and desertion, literally in the last line of ‘I would have touched the heavenly key’ for what comes after the last word of the poem, ‘felt’ is silence. The presence of stirring emotion is acknowledged but the ability to explain it is denied. The shadowy longings are brought into relief by imagery of members of the animal kingdom finding their home but the speakers are left anticipating and waiting: looking into the horizon in ‘The sun has set’ and seeking a response from the instrument in ‘Alone I sat’. Something is being denied and that is, to borrow the terms of Herbert’s poem, the gift of rest. However, what energises these poems is the consequent wearying and longing to be homebound like the bird, deer and sheep.

These ordinary objects and their consequent emotional states cannot be fully grasped in their elusiveness. Intimations, in the sense of signs, suggestions and hints, is a word that fits them well. They are pointers towards a state of felicity and bliss and they evoke nostalgia for that condition. However, there is a sense in which the longing itself is a type of bliss.

The tantalising final line of the fragment, ‘I would have touched the heavenly key’: ‘And then I felt’ appears to be incomplete. There is the hint of an unexpected advent of visionary bliss, yet there is no explanation as to what occasions it. What matters is the experience of the ‘feeling’ itself rather than the place or state of which it is a harbinger. Indeed the fall into silence after the word indicates that to explain would be to lose. To fulfil these longings would be to lose them; to borrow a sentence from Karl Kroeber, when he writes that the Romantic visionary lyric ‘evokes emotions without satisfying them’, what is important is the evocation rather than the satisfaction.<sup>18</sup>

*Wordsworthian Discontent: Emily Brontë’s poetry and Wordsworth’s ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’.*

Arguably, the most powerful exploration of the fall from connection to custom is found in William Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ and it also provides an illuminating commentary on the Brontë poems already considered. However, the restlessness of the ‘obstinate questionings’ (144) that Wordsworth engages in dialogue with in the ‘Ode’ is unrestrained in Emily Brontë’s poetry (I shall return to this idea later to explain how Brontë chooses a state of nostalgia).

It has already been discussed how the fragment, ‘The sun has set’ (along with the poem before it with which it may have been linked, ‘The Battle had passed’) contrasts the movement home of animals with the homelessness of the speaker. This comfortlessness and sense that the world of nature is disregarding the world of the viewer are felt poignantly in the ‘Ode’. Wordsworth portrays how nature continues despite his loss of vision:

Waters on a starry night

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Narrative Art*, (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1966) p. 56.



Are beautiful and fair;

The sunshine is a glorious birth; (14-16)

The impersonalised and disconnected listing precedes the statement ‘that there hath pass’d away a glory from the earth’ (18) suggesting that nature continues without the speaker: they still retain their qualities. The dissonance between the poet and nature is felt keenly in both Wordsworth and Emily Brontë. While it may be an unequal comparison (the ‘Ode’ is a philosophical meditation composed when Wordsworth was in his early thirties; the Brontë poem is most likely a Gondal lyric written when Emily Brontë was in her late teens), it is still the case that the unresponsiveness of nature is strongly felt in both poems. This leads to ‘obstinate questionings’, restlessness and nostalgia for a time of consonance with the world of nature around them. Emily Brontë’s ‘old grey stone’ and William Wordsworth’s ‘waters on a starry night’ speak of something that has gone, which the poets want to find.

That the state in the ‘Ode’ is one of restlessness is implied in the line ‘Not in entire forgetfulness... do we come / From God, who is our home’ (62-65). Ability to be content in the world is denied by the remembrance that something has been forgotten and that the ‘visionary gleam’ has now fled. The restlessness that this invokes (with the consequent ‘obstinate questionings / of sense and outward things’) is quietened by Wordsworth by his choice to find ‘Strength in what remains behind’ (183), through asserting that if something was once true it is always so. When this resolution is compared with Brontë’s handling of the problem of remembering in ‘Remembrance’, it is evident that the following lines can be seen as Emily Brontë’s treatment of the same problem:

No later light has lightened up my heaven,

No second morn has ever shone for me;

All my life’s bliss from thy dear life was given,

All my life’s bliss is in the grave with thee.

But, when the days of golden dreams had perished,  
 And even despair was powerless to destroy;  
 Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,  
 Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy. (17-24)

There is a greater determination to see what has gone as irrevocably dead and begrudging acceptance that life will not be graced by Wordsworth's 'visionary gleam' (56).

Wordsworthian compensation is met with Brontëan stoicism. If grief finished there it would be rest; the dead would sleep soundly in their graves and there would be no nostalgia.

However, the last verse reveals that the 'empty world' can no longer be home:

And, even yet, I dare not let it languish,  
 Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;  
 Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,  
 How could I seek the empty world again? (29-32)

Stoical resolution falters as Emily Brontë contemplates the capacity of the 'divinest anguish' of remembrance to disturb her fragile accommodation with the world. Her nomination of the world as 'empty' reveals that, for Emily Brontë, efforts to imagine compensation have been less successful than Wordsworth in the 'Ode'. Brontë's restlessness is more pronounced.

A final observation in this consideration of the idea of restlessness showing affinity between Wordsworth and Emily Brontë is in the way that the world is conceived. Both the 'Ode' and 'Remembrance' employ the imagery of a sea journey. For Wordsworth, it is a journey away from the shore. Earth is distinguished from nature as a 'homely Nurse' (81) who attempts to make the poet 'Forget the glories he hath known / And that imperial palace whence he came' (83-4). Brontë's speaker is also inland as she states elegiacally that 'my thoughts no longer hover / Over the mountains, on that northern shore' (5-6). Brontë's

speaker asks for forgiveness for forgetting but yet considers that the other desires that come may ‘obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!’ (16). For both poets, there is an acceptance of the near-impossibility of preserving such connection across time and both seek accommodation with the world around them. Yet Brontë, in a poem written much later in her poetic career, still shows that restless inability to come to an accommodation with and be accommodated in the world where vision had gone.

However, the power of indefinable intimations to cause restlessness should not be underestimated in the poetry of Wordsworth. In his work on *The Excursion*, some of which he was writing after the ‘Ode’, Wordsworth still shows awareness of the problems of being disturbed with indefinable emotions. The Wanderer confesses, in response to beholding the rocks that surround the Solitary’s dwelling place in the mountains, that ‘some shadowy intimations haunt me here’ (III. 91). That there are problems with bringing these shadows into the full light of day is also implied in the Solitary’s confession that his lack of regret when considering the past is tainted with ‘remembrances of dream-like joys / That scarcely seem to have belonged to me’ (III. 279-80). Freud’s statement, from his ‘Essay on the Uncanny’ that ‘The uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it’ is one gloss on the frustrations of dealing with something that is so tantalisingly familiar, yet so difficult to fully realise.<sup>19</sup> The ‘intimations’ of Wordsworth and Brontë are those sensations which are ‘secretly familiar’ but have ‘undergone repression’ as, to use Wordsworthian terms, original glory is left behind. The gap between the two states is what causes restlessness and the consequent nostalgia or a state of homesickness for a home that one does not know.

However, this restlessness is not an undesirable state and can be sought for its own sake; it is this which animates the more lyrical passages of *Wuthering Heights*. Jay Clayton,

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<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachy et al., Vol 17, 1955, (London: Hogarth Press, 1962) p. 245.

in his study of transcendence and the novel, considers this seeming paradox when he brings the ideas of the poststructuralist psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, to bear on *Wuthering Heights*. While Lacan argues that, with the advent of language comes separation and to articulate a desire is to separate oneself from the object of longing, Clayton argues that Brontë inflects desire differently. He contends that ultimately, in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë imagines ‘an unmediated form of desire – desire not *for* anything, not for any single vision or representation, but for the enlarging power of desire itself’.<sup>20</sup>

*The ‘Enlarging Power of Desire’*

The restlessness inherent in this ‘enlarging power of desire’ is felt in ‘To a Wreath of Snow’; this is an exile poem where the speaker is a prisoner whose longing for the mountains is awoken by the sight of snow (also written at around the same period as the other poems considered in this chapter):

O transient voyager of heaven!

O silent sign of winter skies!

What adverse wind thy sail has driven

To dungeons where a prisoner lies?

Methinks the hands that shut the sun

So sternly from this mourning brow

Might still their rebel task have done

And checked a thing so frail as thou

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<sup>20</sup> Jay Clayton, *Romantic Vision and the Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) p. 101.

They would have done it had they known  
The talisman that dwelt in thee,  
For all the suns that ever shone  
Have never been so kind to me!

For many a week, and many a day  
My heart was weighed with sinking gloom  
When morning rose in mourning grey  
And faintly lit my prison room,

But angel like, when I awoke  
Thy silvery form so soft and fair  
Shining through darkness, sweetly spoke  
Of cloudy skies and mountains bare

The dearest to a mountaineer  
Who, all life long has loved the snow  
That crowned her native summits drear,  
Better, than greenest plains below –

And voiceless, soulless messenger  
Thy presence waked a thrilling tone  
That comforts me while thou art here  
And will sustain when thou art gone

The earth-bound nature of this poem is masked by the airy diction aided by the repetition of ‘O’ in the apostrophe to the drift of snow; the expression of longing makes it clear that the monotony of the speaker’s imprisonment has been disturbed.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the elevated diction highlights the incommensurability of the sensation with the object that inspired it: ‘transient voyager of heaven’ suggests an angel rather than a wreath of snow. The passivity of the poem’s speaker (unlike the speaker in ‘The sun has set’, this speaker does not command a wide landscape) means that there is a Coleridgean element of grace in Brontë’s version of what the Romantic poet in ‘Frost at Midnight’ calls the ‘secret ministry’ of the snow (43).<sup>22</sup> This desirable restlessness cannot be summoned since it comes of its own accord. This gestures towards the stirring of the pool of Bethesda in St. John’s Gospel where ‘an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and *troubled* the water; whosoever then first after the *troubling* of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had’ (John 5:4 emphasis added). Restlessness induced from stirring leads to healing and home.

The frail wreath succeeds where the sun fails, and offers comfort, even more so with ‘talisman’ suggesting that it is the source of a hidden power. This is a stronger source than the sun, for the physical power of the sun to melt the snow is not matched by the hidden power of occult inspiration; its effect on the speaker is highlighted in the second couplet in the third stanza where the prisoner thwarts our assumption of any simple opposition between a life-giving sun and a deathly winter. This playing with expectations sets Brontë up as a poet whose imagination is fed by northern wintriness rather than southern warmer climes. Indeed, what is surprising (at least to the prisoner) is the ease with which the sun is removed from the prisoner’s sight. The ‘hands that shut the sun / So sternly from this mourning brow’ can be seen as an parody of the act of creation. There is also forcefulness in the intensifying

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<sup>21</sup> The following observation is also helpful: ‘The apostrophic “O” implies a lack; the nostalgic quest for a moment or place of origin’. Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2015) p. 235.

<sup>22</sup> *The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats*, (Paris: Galignani, 1829), p. 65. All references to Coleridge’s poems taken from this edition. Page references given parenthetically.

clause of ‘so sternly’ and the sense of omnipotent force behind this line foreshadows the masculine sun that Brontë sets herself against in her later poem, ‘Stars’. However, in this poem, the snow wreath has its own power evoked by Brontë’s use of personification. As well as the use of ‘thou’ as a form of address to the snow wreath, the speaker also reduces herself as a subject by referring to herself impersonally, for example ‘a prisoner’ in the first stanza and ‘this mourning brow’ in the second. This reversal of the subject/object relationship is also emphasised by the granting of agency to the snow-wreath. The fact that the rebels failed to have ‘checked’ it from providing inspiration to the prisoner gives it an ability to out-manoeuve the captors in much the same way that an angelic visitor might have done.

The fourth stanza contains further imagery of the sun and morning being harbingers of the oppressive world; the play in ‘morning’ on its homonym ‘mourning’ and the ‘prison room’ set the scene for the later awakening from a visionary night of reverie in ‘Stars’ seven years later. This stanza and the following one contrast the ‘faintly’ awakening of the sun with the ‘shining’ awakening of the snow (this reversal, already touched on, becomes a familiar idea in Emily Brontë’s poetry and has been considered in the introduction through considering ‘Loud without’). The phrase, ‘Shining through darkness’ echoes William Cowper’s hymn, ‘Light Shining out of Darkness’:

Ye fearful Saints fresh courage take  
 The clouds ye so much dread,  
 Are big with mercy, and shall break  
 In blessings on your head. (Vol. 1, 9-12)<sup>23</sup>

Emily Brontë, as Cowper, reworks our expectations of difficulty-bearing clouds into a vision that is altogether more desirable.

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<sup>23</sup> All references to Cowper’s poetry taken from: John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp eds. *The Poems of William Cowper*. 3 vol. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). Volume and line numbers given parenthetically.

The wreath of snow also serves as a reminder of a far-off country intimated by the way in which the speaker refers to herself as a ‘mountaineer’. This objectifying of the speaker removes a melodramatic tone and also roots the speaker’s love of their home in the earth (the idea of a homesick mountaineer has also been considered in the introduction) which is an implicit rejection of the world of the sun.

Emily Brontë self-consciously privileges the ‘drear’ in the penultimate stanza. The placing of ‘Better’ at the start of the following line with its enclosing commas emphasises how a mountain crowned with snow is preferred to ‘greenest plains below’. This conception continues in later poetry, an example being the rhetorical question in ‘M. G. for the U. S.’, ‘What flower in Ula’s gardens sweet / Is worth one flake of snow?’ (33-4). Both these poems were written in December, though six years divide them, and show Brontë consistently imagining home in frozen Northern lands rather than warm summer climes: ‘A vision of huge, clear spaces hanging over the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity...’<sup>24</sup>

What agitates all this nostalgia for home is the ‘talisman’ of a ‘wreath of snow’ and in this poem is the kernel of Emily Brontë’s overriding preoccupation: the nostalgic longing of a prisoner for a home. The following lines from Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ metamorphose Brontë’s imagined prisoner in a dungeon:

Shades of the prison house begin to close  
 Upon the growing boy,  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
 He sees it in his joy; (67-70)

Wordsworth’s youth, who is travelling further from the east, is imagined by Brontë as one travelling further from the north. While one poem is a philosophical meditation and the other

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<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955), p. 74.



is arising from a character conceived in an imaginary world, I contend that the same nostalgic vision actuates both writers.

The final stanza completes the poem in a reflective and quietly confident manner; the placing of a dash at the end of the previous stanza suggests that this poem has been working towards a thought that is now concluded (the dash functions as a colon: delivering the goods). There is not the fragmented incompleteness of 'I would have touched the heavenly key' or the anguished wrenching away from night's bliss in 'Stars'. The ability of a messenger that is 'soulless' and 'voiceless' to awaken a 'thrilling' tone suggests that the prisoner may be projecting his own longing onto the wreath yet the use of 'talisman' suggests that there is, to borrow the disenchanted words of Coleridge from 'Dejection, an Ode', more than 'our life alone' (48) living in the wreath. In any case, the use of those two adjectives at the start of the stanza suggests that the effect of the wreath is understated (the poem has moved on from the hyperbolic intensity of the 'O' in the opening stanza). The tone of restraint means that the tone of visionary content (bliss seems too strong a word) completes the poem.

The essence of what Emily Brontë's speaker experiences in her response to the snow is the same as that of Wordsworth in the 'Ode' as he remembers childhood visionary immediacy:

O joy! That in our embers  
 Is something that doth live,  
 That nature yet remembers  
 What was so fugitive! (132-135)

The restlessness that both poets feel is a blessed restlessness and a fortunate fall as they are both reminded of a former home. The speakers in both poems have been, to borrow a phrase from a later Wordsworth sonnet, 'Surprised by joy'. The stirring of the pool that causes restlessness is unpredictable. Finally, in considering this poem, the prisoner's reaction to the

wreath of snow is very Wordsworthian, exuding the same confidence in the power of the ‘inward eye’ to bring to mind nourishing visions when they are no longer present to ocular vision.

Less than a year after the lyrical poems considered so far in this chapter, the idea of an object bringing restlessness through a ‘moment of arrest’ was still being explored by Emily Brontë. Here is a fragment by way of example:

There are two trees in a lonely field  
 They breathe a spell to me  
 A dreary thought their dark boughs yield  
 All waving solemnly

The ordinariness of the trees is emphasised through the non-specific language; their investment with significance is found in the opening two words. Using the present tense in ‘there are’ intensifies that ‘moment of arrest’ as all we have is the experience; there is no ‘after’ to dilute its potency. The present tense also gives these trees a staying power; they are still here, survivors.

What is most notable about these trees, however, is how they bestow the ‘spell’ on the speaker. The use of ‘yield’ evokes a due that is rendered as a result of effort on the part of the speaker. However, there is something of a grace moment about the speaker’s encounter with these trees; the yielding seems to come not as the result of active exertion but of passive beholding. The action of the trees is foregrounded rather than that of the speaker in the poem. The thought they yield may be ‘dreary’ but this may be Wordsworth’s ‘visionary dreariness’ with which he invested his watching of the woman with a pitcher on Penrith Beacon.<sup>25</sup> Yet this fragment of an encounter with a tree is less sadly dreary than Wordsworth’s similar encounter in the ‘Ode’ where he invests the tree with the same

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<sup>25</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen Book Prelude*, Mark L. Reed ed. Vol. II, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) p. 210.

particularity that Bronte does: 'But there's a Tree, of many one' (51) where the recollection marks a movement from the tone of compensatory optimism to despair in the wake of visionary abandonment. In Brontë's fragment, the tree is still invested with visionary significance but Wordsworth's tree has faded into 'the light of common day'.

Emily Brontë's optimism is not sustained in a poem written a few months later:

O Dream, where art thou now?

Long years have past away

Since last, from off thine angel brow

I saw the light decay –

Alas, alas for me

Thou wert so bright and fair,

I would not think thy memory

Would yield me nought but care!

The sun-beam and the storm,

The summer-eve divine,

The silent night of solemn calm,

The full moon's cloudless shine

Were once entwined with thee

But now, with weary pain –

Lost vision! 'tis enough for me –

Thou canst not shine again –

The remembrance of past visionary intensity, that for Wordsworth leads to ‘perpetual benedictions’ and ‘joy’ that ‘something in our embers doth live’ in the ‘Ode’ (132-137), for the speaker in Emily Brontë’s poem results in ‘nought but care’. That the vision was ‘once so bright and fair’ compounds the tone of lament for Brontë; this is intensified by the lack of caesura in the second stanza in which the restrained grief of the first stanza moves into intense longing and the tone of questioning becomes that of protest. Emily Brontë eschews the tone of philosophical resignation in Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ with the exclamatory statement at the end of the poem; the vision is ‘Lost’ and the final line ‘thou canst not shine again’ is unambiguous and stark in its statement.

The poem teases with its visionary possibility. The use of incantatory sibilance, in a lyric invocation, effects the advent of visionary bliss in the third stanza where the scudding ‘i’ sounds in the first part of the third line give way to sonorous long vowel sounds. However, this descriptive listing recalls the listing in the second verse of the ‘Ode’ of Wordsworth where, despite the poet’s loss of vision he acknowledges, with sadness, that the natural world still goes on without him. The difference in their response to the external world can be summarised as follows. Whereas Wordsworth reaches the position, adumbrated in ‘Daffodils’ of his ability to access past experience through the ‘inward eye’ (15), Brontë’s inability to access any past experience is articulated in the final stanza. The sense of building vision in stanza three is punctured in one word at the start of the final stanza in the use of ‘Were’.

Emily Brontë is articulating a version of the same problem as Wordsworth in the ‘Ode’; the problem is what to do when objects seen in the present are not endowed with the same visionary brilliance that they possessed, or appeared to possess, in the past. Brontë, like Wordsworth, looks back to when nature was ‘entwined’ with the ‘dream’ alluded to in the first stanza and with the ‘lost vision’ of the final stanza. However, unlike Wordsworth, there

is something stoical in the way that she conceives of lost vision. The 'weary pain' in the final stanza alludes to the time in the later 'Remembrance' when 'even despair was powerless to destroy' through its evocation of the idea that even the pain itself is wearying. Like Wordsworth, Brontë is moving through grief into another state but, differently to Wordsworth it is a determination to face this loss of vision directly and not to come to terms with it through adapting a mode of philosophical consolation that could itself prove a chimera. The phrase, 'tis enough for me' suggests that the speaker is not looking for any further consolation and is simply prepared to state the fact that 'Thou canst not shine again'. She has moved from the protest of the first half of the poem to the stoical determination simply to face the loss in the second half. However, as in a number of other Brontë poems, this is rendered provisional through the use of 'again' as the final word of the poem.

'Remembrance' is one such poem; it, unlike 'O Dream', moves beyond stoicism to a rising forth of passion but, like the poem currently being discussed, it finishes with 'again' showing a very Brontëan resistance to closure. So, the inability in these poems to find a final position, in contrast to Wordsworth finding a firm place to stand by the end of the 'Ode', gives them the quality of restlessness.

Having elicited the quality of restlessness in 'O Dream' and how the poet refuses a stance that admits of consolation, one can see how such a refusal energises *Wuthering Heights*. I wish to apply the existential position taken in this poem to Edgar Linton's response to the death of Catherine Linton. Nelly tells Lockwood that Edgar did not wish for Catherine's spirit to haunt him and that he was under the sway of a 'melancholy sweeter than common joy' (226). The joy that Nelly attributes to Edgar Linton is not the more philosophical 'joy' that Wordsworth names in the 'Ode' but they both find something in the 'embers'. However, the words of Heathcliff describing Edgar's shallow cares as 'that insipid, paltry creature attending her from *duty* and *humanity*' (187) lie behind this. The settledness

of Edgar's resignation is a state-of-mind that Brontë points up and contrasts with the energised searching and yearning of Heathcliff. Part of his appeal is the refusal to rest, and the refusal of consolation is the refusal to admit that his dream and vision are over.

There is one further poem to consider: 'Why do I hate that lone green dell?' It is a more explicitly Gondal poem with a clear sense of background story.<sup>26</sup> The situation is of a place recalled to the speaker's mind and interrogated by her in a lyrical movement by which mind confronts nature. The foregrounding of 'Buried' at the start of the second line suggests a memory that is rising up from forgotten depths and that the speaker is unable to account for the strong feelings of hate that the place arouses in them. The poem has the Wordsworthian hallmark of exploring the ability of a place to arrest attention; indeed, it could be said that the speaker is invoking the power of the Wordsworthian inward eye but that this visionary organ is creating restlessness rather than 'bliss':

Why do I hate that lone green dell?

Buried in moors and mountains wild

That is a spot I had loved too well

Had I but seen it when a child

There are bones whitening there in the summer's heat

But it is not for that and none can tell

None but one can the secret repeat

Why I hate that lone green dell

Noble foe I pardon thee

All thy cold and scornful pride

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<sup>26</sup> The initials A. G. A., Emily Brontë's Gondal heroine, appear at the head of the poem. See Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 249.

For thou wast a priceless friend to me

When my sad heart had none beside

And leaning on thy generous arm

A breath of old times over me came

The earth shone round with a long lost charm

Alas I forgot I was not the same

Before a day – an hour passed by

My spirit knew itself once more

I saw the gilded vapours fly

And leave me as I was before.

What is curious about the first stanza is its sense of belatedness. The ‘green dell’ to which the speaker alludes would, encountered as a child, have been one that she would have ‘loved too well’. Therefore, it is estrangement, rather than innate hatred: her perception of the place has changed. The ballad-like refrain of ‘that lone green dell’ with the same particularising ‘that’ discussed earlier in the chapter recalls Wordsworth’s focus on the tree and the field in the ‘Ode’.

The belatedness takes on a new tint with the realisation that the childhood visitation is imaginary. The speaker is imagining the place untainted by the memory that causes hatred. Another way of considering this is as an attempt to get back to an original innocence, untainted by the ‘bones whitening’ though the speaker is insistent that they are not the reason for her hatred: ‘But it is not for that’. Indeed, the phrase has the air of one trying to dismiss the thought of whitening bones as she tries to ponder the question posed at the start of the poem. Rhetorically, the speaker is deliberately withholding from the listener to the poem;

there is a clear sense here that ‘poetry is overheard’.<sup>27</sup> However, it seems that the reason for the arousal of strong emotion in the speaker is, ultimately, incomprehensible. To borrow the words of Nelly Dean cited earlier in the chapter, the speaker ‘cannot say why’ where ‘cannot’ is inflected as both volitional and involuntary.

The nostalgic restlessness is empowered most clearly by the lyrical phrase: ‘A breath of old times’. The hues of nostalgia cause the speaker to see the ‘Noble foe’ as a ‘priceless friend’. This retrospect of past places and people has hues of Wordsworthian emotion recollected in tranquillity. The decision to pardon the ‘Noble Foe’ in the light of the ‘priceless friend’ whose remembrance the speaker had repressed is a stark revaluation and the forgiveness of this ‘foe’ is linked to the remembrance of this, in some ways Wordsworthian ‘spot’ with its ‘renovating virtue’ leading to a change of mental state.<sup>28</sup>

The remembrance of this foe reconceived as a friend as part of the reverie experienced by the speaker leads to the approach of visionary bliss. The first line of the penultimate stanza, ‘leaning on thy generous arm’, suggests that this experience of visionary intensity may be one remembered by her rather than experienced in the present of the poem. This experience enables the speaker to be in the time before she was changed and enables her to recover what was lost: ‘the earth shone round with a long lost charm’ (this recovery is what Catherine was straining for in the delirium of her last illness). However, the gradual receding of this experience begins in the last line of the stanza. The use of the past tense in ‘forgot’ accentuates the sense that, in the present time of this recapturing of ‘old times’, the speaker was enveloped in an all-consuming experience. ‘Alas’ admits that the speaker knows any attempt to return to past bliss was futile; in fact she regrets that she did not remember. This is not someone who wants to use the re-entry into past visionary bliss as a narcotic to dull

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<sup>27</sup> John Stuart Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties’, *English Critical Essays: Nineteenth Century*, ed. Edmund D. Jones, (London: Oxford UP, 1971), p. 347.

<sup>28</sup> See *The Prelude* (1850), line 210. reference taken from: William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, Ed. W. J. B. Owen, (Ithaca: Cornell, 1985) p. 238.



present reality; the feeling behind this line is that the speaker regrets being taken in, foreshadowed by her awareness of the possibility of loving a place ‘too well’ in the first verse. This penultimate verse conveys the idea of someone who has let herself get carried away.

The line, ‘Alas I forgot I was not the same’, represents the gathering clouds that will dull the imaginative re-entry into past experience. A twentieth-century poet influenced by ideas of Blakean vision, Kathleen Raine, articulates the frustration felt in this poem at the inability to sustain a visionary state when she wrote in ‘Last Things’ that even though we ‘seem at times to be present in past presents’ we cannot ‘Sense-bound travel the great sphere where all is present’.<sup>29</sup> The temporary replacement of the present with a ‘breath of old times’ cannot be sustained. Indeed, the sense of receding possibility is strengthened by the poet correcting her memory as to how long the experience lasted in the first line of the final verse. The line ‘My spirit knew itself once more’ suggests coming back to her senses and obliges the ‘soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain’ of the later ‘Prisoner’. The inability to hold onto this experience is also strengthened by the use of the verb, ‘fly’ in the following line as well as the insubstantiality of ‘vapours’.

The last line of the poem is stark in its abandonment. As the speaker has returned to self-consciousness they are no further forward. There is no answer to the question posed at the start of the poem. Like Nelly Dean in her encounter with the guide-post, an encounter with an object or particular place yields to nostalgic yearnings that are ultimately unanswerable. The resulting restlessness is what gives the writing its energy.

Restlessness activates the aspects of nostalgia and homesickness explored in the following chapters. In the chapters on Catholicism and Irishness, the two modes of identity are presented as troublers that withhold the gift of rest from Emily Brontë. Gondal disturbed

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<sup>29</sup> Kathleen Raine. *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine*. (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 2008) p. 140.

Emily Brontë's ability to make a home in the same world as her sisters.<sup>30</sup> Children are presented in Brontë's poetry as being goaded by an indefinable homesickness which challenges the 'blest' condition of the child in Wordsworth's 'Ode' (114). The idea of restlessness takes on new resonance with the haunting that troubles *Wuthering Heights* and the persistence of ghosts in Emily Brontë's writing. The closest that Brontë comes to home is in her rejection of the provoker of restlessness in Herbert's poem, *God, in favour of a home on the earth*.

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<sup>30</sup> See Barker's argument that Emily Brontë's early return from Roe Head was not due to longing for Haworth, as implied by Charlotte in her preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, but the fact that 'Home was the only place which could offer her the unbridled indulgence of Gondal fantasy'. Barker, p. 66.

*Chapter Two: The Catholic Imagination: Purgatory and Pilgrimage*

*Literary and Social Context*

Emily Brontë made two known, brief statements about religion during her life. The first was recalled by Laetitia Wheelwright, who was a pupil at the Pensionnat Heger when Emily and Charlotte were teaching there between February and November of 1842. She responded to enquiries by Clement Shorter for recollections of Emily Brontë by describing her ‘tallish, ungainly ill-dressed figure’. She also remembered that, when teased about her dress, Emily Brontë responded by saying that ‘I wish to be as God made me’.<sup>1</sup> The second statement was a recollection by Charlotte’s friend, Mary Taylor, when she was staying at Haworth parsonage. During a discussion about religion, she recalled that Emily responded to her observation that religion only concerned oneself and God with a ‘laconic “that’s right!”’<sup>2</sup>

Laetitia Wheelwright’s comments about clothing are illuminating. Elizabeth Gaskell wrote in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, reporting another observation from Mary Taylor, that Emily Brontë’s petticoats ‘had not a curve or wave in them, but hung down straight and long, clinging to her lank figure’.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on her plain dress recalls Lucy Snowe’s similarly bemused initial observations about Paulina’s ‘black frock and tiny braided apron’ in *Villette* (16). This same bemused reaction is present in Lucy’s description of Paulina praying ‘like some Catholic or Methodist enthusiast – some precocious fanatic or untimely saint’ at the start of the chapter (15). Lucy Snowe’s own choice of clothing for Madame Beck’s fete has echoes of Charlotte’s description of Emily’s love for the moors: ‘I lit upon a crape-like

<sup>1</sup> Winifred Gérin, *Emily Brontë: A Biography*, (Oxford: OUP, 1971) p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Gérin p. 156

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, (London: Everyman, 1977) p. 163.

material of purple-grey – the colour, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom’ (182/3). Her verdict on this choice of apparel is that ‘in this same gown of shadow, *I felt at home*, and at ease’ (183 emphasis added). In each of these examples, plain clothes cloak fervent and unconventional natures.

Staying with Charlotte’s writing, it is interesting to note that, like Paulina in *Villette*, her juvenilia also imagines a character praying like a ‘Catholic’ and an ‘untimely saint’. In *The Spell*, there is a character called Emily, the Duchess of Valdacella and the daughter-in-law of Lord Wellesley. Wellesley, who narrates the story, describes Emily’s family history: ‘Emily, on the mother’s side comes of the old Roman-Catholic family of the Ravenswoods & is herself a devout daughter of Holy Kirk’.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic sensibilities of Emily are also alluded to earlier in the story; the child, Earnest, states that ‘I should not like to be a Roman-Catholic, & Papa says I am not to be. But Emily will, & then she’ll have to tell her beads every night and confess every week’.<sup>5</sup>

Charlotte’s references to Catholicism continued into her mature work. In *Shirley*, Sir Philip Nunnely, an unsuccessful suitor for Shirley’s hand, shows her some ‘mementos’ associated with his ancestress. Brontë narrates that Shirley proceeded to ‘examine the missal and the rosary on the inlaid shelf’ (620).<sup>6</sup> Shirley’s curiosity about the departed world of Catholicism, even though it is rejected, adds to Charlotte’s presentation of her character as one who disdains social norms. Elizabeth Gaskell wrote that, in *Shirley Keeldar*, Charlotte depicted ‘What Emily Brontë would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity’.<sup>7</sup> Shirley is seen, in the incident from which the quotation is taken, exhibiting an interest in the old world of Catholicism. Charlotte imagines a character, called Emily, in her juvenilia with Catholic sensibilities. Finally, the disparaging comments made about Emily

<sup>4</sup> Christine Alexander, ed. *The Brontës: Tales of Glass Town, Angria and Gondal*, (Oxford: OUP, 2010) p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander, ed. p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Reference taken from: Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) Page references given parenthetically.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 300

Brontë's dress in Brussels are reimagined in Paulina praying like a 'Catholic or Methodist enthusiast'. This detail echoes Isabella's observation about Heathcliff praying 'like a Methodist' (153). The fact that Heathcliff is not described as praying like a Catholic jars awkwardly at this stage in the argument; however, what can be postulated is that Emily Brontë evinced a fascination with more *enthusiastic* forms of religion.

As pointed out at the start of the chapter, the nature of Emily Brontë's engagement with religion is shadowy. To use the image in the quotation from *Villette* above, it is clothed in a 'gown of shadow'; unlike Charlotte's explicit engagement with religion in her novels, Emily's religious convictions were much more private. It is not the intention of this chapter to claim her as having theological leanings towards Catholicism or even Catholic sympathies in the debates raging around Catholic emancipation in the 1820's and 30's. There have been some writers on Emily Brontë who have made connections between her and Catholicism. B. G. MacCarthy in an article on Emily Brontë, commenting on the fact that her paternal grandmother was raised a Catholic, wrote that 'here we have once again that mixed strain, that conflicting background out of which sometimes a spark of originality is struck'<sup>8</sup>. Also, as well as mooted Catholic traces in the Brontë family, other writers have suggested that Emily may have been drawn to figures from Catholic hagiography. Winifred Gérin, in her biography of Emily Brontë, has suggested affinities between Emily Brontë and Catholic mystics such as Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross in the way she 'attained her soul's release'.<sup>9</sup>

The connection that will be made between Brontë and Catholicism in this chapter lies in the uncomfortable nostalgia present among some Romantic and early Victorian writers for a more connected world that had passed away. The image of Paulina praying is again helpful to explain the idea of Emily Brontë finding creative possibilities in a nostalgic Catholic

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<sup>8</sup> B. G. MacCarthy, 'Emily Brontë', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, (39.153.1950) 15-30, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Gérin, p. 103.

imagination. Her fervent prayers are preceded by the description of her intensity: ‘no furrowed face of adult exile, longing for Europe at Europe’s antipodes, ever bore more legibly the lines of home sickness’ (15). The image of praying like a Catholic overwrought with homesickness speaks of someone who, to employ the imagery of clothing again, does not feel well-dressed for the world they are in. It would be speculative to suggest that Emily Brontë’s statement, ‘I wish to be as God made me’, involved Catholicism to any degree. It is more reasonable to argue that the nostalgic ways in which a Catholic past was imagined provided an elsewhere (in the same way as Irishness) that Emily Brontë reached towards as the object of her nostalgic yearning.

The Protestant Reformation cancelled the claims of the dead on the living in its rejection of the idea that the prayers of the living could bring release from the torments of purgatory. Eamon Duffy expresses it sharply and rewards quotation at length: the ‘Reformation attack on the cult of the dead was more than a polemic against a “false” metaphysical belief: it was an attempt to redefine the boundaries of human community, and, in an act of exorcism, to limit the claims of the past, and the people of the past, on the people of the present’.<sup>10</sup> In a less theological context there was anxiety, expressed by Wordsworth in ‘The world is too much with us’, that the commercial demands of the present were silencing the voice of the past. However, to inflect this anxiety more theologically, it is possible to argue that the Reformation induced a state of uncertainty in terms of people’s bonds with and obligations to the past. William Marshall, in *The World of the Victorian Novel*, during a discussion of the Protestant emphasis on personal calling and resulting individualism, commented that the concomitant insecurities were ‘hardly alleviated by [the] privation of the solace of the confessional’.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Yale: Yale UP, 2005) p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> William H Marshall, *The World of the Victorian Novel*, (Cranbury: Barnes, 1967) pp. 22-23.

Early Victorian England, as felt most keenly in the debate around Catholic emancipation, found it hard to come to terms with its Catholic past. Thomas Carlyle, who articulated Victorian anxieties about society and who shared in the widespread suspicion of Catholicism, nevertheless wrote in a discussion of Shakespeare as a hero that he was the ‘still more melodious priest of a *true* Catholicism’.<sup>12</sup> Later in the same essay he mournfully asked why the ‘sublime’ Catholicism of Dante could not continue.<sup>13</sup> This succeeded bewailing that ‘alas nothing will *continue*’.<sup>14</sup> Carlyle’s alighting on Dante is significant in the light of sympathy that Dante shows for the condition of exile in the opening of his *Inferno*: ‘In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost’.<sup>15</sup> So, *On Heroes and Hero Worship* articulates an awkwardly felt nostalgia for a Catholic past. Carlyle puts it most strongly when he writes that ‘It lasts here for a purpose. Let it last as long as it can’.<sup>16</sup> The essence of Carlyle’s awkward manoeuvres in defining his vision of the ‘true Catholicism’ is his desire not to be ‘unjust to the Old’.<sup>17</sup>

It is in that desire that Emily Brontë’s imagination can be seen as Catholic. Stephen Greenblatt in *Hamlet in Purgatory* has a helpful angle. In the chapter entitled ‘The Rights of Memory’ he explains Thomas More’s worry that the Protestant Reformation would leave a world where ‘each generation would be cut off from the last’ and Greenblatt emphasises the promise of connectedness that is implicit in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.<sup>18</sup> The corollary of this, as Gavin Hopps succinctly expresses it in a recent collection of essays on Byron and the supernatural was that the reformation was a ‘venture of separateness’.<sup>19</sup> This pre-Reformation idea of being connected to the dead is present in Emily Brontë’s poetry and

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<sup>12</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 101.

<sup>15</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, trans. John D. Sinclair, (Oxford: OUP, 1961) p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) p. 144.

<sup>19</sup> Gavin Hopps, ed. *Byron’s Ghosts: The Spectral, the Spiritual and the Supernatural*, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013) p. 5.

prose; there is, particularly in *Wuthering Heights*, communion between the dead and the living. G. E. Harrison expresses the same idea very powerfully: ‘*Wuthering Heights* reads as a scrap of history torn from the communion of the saints of old and flung in the face of the modern world’.<sup>20</sup>

This communion also extends, in another inflection of the ‘spot’ that causes a moment of arrest discussed in chapter one, to particular places; in particular the efficacy of some places to draw someone back to them with a nostalgic longing. Ruins of old, Catholic monasteries and abbeys, discarded by the onward march of Protestant progress, provided inspiration for the Romantic imagination. Along with writers such as Ann Radcliffe and Monk Lewis there was fascination with a departed Catholic world that was more connected to the numinous. An example occurs in an early poem of John Keats, ‘Calidore: A Fragment’, where the protagonist approaches a shore which featured, among other scenes and ‘Objects that look’d out so invitingly’ a ‘little chapel with the cross above / Upholding wreaths of ivy’ (58). There was also - what I call - the motif of the return to the ruined house as a nostalgic focus for departed glory. John Henry Newman helped his hearers to imagine return to the ruined Catholic house in his sermon, ‘The Second Spring’ (1852), to illustrate how Catholicism had been discarded: ‘An old-fashioned house of gloomy appearance, closed in with high walls, with an iron gate, and yews, and the report attaching to it that “Roman Catholics” lived there’.<sup>21</sup> *Wuthering Heights* is one such return. It is a fidelity to place.

It is the possibility of return that is fed by a Catholic imagination with its connection to the dead (Purgatory) and its revisiting of sacred places (Pilgrimage). Emily Brontë would have been surrounded with an evangelical way of viewing the world as a place of exile and danger (the apex of which is found in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*). For example, her father’s sermon preached on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1824, ten days after the Crow Hill bog burst

<sup>20</sup> Cited in, Simon Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> John Henry Newman, ‘The Second Spring’, *A Newman Treasury: Selections from the Prose Works of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, Ed. Charles Frederick Harrold, (London: Longman, 1945), p. 215.



may have terrified her with its apocalyptic imagining of the ‘last and greatest day, when the earth shall be burnt up’. Such imagery may have been perceived by Emily Brontë as a divine rejection of the earth she loved so much.<sup>22</sup> Also, among an Elizabethan book of homilies reprinted in 1844 and approved for the use of Anglican clergy, was one that dealt with Purgatory.<sup>23</sup> ‘The Third Part of the Homily Concerning Prayer’ exhorted listeners to not ‘let us dream any more, that the souls of the dead are anything at all holpen by our prayers’.<sup>24</sup> The grounds for severing connection between the dead and the living are that ‘the sentence of God is unchangeable’.<sup>25</sup> It is evident that the doctrine in this homily was reflected in Patrick Brontë’s own beliefs. In his novelette, ‘The Cottage in the Wood’ (1815), Patrick describes the feelings of Mary after the death of her parents. He writes that death ‘put a *final* separation between her and them (emphasis added) and that her faith ‘pointed to heaven’.<sup>26</sup> The evangelical discarding of the earth is not a world-view in which Emily Brontë could have found a home. She sought to be true to the old, retaining communion with those that were under the earth and allowing herself to be nourished by a Wordsworthian ‘fructifying virtue’ of certain places to which she returns.

The main context in which Emily would have been aware of Roman Catholicism was the debate over Catholic emancipation. In an article on ‘Ireland, and the Catholic Question’ in the October 1828 edition of Blackwood’s magazine, Roman Catholics were described as ‘in the highest degree bigoted, fanatical and intolerant’.<sup>27</sup> The article also exhorted its readers to ‘Look at Ireland’ to see the destructive influence of Catholicism (Catholicism and Irishness were linked in the prevailing attitudes of the time in England). The Catholic question was

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<sup>22</sup> J. Horsfall Turner, ed. *Brontëana: The Rev. Patrick Brontë, A. B., His Collected Works and Life*, (Bingley: Harrison, 1898), p. 215.

<sup>23</sup> An 1802 edition of this title was owned by Patrick Brontë and is currently in the collection at the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

<sup>24</sup> ‘An [sic] Homily or Sermon Concerning Prayer’, *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches*, (Oxford: OUP, 1844) p. 300.

<sup>25</sup> *Homilies*, p.299.

<sup>26</sup> Horsfall Turner ed. p. 114

<sup>27</sup> ‘Ireland, and the Catholic Question’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* volume (24.1828), p. 431.

discussed with animation at the parsonage.<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Brontë described the day they heard about the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Bill and the ‘eagerness’ with which Patrick ‘tore off the cover’ of the day’s newspaper to learn the news.<sup>29</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Catholicism would have been present in the minds of the young Brontës. Thus, it may have entered into the juvenilia of Charlotte imagining an ‘Emily’ being raised as a ‘devout daughter of holy kirk’. Tom Winnifrith comments on Charlotte’s hostility to Roman Catholicism as ‘dislike of the elaborate ritual mingled with a secret hankering after it’.<sup>30</sup> Even Patrick, contrary to the impression that may have been given by the citation of the Crow Hill bog burst sermon above, in letters to the *Leeds Intelligencer* in 1829, espoused a moderate and reasoned approach to the Catholic question. What Emily thought about the question is unknown and is at a tangent to the purpose of this chapter, which is to argue that Emily Brontë’s nostalgic imagination found a more ready home in the world imagined by the Catholic than the Protestant.

Before introducing the poems to be discussed in a consideration of a nostalgic Catholic imagination, there is one more point to be made. In early Victorian England, the terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Superstition’ were virtually synonymous. The ‘Catholic’ was associated with the irrational and shadowy. Indeed it was seen as a ghost to be faced. Wolfe Tone, speaking in support of Catholic Emancipation stated, ‘Let us speak to this *ghastly spectre* of our distempered imagination, the genius of Irish Catholicity’ (emphasis added).<sup>31</sup> The idea of the rational meeting something that is distempered has a parallel with the measured Lockwood (who is concerned to stay clear of ‘heterodox’ opinions) encountering the feverish – such as when he beholds the ‘superstition’ of Heathcliff with much the same

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<sup>28</sup> Patrick Brontë also portrayed his characters discussing Catholic emancipation in his novelette, ‘The Maid of Killarney’, Horsfall Turner ed., pp. 145-146.

<sup>29</sup> Dudley Green, *Patrick Brontë, Father of Genius*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Tom Winnifrith, *The Brontës and their Background: Romance and Reality*, (London: Macmillan, 1988) p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity 1778-1829*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p. 24.

comprehension that the notion of praying for the dead might be viewed by Evangelical Anglicans. In the editor's footnote to Elizabeth Inchbald's, *A Simple Story*, superstition is defined as 'irrational apprehension concerning religion'.<sup>32</sup> It is this sense of 'irrational apprehension', like Heathcliff's expectation of the return of Catherine, that is such a powerful force in *Wuthering Heights*: the nostalgia prompted by Protestant rationalism finds its answer in Catholic superstition.

In the following consideration of how Emily Brontë's nostalgia was fed by a Catholic imagination, she will, as throughout the thesis, be situated as a Wordsworthian poet. This means that there exists, in both poets, a comparable imaginative pull towards connection with the dead and the sacred place. A poem that works imaginatively with Catholic and Protestant perceptions of the world, Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone*, will be used to elucidate the moments in Emily Brontë's poems where, arguably, she is imagining a Catholic world.

### *The White Doe of Rylstone*

The seed for *The White Doe of Rylstone* was planted by the visit of William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Bolton Abbey during the summer of 1807. The poet's subsequent reading of Thomas Whitaker's *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven* provided further nourishment. Whitaker, after recounting the story of the Norton family (a local Catholic family who had fought in the Rising of the North and placed their faith in a banner with the cross and the five wounds of Christ), describes the legend of a white doe, which wandered over Rylstone Fell to Bolton Abbey during the church service each Sunday. In his account, Whitaker speculated on the identity of the doe as perhaps the 'soul of one of the Nortons who had taken up its abode in that animal'. However, after considering that a

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. J. M. S. Tompkins (Oxford: OUP, 2009) p. 87.

‘wild stag’ might have been a more fitting receptacle for such a battle-weary soul, he came to the conclusion that the doe might have been the soul of a ‘beautiful and injured female’.<sup>33</sup>

It was the idea of an ‘injured female’ that interested Wordsworth. Norton had nine daughters and Wordsworth’s poem focused on the story of one of them. The poem opens with a description of a Sunday morning service at Bolton Priory and the doe makes its accustomed pilgrimage. The ideas of three individuals in the congregation, a mother, an elderly man and a student are discussed and their imaginative conceits about the doe, their ‘fancies wild’ (326), are seemingly dismissed by the narrator.<sup>34</sup> This is where Wordsworth shows what he is attempting in the poem. In a letter to Coleridge, during initial preparations for publication, Wordsworth wrote that ‘the principal objects and agents, such as the banner and the doe, produced their influences and effects not by powers naturally inherent in them but such as they were endued with by the imagination of the human minds on whom they operated’.<sup>35</sup> Put differently, this is a poem about the use and abuse of the imagination.

The poem, in the following cantos, continues to tell the ‘mortal story’ (337) of Richard Norton’s decision to fight in the Rising of the North and the vain attempts of his son, Francis, to dissuade him. Emily Norton was engaged by her father to make a banner with ‘The sacred Cross; and figured there / The five dear wounds our Lord did bear’ (357-8). Norton and his sons (excepting Francis) then took the banner to fight in the battle near Durham. Nevertheless, Francis decides to follow them, not to fight but to show loyalty. Before leaving, he enjoins Emily to stay at Rylstone Hall and not follow him to the battle. He points out a doe, ‘more white than snow’ (563), feeding nearby, arguing that even it will desert the Norton family in the inevitable defeat. Francis continues to draw on nature to illustrate the coming humiliation of the Norton family by saying that Emily is the ‘last leaf

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<sup>33</sup> Kristine Dugas, ed. *The White Doe of Rylstone; or The Fate of the Nortons*, By William Wordsworth, 1815, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> All references to *The White Doe of Rylstone* taken from: William Wordsworth, *The White Doe of Rylstone; or The Fate of the Nortons*, ed. Kristine Dugas, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988). Line references given parenthetically.

<sup>35</sup> Dugas, ed. p. 11.

which by heaven's decree / Must hang upon a blasted tree' (571-2). He then goes to join his brothers and father who are subsequently defeated; however, Francis takes the banner and returns with it to Bolton Priory to 'lay the relic on the shrine' (1451). He is intercepted by forces loyal to Queen Elizabeth, killed and the banner taken. Emily Norton, who is now the only one of the family left, at the end of the fifth canto hears the 'funeral dirge' (1562) of Francis and realises he is dead. She now wanders the area alone and is followed by the white doe that Francis claimed would desert her like all else. Eventually, Emily Norton dies and the reader discovers that it is her grave that the doe visits faithfully each Sunday at the start of the poem.

Wordsworth made some alterations to the story as found in Whitaker. A key change was to make Emily Norton a Protestant, taught by her mother to 'worship in simplicity / The invisible God, and take for guide / the faith reformed and purified' (1042-4); this is the same faith as her brother, Francis, who stated that, along with Emily, 'we have breathed the breath / Together of a purer faith' (573-4). Wordsworth uses this 'purer faith' (particularly the quiet suffering of Emily Norton) to contrast with the 'shock of zeal' (581) of trust in an 'unhallowed banner' (505). The distrust of symbols is elaborated by Francis. Besides referring to the banner he also, by way of seeking metaphors for the fall of the Norton family, points to the doe (who was just feeding a few steps away) and claims that she will 'to her peaceful woods / Return' (564/5) as if the Nortons had never existed.

Of course, as seen at the end of the poem, the doe does return and with this can be introduced the problems with Wordsworth's 'purer' and, in this poem Protestant, imagination. The main problem is that the Catholic imagination it should replace is rendered with much more poignancy. Richard Norton's plea to the other chiefs to be inspired by the banner and fight fails and he contemplates the banner:

...he upraised his head

Towards that Imagery once more  
 But the familiar prospect shed  
 Despondency unfelt before  
 A shock of intimations vain,  
 Blank fear, and superstitious pain. (866-71)

The wording here recalls Wordsworth's own account of the loss of imaginative vision in the 'Ode' and Richard Norton attributes his own failure to imagine the power in the banner by reference to the teaching of Emily's Protestant mother: 'far back my mind must go / to find the wellspring of this woe' (891-2). There is something of the doomed and noble rebel about Richard Norton that excites the imagination far more than the 'faith reformed and purified' (1044) of his late wife. Also, the inadvertent use of Catholic imagery works against the rejection of a Catholic imagination; even Emily Norton's mother is described by the narrator as a 'saint' (1038). Emily herself attracts Catholic language when she is described as 'The consecrated Emily' (998) at the start of the fourth canto as she waits for the return of her father and brothers. A few lines after this the doe reappears, a 'lonely *relic*' (1007 emphasis added) but Emily does not notice.

'Consecrated' and 'relic' suggest something touched by a Catholic imagination.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that Emily is described, at the moment when she does not perceive the doe as 'thought-bewildered' (1015), but a few lines later she remembers the Protestant faith taught her by her mother (1030-40). It is the bewilderment of thought that prevents her from perceiving the doe, the same bewilderment that affects her father as discussed earlier. She pays slight regard to the visible doe, yet remembers her mother's teaching about the 'invisible God' (1043). This prioritising of the invisible over the visible is the rejection of the sacramental for the abstract. Arguably, Wordsworth succeeded in his aim to direct sympathy

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<sup>36</sup> The *OED* states that 'relic' is particularly applicable in a Catholic context. See 'relic' n., Def. 1, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2009

towards the suffering Emily rather than the speculations about whom the doe may be at the start of the poem. However, the nostalgic attraction to relics from a former way of imagining the world remains strong.

*The 'White Doe of Rylstone' and 'Wuthering Heights'*

The New Year's Day marriage of Hareton and Catherine, and even their developing courtship, lacks the emotional resonance of Lockwood's contemplation of the graves in the last paragraph of the novel. *Wuthering Heights* ends where *The White Doe of Rylstone* begins: with attempts to imagine the significance of the grave. The narrator's declaration, at the end of the first canto that he is going to tell 'A tale of tears, a mortal story' (337) (with its implicit rejection of the idea that the doe might be a manifestation of the soul of one of the Nortons) is another way of phrasing Lockwood's wondering 'how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth' (414). This refusal to admit 'unquiet slumbers' is despite the teasing of the 'moths fluttering' and the 'wind sighing'. Lockwood, much like Emily Norton herself as discussed above, does not notice the visible signs of presence around him.

There is a determination to keep the dead in their graves. Lockwood's confession of his inability to imagine anything 'unquiet' about the 'sleepers' in that 'quiet earth' seems a defensive manoeuvre. Arguably, his use of the adjective, 'quiet', is as much of an imaginative imposition as that performed by the congregation members at the start of Wordsworth's poem. The use of 'quiet' has the quality of insistence about it. This is much like Wordsworth's exhortation in the first canto of *The White Doe of Rylstone* to 'Lie silent in your graves ye dead! / Lie quiet in your churchyard bed!' (69-70) as he imagines the

pilgrimage of the doe to Emily Norton's grave. The use of exclamation marks gives the sense that the narrator, with great effort, is endeavouring to stop the dead from awakening.

While the focus is on Lockwood's meditation by the graves it is noticeable how different his diction is in its softness. It is as if his experience of the story of *Wuthering Heights* has changed him and, in particular, his own ghostly vision. To quote from Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas': 'A deep distress hath humaniz'd my Soul' (36). Indeed, this poem is a useful one when considering the ponderings by the grave. 'Elegiac Stanzas' is, like the end of *Wuthering Heights*, an attempt to imagine the quiet as unquiet. However, in Wordsworth's poem, he admits of the impossibility (arising from the death of his brother at sea) of imagining anything else but the 'unquiet' storm: 'Oh, 'tis a passionate work'. The object lesson in the poem is the admission of the world of storm, caused by grief, and the rejection of the recollection of Peele castle 'sleeping on a glassy sea'. So, in 'Elegiac Stanzas', Wordsworth chooses the scene as presented to him in the picture as it connects him with his dead brother. Lockwood, however, chooses to reject the storm of 'unquiet slumbers' and his decision to not acknowledge connection with the dead shows how his distress has not 'humanised' his soul.

This problem over what to do with the dead is the faultline between a Protestant imagination, which rejects the possibility of communion with the dead, and a Catholic imagination, which is more hospitable to such a connection. Lockwood beholds Heathcliff calling out to Catherine's spirit in the third chapter of *Wuthering Heights* and describes it as 'a piece of *superstition* on the part of my landlord, which belied, oddly, his apparent sense' (35 emphasis added). There is incomprehension at one person trying to reach out to a spirit dear to them in the purgatory of the moors (that Catherine is in a purgatory of sorts is implied when she says to Heathcliff before she dies: 'should a word of mine distress you hereafter, think I feel the same distress underground'). By the end of the novel, Lockwood has not



changed; he has not admitted of an active commerce between the living and the dead. Protestant rationalism, and the rejection of any kind of purgatory cannot understand Catholic superstition.<sup>37</sup>

Lockwood's arrival at Wuthering Heights in the first chapter of the novel can be viewed as a clash of imaginations. This is seen just before he passes the 'threshold' of the house where he stopped to 'admire' (5). The verb, as well as confirming the subject/object relationship between Lockwood and the house, casts him as the sophisticated Londoner admiring a rustic dwelling. This relationship is confirmed in Lockwood's desire to have 'requested a short history of the place' (5). This utterance of the Regency gentleman, as if he is on the grand tour, is rudely dispelled by the 'surly' Heathcliff waiting for his entrance. Lockwood notices the 'wilderness of crumbling griffins' and 'detected the date "1500"' (5). Both the fact that the 'grotesque carving' of 'griffins' is freighted with a Gothic medievalism, and the date above the door, suggest the world of Wuthering Heights belonging to pre-Reformation 'superstition'. This sense of a past world is confirmed by the use of 'crumbling': a dying world that has more imaginative appeal than the rationalism whose representative is at its 'threshold'.

To elucidate this point about a clash of imaginations, it will be useful to refer to *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) by Sydney Owenson.<sup>38</sup> As a national tale, it is aiming to provide a homogenising story to unite the four nations of the United Kingdom.<sup>39</sup> A dissipated English protagonist, Horatio, is sent to his father's estate in the wilds of Connaught to atone for his

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<sup>37</sup> Cameron Dodworth, in an illuminating article, argues that Heathcliff and Catherine choose Purgatory over Heaven: 'Their mutual desire to spend the afterlife in some sort of static purgatory on the moors is quite apparent'. Cameron Dodworth, 'The Mystery of the Moors: Purgatory and the Absence/Presence of Evil in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, (37.2.2012), 125-135, p. 132.

<sup>38</sup> Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, (London: OUP, 2008). Page references given parenthetically.

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Brontë's novelette, 'The Maid of Killarney' anticipates *The Wild Irish Girl* in its portrayal of the young Englishman, Albion, who is charmed by a young Irish woman, Flora, and marries her at the end of the story. A hint of Patrick's support for the union is discerned in Captain Loughlean's words: 'Opposed to the common enemy, Scotch and English, Welsh and Irish, Whig and Tory, melting and mixing, form but one mass, and that is borne against the foe, with irresistible destruction!' Horsfall Turner, ed., p. 146.

debt-ridden ways. While there, he encounters a noble Irish family and attends Catholic mass. I quote his reaction for the purpose of comparing it with Lockwood's reaction to *Wuthering Heights*:

What a religion is this! How finely does it harmonise with the weakness of our nature; how seducingly it speaks to the senses; how forcibly it works on the passions; how strongly it seizes on the imagination; how interesting its forms; how graceful its ceremonies; how awful its rites – what a captivating, what a *picturesque* faith! Who would not become its proselyte, were it not for the stern opposition of reason – the cold suggestion of philosophy (50).

'Seducingly' evokes a pull between attraction and mistrust which is the same polarity that actuates Lockwood's responses to the younger Catherine. However, while Owenson imagines an accommodation between Irish Catholicism and English Protestantism through the developing relationship of Horatio and Glorvina, Lockwood remains the outsider at the end of *Wuthering Heights* and there is no accommodation with the past. The imaginative temptations are strong. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, Horatio talks of breathing in this 'region of superstition' and seeing it in terms of being 'infected'; this is in addition to the fight between his 'scepticism' and his 'inclination' (46). This same tug is felt in *The White Doe of Rylstone* through Wordsworth's endeavours to resist imaginative apprehension that something supernatural inheres in the doe with Horatio's 'cold suggestion of philosophy'.<sup>40</sup>

Emily Brontë, as stated in the previous paragraph, does not aim to reach an imaginative compromise with the past. In *Wuthering Heights*, the superstitious is given more imaginative weight than the compromise, in keeping with the trajectory of a national tale, that replaces it in the marriage of Hareton and Catherine. Emily Brontë's imaginative vision is energised by the restlessness of the past and her determination to keep it 'separate' rather

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<sup>40</sup> Owenson's choice of name for her protagonist is an implied allusion to the words of Hamlet: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (I.v.168/9)

than have it subsumed. Her imagination is more at home in the Catholic world of superstition than Protestant reason.

Books can be used to illustrate the difference between the two imaginations. Reading material has a hard time in *Wuthering Heights*. During Lockwood's reading of Catherine's diary written in the pages of her books, (and so expressing preference for immediate experience over written ideas) he learns of Joseph's attempt to break up the communing of Heathcliff and Catherine through a forcible exhortation to read: 'they's good books enugh if ye'll read them; sit ye dahn and think uh yer sowls' (26). By connecting reading with thinking 'uh yer souls', Joseph is reaffirming in his zealous, demotic way the Reformation elevation of the pulpit over the altar. The communion of Heathcliff and Catherine, 'in the arch of the dresser', is torn down by an injunction to read.

Catherine's response to Joseph, when she rejects the reading material by hurling 'it into the dog-kennel' and vowing that 'I hated a good book' (26) parallels Richard Norton and the rebels in *The White Doe of Rylstone*. When they reach Durham Cathedral, Wordsworth writes that they 'Sang mass, - and tore the book of prayer, - And trod the Bible beneath their feet' (720-1). The motive behind the rejection of a 'good book' in both *The White Doe of Rylstone* and *Wuthering Heights* is the same: the book prevents communion; the Catholic imagination prefers the immediacy of experience over the abstraction of print.

The 'crumbling' house of *Wuthering Heights* is consecrated by the immediacy of the encounters between Heathcliff and Catherine. When he returns to *Wuthering Heights*, Nelly Dean recounts to Lockwood Heathcliff's curious choice of abode with his old persecutor as 'an attachment to the house where we lived together' (122). This is the power of nostalgic attachment over the reconfiguring of a new synthesis (Hareton and Catherine's choice to reside at Thrushcross Grange at the end of the novel seems like an act of betrayal). This power is missed by the Protestant-taught Francis Norton in *The White Doe of Rylstone*.

When he prophesies the fall of Rylstone Hall to Emily Norton, he uses imagery of animals forsaking their home:

...-The Hound

Be parted from his ancient ground:

The blast will sweep us all away,

One desolation, one decay! (556-9).

He even imagines the white doe returning 'to her peaceful woods' (564) as if Rylstone Hall had never existed. Yet the loyalty of the doe to Emily Norton proves Francis' words wrong, as Wordsworth is keen to point out: 'But here her Brother's words have failed' (1804).

Moreover, the moment before the doe reappears to Emily, Wordsworth describes her as sitting:

beneath a mouldered tree,

A self-surviving leafless Oak,

By unregarded age from stroke

Of ravage saved (1648-51).

The symbolism of the oak is of that which survives the ravages of time. The use of 'unregarded' suggests that which belongs to the past but still provides shelter. Like *Wuthering Heights*, the 'unregarded' has greater resonance than that which displaces it. Both are consecrated by deeper associations.

The idea of nostalgic returning to a place consecrated by past associations will be discussed when Emily Brontë's poetry is considered in the next section. However, there is one more angle to be considered where *Wuthering Heights* could be considered as being powered by a nostalgic Catholic imagination: that is in the use of language and imagery of devotion. There are two passages in *Wuthering Heights* where the language of saintly devotion is used in relation to Heathcliff's relationship to Catherine; both occur in

conversations with Nelly Dean. The first is just after the death of Catherine Linton and the second is where Heathcliff recounts his digging down to Catherine's coffin.

Nelly discovers Heathcliff in the park of Thrushcross Grange:

...leant against an old ash tree, his hat off, and the hair soaked with the dew that had gathered on the budded branches, and fell pattering around him. He had been standing a long time in that position, for I saw a pair of ousels passing and repassing scarcely three feet from him, busy in building their nest and regarding his proximity no more than that of a piece of timber. (203)

There is something unnatural in the naturalism of this description; the dew-soaked hair and the fearlessness of the ousels shows a reincorporation into nature, as well as nature's validation of his devotion. Heathcliff's is a completely irrational, yet natural, stance. His vigil is described using imagery of abundance, 'hair soaked with the dew'. This feeling of an outsized and passionate devotion is intensified a few paragraphs later where Heathcliff 'dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears' (204-5). The imaginative centring of this passion on the ash tree is developed with Nelly's observation that there 'were several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree' (205). This passion of Heathcliff in the garden of Thrushcross Grange has faint echoes of the passion of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Nelly's rationalist incomprehension of Heathcliff's emotional agony reinforces its hagiographical tone and recalls Lockwood's similar incomprehension of Heathcliff's behaviour during his stay at Wuthering Heights.

In *The White Doe of Rylstone*, Wordsworth disavows an imagination that perceives inherent life in objects such as the banner of the five wounds; he portrays this most poignantly in the failure of Richard Norton to inspire the rebel army with the 'sanctity of old' (844). The incomprehension and futility of Norton's devotion finds an echo in Heathcliff's

outsized devotion to Catherine. Wordsworth, despite a subliminal attraction to the old ways of Catholic devotion, at the end chooses a more naturalistic perspective on the weekly pilgrimage of the doe. However, Emily Brontë's investment in Heathcliff's devotion is such that, when it ends in his death, there is nowhere for her imagination to rest apart from in the possibility of unquiet slumbers.

The tone of devotion that is uncomprehended is intensified with Heathcliff's instructions to the sexton to remove the earth from Catherine's coffin. His insistence that Catherine's face 'is hers yet' (349) recalls the hagiography of the incorrupt bodies of saints (an imaginative hagiography that Wordsworth rejects in *The White Doe of Rylstone*); it also, like the ousels being unafraid of Heathcliff, lends imaginative sanction to their love. Heathcliff's response to Nelly Dean's post-Reformation horror that he 'disturbed the dead' (349) is to turn it on its head and insist that the dead Catherine has 'disturbed me, night and day through eighteen years' (349). This imagination of restless commerce between the living and the dead belongs to a Catholic world. Finally, Heathcliff's assertion to Nelly Dean that he 'ought to have sweat blood from the anguish of my yearning, from the fervour of my supplications' (351) once again situates Heathcliff's separation from Catherine as a Gethsemane inflected agony in blood-soaked hues – this intense visual imagining is Catholic.

The poet's claim in the final canto of *The White Doe of Rylstone* that he has quitted 'unsubstantial dreams' (1859) in his rendering of the tale of the white doe is undermined by his subsequent account of the final days of Emily Norton. His description of 'The re-ascent in sanctity!' (1866) of his Protestant-conceived character after the death of her family has left her bereft, far from emphasising her humanity, suggests her attaining to sainthood, a Catholic concept. The imaginative colouring of a Catholic world that Wordsworth does not fully succeed in burying (despite his stated intention in the letter to Coleridge) is more welcome in *Wuthering Heights* with Emily Brontë's greater ease at the idea of communion with the dead.

Wordsworth's attempts to bury the Catholic (through his conception of Emily Norton as a Protestant) has parallels with Charlotte Brontë's treatment in *Villette*. Yet, in Paul Emmanuel, it is felt as an irresistible force. One does not quite believe Lucy Snowe, when she says of Paul Emmanuel that 'I did not reckon among the proofs of his greatness, either the act of confession, or the *saint-worship*' (572 emphasis added). It has been seen, in this section, that saint worship held attraction for both Wordsworth and Emily Brontë. Paul Emmanuel's constancy for 'twenty years' echoes the period of time for which Catherine Earnshaw's spirit haunts in *Wuthering Heights*. A Catholic imagination is a 'ghostly troubler' (*Villette* 600) in *Wuthering Heights*.

*The festal hall and the return to the old house: A Catholic imagination in Emily Brontë's  
Poetry*

Having developed the idea of a Catholic imagination as a 'ghostly troubler' in the preceding sections of this chapter, it is now time to discuss it as a presence in the poetry of Emily Brontë, particularly in some of the shorter fragments. These poems are often more recognisable as belonging to the lives of the dramatis personae of Gondal. Brontë colours this imaginary world with hues borrowed from the world of England past, with a sense of connection to the past and attraction to the sacred spot that belongs to pre-reformation England.<sup>41</sup> This colouring is also profoundly nostalgic with its implied restlessness and search for a dwelling place.

The first fragment is chosen for its evocation of the doom that Francis Norton prophesied for Emily Norton: 'But thou, my sister, doomed to be / The last leaf which by

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<sup>41</sup> Dinah Birch writes of a 'faint but unrealized suggestion of medievalism' when discussing Emily Brontë's poetry: Dinah Birch, 'Emily Brontë', Claude Rawson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) p. 413.

heaven's decree / Must hang upon a blasted tree' (570-2). Similarly, Emily Brontë vividly renders the experience of being cast-off:

The wind was rough which tore

The leaf from its parent tree

The fate was cruel which bore

The withering corpse to me

We wander on we have no rest

It is a dreary way

What shadow is it

That ever moves before [my] eyes

It has a brow of ghostly whiteness

The simple statement of Brontë's trimeter, when compared with the apocalyptic declamation of Wordsworth's tetrameter in the lines quoted above, effects a brutal finality. The elaborate explication of Wordsworth's chosen metaphor of the tree is met with Brontëan direct statement, 'The wind was rough', which is brutal in its simplicity. As in *The White Doe of Rylstone*, what is being implied (due to the freighting of trees with notions of family history) is the disintegration of a family.

However, the tone is not quite elegiac; there is too much activity for that to be said of the fragment. The present continuous tense implied in 'withering corpse' evokes process by contrast with the finality of the leaf being torn from the tree. The sense of restless movement is developed in the parataxis of 'We wander on we have no rest'; the onomatopoeic metre of



the line suggests walking. The 'dreary way' states that there is a road to be travelled after the tearing of the leaf in the first four lines. This restless activity remains in the final three lines with the shadow that 'ever moves' (emphasis added). Framing the last three lines as a question avoids the shutting-down of statement and the 'brow of ghostly whiteness' works against a final rest.

The restless nostalgic energy in this fragment is answered by the long after-life of Emily Norton. There are not only the spectral possibilities raised by the doe itself, but the lingering of Emily Norton after she has metaphorically fallen from the tree, for the whole of the seventh canto. Wordsworth's insistence, with the italicisation in 'she *hath* wandered, long and far' (1630), shows his interest in preserving her after the final act of the destruction of the Norton clan. This is confirmed by his development of Francis' words quoted above; Wordsworth describes Emily as:

Herself most like a stately Flower,  
 (Such have I seen) whom chance of birth  
 Hath separated from its kind,  
 To live and die in a shady bower,  
 Single on the gladsome earth. (1653-7)

This is a much gentler doom than hanging, in Francis' words, 'on a blasted tree'. Despite the poignant evocation of a group who have passed, Wordsworth and Emily Brontë resist the finality of elegy and the sterility of epitaph. Both poets show reluctance to administer the final stroke with their pens and this results in the ghostly troubling of the past agitating the present.

In her notes to Emily Brontë's fragment, Janet Gezari compares the fragment to Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Mutability*. The central paradox in Shelley's short poem that 'Nought may

endure but Mutability' is explored by both Brontë and Wordsworth.<sup>42</sup> It consists of an attraction to a family, the 'parent tree', which has passed into the legendary and spectral, yet the decision to imagine something other than death (Emily Norton becomes the 'Daughter of the Eternal prime' [1929]) insists on mutability. This means that the past troubles the present.

The same mutability, arising from the imaginative invocation of the past through elegy, is also felt in one of Emily Brontë's short poems that imagine a possible Gondal character fleeing from festivity:

The inspiring music's thrilling sound  
 The glory of the festal day  
 The glittering splendour rising round  
 Have passed like all earth's joys away

Forsaken by that Lady fair  
 She glides unheeding through them all  
 Covering the brow to hide the tear  
 That still though checked trembles to fall

She hurries through the outer Hall  
 And up the stairs through galleries dim  
 That murmur to the breezes' call  
 The night-wind's lonely vesper hymn

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Shelley, ed. Vol 3. p2.

The first verse suggests celebration and richness with adjectives such as ‘inspiring’ and ‘thrilling’, here probably used in the sense of being piercing and penetrating. A rich impression on the senses has been made but it has ‘passed like all earth’s joys away’. This verse finds a parallel in lines from *The White Doe of Rylstone* which describe the environment of the doe’s peregrinations:

Here walks amid the mournful waste  
Of prostrate altars, shrines defaced,  
And floors encumbered with rich show  
Of fret-work imagery laid low (1908-11)

The ‘rich show’ in both poems is ‘forsaken’ and the ornamentation is rejected; in Wordsworth’s poem by those who dismantled Bolton Priory, and in Brontë’s by the ‘Lady fair’ whom the poetic voice observes (Wordsworth’s use of ‘defaced’, with its connotation of an unjust act of vandalism, implies a sympathetic identification with an erased Catholicism).

The reasons for the woman’s departure from the ‘glory of the festal day’ are unknown. The use of ‘unheeding’ suggests preoccupation; with ‘glides’, it imparts a ghostlike quality. Brontë intensifies this sense of being from somewhere else in the third verse by her apparent entrance ‘through the outer hall’; it is as if Brontë imagines her as coming from outside the dwelling. Like Emily Norton, there is something of a Coleridgean unearthly Geraldine-like creature about this observed ‘Lady fair’. Both Geraldine, in *Christabel*, and Emily Brontë’s character are revealed in a supernatural moment of frozen time when ‘There is not wind enough to twirl / The one red leaf (67). The unearthliness of Brontë’s character is also portrayed by the moment frozen in time with ‘the tear / That still though checked trembles to fall’. There is an echo of Keats’ observation on the freezing of time in the ‘Ode to a Grecian Urn’ with the ‘happy boughs! that cannot shed / Your leaves’ (62). Stillness and process are in equipoise. However, ‘trembles’ is freighted heavily with

the physical movement of the tear and the inevitability that the tear in this line, ‘though checked’, will inevitably fall and disappear. Brontë poignantly evokes the inevitability of change.

In the final verse the verb ‘hurries’ disturbs the impression of suspended animation, and speed is sustained as she moves ‘up the stairs through galleries dim’. The use of ‘dim’ gives a dreamlike quality to the hall. Personification evokes still further this air of unreality as the galleries ‘murmur to the breezes’ call’. The dwelling’s responsiveness to its environment forms a contrast to the ‘unheeding’ lady as she moves through the hall. Presumably she does not hear ‘The night-wind’s lonely vesper hymn’ as the ‘galleries’ respond antiphonally to the ‘breezes’ call’.

So, this poem features a ‘Lady fair’ who ‘unheeding’ passes through ‘the glittering splendour rising round’ (an incense-like image). These ‘joys’ have now ‘passed’. The intensity and mystery in the descriptive detail strengthens the sense that this passing is mourned. Faint religious hues enter through the use of ‘festal day’, with its connotations of a Catholic saint’s day, and the reference to a ‘vesper hymn’. Neither of these references are specifically Catholic but, when set in the poem’s context of luxuriant festivity heard in the plosive *g*, both suggest the imagination of a past occasion imagined in a recognisably pre-Reformation Gondal location. The writing anticipates Lucy Snowe’s drug-induced wanderings among the fete in the town of Vilette: ‘I found myself, with the suddenness of magic, plunged amidst a gay, joyous living crowd’ (549). The dream-like nature of the experience is suggested by the personification of Imagination: “‘Rise!’ she said. “Sluggard! This night I will have *my* will; nor shall thou prevail”” (547). Catholic festivities awe the Protestant Lucy as ‘she glides unheeding through them all’. Perhaps at the heart of this short poem by Emily Brontë is the resistance of an imagination that eschews spectacle to one that makes a guilty home in the world of festivity.

A sense of enchantment and a colouring by a pre-reformation world is also present in the next short poem written the following year in 1837. The pull of a Catholic imagination is stronger in the implied anxiety about the place of the dead:

Start not upon the minster wall  
 Sunshine is shed in holy calm  
 And lonely though my footsteps fall  
 The saints shall shelter thee from harm

Shrink not if it be summer noon  
 This shadow should right welcome be  
 These stairs are steep but landed soon  
 We'll rest us long and quietly

What though our path be o'er the dead  
 They slumber soundly in the tomb  
 And why should mortals fear to tread  
 The pathway to their future home?

Janet Gezari cites a connection made between this poem and an early poem by Byron, 'Lines inscribed upon a cup formed from a Skull', which humorously imagines the shock that one may get at being invited to drink from such a vessel and elaborates a preference for holding the 'sparkling grape' (vol. 6 line 3) over being in the grave.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Byron's poem from its opening line situates the central question as being the presence of spirit (Alison Milbank points out that many of Byron's contemporaries saw him tending in the direction of

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<sup>43</sup> All references to Byron's poetry taken from: *The Works of Lord Byron*, 6 vol, (London: John Murray, 1829). Volume and line number given parenthetically.

a crypto-Catholicism<sup>44</sup>). The drinker is invited, in a double injunction, to ‘Start not – nor deem my spirit fled’ (vol. 6 line 1). The line enjoins against shock but also acknowledges the existence of spirit.

Brontë’s poem contains the same injunction. The interlocutor encourages a calm response to a place that has awed the person addressed. The instruction to ‘start not’ is aided by the soothing reassurance of the second line, ‘Sunshine is shed in holy calm’ evoking a place suffused with a religious imagination. The second thought in the first verse contrasts isolation, suggested by the ‘lonely’ sound of footsteps, with the protection of community offered by the ‘shelter’ of saints. The invocation of saintly protection is an explicit image from a Catholic world; but this is clearly a place in which the person addressed feels ill-at-ease.

The reassuring voice of the interlocutor is also felt in the second stanza. The sense of the first two lines is their encouragement to ‘Shrink not’ from a ‘shadow’ that, as it is a ‘summer noon’, should actually be ‘welcome’ rather than seen as a threat. In the statement, ‘We’ll rest us long and quietly’, arrival at the end of a journey is discerned. The third verse continues the speaker’s efforts to calm fears. The first line sounds as if he is answering, and even dismissing, his fellow traveller’s objections to travelling ‘o’er the dead’. Whether this is a literal walking over the grave slabs in a minster is beside the point; what is important is that questions of commerce between the living and the dead are being considered. A Lockwoodian insistence on quiet slumbers emerges in the assertion that ‘They slumber soundly in the tomb’, a line meant to provide assurance that no ghosts will be awakened despite walking ‘o’er the dead’. This assertion does not sit comfortably with the promise of the shelter of the saints in the first stanza.

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<sup>44</sup> Alison Milbank, ‘The Explained Supernatural in Don Juan’ in Gavin Hopps, ed. p. 181.

What we have in this poem, is the working out in an archaic Catholic world of the contradictory beliefs felt in Lockwood's pondering by the graveside at the end of *Wuthering Heights*. The question in the last two lines implies the finding of a home in the grave.

The wording of the question 'And why should mortals fear to tread / The pathway to their future home', has an air of moralising piety about it. It is as if the speaker is seeking to draw conventional graveside epigrams about contemplating one's own mortality from the tombs that they behold. The imaginative colouring of the final verse is very different to the first; now the dead are immaterial rather than being the sustaining presence in the 'holy calm' of the saints. The question this poem poses, and does not answer, is the nature of the presence of the dead. It is possible that the third verse is a second speaker answering the imaginative intuitions of the first with dismissive sermonising. Certainly the declamatory tone of the final verse is different to the hushed nuances of the first and second. To return to Byron's poem, by way of bringing the discussion of this Brontë poem to a close, the image of a drink being offered is worthy of note. Behind it is an inversion of the Homeric idea that, in the underworld, a ghost has to be offered a drink before it will speak.<sup>45</sup> With Byron, the offering of a drink in a skull evokes possibilities of connection with the dead. In Brontë's poem, the speaker leads an awe-struck beholder into the imaginative possibilities of a world that existed before the reformation.

An illuminating poem to be considered as part of this discussion of a Catholic imagination in Emily Brontë's poetry is one in which the right relation of the dead to the living is explored in an explicitly recognisable Gondal setting:

The organ swells the trumpets sound

The lamps in triumph glow

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<sup>45</sup> See *The Odyssey of Homer*, ed. Richard Wilding, (Brighton: The Book Guild, 2011), Bk. 11, line 100.

And none of all those thousands round  
 Regards who sleeps below

Those haughty eyes that tears should fill  
 Glance clearly cloudlessly

Those bounding breasts that grief should fill  
 From thought of grief are free

His subjects and his soldiers there  
 They blessed his rising bloom

But none a single sigh can spare  
 To breathe above his tomb

Comrades in arms I've looked to mark  
 One shade of feeling swell

As your feet trod above the dark  
 Recesses of his cell

Fannie Ratchford, in *Gondal's Queen* sees this poem as about the coronation of Augusta Geraldine Almeda in the cathedral where Julius Brenzaida is buried (both are characters in Emily Brontë's Gondal saga).<sup>46</sup> The first two lines evoke the sounds and sights of ecclesiastical pomp with a sense of ascendancy in 'swell' and the 'trumpets sound'. The nub of the poem, however, is found in the last two lines of the first verse in the lack of 'regard'

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<sup>46</sup> Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford, *Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse by Emily Jane Brontë*, (Austin: Texas UP, 1955), p. 125.



for those who ‘sleep below’. The living, in their celebration, are unaware of the dead who lie beneath their feet.

The following verse strengthens this idea by emphasising the emotional disconnection with the dead that lie beneath. ‘Tears should fill’ and ‘grief should thrill’ but instead the eyes are ‘haughty’. The action of the eyes, as they ‘Glance clearly cloudlessly’ betrays the shallowness of any felt emotion in the brevity implied in ‘Glance’. This shallowness is also felt in ‘cloudlessly’ where the sound falls away to the end of the line. It is as if the bass resonance felt in the first verse in fact has no weight of communion and disappears in the susurrating hiss of ‘cloudless’. The lack of emotional weight contrasts with the resonance in ‘thrill’; it is worth dwelling on the word. The sense in which Emily Brontë would have used it includes ‘a penetrating feeling of influx and emotion’.<sup>47</sup> Brontë is contrasting an emotional state that penetrates with one that simply glances emptily, implicit in the transparency of ‘clearly cloudlessly’ (Even the plosive sound in ‘bounding breasts’ in the following line points up this contrast). However, ‘thrill’ also has further resonance in a use of the word that would probably have been obsolete by the time that Emily Brontë was writing where it was used of a weapon breaking through armour.<sup>48</sup> The phrase, ‘grief should thrill’ evokes the state where the dead have claims on the living rather than being free from ‘thought of grief’.

A mourning of past greatness is felt in the third stanza. The alternate rhyming of ‘bloom’ with ‘tomb’ hints at the idea of the ‘tomb’ being a source of growth. This is also felt in the rhyming of glow/below and swell/cell in the first and last verses respectively. The rhyme highlights the main conceit in the poem which is the life that is to be had by regarding the dead. Instead what has happened is that the triumph of ascendancy has resulted in the ignoring of ancestry as the speaker states in the final stanza where he has ‘looked to mark / One shade of feeling swell’. There, the depth, implicit in ‘shade’, counterpoints the

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<sup>47</sup> ‘thrill’ n., Def. 3, *OED*.

<sup>48</sup> ‘thrill’ v., Def. 5. *OED*.

shallowness in ‘cloudlessly’. This sense of hidden depth is felt in the use of ‘dark / Recesses’. Indeed the placing of this word at the start of the final line suggests that there are unknown depths to be reached of which those who ‘trod above’ are ignorant. The use of ‘cell’ has monastic overtones as well as that of imprisonment.

It is not in the reasonable supposition that the poem is set in a place of worship that the idea of a Catholic imagination inheres, but rather, it is in the contrast of two ways of viewing the world: one that is alienated and one that is connected. The poem portrays the congregation, gathered for a celebration, for whom the past is dead and those who have died are passed away. This is along the same lines as Thomas More’s concern that the removal of purgatory would annul the connection between the dead and the living, just as the speaker in Emily Brontë’s poem is troubled by this connection not being acknowledged. It is the question of the reality of this connection, among a nostalgic consideration of past greatness that has energised the poems considered and will give imaginative intensity to the love between Heathcliff and Catherine.

The final poem to be considered is short enough to be a fragment but it is haiku-like in its distillation of a complete thought:

Heaven’s glory shone where he was laid  
 In life’s decline  
 I turned me from that young saint’s bed  
 To gaze on thine –

It was a summer day that saw  
 His spirit’s flight  
 Thine parted in a time of awe

## A winter-night

This poem imagines the awe of a sacred place as ‘Heaven’s glory’ shines in a particular spot. The metre is unusual for Emily Brontë with the pairing of octosyllabic with quartosyllabic lines; it has the effect of slowing the pace in the second and fourth line of each verse, almost as if language is beginning to fail in a ‘time of awe’; this time contrasts with the everyday and common implied in ‘a summer’s day’. So within this short poem is contained the idea of a sacred space and a sacred time: holy places and holy days. However, like the previous poem, it is not in the reference to ‘heaven’ or even a ‘saint’ (the word, perhaps, is used ironically) that a Catholic imagination can be seen at work, but in the way that time is used. This poem involves the contemplation of two graves (bed) and considers the manner of parting from life. The ‘spirit’s flight’ of one was in a summer day whereas the parting of the other was in ‘a time of awe’ which echoes ‘the glory of the festal day’ discussed above: a winter’s night. It seems that this ‘night’ was appointed for departure whereas the fact that it was a ‘summer day’ was incidental to the passing of the ‘saint’. This idea can be seen in *Wuthering Heights* with Heathcliff’s feeling that ‘A strange change is approaching / I am in its shadow at present’ gesturing towards an appointed *kairos* rather than *chronos* time. This example of superstition arising from the ‘dark / Recesses’ is one that Nelly Dean endeavours to resist with the suggestion of some Protestant Bible reading (408) to counter a Catholic insistence on the existence of a ‘time of awe’.

The ‘gaze’ of the speaker contrasts with the ‘glance’ considered in the previous poem. The speaker in this poem dwells on the presence of the dead and the ‘gaze’ reveals the preoccupations that drive Emily Brontë’s nostalgic vision. The word is heavily freighted with desire and yearning, as well as faintly implying an envy of what the speaker beholds. The act of turning ‘from that young saint’s bed’ implies a rejection of ‘Heaven’s glory’ that

‘shone where he was laid’. A rejection of the heavenly may seem at odds with the subject matter of the poem but it fits with the eschewing of heaven for earth in *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë’s pairings also explore this idea. For example, there is a contrast between the lightness and gentle tone implied in ‘flight’ (which is also felt in the gradual ‘decline’ which suggests fading away) and the finality implied in the heavier plosive sound of ‘parted’. It seems that the speaker becomes less poetic and, indeed, more Anglo-Saxon in their word choice when articulating the object of their ‘gaze’. The stronger sense of sudden break in ‘parted’ causes longing, a sense of ‘awe’, which the gradual ‘flight’ of the ‘young saint’ did not either inspire or satisfy.

Among the details that come to the speaker’s remembrance when gazing on ‘Thine’ (the identity of whom is more mysterious than the ‘young saint’) is the time of ‘parting’. The phrases ‘a time of awe’ and ‘a winter’s night’ merit further consideration with their evocation of an appointed time. The chiasmatic pairing of the two ways of dying in this stanza increase the import of the final line: the placement of the pronoun, ‘his’, after stating the season, builds this sense of the parting making a weaker impression on the speaker, however, the foregrounding of ‘Thine’ (along with its archaic construction) before naming the time-of-day in the final line (so that he becomes the subject rather than the object) expresses the greater impression that this parting made. The word, ‘awe’ is used in the sense of ‘an attitude of mind subdued to profound reverence’ (*OED*) which is suggested by the sense of finality that freights ‘parted’. The phrase ‘A winter-night’ being a single quartosyllabic line lends it a starkness of effect: there is nothing there but an invitation to contemplate the manner of parting and the possibilities of presence that inhere in the ‘time of awe’.

*Bidding 'The Ancient Torrent Flow': Catholic Stirrings of the Past*

In concluding this discussion of how a Catholic imagination may have fed the restless nostalgic vision in Emily Brontë's writing, it is appropriate to restate the central ideas and then offer some preliminary thoughts that will lay the foundation for the study of Irishness in the following chapter. This chapter has elucidated the energising of nostalgia in the poetry and *Wuthering Heights* through considering a purgatorial displacement in time and a pilgrimaging displacement in space; Emily Brontë's imagination was actuated by a nostalgic homesickness for a world in which the dead had a relationship with the living and where places which evoked the presence of a Catholic world were still 'instinct with spirit'.

It is speculative to claim that this sense of a nostalgic yearning suggests Emily Brontë's sympathy for a particular form of Christian imagination which had passed. However, it is interesting to note that Cardinal Newman wrote of the sense, in the writings of Romantic poets, of the sacramental beauty of the world.<sup>49</sup> The chapter has considered how Emily Brontë, in the way that her writing evokes nostalgic yearnings that are felt in *The White Doe of Rylstone*, is the poetic heir of Wordsworth in fidelity to a particular spot.

Emily Brontë wrote much of her poetry against the backdrop of the debate on Catholic emancipation. It would be fair to say that those who argued against it wished to silence the claims of the past. Some of those who were exploring the conditions for Catholic emancipation wished to enforce a form of historical amnesia in the demand that, in return for emancipation, Roman Catholics relinquished claims on pre-Reformation property: dissolution was not to become restitution; this idea was challenged by Cardinal Newman in 'The Second Spring' which imagined a re-flourishing of Catholic culture: 'The past *has* returned, the dead

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<sup>49</sup> Tomko, p. 193.

lives'.<sup>50</sup> Emily Brontë, as seen in the discussion of the preceding poems, pondered hard the claims of the past and espoused the claims that arose from a collective memory of religious rites before the Reformation. Indeed, it would be remarkable, for a poet whose writing is so energised by considerations of remembrance and memory, not to have, even without apprehending it herself, imagined a pre-Reformation way of seeing the world.

The quotation in the title to this section is taken from the final verse in a poem of Emily Brontë's that explores the lingering presence of the past: 'For him who struck thy foreign string':

Even so, guitar, thy magic tone  
 Hath moved the tear and waked the sigh  
 Hath bid the ancient torrent flow  
 Although its very source is dry!

It is a meditation on how images from the past are able to haunt the present. Considerations of space prevent a more detailed study of this poem but there is keenly-felt surprise at the ability of objects, such as a tree, to disturb when they are long gone. Brontë describes how the reflection of the tree may be seen in the water when the tree itself has been cut down by a woodsman, which seems appropriate as a metaphor for the traces of nostalgic Catholic imagining that are felt in Emily Brontë's writing. Perhaps the use of this image is an expression of Brontë's desire, in Michael Tomko's words, to make 'a nostalgic return to a religious form of identity incompatible with modernity'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John Henry Newman, 'The Second Spring', *A Newman Treasury: Selections from the Prose Works of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, Ed., Charles Frederick Harrold, (London: Longman, 1945), p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> Tomko, p. 195.

*Chapter Three: Irishness*

The following chapter is not an effort to appropriate Emily Brontë as an Irish writer; rather, it involves consideration of the ways in which perceptions of what it was to be Irish, contemporaneous with the Brontës, are useful in foregrounding the nostalgic energy in her writing. After a survey of the ways in which Emily Brontë's critics have discussed notions of Irishness in her writing, the idea of nostalgia as an energising, and indeed, willed exile will be explored. As with Catholicism in the previous chapter, and Brontë's creation of the world of Gondal in the next chapter, Irishness will be seen as another way that she can conceive of an elsewhere as a home.

The Irish ancestry of Emily Brontë on her father's side has meant that the relevance of her Irish background to the poetry and novel has been taken for granted without the need for any scholarly probing. Indeed, the very notion of Irishness itself has been taken as a given; the real question is if Emily Brontë's writing was influenced by any sense of Irishness, which version? It is also worthwhile to ask why attempts to elucidate the Irishness in Emily Brontë's writing have persisted.

Consideration of Irish influences on the Brontës has a long pedigree. The first study was written by Dr William Wright, a Presbyterian missionary who grew up near the siblings of Patrick Brontë as adults – the 'Irish Brontës', as he commonly referred to them - and, in 1894 *The Brontës in Ireland* was published. Much of this study is taken up with recounting stories of Brontë ancestors (including the foundling, Walsh, who was said to provide the inspiration for Heathcliff) with the suggestion that these tales, told by Patrick Brontë over the breakfast table, made the greatest impression on Emily: 'None of the stories betray their

origin so clearly as *Wuthering Heights*, just as none of the novelists were so fascinated with their father's tales as Emily'.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty years later, Emily Brontë was being appropriated as part of the search for an Irish poetic voice. In the second half of the nineteenth-century, Irish writers (most notably William Butler Yeats) were endeavouring to gain a sense of themselves and what it meant to write an Irish literature. As Declan Kiberd states, Ireland was in 'a sort of nowhere, waiting for its appropriate images and symbols to be inscribed in it' and Irish literature was often described in a resistant manner as not being English.<sup>2</sup> An example of this was *Literature in Ireland* by Thomas MacDonagh who was a university lecturer, as well as one of the rebels who was shot after the collapse of the 1916 Easter Rising. His literary study (published posthumously) was an attempt to forge an Irish canon distinct from the literary heritage that was imposed by the colonial power. In the introduction, MacDonagh states that he will treat Irish literature as a 'separate thing' in order to 'set it in its true light'.<sup>3</sup>

In *Literature in Ireland*, MacDonagh endeavoured to articulate an 'Irish mode' of writing.<sup>4</sup> He includes Emily Brontë as a poet who belonged to this mode without knowing it and was 'continually attempting the "English poem", unaware of her true vein'.<sup>5</sup> So he places her with the other 'exiles' as a poet unaware of her origins.<sup>6</sup> He cites 'Alone I sat the summer day' (discussed in chapter one) to illustrate the endeavour to find her true voice. This image of Emily Brontë trying to find her own voice connects revealingly with MacDonagh's attempt to find a poetic voice for the Irish people. His writing is suggestive of trying to find the right language, so, when writing about mystics, he portrays their difficulty as expressing 'in terms of sense and wit the things of God that are made known to him in no

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. William Wright, *The Brontës in Ireland: or Facts Stranger than Fiction*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894) p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995) p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland*, (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1916) p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> MacDonagh, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> MacDonagh, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> MacDonagh, p. 62.



language' (which is the difficulty Brontë has in the poem he considers).<sup>7</sup> So, for MacDonagh, Brontë becomes the poet speaking the wrong language 'singing the Lord's song in a strange land' (Psalm 137:4). Emily Brontë as an Irish poet is one who is in exile.

Endeavours to appropriate Emily Brontë as an Irish writer continued with the publication of a short study by Cathal O'Byrne: *The Gaelic Source of the Brontë Genius*. The study avows the appeal to a sentimental gut-feeling. As an example, after summarising at length an old Irish romance translated by the first president of Ireland, Douglas Hyde, he states how the style of writing in the description can be discerned in 'the writings of Emily Brontë particularly'.<sup>8</sup> He follows this by placing 'side by side' (to borrow O'Byrne's phrasing) a third-century Gaelic poem and a piece of description from *Wuthering Heights* and writes of the selected passage, that 'the careful reader who cannot catch an echo of the music of the third-century Gaelic poem in the exquisite word-painting of Emily Brontë 'may have ears but an ear he cannot have''.<sup>9</sup> O'Byrne's argument is the corollary of the contention of George Saintsbury, a Victorian English literary critic, who argued for an English metre in Victorian poetry; in an essay on metre in Victorian poetry, Yopie Prins considers the 'nostalgic and nationalist strain in his reading of lyric history'.<sup>10</sup> It is the same 'strain' that actuates O'Byrne's reading of Brontë's writing but, despite his complaint that a reader who cannot detect the Irish nature of Brontë's writing cannot have an 'ear', his basis for comparison is on the grounds of theme, a focus on nature, rather than metrical similitude. Aside from the lack of a rationale for such a reading, nature poetry as an essentially Irish trait is problematized by a materialist criticism that argues for an absence of nature from Irish poetry on the grounds that nature was to be worked rather than contemplated.<sup>11</sup> In a similar

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas MacDonagh, 'Language and Literature in Ireland', *The Irish Review* (4.40.1914): 176-182. p. 182.

<sup>8</sup> Cathal O'Byrne, *The Gaelic Source of the Brontë Genius*, (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1933), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> O'Byrne, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Bristow, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. (London: Verso, 1995) p. 5.

vein is O'Byrne's connection between the Irish tradition of fasting in protest with Catherine Linton's fast in *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on this, with tongue firmly in cheek, Declan Kiberd, in recounting how Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, an Irish suffragette who went on hunger strike in 1914 described her heightened awareness of passages describing food in novels she was reading, including the Brontës, wittily observes that 'no doubt, the story of Catherine Earnshaw had a certain grim appeal'.<sup>13</sup>

Hunger leads on to Terry Eagleton's reading of *Wuthering Heights* as an allegory for the Irish famine in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995). He also argues that Ireland represented emotions that the English had repressed. The heart of Eagleton's argument, expressed in a lyricism that is not often associated with materialist criticism, is that the world of *Wuthering Heights* is subsumed into a new way of ordering society. I quote at length:

That history will of course continue; but as in Emily Brontë's novel there is something recalcitrant at its core which defeats articulation, some 'real' which stubbornly refuses to be symbolised. In both cases the 'real' is a voracious desire which was beaten back and defeated, which could find no place in the symbolic order of social time and was expunged from it, but which like the shades of Catherine and Heathcliff will return to haunt a history now in the process of regathering its stalled momentum and moving onwards and upwards.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of a 'voracious desire which was beaten back and defeated' is also felt in an Ojibwe Indian myth called 'The Jaguar's Wife'; it is recounted by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their chapter on *Wuthering Heights*, as analogous to the novel: a young girl marries a jaguar. All is well for a while but the grandmother, who is worried about her granddaughter becoming more beastlike as a result of her marriage to the jaguar, ends up killing her. The story finishes with the jaguar leaving and the sound of its roaring receding into the distance.

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<sup>12</sup> O'Byrne, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Kiberd, p. 397.

<sup>14</sup> Eagleton, pp. 14-15.

This summary of the story is needed to make sense of the comment at the end of the chapter: ‘And in the voice of the wind that sweeps through the newly cultivated garden at Wuthering Heights, we hear the jaguar... roaring in the distance’.<sup>15</sup>

In the extracts from Eagleton and Gilbert and Gubar there is reference to an echo which, because of the strength of its desire, cannot be accommodated in the present. However, Torgerson argues that Eagleton does not go far enough in his appreciation that a former way of life has disappeared. Her argument is that Hareton and Catherine’s marriage will perpetuate oppression rather than resolve it, that: ‘With Hareton’s acculturation into a “gentleman”, the process of his transformation into a “vampire” has been set in motion’.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, Eagleton’s conceiving of Heathcliff as a desire, or hunger, is telling and I will use this to explore the idea that one facet of nostalgic yearning in Emily Brontë’s writing is hunger that cannot be satisfied; this was one conception of Irishness that was explicated by Matthew Arnold in his *On the Study of Celtic Literature* through the now famous aphorism of the Celt ‘ready to react against the despotism of fact’.<sup>17</sup> Matthew Campbell contends that an Irish poet, James Charles Mangan, was attracted to German poems ‘of *Sehnsucht*, or those that lingered in an aesthetic of unachievable longing’.<sup>18</sup> Mangan’s translation of Schiller’s, ‘The Unrealities’, shows interest in a poem that powerfully bewails the impossibility of longing ever being satisfied: ‘How struggled all my feelings to extend / Themselves afar beyond their prisoning bounds!’<sup>19</sup> Mangan’s poetry and translations suggest his preference to remain in a state of longing rather than accept inauthentic resolution.

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<sup>15</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) p. 308.

<sup>16</sup> Torgerson, p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Arnold, ‘On the Study of Celtic Literature’, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, vol. 3, Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1962), p. 344.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, p. 98.

<sup>19</sup> *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan: Poems 1818-1837*, eds. Jacques Chuto et al., (Portland OR: Irish Academic Press, 1996) p. 119, lines 33-34.

Eagleton's statement in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* that it is 'tempting to speculate' brings his methodology uncomfortably close to that of Wright and O'Byrne.<sup>20</sup> However, his puckish insightfulness usefully opens up discussion of Irishness as one inflection of nostalgic energy in Emily Brontë's writing. Another consideration of Irish influences was made by Edward Chitham, in his characteristically painstaking way, in *The Brontës' Irish Background* (1986). He drew on Wright's work to argue that the inspiration for much of Emily Brontë's writing would have been in the stories told to her by Patrick.

The idea of the national tale, touched on in the previous chapter, has also been used to elucidate the Irishness in the work of the Brontës more generally. Kathleen Constable reads Jane Eyre's treatment at the hands of the Reed family through the paradigm of English policies towards Ireland during the famine. The marriage of Jane and Rochester enabled Charlotte to 'mediate her own dual heritage'.<sup>21</sup> While Emily Brontë is not directly mentioned by Constable, such a historicised reading could be transferred to *Wuthering Heights* as Terry Eagleton does in his reading of the novel as representing, in the displacement of *Wuthering Heights* by Thrushcross Grange, Ireland's fast-forwarding into modernity. However, what is worthy of further consideration is the way Emily Brontë weaves into *Wuthering Heights*, a nostalgia that resists the assimilation.

### *Conceiving Irishness in the Nineteenth-Century*

To return to an earlier point, the difficulty in conceiving of Emily Brontë as a writer deeply influenced by her Irish background, and even as an Irish writer, is that Irish literary culture was itself trying to work out what such a creature was; this means that any attempt to

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<sup>20</sup> Eagleton, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Constable, 'Writing the Minefield: Reflections of Union in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*', Neil McCaw, ed. *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth Century British Culture*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) p. 108.

discuss Emily Brontë's Irishness takes place on shifting ground; take, as an example, the way that many Irish nationalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries conceived of themselves as rural and frugal. Kiberd recounts the tale of Michael Collins, being cheered at the sight of a donkey and cart in London, and declaring 'I stand for that'.<sup>22</sup> The point that Kiberd makes from this is that Irish pastoralism had its roots in English Romanticism rather than any essential Irishness. The irony deepens when one considers that Collins' definite assertion of what he was fighting for is the inverse of Beaupuy's assertion of what he was fighting against in *The Prelude* (1850). Wordsworth recalls how, upon seeing a poverty-stricken girl with her cow, Beaupuy exclaimed: 'Tis against *that*, / That we are fighting.' (IX: 517-8)<sup>23</sup>

A key figure when considering how ideas of Irishness played themselves out in Victorian England is Matthew Arnold. *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1866) was an attempt to reconcile head and heart: an effort to reconcile commitment to British values of Empire with attraction to the mystique of Celticism. Here Arnold follows in the tradition of writers such as Sir Walter Scott who were torn between commitment to the Act of Union (1707) and yearning towards an older and more authentic form of existence (the wider context for this is that of a rapidly industrialising England and nostalgia for the pre-industrial). Arnold was worried about the 'profound sense of estrangement' between the British and the Irish, caused by a neat division between the Teutonic and the Celtic.<sup>24</sup> He wrote the essay to 'fairly unite, if possible, in one people with them'.<sup>25</sup> The essay betrays Arnold's own unhappiness in Victorian England caused by 'Fear of the zeitgeist, on the one hand, and distrust of his own innate perceptions.'<sup>26</sup> It was as if Arnold himself was reacting

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in Kiberd, p. 487.

<sup>23</sup> Reference taken from, William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. W. J. B. Owen, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) p. 193. Book and line number given in text.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 300.

<sup>25</sup> Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 302.

<sup>26</sup> E. D. H. Johnson, *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry: Sources of the Poetic Imagination in Tennyson, Browning and Arnold*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1952) p. 159.

‘against the despotism of fact’.<sup>27</sup> Arnold’s essay, written twenty years after Emily Brontë’s death, encapsulates some of the more enlightened views of Irishness that would have been current during her lifetime (even though these views may seem stereotypical in the twenty-first century). His writing can be understood as a dichotomy between the rational Teutons and the passionate Celts who ‘strain human nature further than it will stand’.<sup>28</sup>

Arnold’s ideas about the Celtic temperament find their way into biographical studies of the Brontë family. Lock and Dixon’s biography of Patrick Brontë describes how ‘The clash of [Patrick’s] impulsive Irish temperament against the rough, outspoken practical nature of the West Riding people was remembered with fascination’; the juxtaposition in this statement is straight out of Arnold.<sup>29</sup> It is also important to point out that Patrick Brontë himself imbibed stereotypes about the Irish that Arnold would later discuss. In ‘The Maid of Killarney’, Albion states: ‘The Scotch... are plodding and sure; the English, wary, phlegmatic and profound; the Irish are free, humourous, and designing; their courage is sometimes rash and their liberality often prodigal: many of them are interesting and original; so that he who has once seen them, will not easily forget them and will generally wish to see them again’.<sup>30</sup> Arnoldian ideas about the Irish are also succinctly expressed when Albion exclaims, in response to hearing an Irish girl sing: ‘Rather incoherent, but wild and beautiful!’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 344.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> John Lock and Canon W. T. Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow: The Life, Letters and Times of the Rev. Patrick Brontë*, (London: Nelson, 1965) p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> Horsfall Turner ed., pp. 134/5.

<sup>31</sup> Horsfall Turner ed., p. 169.

*Irishness and the Brontë Family*

Due to the complexities and contradictions of considering and historicising notions of Irishness, writing about possible Irish influences on the writing of Emily Brontë is somewhat of a minefield. However, if for no other reason than its persistence in studies of Emily Brontë, it is unwise to dismiss it altogether; instead, the terms of the argument must be shifted from some supposed essential Irishness as shaping Emily's writing to ideas about Irishness. Biography is useful insofar as it establishes that the sense of possessing an Irish identity would have been felt in the Brontë household. In a letter Patrick wrote to the Reverend William Campbell, the vicar of a church where Patrick had been curate, he observes that 'I have had a letter lately from Ireland, they are all well', which is followed a few lines later by 'Ah! Dulce Domum', which is Latin for 'sweet home'; the point is that the Brontës would have had presented to them the idea of a longing for home as coterminous with a longing for Ireland.<sup>32</sup> This idea is reflected in Anne Brontë, when Patrick's brother, James Brunty, from Ballynaskeagh, visited Haworth, talking of 'accompanying him to Ireland'.<sup>33</sup> Alice Brontë, Patrick's sister, recalled in an interview that 'Ann, the youngest, wanted to come home with Jamie. He thought it queer that she called Ireland home'.<sup>34</sup>

There are further, and more sinister, reasons for contending that notions of Irishness would have loomed large in the Brontë household. Winifred Gerin describes an eye-witness account of the consequences arising from Branwell shouting down a crowd who were heckling his father during hustings: 'a gesture which earned him the distinction of being burned in effigy, holding a potato in one hand and a herring in the other – a Haworth way of

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<sup>32</sup> *A Man of Sorrow*, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Chitham, *The Brontës' Irish Background*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 108. Chitham also argues that 'her interest in Irish matters is underlined by her choice of the un-Yorkshire name Fergus for a character in *Wildfell Hall*': *The Life of Anne Brontë*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> Chitham, *Irish Background*, pp. 107/8.

reminding him of his Irish origin'.<sup>35</sup> Terry Eagleton wryly observes of this incident that 'The Brontës may have effaced their Irish origin but the good people of Haworth evidently kept it well in mind'.<sup>36</sup> Biographers have discussed Charlotte Brontë's efforts to mask her own Irish identity, partly through mocking it in the character of Augustus Malone in *Shirley*. This sense of Irishness as almost a deformity that hinders advancement in polite society is also implied in the contention that Patrick Brontë changed his surname from the Irish Brunty to the more anglicised Brontë when he matriculated at Cambridge.<sup>37</sup> This rejection of Irishness is also present, ironically, in Patrick Brontë's poem, 'The Harper of Erin'. In an unexpected swerve, Patrick writes that 'I shall not sing of Erin' as he moves on to sing the praises of Jesus instead.<sup>38</sup> Biographically speaking, Emily Brontë's relationship with her Irish roots are more hidden. Literarily, however, the idea that in her work nostalgia manifests itself as the yearning of an exile is one way in which she could be said to respond to contemporary notions of what it was to be Irish.

To elucidate the ways in which Emily Brontë's poetry could be read as articulating the nostalgic longing of an Irish exile, her poems will be compared with some from Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*. The primary reason for this choice is that many would have heard in the poetry of Thomas Moore the voice of the Irish exile – indeed it can be said that he was a self-styled exile. Moore was the epitome of the Arnoldian marriage between the rational English and the passionate Irish. His poetry plays on and plays up to this idea. It is highly likely that the Brontës would have read Moore (or played his melodies).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Winifred Gérin, *Branwell Brontë*, (London: Nelson, 1961) p. 90.

<sup>36</sup> Eagleton, *Great Hunger*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Green, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> Horsfall Turner, ed. p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Anne Brontë owned some songs by Moore (Chitham, *Life of Anne Brontë*, p. 114). Charlotte exhorted Ellen Nussey to read Moore's life of Byron (*The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, Ed. Margaret Smith, Vol 1, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 131. The sisters also named a local waterfall 'the meeting of the waters' after Moore's poem of the same name.



*Wuthering Heights* will also be considered as articulating notions of Irishness. Along with a sense of exile, being divorced from one's true language will be discussed as an inflection of that exile. What will emerge is not, on Emily Brontë's part, a misty-eyed nostalgia for an Irish heritage but rather a state-of-being where the Irishness of exile and the inarticulate stirs up a nostalgic restlessness that prevents any sense of being at home.

*Nostalgia and Irishness in Emily Brontë's Poetry*

Emily Brontë wrote a poem that explored the pains and pleasures of association that come from the playing of a harp:

Harp of wild and dream like strain

When I touch thy strings

Why dost thou repeat again

Long forgotten things?

Harp in other earlier days

I could sing to thee

And not one of all my lays

Vexed my memory

But now if I awake a note

That gave me joy before

Sounds of sorrow from thee float

Changing evermore

Yet still steeped in memory's dyes

They come sailing on

Darkening all my summer skies

Shutting out my sun

The harp in the first stanza insistently afflicts by the way it 'repeat[s] again' with its tautology, freight of relentlessness and the speaker's questioning of why this is so. The music that the harp plays being described as 'wild and dream like' partakes of Arnoldian commonplaces about the Celtic temperament. This exercise of a nostalgic impulse, for the speaker has agency through their 'touch' of the strings, results in the stirring of forgotten depths. This impulse is strengthened in the second verse with the evocation of a past time that was untroubled. Memory was still present in the time the speaker remembers but the memory was not 'vexed'; the use of this word is revealing with its connotations of being kept in an unquiet state. The speaker remembers a time when memory, even though it was present, was at rest. Present in the first two verses of the poem is the idea of a 'ghostly troubler', discussed in the last chapter, that will not let the speaker be at peace. Despite its apparent use of commonplace imagery (which Emily Brontë may well have found in Thomas Moore), this poem is a potent imagining of restless homesick energy. This chimes with the idea that the orientation of Irish poets, in the opening years of the nineteenth century, was fundamentally nostalgic. Matthew Campbell in a recent study of Irish poetry, a dexterous blend of contextual insightfulness and incisive close reading, argues that 'Irish poetry written within the time of the union needs to be read as a form of longing, seeking...to recuperate a lost past'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew Campbell, *Irish Poetry under the Union, 1801-1824*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013) p. 68.

The sense of energy is sustained through the third stanza. The first couplet echoes the moment of realisation in Wordsworth's 'Ode' that there has been a great change. The use of 'awake' suggests something that has lain long dormant but what the same 'note' brings is something different. However, the 'sounds of sorrow' that are 'Changing evermore' represent the energy of longing rather than the lethargy of despair. This energy recalls the present continuous in an early poem such as 'Loud without' and anticipates the continuous changing of the spirit in 'No Coward Soul is Mine'. The image of a cloud also gestures towards Shelley's 'The Cloud' where the personified cloud states that 'I change, but I cannot die'.<sup>41</sup>

The sense that this is not an indulgent and luxuriant nostalgia that will allow rest is developed in the final stanza. The use of 'dyes' suggests a complete immersion in the sound of the harp aided by the word, 'steeped'; it is as if the memory now becomes the atmosphere. The image recalls its later reshaping in *Wuthering Heights* as a dream that has gone 'through me, like wine through water' (99). Indeed, this is a useful connection to make as it brings to the fore the idea of being troubled and a half-remembered memory causing disturbance. The present continuous verbs of 'sailing', 'darkening' and 'shutting' give a relentless sense of being overpowered by memory. The use of this tense also means that we experience the poem *in media res*; the notes of the harp are still working their memory-recalling effect at the end of the poem.

The poem's nostalgia is brittle rather than languid. What this means is that the speaker is not in control of the forces that she is able to 'awake'; she is still being overwhelmed by the experience of memory at the end of the poem. By way of contrast, the use of the harp as an image that kindles memory in Thomas Moore's poetry feels like an

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Shelley, ed. Vol. 3, p. 242.

expression of nostalgia articulated from a more stable position than the scudding clouds in Emily Brontë's poem. One such poem by Moore generates echoes in Emily Brontë's poems:

The harp that once through Tara's halls  
     The soul of music shed,  
 Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls,  
     As if that soul were fled.  
 So sleeps the pride of former days,  
     So glory's thrill is o'er  
 And hearts, that once beat high for praise,  
     Now feel that pulse no more!

No more to chiefs and ladies bright  
     The harp of Tara swells;  
 The chord alone, that breaks at night,  
     Its tale of ruin tells.  
 Thus freedom now so seldom wakes  
     The only throb she gives  
 Is when some heart indignant breaks  
     To show that still she lives! (285)<sup>42</sup>

Like Brontë, Moore juxtaposes the effect the music of the harp had in the past and in the present. The untroubling music of the harp in Brontë meets the harp that 'the soul of music shed' in Moore. However, Moore's harp is now soulless and 'hangs as mute': silent

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<sup>42</sup> All references to Thomas Moore's poetry taken from: Thomas Moore, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, (Paris: Galignani, 1827). Page numbers given parenthetically.

and inert. The use of the verb 'sleeps' as well as the lifelessness in 'feel that pulse no more' all build this suggestion of a languid lack of energy.

Brontë's imagining of the symbol of the harp that resurrects past memories is, as has been discussed, very energetic in its ability to trouble. What makes the tone different to Moore's is the mood of closed elegy in Moore and stirred-up nostalgia in Brontë. The mood in Moore's melody is akin to the 'melancholy that is sweeter than common joy' (226) that Emily Brontë uses to describe Edgar's grief for his dead wife. For Moore, the loss of the past is sad and an occasion for tears; however, one would not dream that the past could come alive again. Even when the harp does wake, as a response to the 'heart' that 'indignant breaks', the rhetorical flourish of the language is suggestive of dramatic overstatement. This has the effect of diminishing nostalgia as a present troubler threatening to overturn the way things are but imagining it instead as a state safely consigned to the past. Brontë stirs a present troubling that is exiled from the past whereas Moore, in the musicality of his rhetorical flourishes suggests an accommodation with the present. Emily Brontë is eschewing easy resolution.

An undated fragment by Emily Brontë refers to a woman called Iernë (a word often used for Ireland, as in Shelley's *Adonais*) with a painful sense of exile:

Iernë's eyes were glazed and dim  
 When the castle bell tolled one  
 She looked around her dungeon grim  
 The grating cast a doubtful gleam  
 'Twas one cloud saddened cold moon-beam  
 Iernë gazed as in a dream  
 And thought she saw the sun

She thought it was the break of day

The night had been so long

As noted in the previous comparison between Moore and Brontë, it is possible that Brontë may have gleaned ideas of Irishness from his poetry; for Moore, one expression of being Irish is to express a sense of being an exile; however, Moore's expression of exile feels as if it has been aestheticized: Brontë's is felt on the pulses. Just as she resists the consolation that Wordsworth offers in the 'Ode', so she resists the transmutation of nostalgia into a safe work of art that Moore provides. What both refusals entail is a choosing to feel exile rather than settle for the false home of an imaginative resolution. The use of the symbol of the harp by Brontë, and the choosing of Iernë as a name (goddess of Ireland) may perhaps suggest a conscious drawing on the 'appropriate images and symbols' to denote an Irish sense of exile.

A striking feature of this undated fragment by Emily Brontë is its embodiment of the vicissitudes of perception in the persona of Iernë. Initially, this is figured through the failure of sight in 'glazed and dim'. This leads to her action of having 'looked around' with its suggestion of an anxious search effected by the adjective 'grim'. The search modulates into the offering of a fragile hope kindled by how 'The grating cast a doubtful gleam' (the metre in this line echoes the Wesleyan hymn, 'And can it be'; the confident statement of the dungeon that 'flamed with light' in Wesley's hymn is answered with more uncertainty in Brontë's evocation of the same space). Rhythmic slowing emphasises the disappointment in the following statement that ''Twas one cloud saddened cold moon-beam' with the alliteration of 'a' and 'o' sounds retarding over-hasty enunciation of those words.

The sense of being cheated out of any visionary hopefulness is present in the qualifying of Iernë's gaze with 'as in a dream', the phrase serving as a reminder of the

experience's insubstantiality. The repetition of 'thought' develops this idea and emphasises Ierne's perception over what may have actually happened. The biblical sense of 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick' (Proverbs 13:12) is evoked strongly by the final line, 'The night had been so long'. This fragment elicits an exile uncheered by any compensatory hope; it represents the psychological state of the pain of exile rather than the distanced aesthetisation of it that is found in Thomas Moore. The move from alternate to triple rhyme is suggestive of a building anticipation before a growing realisation that the hope has cheated her.

The idea of imprisonment as a form of exile is also found in Moore's evocation of the harp in 'Dear Harp of My Country':

Dear Harp of my country! in darkness I found thee;  
 The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long,  
 When proudly, my own Island Harp, I unbound thee,  
 And gave all thy chords to light, freedom and song!  
 The warm lay of love and the light note of gladness  
 Have waken'd thy fondest, thy liveliest thrill;  
 But, so oft hast thou echo'd the deep sigh of sadness,  
 That ev'n in thy mirth it will steal from thee still.

Dear Harp of my Country! farewell to thy numbers,  
 This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine!',  
 Go, sleep, with the sunshine of Fame on thy slumbers,  
 Till touch'd by some hand less unworthy than mine;  
 If the pulse of the patriot, soldier or lover,

Have throbb'd at our lay, 'tis thy glory alone;  
 I was *but* as the wind, passing heedlessly over,  
 And all the wild sweetness I waked was thy own. (306)

The second line of the first stanza is explicated by Moore in a footnote, where he explains an antiquated bardic tradition of silencing harps to bring about an end to conflict: 'The chain of silence was a sort of practical figure of rhetoric among the ancient Irish'.<sup>43</sup> The idea of a 'cold chain of silence' has already been explored in the discussion of 'Alone I sat the summer day' in chapter one. Its importance for Brontë's imagining of a sense of Irishness, as stated in the introduction to this chapter, lies in her inability to speak the right language.

Whereas Moore is quick to break the 'cold chain of silence', Emily Brontë is unable to escape it. An ease of evocation is felt in the line 'gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song'. The harp's 'liveliest thrill' has been 'waken'd'. The word, 'thrill' has already been discussed in the context of Brontë's poetry but it is also worthy of consideration here for its connotation of the harp's resonance with what is around it. The ease with which Moore awakens the 'thrill' contrasts with Emily Brontë's 'tuneless string' (or the failure of comforting light to materialise in the poem considered above). However, while Moore's harp trills to his playing, there is less control over the resultant emotional state. The use of the verb 'steal' to describe the sound of the 'deep sigh of sadness' coming from the 'light note of gladness' is telling as it suggests something that is present by clandestine means.

What Moore eulogizes as an intruder, 'the deep sigh of sadness', Brontë includes as an integral part of her nostalgic vision; it haunts her but it does not haunt Moore as he consigns it to the past: 'This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine'. Moore's use of the imperative, 'Go' is suggestive of a narrator who is in control of his nostalgic impulses

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<sup>43</sup> See *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, p. 306.



with the primary aim being to evoke ‘sweetness’ (nevertheless modified by ‘wild’ – a pairing found in Emily Brontë’s ‘Loud without’); again, this is the aestheticization of exile from a state that is now safely in the past. The poem’s closing note shows the ease with which Moore is able to bring the harp into life (reflecting Coleridge’s confidence, at the start of his career as a poet, in *The Eolian Harp* with its evocation of the ‘organic harp’ (38) that is responsive to the breeze). Any affected self-depreciation in ‘I was *but* as the wind’ is neutralized by the placing of the subject at the start of the sentence. However, Emily Brontë’s Iernë is in the middle of her exile and her harp is still ‘steeped in memory’s dyes’. So, any reflected sense of Irishness that she may have found in her reading of Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies* is a deeply troubled unresolved past reality agitating the present. Moore’s harp has been put to sleep ‘with the sunshine of Fame on thy slumbers’; Brontë’s Iernë cannot find her sunshine and the feeling in Emily Brontë’s harp cannot be spoken.

*‘Be His faults and Follies Forgot’: The Aestheticization of Remembrance*

Moore’s endeavour to regulate the rhythms of his harp is problematized by Emily Brontë where the musical strains have the capacity to be deeply troubling (There is not the space to dwell on the aptness of this as a metaphor for the ways in which an Irish background was imaginatively handled). This same contrast between the instinct to direct emotional currents and the preparedness to face up to their darker implications is felt in the way the poets treat the problem of how to remember the dead; this is of particular concern when there is the consciousness of defeat. A consideration of exile as, firstly an expression of a nostalgic impulse, and as a manifestation of an Irish aesthetic current in contemporary writing, will lead into a discussion of how Moore and Brontë treat the ultimate form of exile: death.

Thomas Moore's 'When Cold in the Earth' finds its echo in Emily Brontë's 'Remembrance'.<sup>44</sup> The poem's address to a friend of the deceased, with its exhortation for him to remember the good he did to his now dead friend, while alive, is the attempt to resolve an uncomfortable emotion. One important point to make is that Moore is imagining this as a future scenario:

When cold in the earth lies the friend thou hast lov'd,  
 Be his faults and his follies forgot by thee then;  
 Or, if from their slumber the veil be remov'd,  
 Weep o'er them in silence, and close it again.  
 And oh! if 'tis pain to remember how far  
 From the pathways of light he was tempted to roam,  
 Be it bliss to remember that thou wert the star  
 That arose on his darkness, and guided him home.

From thee and thy innocent beauty first came  
 The revealings, that taught him true love to adore,  
 To feel the bright presence, and turn him with shame  
 From the idols he blindly had knelt to before.  
 O'er the waves of a life, long benighted and wild,  
 Thou camest, like a soft golden calm o'er the sea;  
 And if happiness purely and glowingly smil'd

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Heywood connects the use of 'cold in the earth', in Moore's 'The Irish Peasant to his Mistress' (a lyric where the peasant promises loyalty to his mistress) with Emily Brontë's 'Remembrance'. He points out Moore's note to the poem that the mistress meant, 'the ancient Church of Ireland' [the Catholic Church]. It is surprising that this illuminating connection, particularly in the light of chapter two's discussion, does not focus on the poem about to be discussed here. Christopher Heywood, 'Ireland, Africa and Love in Emily Brontë's Gondal Poems', *Brontë Studies* (38.2.2013), 111-125, p. 113.

On his ev'ning horizon, the light was from thee.

And though, sometimes, the shades of past folly might rise,

And though falsehood again would allure him to stray,

He but turn'd to the glory that dwelt in those eyes,

And the folly, the falsehood, soon vanish'd away.

As the Priests of the Sun, when their altar grew dim,

At the day-beam alone could its lustre repair,

So, if virtue a moment grew languid in him,

He but flew to that smile, and rekindled it there. (308)

The virtue, that in 'Dear Harp of My Country' is attributed to 'thy glory' of the harp alone is, in this poem, ascribed to the addressed lover for their influence on the waywardness of the beloved and ability to guide him 'home'. The confidence that Moore places in imagined past virtue is a keynote in the poems considered as part of this discussion of Irishness. The way that Moore conceives of imagining Irishness, as a glory that has gone (perhaps necessarily) but can provide compensatory comfort, has affinities with the philosophical trajectory of Wordsworth's 'Ode'. Moore, as he imagines the addressee of the poem facing bereavement, is confident in the efficacy of imaginative compensation and in the view that it will be 'bliss to remember'.

The phrase, 'When cold in the Earth', that evokes the connection with Emily Brontë's 'Remembrance', is revealingly not dwelt on by Moore. He quickly turns from it to encourage a focus on the virtues of the person left behind; their 'bright presence', 'golden calm' and 'glory that dwelt in those eyes' all contrast with the bleakness of 'cold'. This treatment of the

topic forms a stark contrast to Emily Brontë's insistence in 'Remembrance' that the deceased is, indeed, 'Cold in the earth':

Cold in the earth – and the deep snow piled above thee,  
 Far, far, removed, cold in the dreary grave!  
 Have I forgot, my only love, to love thee,  
 Severed at last by Time's all-severing wave?

The repetition of 'cold' in the second line and the foregrounding of 'Far' emphasise that the deceased is not available for imaginative compensation. The use of 'only' removes the possibility of a second chance and 'severed' emphasises the irrevocability of the break. Indeed, the problem posed in this first verse is the possibility of forgetting, something that does not seem to occur to the speaker in Moore's poem with all their effusions of warm virtue. In 'Remembrance', Brontë is keen to face this possibility.

Another poem by Emily Brontë where these questions are faced is a dialogue between one speaker who is keen to imagine the annihilation from memory and another who seeks comfort from the thought that they will be remembered:

In the earth, the earth thou shalt be laid  
 A grey stone standing over thee  
 Black mould beneath thee spread  
 And black mould to cover thee –  
  
 'Well there is rest there  
 So fast come thy prophecy –  
 The time when my sunny hair  
 Shall with grass roots twined be'

But, cold, cold is that resting place  
 Shut out from joy and liberty  
 And all who loved thy living face  
 Will shrink from its gloom and thee

‘Not so, *here* the world is chill  
 And sworn friends fall from me  
 But *there*, they’ll own me still  
 And prize my memory’

Farewell, then, all that love  
 All that deep sympathy:  
 Sleep on, heaven laughs above –  
 Earth never misses thee –

Turf-sod and tombstone drear  
 Part human company  
 One heart broke, only, there  
*That* heart was worthy thee.

As with ‘Remembrance’, there is insistence on the resting place in the first line, with ‘the earth’ forcing an uncomfortable dwelling on the final resting place. The insistence that the resting place is ‘cold’ is postulated as a reason why the dead person will be shunned by the living; the second speaker counters this with equal insistence: ‘here’ in the world they are

forgotten but 'there', in the grave, they will be remembered. This is a poem that deals with the problems of remembering.

The contrasting impulses in the poem are between a tendency to aestheticize the parting that is caused by the grave and one that seeks to confront the interlocutor with death's oblivion. The second speaker, in a way that echoes the confidence of Moore in fructifying memories in 'When cold in the earth', expresses confidence that, when in the grave 'But, *there*, they'll own me still / And prize my memory'. There is something of artifice in how the speaker neatly juxtaposes the '*here* the world is chill', with the rhetorical flourish of turning the cold of the grave into the cold of life, and the '*there* they'll own me still'; there is the implication that the speaker will achieve a connection with his 'sworn friends' in death that was denied him in life. That this approaches sentimentalism worthy of Moore is also demonstrated in the overly-wrought language used to describe death in the second verse. The image of sunny hair twined with grass roots, in its naturalisation of the process of decay recalls Ariel's song describing the supposed death of Ferdinand's father in *The Tempest*, 'Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change' (I.ii.403-404).

Brontë problematizes this confidence in the virtue of memory as a 'prize' through the other speaker. The insistence on 'earth' in the first stanza is met with a similar focus on 'cold' in the third. Indeed, both speakers endeavour to appropriate the language of the other. One speaker turns the comforting rest of the other into a 'cold' rest and then, as has already been discussed, the speaker resituates the 'cold' from death to life. The speaker problematizes through an emphasis on disconnection through 'shut out' and 'Farewell'. This is confirmed by the stark statement, 'Earth never misses thee' and the tone of irony in the supposed 'deep sympathy'.

The insistence continues in the final stanza that 'human company' is parted in the grave. However, imaginative possibilities are thrown open by the final two lines. The

solitariness of the ‘One heart’ that ‘broke’ suggests, through the ambiguous placing of ‘only’ the loyal graveside vigil of a devoted lover who was ‘worthy thee’. So this final stanza, with its insistence on final parting also poignantly evokes a reluctance to leave and be parted. Brontë, while insisting on the brutal reality of the final parting, subtly undermines it in the final what can be almost described as a plea (with the urgency communicated by the exclamation mark). The aestheticizing impulse, here and in Moore, is flawed as it either denies connection by the transformation of life into art, or does not do justice to Brontë’s determination to stare the reality of death straight in the face. Yet the brutal insistence of the other speaker does not gain the full sanction of the poet, hence the complication of the final stanza.

Brontë’s engagement with Irishness through these poems, in the way that she takes and appropriates Moore’s imagery in his explicit attempt to conceive of an Irish identity in *Irish Melodies*, shows her reluctance to admit either of complete disconnection or a comfortable aestheticization. *Wuthering Heights* will be considered more fully in the next section when language is discussed, but it is worthwhile considering here how Brontë resists aesthetic impulses in the novel. Generally, in the narrative, Lockwood is an aestheticizing filter, and this is felt particularly when he returns to Wuthering Heights towards the end of the novel. As he enters the gate where it ‘yielded to my hand’ (371), he mentally contrasts it with the first time he tried the gate at the start of the novel where it ‘manifested no sympathising movement’ (4) and concludes ‘That is an improvement!’ (371). This sense of a domestic fixture being tamed, aided by ‘yielded’ (as well as the domesticating freight of ‘improvement’) is confirmed when he notices ‘A fragrance of stocks and wall flowers, wafted on the air, from amongst the homely fruit trees’ (371). Again, this contrasts with the start of the novel where he commented on how ‘The grass grows up between the flags’ (4). The domesticating impulse, which leads to the shutting up of Wuthering Heights is one which is

felt with regret; the aestheticizing of something where it becomes an object that is designed to evoke pleasure, is one which leads to death (this idea is behind Catherine Earnshaw's comparison between her love for Linton that is like 'foliage in the woods and her love for Heathcliff that 'resembles the eternal rocks beneath' [101]). Terry Eagleton's perspective on *Wuthering Heights* as the displacement of one house by another is useful for the developing argument here. The aestheticization of Moore that she resists, as well as the easy resolution of the national tale, is part of a consciousness in her writing that a way of life really is dead and that no Irish melodic impulse can bring it back.

This section has seen Emily Brontë question the silence of the harp (where Moore simply affirms its past glory) and, more deeply, the silence of the tomb. The paradox is that, for Brontë to articulate Irishness (of which the harp could be seen as a synecdoche) as Moore did, would be to aestheticize and to admit of a final home; therefore, Moore's eloquent expression of exile is, for Brontë, really no exile at all. So Emily Brontë, with her imaginative impulse of restless nostalgia, reimagines symbols of Irishness which, as shall be developed later, involve the rejection of an inauthentic home and the experience of a deeper exile.

#### *The Failure of Language: Irishness and 'Wuthering Heights'*

To say, as Terry Eagleton does, that Heathcliff represents a 'recalcitrant' and hungry Ireland is an oversimplification but, when it comes to considerations of language, he points up the difference between the inarticulacy of the colonised and the articulateness of the coloniser. The situating of Heathcliff's discovery in Liverpool, with the mysteriousness of his pre-history, testifies to the difficulty of articulating any hidden Irishness. So, for Emily Brontë, the failure to articulate Heathcliff's origins, as well as the times when Heathcliff is



inarticulate, is an expression of Irishness: it is an inability to, quoting from ‘Alone I sat the summer day’, ‘speak the feeling’.

When Heathcliff is brought to Wuthering Heights by Mr Earnshaw, Nelly describes him as repeating ‘over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand’ (45) (a glance at the citations for the use of ‘gibberish’ in the *OED* will reveal its application to the language of colonised natives). Soon afterwards, while explaining to Lockwood Mr Earnshaw’s partiality for the young Heathcliff, Nelly states that Mr Earnshaw believed everything Heathcliff said, reflecting, in parentheses, that ‘for that matter he said precious little’ (46). Nelly Dean’s baffled incomprehension of Mr Earnshaw’s affection for the young Heathcliff is due, in part, to the efficacy of communication between father and adopted child; he was ‘believing’ of ‘all’ Heathcliff ‘said’ (46). Mr Earnshaw’s main utterance in the novel is worthy of further consideration:

And at the end of it to be flighted to death... See here wife; I was never beaten with anything in my life; but you must e’en take it as a gift from God; though its as dark almost as if it came from the devil. (44)

His few words are heavily laden with dialect with the use of ‘flighted’ and the contraction of ‘e’en’. There is also the sense of having met with something that has marked him in ‘beaten’, the word conveying a sense of having being overcome as well as the invocation of supernatural origins. The heavy inflection of dialect occurs, too, in his words to Hindley before he sets off on the journey to Liverpool: ‘Now, my bonny man...’. The use of the Celtic-derived ‘bonny’, ‘not a word of ordinary English prose’ (*OED*) represents a manner of speaking that dies out within a couple of chapters foreshadowing the closure of *Wuthering Heights* itself at the end of the novel. When Heathcliff utters a ‘heart-breaking cry’ (53) on the occasion of Mr Earnshaw’s death, it is for the passing of a common language as well as that of a protecting figure.

Mr Earnshaw's singularity of speaking suggests the receding of a mode of articulation. Heathcliff withdraws into silence. Nelly's observation that 'he complained so seldom' along with her admission that 'I was deceived' (49) as she thought that it signified a lack of vindictiveness, hardens this sense of Heathcliff abstaining from language. He uses silence as a weapon against the new world that he finds himself in. This dynamic is once again in evidence when Edgar Linton is starting to visit Wuthering Heights in the early days of his courtship. When Heathcliff questions the amount of time Catherine is spending with him relative to Edgar Linton, she responds, 'And should I always be sitting with you... What good do I get – what do you talk about? You might be dumb or a baby for anything you say to amuse me, or for anything you do, either!' (86). Catherine's comparison of Heathcliff to a baby is revealing; it is as if he is refusing to enter the symbolic order and thus destroy through linguistic expression. His reluctance to 'speak the feeling' is an expression of resistance to the world that he experiences as an exile. One also recalls Thomas MacDonagh's assertions about Emily Brontë being unable to find her true vein; there is a sense in Heathcliff's fraught relationship with language that to speak would be to solidify his exile as, in fact, happens when he returns to Wuthering Heights, using the acquired sophisticated language of Thrushcross Grange.

Heathcliff passes on this linguistic inheritance to Hareton Earnshaw which he expresses to Nelly Dean as his stated aim:

'I've tied his tongue', observed Heathcliff. 'He'll not venture a single syllable, all the time! Nelly, you recollect me at his age – nay, some years younger – did I ever look so stupid: so "gaumless" as Joseph calls it'. (267)

The new sophistication in Heathcliff's manner is found in the way that he refers to Joseph's manner of speaking as something other; it echoes Linton's mocking of Hareton soon after for being unable to read his own name above the door of Wuthering Heights, the same name that

Lockwood notices on his first visit. Hareton's disdain for the language that he cannot access is felt in the angry assertion that 'it's some damnable writing... I cannot read it' (268).

Catherine's statement of the obvious in response to Hareton that 'it's English' (268) is, nonetheless, very revealing. Hareton's inability to understand 'English' situates him as an outsider who cannot speak in the rhythms of a world he has been alienated from. This sense of being an outsider is painfully felt in Catherine's statement that 'I think he does not understand me; I can hardly understand *him*, I'm sure!' (268).

This linguistic exile of Heathcliff and his infliction of the same condition on Hareton is tied to the fortunes of Wuthering Heights; with greater eloquence and an understanding of 'English' comes a shift of focus to Thrushcross Grange. What is felt here is a painful inability to speak in the rhythms of an ascendant world and mode of being in much the same way that Macdonagh conceives of Emily Brontë being unaware of the language that was in fact native to her.

*'A Voice As Sweet as a Silver Bell': The Distancing of Language in 'Wuthering Heights'*

When Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights, he observes Cathy teaching Hareton to read. Almost immediately afterwards, he is informed of Heathcliff's death by Nelly. Juxtaposition suggests connection. Heathcliff's death means that Hareton is free to acquire another mode of expression, whereas, beforehand, he was constrained by Heathcliff's aversion to reading as evidenced by his destruction of Catherine's books when she moved to Wuthering Heights. As books gain greater prominence the sense of a visceral connection wanes. For example, when Catherine expresses defiantly to Hareton her contention that he cannot take her books away from her because 'I've most of them written on my brain and printed in my heart'(364), the use of clichéd sentiment suggests the lady protesting too much.

Her mother had different material on her brain: 'he's always in my mind' (102); language has taken the place of pre-linguistic oneness and these words of Catherine communicate a loss.

One way of inflecting the connection that Brontë sets up in her evocation of Wuthering Heights post-Heathcliff is simply that, now Hareton is free of the oppressive influence of Heathcliff, he is free to blossom. Yet the imaginative bent of the book is in a completely different direction: that is to say the advent of 'book larning' (269) plays a role in the demise of Wuthering Heights. There is the sense that, when Hareton is taught to read, he is being schooled in the acquisition of a mode that is invasive. Whatever may develop between himself and Catherine, they will never be able to attain the pre-lapsarian (or pre-verbal) intimacy that was enjoyed between her mother and Heathcliff.

So, the necessity for progress impels Hareton onward to culture and refinement but it is a movement away from Eden. One thinks of Lockwood's movement in the other direction where he stacks up books against Catherine as a guard against immediate experience. This is not to say that Emily Brontë conceived of Hareton's Caliban-like degradation as preferable, but rather to point to her sense that the door has forever shut on the unmediated way of experiencing reality that Heathcliff and Catherine enjoyed. Reading is a poor substitute for that unmediated access to experience. Also, the reader may be discomfited by these endeavours to civilize Hareton in much the same way that one critic was troubled by the perhaps, more subtle, degradation of Catherine 'sticking primroses' (386) in Hareton's porridge as a provocation to Heathcliff. This is not an artistic failure on Brontë's part, as some critics have suggested; rather, she is pointing up the difference between undifferentiated bliss and a life that has to be mediated through language. This juxtaposition gives the novel its homesick energy.

The overtones in the preceding argument of endeavours to civilize the savage would be of interest to the post-colonial critic (with the concomitant idea of the society that the

savage represented being swallowed up), but I wish to keep the focus on the distancing impact of being exiled through the attainment of language; the implication, in *Wuthering Heights* that this is to be mourned highlights the regressive aspect of Emily Brontë's vision. Indeed, her portrayal of the modulation from a more direct and authentic way of speaking to one that is mediated through a new sophistication parallels the move from Brunty to Brontë. This effort to obscure origins in *Wuthering Heights* is felt as a loss. The way that Brontë situates the language of the savage who needs to be civilized evokes the linguistic inferiority of the outsider with the vulgar accent and the 'frightful Yorkshire pronunciation' (269) that may have affinities with the experience of the Irish immigrant.

Joseph is a barometer of the change in linguistic appropriation that is afoot at *Wuthering Heights*. There is a whiff of nostalgia in his expression of a preference for a previous mode of expression over the ditties of Nelly Dean and the schooling of Hareton: 'Aw'd rather, by th' haulf, hev 'em swearing i' my lugs frough morn tuh neeght' (372). When Nelly starts to recount to Lockwood the narrative of Catherine's original overtures to Hareton, she tells him of Joseph's reaction to seeing the two bent over a book: 'perfectly aghast at the spectacle of Catherine seated on the same bench with Hareton' (382/3). There is something of a rough poignancy in the conclusion that he reaches: 'Aw's gang tuh my awn rahm. This hoile's norther mensful nor seemly for us – we mun side aht, and search another!' (383). The note of being superseded and displaced in this utterance is connected with Hareton's acquisition of language.

The ideas of Margaret Homans in *Bearing the Word* are illuminating in this context. Using Lacanian ideas of language, she expresses the writer's dilemma that language represents a loss of experience, the literal (using the words of Catherine Earnshaw) 'With it, and in it' (197). She expresses her sense of 'the threat that the literal poses to *articulation*

within the symbolic order' (emphasis added).<sup>45</sup> In this vein she argues that Brontë, in showing so few of her characters outdoors during the course of *Wuthering Heights* is revealing her love of nature: to express this love would actually be to destroy it. So Hareton's acquisition of language and his learning of his own name is distancing him from his true heritage so all that can happen to *Wuthering Heights* is its abandonment. Language is being constructed over a loss, a loss that is felt through the taming that comes through language and Hareton and Catherine's cultivation of a garden – an action that both Heathcliff and Joseph feel as a threat to the current order. Developing Homans' comments about language earlier, the creation of a garden shows a disconnection from the world of nature.

*The 'Ghostly Troubler' of an Irish Identity*

The manifestation of Irishness in Emily Brontë's writing, using the symbols of an Irish identity that she may have encountered in her reading of Thomas Moore, is essentially regressive, divested of Moore's sentimentality. Whether it is conveyed through the memories evoked by a harp or suggested through the displacement of one mode of speaking for another, Irishness is nostalgic in its orientation. However, it is important to state that this is not the misty-eyed nostalgia that is implicit in many twenty-first century conceptions of the word, nor a longing for Ireland as a geographical entity necessarily. It is to be troubled by a state that, for all its refusal to be pinned down and its inarticulateness, is nevertheless to be prized above the sophisticated world that has replaced it. Arguably this was not a world that Charlotte Brontë embraced as she sought to obscure her Irish origins.

Emily Brontë's relationship with her Irish heritage may have been less dismissive. Her appropriation of Iernë as a name may have been an echo of Shelley's connection of that

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<sup>45</sup> Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989) p. 73.

name with Thomas Moore in his elegy for Keats, *Adonais*: ‘From her wilds, Ierne sent / The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong / And love taught grief to fall like music from his tongue’.<sup>46</sup> Aside from highlighting how Moore was seen as the poetic representative of Ireland, there is, here, a situating of the Irish poet as the lyrist of a nostalgic loss. What is also interesting is the alliteration of ‘sweetest’ and ‘saddest’ that anticipates Nelly Dean’s description of the mourning of Edgar Linton as a ‘melancholy sweeter than common joy’. As has been previously discussed, through a consideration of both Moore’s and Brontë’s poetry, the latter resists the ‘sweet’ consolations of the former for a nostalgic yearning that is starker. Emily Brontë rejects a sentimental version of Irishness that was offered to her in the writing of the time.

In nineteenth-century England, Irishness represented otherness and it could have provided a way for Emily Brontë to articulate her sense of not fitting; it is a challenge to Britishness and the inauthentic home in which she finds herself. Thinking about Irishness in this way may account for its enduring appeal among Brontë scholars for it provided a way to establish Brontë’s sense of otherness and difference. However, the distinction has often not been made between sentimental notions of an inherent Irishness and one that is mediated through perceptions that were current in Victorian England and articulated by writers such as Matthew Arnold.

So a sense of not fitting leads to an effort to conceive of an elsewhere that acts as a ‘ghostly troubler’ to the present and, in the context of Irishness, problematizes the easy resolution that was offered by the many national tales that were written, not just Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl* that was considered in chapter two, but those of a writer who Emily Brontë was certainly familiar with – Sir Walter Scott; the happy merging of the Gaelic into the United Kingdom is not one that Emily Brontë shared and it is difficult to feel the union of

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Shelley, ed. Vol 4, p. 97.

the two houses in *Wuthering Heights*, through the marriage of Hareton and Catherine, as anything other than a loss: any imaginative recompense lies in the possibility that Heathcliff and Catherine are still acting as ‘ghostly troublers’ at the end of the novel. The sense of loss is stronger than the sense of hope that a new family line may be established by the new couple.

This chapter looks forward to considering Gondal as another way that Emily Brontë exercised the same impulse to conceive of an elsewhere as a home as a way of articulating her sense of nostalgia. It was a way of imagining exile and disassociating herself from a world of which she did not feel a part. It also looks forward to the fuller consideration of *Wuthering Heights* which expresses the sense that ‘the outrage to the hearth is the supreme catastrophe’. This is a quotation taken from John Millington Synge’s *The Aran Islands* where, in the way he describes the home lives of the islanders, is felt the intense domesticity that existed in *Wuthering Heights*. He continues:

They live here in a world of grey, where there are wild rains and mists every week in the year, and their warm chimney corners, filled with children and young girls, grow into the consciousness of each family in a way it is not easy to understand in more civilized places.<sup>47</sup>

The context of this quotation is the description of an eviction experienced as a ‘catastrophe’ and, in her refraction of conceptions of Irishness, Brontë experiences the moving on of the world around her as a ‘catastrophe’ rather than something that is necessary and even welcome. Much in the same way that an Irish text from the Celtic Revival, *The Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, presents the passing of an old world, so Brontë employs this retrospective

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<sup>47</sup> John M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1907) p. 78.



vision and sympathy for a group of people, in her poetry and *Wuthering Heights*, who are unable to accommodate themselves to the modern world.

So the focus on Emily Brontë conceiving of an elsewhere that she can call home and have her nostalgic impulse allayed will continue in the next chapter through a consideration of Gondal. Both Irishness and Gondal are articulations of the ‘world within’; one being felt as, to borrow Thomas MacDonagh’s words, ‘A hereditary memory’ and the other as the creation of a world, not so much that she can find a home in, but where she can explore her own sense of exile.

Chapter Four: Gondal: 'The Gift of Alterability'

*The Gondal Debate*

The importance of Gondal for Emily Brontë's poetry has divided scholars: either her imaginary world is an organising principle for her poetry (as well as providing the seeds for *Wuthering Heights*) or Gondal is the inspiration of her worst work. The former perspective is represented, most famously, by Fannie Ratchford who organised all of the poetry as a coherent narrative of Gondal in *Gondal's Queen*; the latter viewpoint's champion is Derek Stanford who writes of the 'red herring of Gondal', seeing it as distracting the reader from a true appreciation of Emily Brontë's poetry.<sup>1</sup> He gives the Gondal poems short shrift, dismissing their artistic merit as 'Byronic bombast'.<sup>2</sup> With more restraint, Edward Chitham situates Gondal Byronism in terms of Brontë's relationship with her Romantic forebears, arguing that Gondal, in linking the poetry with 'Scott and Byron and drawing our attention away from her relationship with such Romantics as Coleridge and Shelley' is, in effect, an artistic straitjacket.<sup>3</sup> Space does not permit a lengthy challenge to the view that Byron's influence on Emily Brontë is less mature than Shelley and Coleridge's. Indeed, Byron provides a helpful insight into the nature of her Gondal project. In the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron expressed his sense of a home in the very act of writing: 'There woos no home, nor hope, nor life, save what is here' (Vol 2, CV). The creation of a home in the very act of writing is exactly what Emily Brontë was endeavouring to do in her creation of Gondal.

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<sup>1</sup> Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford, *Emily Brontë, her life and work*, (London: Peter Owen, 1966) p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Spark and Stanford, p. 129

<sup>3</sup> Edward Chitham and Tom Winnifrith, *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems*, (London: Macmillan, 1983) p. 57.

The idea of Gondal's irrelevance is continued by Angela Leighton who argues that Emily Brontë's poetry is best read by filtering Gondal out. She states that when a Gondal poem is read as unrooted lyric rather than as a time-and-place specific dramatic poem, it cuts 'free, becoming the voices of anyone or no one, breaking the poem's dependence on contingent actions'.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, this is one step on from Chitham's view, considered above, as it at least recognises the artistic merits of the Gondal poetry (though, through a discussion of a number of poems in this chapter, it will be shown that the artistic merits of the Gondal poems notebook range far wider than 'Remembrance', the poem under discussion in Leighton's article).

Gondal warrants consideration as shaping Emily Brontë's poetic output rather than dismissal as the scaffolding of a juvenile poet. It is, in a more literal way than the considerations of Irishness and Catholicism in the previous two chapters, a means of exploring the nature of exile. For this reason, the fact that Brontë conceived of this imaginative world in the first place should not be ignored (as well as the intentionality involved in her separating out of some poems into the 'Gondal Poems' notebook). The Gondal poems draw imaginative life from longing, often embodied in a dramatic form (with its sense of voice and action). In a way that recalls Shelley's description of Thomas Moore in *Adonais*, Brontë is the singer of Gondal's wrong. Gondal, as will be discussed in this chapter, is an expression of Emily Brontë's keenly felt and restless nostalgia.

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<sup>4</sup> Angela Leighton, 'Lyric and the Lyrical' in Kate Flint, ed., *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) p. 162.

*Old Elbë Hall: The Locus Classicus of Home in Emily Brontë's World of Gondal*

The first poem in the Gondal poems notebook is about longing for home and horror at being ripped away from that home. The dramatic Gondal setting is that Alexander, Lord of Elbë, is dying by Lake Elnor and grappling with the possibility that his lover, Augusta, will forget him. He also grapples with the indignity of dying away from his native country and the prospect of being severed from the 'sweet, sweet world':

There shines the moon, at noon of night-

Vision of glory – Dream of light!

Holy as heaven – undimmed and pure,

Looking down on the lonely moor –

And lonelier still beneath her ray

That drear moor stretches far away

Till it seems strange that aught can lie

Beneath its zone of silver sky –

Bright moon – dear moon! When years have past

My weary feet return at last-

And still upon Lake Elnor's breast

Thy solemn rays serenely rest

And still the Fern-leaves sighing wave

Like mourners over Elbë's grave

And Earth's the same but Oh to see

How widely time has altered me!

Am I the being who long ago

Sat watching by that water side  
The light of life expiring slow  
From his fair cheek and brow of pride?  
Not oft these mountains feel the shine  
Of such a day – as fading then,  
Cast from its fount of gold divine  
A last smile on the heathery plain  
And kissed the far-off peaks of snow  
That gleaming on the horizon shone  
As if in summer's warmest glow  
Stern winter claimed a loftier throne –  
And there he lay among the bloom  
His red blood dyed a deeper hue  
Shuddering to feel the ghostly gloom  
That coming Death around him threw –  
Sickening to think one hour would sever  
The sweet, sweet world and him forever  
To think that twilight gathering dim  
Would never pass away to him –  
No – never more! That awful thought  
A thousand dreary feelings brought,  
And memory all her powers combined  
And rushed upon his fainting mind  
Wide, swelling woodlands seemed to rise  
Beneath soft, sunny, southern skies –

Old Elbë Hall his noble home  
Towered 'mid its trees, whose foliage green  
Rustled with the kind airs that come  
From summer Heavens when most serene  
And bursting through the leafy shade  
A gush of golden sunlight played;  
Bathing the walls in amber light  
And sparkling in the water clear  
That stretched below – reflected bright  
The whole wide world of cloudless air –  
And still before his spirit's eye  
Such well known scenes would rise and fly  
Till, maddening with despair and pain  
He turned his dying face to me  
And wildly cried, 'Oh once again  
Might I my native country see!  
But once again – one single day!  
And must it - can it *never* be?  
To die – and die so far away  
When life has hardly smiled for me –  
Augusta – you will soon return  
Back to that land in health and bloom  
And then the heath alone will mourn  
Above my unremembered tomb  
For you'll forget the lonely grave

And mouldering corpse by Elnor's wave' –

The poem opens by balancing noun-phrases that apostrophise the moon creating an antiphonal atmosphere of solemn worship; the cadence is slow, measured and calm. The speaker (presumably Augusta) contemplates the imagined scene until she finds it 'strange that aught can lie / Beyond its zone of silver sky'; this is the contemplation of an imagined scene until nothing else can be imagined.

However, the undifferentiated hypnotic bliss is broken by the recollection of past trauma as Augusta reflects on the last hours of her lover, Alexander, Lord of Elbë. The poem's occasion is her return to 'Lake Elnor's breast' where Alexander was slain many years previously. In a Wordsworthian manner (but where the emotion is not recollected in tranquillity) Augusta experiences the return to a place hallowed by past associations and exclaims: 'How wildly Time has altered me'. Brontë, through the prism of Gondal, explores Wordsworthian revisiting.

The search for a sympathising connection, previously considered in chapter two, is felt, within this poem, in the motions of the natural world. Augusta's observation that: 'And still the Fern-leaves sighing wave / Like mourners over Elbe's grave' is suggestive of sympathetic breathings of a nature that is a dependable constant (suggested by 'and still') in a world of mutability. *The Excursion* ponders similar considerations as the Wanderer muses on nature's sympathies that 'steal upon the meditative mind, / and grow with thought' (I.515-6) only to evince scepticism that nature is sympathetic to human suffering. This is a shift in position from Wordsworth's *The Thorn*, where the connection between a jilted woman left to carry her fiancé's child and nature is stronger. Here the moss on the supposed site of the infant's grave, in what can be read as a cry for justice, spreads over a nearby thorn bush:

But plain it is, the thorn is bound

With heavy tufts of moss, that strive  
 To drag it to the ground.<sup>5</sup>

In this matter, Emily Brontë swerves from the position of the later Wordsworth to explore the possibility that people and nature are connected in a sympathetic relationship.

However, nature is not sympathetic in Augusta's recollection of keeping vigil with the dying Elbë. As he is dying, the brightness of the sunset, bringing 'A last smile on the heathery plain', is pathetic fallacy in reverse; nature continues to fire its beauty regardless of one whose beauty is fading. However, the possibility of sympathetic motions return with the use of 'fading' to evoke the end of the day with the word's freighting of lifelessness. The appositeness of nature's mood to the human drama being acted out is also in the personification of the sun as it:

...Kissed the far off peaks of snow  
 That gleaming on the horizon shone  
 As if in summer's warmest glow  
 Stern winter claimed a loftier throne

The placing of this description in-parenthesis, suggesting Augusta's sense of the import of the natural world around her, implies the ability of nature to bring pause and modulate a fraught human drama into something more reflective. This is a characteristically Wordsworthian swerve, and the progress of Augusta's thoughts, as she reflects on the time of Elbë's death, shows some signs of Wordsworthian emotion recollected in tranquillity.

It would be more difficult to point-up the relationship between nature and human suffering if the poem as a drama were considered; it is not meant to be read as a disembodied lyric evocation of intense emotion. The drama earths the poem; it does matter that this is a Gondal poem. Also, this delineation of the weaving of the human drama and the natural

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<sup>5</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) lines 244-6.



presence is a master stroke of the poem which renders Lyn Pyket's assessment of it as 'far from accomplished' too sweeping; this critical judgement also does not take due cognizance of the nuances that Pyket herself acknowledges when she writes of the poem's 'layering effect'.<sup>6</sup> The poem's presentation of a Gondal character reading the natural world, discerning sympathies but also being troubled by a 'stern' indifference, creates the conditions for a nostalgic exploration of exile.

Elbë's severing from the 'sweet, sweet world' is portrayed with force. The insistence in 'No –never more!', as Augusta recalls her contemplation of Elbë's nearing death, is an overstatement which probably led to the poem's dismissal by scholars; however, the following details become more subtle. The major key becomes a minor key:

That awful thought

A thousand dreary feelings brought

And memory all her powers combined

And rushed upon his fainting mind

Reading *awful* as connoting awe situates the dying Elbë's remembering as one that goes beyond the immediate terror of his impending death. These lines combine the agitated and the tranquil: the melancholy that inheres in 'dreary' is ill-matched with the exaggeration of 'thousand'; any softening influence of 'memory' is cancelled by the action of the personified force 'rushing' upon Alexander's mind. This is a forceful imagining of memory and Alexander is overwhelmed by it. The fact that they 'rushed upon his fainting mind' suggests someone in the grip of an ecstasy or vision.

This vision is of Alexander's home and the susurrations in the following lines signal the dominance of memory over the pain of present reality. Now the painful onrush of memory is softened with the 'kind airs' which are, nonetheless, the experience of a deep

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<sup>6</sup> Lyn Pykett, *Women Writers: Emily Brontë*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) p. 49.

nostalgia for a past home. What Brontë evokes most powerfully, however, is the return from this brief re-entry into past bliss. That these memories are a cruel taunt in their inability to bring any lasting peace is felt in the line: ‘Such well-known scenes would rise and fly’; through this description the memories evoke the idea of a taunting harpy offering brief sustenance before tearing it away. Exile is reaffirmed most painfully.

It is worth noting the reflection on past times on different levels. Augusta, returning to the place where Alexander fell, is reflecting on the moments before his death. As part of this reflection, she recalls Alexander’s own reflections on his past at Elbë Hall. Her evocation of the sun as it ‘Cast from its fount of gold divine / A last smile on the heathery plain’ echoes Alexander’s remembrance of his past at Elbë hall: ‘And bursting through the leafy shade / A gush of golden sunshine played’. The effect of this Russian-doll imagining of memory is to deepen the intensity of the poem’s reaching back into the past.

The glow of a deeply felt nostalgia, in this poem tilted very close to its literal meaning as a home illness, fades, so that much like the visionary in Brontë’s later poem, ‘The Prisoner’, the soul begins to feel the chain once more. What is so striking about this death scene is its imagining by Brontë as a final flaring up rather than a fading; indeed the end of the poem does not fade as the death of Alexander is not stated. The return of his ‘despair and pain’ leads to a modulation from passionate exclamation, through a pleading questioning, to a final pathetic reproach:

But once again – one single day!

And must it – can it *never* be?

To die – and die so far away

The use of repetition in these lines conveys the sense of desperation as well as being an anguished mockery of the tranquil antiphonal opening of the poem. Alexander bargains with space and time and the echoic structure has the effect of a dawning realisation.

The use of 'Augusta' and its placing in parentheses marks a return to a calmer key and the sense of reproach at life in general as it has hardly 'smiled', narrows to focus on the likelihood that Augusta will 'forget the lonely grave'. In these few lines of the poem are possibly the seeds for Catherine's reproach to Heathcliff that he will forget her when she is in the grave. There is a return to the idea of the possibility of a sympathetic nature as the 'heath alone' will mourn. Here, however, Alexander is wrong to prophesy that Augusta will not return to the tomb since this is precisely where she is at the start of the poem. This revisiting is an important means, throughout Brontë's poetry, of reaching back towards former days of 'sunshine'. Anticipating Emily Brontë's later 'Remembrance' this poem explores the reach and depths of nostalgia.

The poem also reveals Brontë's ability to use dramatic dialogue. The build-up from the opening note of serenity through increasing intensity to the final note of reproach partakes just as much of the dramatic as the lyric impulse. More pertinent, though, for the purpose of this thesis, it shows that Gondal and ideas of home were entwined in the mind of Emily Brontë. The 'well known scenes' are imagined as a place of life through the use of such verbs as 'swelling', 'bursting' and 'sparkling'. The life-giving properties of home are also implied in the reproachful Alexander's statement that Augusta will 'soon return / Back to that land in health and bloom'. The placing of the line-break between 'return' and 'back' again situates a return home as an imaginative preoccupation in the poem. The way that home is described also highlights the desirability of the place. The sun that 'reflected bright / The whole wide world of cloudless air' imparts a sustaining power to the atmosphere of home – Alexander was literally in his element (the choice of 'air' rather than sky is a curious one). There is even a hint of the sustaining power of contemplating home as Alexander lays dying. The mention of 'before his spirit's eye / Such well-known scenes would rise and fly' recalls the idea of Wordsworth's inward eye and the bliss of solitude. However, there is no emotion

recollected in tranquillity for Alexander. As already discussed, Emily Brontë rejects the imaginative consolation that Wordsworth offers; what Alexander feels is a painful sense of being ripped away.

To divorce this poem from its Gondal context would be to divest it of much of the dramatic power that it possesses. The *locus classicus* of this poem is Old Elbë Hall, a Gondal location. To remove it would be to strip the poem of much of its dramatic energy and substitute a Moore-like lyrical sentimental effusion. This is to say that the Gondal location is an integral, rather than an incidental, part of the poem. Elbë's specific reference to 'my native country' situates the evocation of a particular place as well as echoing the lines from the start of Sir Walter Scott's poem, 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel', where the narrator declares:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,

Who never to himself hath said

This is my own, my native land

The importance of Gondal as an imaginative catalyst for the nostalgic homesickness of Emily Brontë's writing is seen in the release it gives her to conceive of a place that can be called home. In the poem just considered, Brontë imagines a state of exile in place and in time and dramatically presents efforts to reach back to a state of undifferentiated bliss that is evoked in the image of Lake Elnor reflecting back 'The whole wide world'. As in Irene Tayler's analysis of 'Stars' where the speaker gazes at the stars with the delight that an infant finds in its mother's eyes, this line suggests an undifferentiated state where the 'whole wide world' is reflected in the lake.<sup>7</sup>

Emily Brontë returned to explore the nostalgic longing evoked by Augusta's longing for Alexander in a poem written six months later:

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<sup>7</sup> Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 35.

Lord of Elbë, on Elbë hill

The mist is thick and the wind is chill

And the heart of thy friend from the dawn of day

Has sighed for sorrow that thou went away –

Lord of Elbë, how pleasant to me

The sound of thy blithesome step would be

Rustling the heath that, only now

Waves as the night-gusts over it blow

Bright are the fires in thy lonely home

I see them far off, and as deepens the gloom

Gleaming like stars through the high forest-boughs

Gladder they glow in the park's repose –

O Alexander! when I return,

Warm as those hearths my heart would burn,

Light as thine own, my foot would fall

If I might hear thy voice in the hall –

But thou art now on a desolate sea –

Parted from Gondal and parted from me –

All my repining is hopeless and vain,

Death never yields back his victims again –

Augusta stands ‘on Elbë hill’, looking towards Elbë Hall and ponders Alexander’s absence due to his death; the idea of a return to the house where Alexander is no longer present animates the poem. The idea of return connects Augusta’s return in ‘A.G.A. to A.E’ with the previous articulation of Elbë’s longing to return home in his dying moments; however, this poem reveals intimately Augusta’s interrogation of her longing for home. Emily Brontë is showing her preoccupation with the idea of return from different perspectives. She imagines Augusta’s return, her anticipation of Alexander’s return and her ‘repining’ that it can never be.

The central image of the poem is that of the ‘fires’. The poem moves through space to the heart of the house. There is a paradox in the brightness of the fires in a ‘lonely home’ which is developed in the next line as the ‘far off’ sight of the fires ‘deepens the gloom’. It is as if the home is forever in prospect and never to be reached. Comparison of the fires to ‘stars’ anticipates Brontë’s treatment of stars as an image of safety. The alliterative repetition of ‘gleaming’ and ‘gladder’ serve to emphasise the attractiveness of the fires and to make the return to the watcher on the hill ‘where the mist is thick and the wind is chill’ all the more ‘desolate’.

In the penultimate stanza the ‘hearths’ of the previous verse are linked with the ‘heart’ to underline the affinity of Augusta with what she beholds from her ‘cold hill side’. The certainty of Augusta’s ‘*When I return*’ (emphasis added) is one possible antecedent for Catherine’s promise of a return to Heathcliff. While discussing this verse, I also wish to note the gentleness of the returning step. To return to the second stanza, Augusta imagines Alexander returning to her over the moor. The evocation of the sound of ‘thy blithesome step’ is, arguably, not helped by the deliberate archaism. However, the unquiet ‘rustling’ of the heath looks both to the imagined return of Alexander and the present reality that it ‘only

now / Waves as the night-gusts over it blow'. This ambiguity produces an exquisite sense of a desired homecoming as the imagined disturbance of the heath by Alexander's feet metamorphoses into that caused by the 'night-gusts': currents of hope and disappointment are felt in the understated exploration of the associative ideas linked with the wind. There is a tantalising sense of a homecoming that could be missed as the sound of footsteps and 'night-gusts' are confused. Augusta's own imagined return in the penultimate verse seems cumbersome in comparison, given the evocation of a burning heart and the heavy alliterative onomatopoeia in 'foot would fall'. When conceiving of a homecoming, the imagination can only tantalise or fail.

The tone of a tantalising imagination continues in the final verse where the 'desolate sea', initially imagined as the literal becomes reconceived as the metaphorical in the final line of the poem. Separation is the key note in the twice repeated 'parted' as well as the image of a beloved on a voyage while the lover pines at home. The futility of complaint is underlined in the third line and the final line stresses irrevocable separation.

Discussing this poem goes some way to establishing Brontë's more explicitly Gondal poetry as possessing artistic merit because of its Gondal setting rather than in spite of it. The dramatic situation is important with the image of Augusta beholding a home from the distance. What is striking, however, is the domesticity of the poem; this point is made as a riposte to those criticisms of Brontë's Gondal poetry as Byronic bombast. There is a balance of the lyrical and the dramatic as Brontë imagines a Gondal tableau of longing for home in suspended animation. Indeed, the threefold alliteration of heath, heart and hearth suggests a merging and confusion of association (the alliteration continues into Heathcliff) in much the same way that Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton and Catherine Heathcliff merge into one another during Lockwood's dream. This poem artfully interweaves lyrical unity and dramatic intensity.

The focus on Alexander's home continues in a third shorter poem:

Old Hall of [Elbë] ruined lonely now  
 House to which the voice of life shall never more return  
 Chambers roofless desolate where weeds and ivy grow  
 Windows through whose broken arches the night winds  
     Sadly mourn  
 Home of the departed the long departed dead.

Over the three poems considered, the visualising of the home has become bleaker; the gusts that held out the possibility of return in the previous poem have now become the night winds that 'sadly mourn'. The sense of an irrevocable end is felt in the statement 'shall never more return'. However, the foregrounding of 'Home' in the final line suggests a return of the spirit to the place it once called home. The sense of desertion in the image of the wind having free rein through the 'broken arches' is mitigated through the suggestion of a spectral presence, aided by the ambiguity as to whether 'Home' denotes a past or present inhabitation. The poem could be a postscript placed at the end of *Wuthering Heights* in its echo of Lockwood's speculations concerning the possibilities of ghostly presence after Hareton and Catherine have moved to Thrushcross Grange.

*The Gift of Alterability: Imagining Home*

In analysing how Brontë's presentation of her world of Gondal serves to situate her as a poet of nostalgia and homesickness, it is worth considering how she presents her thoughts about Gondal in poems that are set, not within her imaginary world, but outside. These



poems express her longing for imaginative freedom and her sense of being torn between two worlds. The first poem, 'A little while, a little while' (hereafter known as 'A little while') explores the mental state of someone who is now allowed to play. The next poem, 'How long will you remain' (hereafter known as 'How long') is suggestive of Brontë's predisposition to night-time reverie and her resistance to being torn away from 'My blissful dream that never comes with day'. The final poem is 'To Imagination' where a clear choosing of one world over another is presented.

Emily Brontë, in these three poems, expresses longing for the 'gift of alterability'.<sup>8</sup> The desire for the world of imagination, or an imaginary world, is the desire for a safe place and a refuge, or as Madeline Hope Dodds expressed it 'a secret abiding place'.<sup>9</sup> In the introduction to her endeavour to knit all of Emily Brontë's poems into a coherent Gondal narrative, Ratchford asserts that, while they were at Roe Head School, Charlotte and Emily, 'were homesick, suffering from such nostalgia of soul as few persons ever do... for their dream worlds, Angria and Gondal'.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this section is to consider the nature of this 'nostalgia of soul'.

'A little while' was written while Emily Brontë was at Law Hill School. The first five verses imagine a time of opportunity where the speaker ponders the option of going, in her imagination, to a spot 'mid barren hills':

A little while, a little while  
 The noisy crowd are barred away;  
 And I can sing and I can smile  
 A little while I've holiday!

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<sup>8</sup>Helen Cixous' words, cited in: Teddi Lynn Chichester, 'Evading "Earth's Dungeon Tomb": Emily Brontë, A.G.A. and the Fatally Feminine', *Victorian Poetry*, (29.1.1991), 1-15. p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Madeline Hope Dodds, 'Gondaliand', *Modern Language Review*, (18.1.1923), 9-21. p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford, *The Brontës' Web of Childhood*, (NY: Columbia UP, 1941) p. 105.

Where wilt thou go my harassed heart?  
 Full many a land invites thee now;  
 And places near, and far apart  
 Have rest for thee, my weary brow –

There is a spot 'mid barren hills  
 Where winter howls and driving rain  
 But if the dreary tempest chills  
 There is a light that warms again

The house is old, the trees are bare  
 And moonless bends the misty dome  
 But what on earth is half so dear –  
 So longed for as the hearth of home?

The mute bird sitting on the stone,  
 The dank moss dripping from the wall,  
 The garden-walk with weeds o'ergrown  
 I love them – how I love them all!

The stanzas above sound very much like Emily Brontë's own world in Haworth and what is striking is the ordinariness of what she observes. The image of the 'dank moss dripping' is Wordsworthian in the way such an ordinary sight can evoke such a 'love' from the poet as well as Keatsian in its sensuous wet luxuriance. The sight of the 'mute bird sitting on the

stone' takes on, in the very quality of its silence, something of the imaginative potentiality of one of Wordsworth's borderers.<sup>11</sup> The situation in the poem is one of emotion recollected in tranquillity.

However, notwithstanding all the powerful evocation of a longed-for home, what follows is a shift in focus to 'another clime':

Shall I go there? or shall I seek

Another clime, another sky.

Where tongues familiar music speak

In accents dear to memory?

Yes, as I mused, the naked room,

The flickering firelight died away

And from the midst of cheerless gloom

I passed to bright, unclouded day –

A little and a lone green lane

That opened on a common wide

A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain

Of mountains circling every side –

A heaven so clear, an earth so calm,

So sweet, so soft, so hushed an air

And, deepening still the dreamlike charm,

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<sup>11</sup> See the opening chapter to, Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision*, (Oxford: OUP, 1982).

Wild moor-sheep feeding everywhere –

That was the scene – I knew it well

I knew the pathways far and near

That winding o'er each billowy swell

Marked out the tracks of wandering deer

Could I have lingered but an hour

It well had paid a week of toil

But truth has banished fancy's power

I hear my dungeon bars recoil –

Even as I stood with raptured eye

Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear

My hour of rest had fled by

And given me back to weary care –

The contrast between the first and second possibilities of imaginative retreat is highlighted by the metrological conditions; the 'winter howls and driving rain' becomes the 'bright, unclouded day'. However, there is much that is familiar in Brontë's real world with the 'wild moor-sheep' and the 'billowy swell'. This seeming awkward mixture of a familiar world, grounded in recognisable features, and a fantasy world that clearly draws on the imagination makes a point about the nostalgic imaginings of a created world. Brontë was never more present in her world than when she was exploring imaginary boundaries in the visionary.

This was in much the same way that the imaginative intensity of William Blake's poetry enabled him to walk the streets of London.

The question is not whether to stay in the real world or indulge in imaginative escape but what imaginative exit to walk through. The option stated in the first part of the poem clearly seems related to Emily Brontë's Haworth, whereas the second part, through the portrayal of escape broken by a return to reality suggested by 'But truth has banished fancy's power', relates to a more wholly imagined world, rather than to the poet's home seen through the haze of imagination. Brontë is in control of her imaginative journey; she can choose. In her later poetry, her visions are more in control; in 'Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle' Brontë refers to the visions that 'rise and change which kill me with desire'. Here, visions control Emily Brontë in contrast to 'A little while' where she chooses her imaginative release. In 'A little while' the return from visionary experience is marked by a mild begrudging, 'my hour of rest had fled by', the return in 'Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle' is traumatic – 'Oh, dreadful is the check'. One poem is set in Brontë's real world while the latter is set in Gondal: this supports the idea that the world of Gondal released the poet's imagination.

The nostalgic emotion in 'A little while' has, in the first half, as its focus, the 'spot 'mid barren hills'. This echoes how Wordsworth focuses on a spot in *Michael*. The ordinariness of the 'straggling heap of unhewn stones' (17) is evoked through Wordsworth's insistence that the central object of the poem is one 'which you might pass by' (15).<sup>12</sup> Brontë is Wordsworth's heir in 'A little while' through the way in which she invests ordinary objects with storied significance.<sup>13</sup> This investment is seen in Brontë's response of recognition of and affection towards the bird, moss and garden walk in stanza five: 'I love them – how I love them all!' This exclamatory repetition anticipates the listener's wonder as to why such objects as 'moss dripping from the wall' would excite her imagination at all. This

<sup>12</sup> References to *Michael* taken from: William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds., James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992). Numbers in parentheses refer to line numbers.

<sup>13</sup> 'storied', adj., def. 2, *OED*.

anticipation of the listener's puzzlement as to why such a place could evoke such strong feelings is also felt in the previous stanza. The rhetorical question situates this imaginative escape as a longing for 'the hearth of home', no matter if it be 'old', 'moonless' and 'misty'.

The fact that this place is a destination for a 'harassed heart' situates it as a place of safety, of 'rest for... my weary brow'. 'A little while' is a poem written out of Brontë's sense that the demands of her world, 'the noisy crowd', disconnect her from the homes that give her imaginative freedom. The plural is used intentionally as this is a poem where Emily Brontë chooses between homes: one that resembles the geographical entity of Haworth and 'another clime'. Taking Gondal as one manifestation of Brontë's preoccupation with imaginative release, this poem shows nostalgia *for* a world such as Gondal, whereas the poems considered in the previous section show the experience of nostalgia *within* the world of Gondal.

In the second part of the poem, Brontë muses on the question of whether she should 'seek / Another clime'. It is a question that is never answered because the subsequent vision of another world seems to happen without the poet's bidding, as she 'mused'. The poet's choice of place is not known. Despite the implication that 'another clime' should contrast with the 'spot' evoked in the first half of the poem, it is still seen as 'familiar'. This second vision has been experienced before and the poet is familiar with the 'accents dear to memory'. Emily Brontë, in specifying this second vision, suggests that this imagined place gives her something that the first does not; there is more of an at-home feeling that has been consecrated by past associations, through 'accents dear to memory'. Indeed, the use of increasingly metaphorical language to introduce the second vision, compared with the first which is imagined with concrete pictures, suggests that greater imaginative depths are being plumbed in this second part of the poem.

These depths are evoked by the adjectives 'distant' and 'dreamy'; however, these spacious words are modified by the specificity of 'A little and a lone green lane'. This

imagined world, however, is more open and expansive. The use of the compound adjective, ‘dim blue’ to describe the sight of the mountains connotes unconfined space through portrayal of an indiscernible horizon. This is modified through the use of ‘A heaven so clear’. While the first vision is full of active adjectives, the second exists in suspended animation. The word ‘hushed’ evokes the muffled voices that might be heard in a dream. Out of this, the poem’s most powerful line, ‘deepening still the dreamlike charm’ suggests that the poet is attaining an imaginative intensity confirmed by another layer being revealed in the ‘Wild moor-sheep feeding everywhere’. The familiar image of sheep does not mean that this moment is any the less visionary. This is because Brontë continues to reach deeper into the imagination to access another world which satisfies her nostalgia. This is a created home, underlined by the repetition of ‘I knew’ and the comprehensiveness of ‘pathways far and near’.

The noticing that marks a familiar home continues with the mention of ‘each billowy swell’ and the identification of ‘tracks of wandering deer’. Edward Chitham argues that the mention of deer situates this part of the poem as imagining Gondal.<sup>14</sup> However, his observation is beside the point. What this poem shows is Brontë’s use of imaginative states to satisfy a longing for home and thus the poem highlights the necessity of considering Gondal as an imaginative prompt.

The last two verses bring the poem to a close with a trope that becomes familiar in Brontë’s later poetry – the inability to sustain visionary release. The personification of ‘truth’ that banishes ‘fancy’s power’ is an early manifestation of the ‘Stern Reason’ in her later poem, ‘Plead for Me’. The use of ‘fancy’ rather than ‘imagination’ is revealing of the nature of visionary release in ‘A little while’. Brontë’s agency in making a choice, using the terms in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, partakes of the imposing of associations rather than

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Gezari, ed. *Complete Poems*, p. 254.

Coleridge's esemplastic power of the imagination. The pain of return from visionary bliss increases as Brontë moves from 'fancy's power' to the more capricious 'phantom bliss' of imagination.

The imperative of return from the bliss of imaginative escape is felt more painfully in 'How long' This poem is a dialogue between the poet and another interlocutor who is endeavouring to pull the poet away from their 'reverie'. The two voices express longing for visionary freedom and bemusement respectively:

How long will you remain? The midnight hour  
 Has tolled the last note from [the] minster tower  
 Come come the fire is dead the lamp burns low  
 Your eyelids droop a weight is on your brow  
 Your cold hands hardly hold the useless pen  
 Come morn will give recovered strength again

No let me linger leave me let me be  
 A little longer in this reverie  
 I'm happy now and would you tear away  
 My blissful dream that never comes with day  
 A vision dear though false for well my mind  
 Knows what a bitter waking waits behind

Can there be pleasure in this shadowy room  
 With windows yawning on intenser gloom  
 And such a dreary wind so bleakly sweeping  
 Round walls where only you are vigil keeping



Besides your face has not a sign of joy  
And more than tearful sorrow fills your eye  
Look on those woods look on that heaven lorn  
And think how changed they'll be tomorrow morn

The dome of heaven expanding bright and blue  
The leaves the green grass sprinkled thick with dew  
And wet mists rising on the river's breast  
And wild birds bursting from their songless nest  
And your own children's merry voices chasing  
The fancies grief not pleasure has been tracing

Aye speak of these – but can you tell me why  
Day breathes such beauty over earth and sky  
And waking sounds revive restore again  
[Dull] hearts that all night long have throbb'd in pain

Is it not that the sunshine and the wind  
Lure from its self the mourner's woe worn mind  
And all the joyous music breathing by  
And all the splendour of that cloudless sky

Regive him shadowy gleams of infancy  
And draw his tired gaze from futurity

This poem opposes the worlds of day and night but the simple juxtaposition between the welcome safety of dark and the harshness of morning is more blended. For example, the ‘splendour of that cloudless sky’ is said to ‘lure’, which connotes an attempted distraction from the poet’s ‘woe worn mind’ that ‘all night long’ has ‘throbbled in pain’. This luring parallels the attempt of the interlocutor in the first verse to distract the poet from their ‘reverie’. There is a strong sense of the poet’s feeling of futility concerning the interlocutor’s claim that morning ‘will give recovered strength again’. The question, for the poet, is what is the object of being woken by the day as she retorts that the day will only reveal ‘the fancies grief not pleasure has been tracing’.

Yet there is the promise of the last two lines of the poem. ‘Regive’ connects with ‘restore’ and ‘revive’ with its promise of a return. The phrase, ‘shadowy gleams of infancy’ echoes the main idea in Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ concerning hints of the true self that are felt as one moves through adulthood.<sup>15</sup> ‘Draw’ connects back to ‘lure’ connoting a deception to hide from a harsh reality. In this poem there is taking refuge in the world of the imagination and of childhood but both acts of imaginative fleeing are futile. The poet is matter of fact that the vision is ‘dear though false’ and that the end result will be ‘bitter waking’. Yet the placing of the last two lines in the poem on their own, as well as the syntax and diction, suggest that, despite the possibility of being deceived, there is something of genuine imaginative sustenance. The import of these final lines is suggested by the fact that Brontë wrote ‘regive’ and ‘Regive him’ many times on the bottom of the manuscript.<sup>16</sup>

Emily Brontë moved on to give the tug-of-war between night and day greater imaginative expression in ‘Stars’. However, what is expressed more forcefully in ‘How long’ is the reluctance to leave behind the ‘reverie’, underlined by the tone of reproach to the other interlocutor in ‘would you tear away’. Indeed the cry ‘let me be’ is existential in its plea.

<sup>15</sup> Gezari, ed. *Complete Poems*, p. 259, also connects this phrase and Wordsworth: ‘the “shadowy gleams of infancy” are reminiscent of Wordsworth’.

<sup>16</sup> See Gezari, ed. p. 259.

The question of the interlocutor ‘Can there be pleasure in this shadowy room’ suggests an encouragement for the poet to notice the world around her but Brontë is at home in her ‘world within’.

Juliet Barker discusses the view that Emily Brontë never moved outside the world of Gondal. As an example, she relates the well-known story of the train journey to York where Emily and Anne discussed the current state of the Gondals. Her argument is that Emily did not need to abandon the ‘world within’ to get on in the ‘world without’; however, ‘How long’ shows that the two are still in an awkward tussle.<sup>17</sup> It will be a while before Emily Brontë attains the imaginative confidence of the ‘God within my breast’ expressed in ‘No coward soul’. It is true that she did not move on from Gondal. Fannie Ratchford expresses the view that ‘The novel did not turn her attention away from Gondal’.<sup>18</sup>

The third poem, ‘To Imagination’, reveals Brontë’s increased confidence in the ‘world within’ with the concomitant lack of compunction concerning the claims of the ‘world without’. Indeed, it contains the same content as ‘A little while’ with none of the anguished tussles with the claims of the outer world in ‘How long’ that would reach their greatest intensity in ‘Plead for Me’. Along with the increased confidence in her inner resources, Brontë is less sparing in her rejection of the ‘world without’. The imaginative poise in the poem is moving towards the strong declarative confidence in ‘No coward soul’. It illuminates Brontë finding refuge from exile in the world through a state of imaginative freedom:

‘To Imagination’

When weary with the long day’s care,

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<sup>17</sup> See Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 436

<sup>18</sup> Ratchford, p. 173.

And earthly change from pain to pain,  
And lost and ready to despair,  
Thy kind voice calls me back again:  
Oh, my true friend! I am not lone,  
While thou canst speak with such a tone!

So hopeless is the world without;  
The world within I doubly prize;  
Thy world, where, guile, and hate, and doubt,  
And cold suspicion never rise;  
Where thou, and I, and Liberty,  
Have undisputed sovereignty.

What matters it, that, all around,  
Danger, and guilt, and darkness lie,  
If but within our bosom's bound  
We hold a bright, untroubled sky,  
Warm with ten thousand mingled rays  
Of suns that know no winter days?

Reason, indeed, may oft complain  
For Nature's sad reality,  
And tell the suffering heart how vain  
Its cherished dreams must always be;  
And Truth may rudely trample down

The flowers of Fancy, newly-blown

But, thou art ever there, to bring

The hovering vision back, and breathe

New glories o'er the blighted spring,

And call a lovelier Life from Death,

And whisper, with a voice divine,

Of real worlds, as bright as thine.

I trust not to thy phantom bliss,

Yet, still, in evening's quiet hour,

With never failing thankfulness,

I welcome thee, Benignant Power;

Sure solacer of human cares

And sweeter hope, when hope despairs!

The title suggests a poem intended to be read as an ode with a tightly controlled structure moving from the looseness of alternate rhyme to the tightly refined final couplet. The voice is rhetorical, exclamatory and emphatic and lacks the tone of qualified assertion and counter-assertion of Emily's other poetry. The one exception to this is the final verse where Brontë questions if she can trust the imagination, yet this poem bears the hallmark of one prepared for publication and many steps removed from the immediacy of thought in which it was conceived. It is revealing that, in the manuscript, the title is written in pencil as it suggests subsequent effort to discipline the problematic bickering between Reason and Imagination to the demands of structure. So the very structure of the poem suggests

constraint which the poem's content does not admit: the form 'doth protest too much' (*Hamlet*) in its effort to present confidence in the imagination as certain.

Nevertheless, the poem opens with weariness. In other poems by Emily Brontë, weary is a straining and active verb, yet its use as an adjective in the opening line is as a result of the 'long day's care'; both the false dawn of deceptive hope and the hardness of life are encapsulated in the expression, 'earthly change from pain to pain' with the barely disguised irony in the repetition of 'pain' as well as the rhyming of 'pain' with 'again'. Brontë's phrasing also mockingly echoes St. Paul's words in his second letter to the Corinthians: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from *glory to glory*' (emphasis added). The first three lines descend very quickly to 'despair'; however, this is a rhetorical device to highlight the effect of imagination's liberating power. But in the poem's opening, there is a sense of bewilderment, confusion and not being fitted for the world.

Imagination is personified in the second half of the first verse; it differs from the abstract concept that Coleridge had defined in his *Biographia Literaria* (though his distinctions between the esemplastic imagination and associative fancy have some bearing on Brontë's use of the words). It is a 'kind voice' and 'my true friend'; however, the personal 'my' has to contend with the more abstracted 'Truth' later in the poem. The 'tone' of imagination's 'kind' voice is different from the unpredictable caprice of Brontë's later visionary experience. Here it is a simple case of cause and effect; Brontë's 'kind voice calls' as a result of her being 'weary with the long day's care'. So the situation of the poem is similar to that of 'A little while' in the way that imagination brings relief to the world-weary.

However, Brontë's begrudging acceptance of the world's demands in 'A little while' has, in this poem, become a stronger rejection. The intensifier 'So' is unpacked in the list of negative qualities associated with the 'world without' that 'never rise' in Brontë's world

within. Indeed, the absence of qualities such as ‘guile’ and ‘hate’ is a reason to conjecture that Brontë did not conceive of her inner world of imagination and Gondal as one and the same state, as she explores such dark emotions in her explicitly Gondal poetry. Instead, there is a sense of control in the ‘undisputed sovereignty’ that Imagination, Brontë and Liberty have over the world within. When this is coupled with the ability of imagination to ‘call a lovelier life from death’ (like Keats’ Grecian urn) in the penultimate stanza of the poem it gestures towards the Brontës’ early bed plays; the siblings took on the role of Genii with the ability to resurrect characters from the dead as they saw fit.<sup>19</sup> This is a world that can be manipulated, and arguably this consideration of imaginative freedom from the standpoint of a poet bewailing from the ‘world without’ lacks the imaginative complexity and ambiguity that is achieved when Brontë writes a Gondal poem from within Gondal. This tension between the conceptualizing of a ‘world within’ and the writing of a poem from ‘within’ that ‘world’ will be returned to in the conclusion of this chapter.

The tone of rhetorical confidence continues in the third stanza with the sweeping aside of danger in the ‘world without’. Confidence in the integrity of Brontë’s imaginative kingdom is evoked by the phrase ‘bosom’s bound’ in its connoting of a kingdom over which the triumvirate of poet, imagination and liberty hold sway. However, the reference to ‘bright, untroubled sky’ paradoxically brings a troubled note to the poem; this is because, in other poems by Emily Brontë, there is a delight in a mixed elemental music with tempest and storm that is not found in this formal ode. This disquiet is intensified in the image of ‘suns that know no winter days’. What is at issue here is the discordant note this poem strikes with other evocations of atmospheric conditions that are harbingers of visionary release (it also strikes a dissonant note with the Gondal poem to be considered at the end of this chapter). The Brontëan imagination here is not at full throttle and is straitjacketed by the demands of

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<sup>19</sup> See Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 156.

her chosen form. Alternatively, it is possible that Brontë is setting up the scenario of a dark outer world as opposed to a bright inner world just to frustrate its application in the final stanza.

Stanzas four and five compare 'Fancy' and the imagination. The dichotomy is Coleridgean in its privileging of imagination's reach; the 'flowers of Fancy' may be trampled down but imagination comes to the rescue and brings the 'hovering vision back'. The confidence of 'thou art ever there' echoes Keats's confidence in the remaining of the Grecian urn in 'Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe' (63). The Persephone-like power of the imagination is felt in its ability to 'breathe / New glories o'er the blighted spring'. The ability to 'call a lovelier life from death' continues this theme and also, unlike the 'Cold pastoral!' (63) of Keats' urn confirms the stanza's key note of affirming the world of process where 'death' and 'blight' are accepted. Emily Brontë's confidence in the biddability of imagination in bringing visionary release is undaunted. The final couplet in the penultimate stanza is curious in its promise of other worlds that are as 'bright' as the world of imagination. The use of 'real', as well as expressing confidence in the release that imagination brings is also suggestive of an attempt to collapse the distinction between the world without and the world within.

The final stanza provides the wild card as, with a surprising twist, Brontë states that 'I trust not to thy phantom bliss' which points both ways as a suggestion of breaking through to a ghostly realm as well as deception by an illusion. The visionary time of 'evening's quiet hour' is consistent with the time of day that brings vision in Brontë's other visionary poems. Certainty returns with the adjectival-phrase 'never failing'. The final couplet suggests that this imaginative solace comes when even hope has failed. So, the poem ends with confidence that, in 'evening's quiet hour', imaginative possibilities dwell.



Brontë explores possibilities of finding home and satisfying nostalgia in all three poems. The moments of visionary bliss arise as a response to the harshness of what Brontë called, in ‘To Imagination’, ‘the world without’. It is poetry of social withdrawal rather than engagement, expressive of being an exile in the everyday world around her. Through these poems, Brontë is trying to find a world that she can dwell on and in. While it is a speculative leap to state that Gondal was this world (more likely it was just one expression of it), considering Emily Brontë’s writing as driven by nostalgia creates new possibilities in both considering poems that conceptualise imaginative escape and those that are within the world to which the poet has escaped.

*‘Home to their Journey’s End’: Homecoming and Gondal*

The final poem to be considered in this chapter is a Gondal nostos that articulates the Gondalians’ emotions on their return to Gondal:<sup>20</sup>

‘Twas yesterday at early dawn  
 I watched the falling snow;  
 A drearier scene on winter morn  
 Was never stretched below

I could not see the mountains round  
 But I knew by the wild wind’s roar  
 How every drift, in their glens profound  
 Was deepening evermore –

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<sup>20</sup> ‘A homecoming or homeward journey as a literary subject.’ ‘nostos’ n. Def. 1, *OED*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2003.

And then I thought of Ula's bowers  
Beyond the southern sea  
Her tropic prairies bright with flowers  
And rivers wandering free –

I thought of many a happy day  
Spent in her Eden isle  
With my dear comrades, young and gay  
All scattered now so far away  
But not forgot the while!

Who that has breathed that heavenly air  
To northern climes would come  
To Gondal's mists and moorlands drear  
And sleet and frozen gloom?

Spring brings the swallow and the lark  
But what will winter bring?  
Its twilight noons and evenings dark  
To match the gifts of spring?

No, Look with me o'er that sullen main  
If thy spirit's eye can see  
There are brave ships floating back again

That no calm southern port could chain  
 From Gondal's stormy sea.

Oh how the hearts of the voyagers beat  
 To feel the frost-wind blow!  
 What flower in Ula's gardens sweet  
 Is worth one flake of snow?

The blast which almost rents their sail  
 Is welcome as a friend;  
 It brings them home, that thundering gale  
 Home to their journey's end:

Home to our souls whose wearying sighs  
 Lament their absence drear  
 And feel how bright even winter skies  
 Would shine if they were here!

The clear privileging of harsh northern climes as home strikes a dissonant note with the 'suns that know no winter days' in 'To Imagination'. However, the first two stanzas also evoke the sense of a place known. The hypnotic watching of the 'falling snow', with the superlative comparison stating that a 'drearier scene... was never stretched below' convey amazement at the scene, a quality of wonder aided by the adjective 'stretched', that accentuates a mental picture of the speaker taking in the scene. The second stanza develops this amazement through the speaker's inability to 'see the mountains round'. However, it is

the phrase ‘But I knew’ that situates this beholding as one of love rather than fear. On a simple level of deduction, the Gondalian speaker conjectures that, due to the winds, the drifts were ‘deepening ever more’ but, their visualisation of a place remote from them, the glens in the mountains, situates the speaker’s snow-bound reverie as an experience of seeing with a Wordsworthian inward eye. She is experiencing a Wordsworthian reverie and dancing with the snow just as Wordsworth ‘dances with the Daffodils’ (17).

The next four stanzas contrast with the first two in their description of the warmer climate of Ula with its ‘rivers wandering free’. The speaker recalling ‘many a happy day / Spent in her Eden isle’ suggests that they found a home of sorts in the ‘heavenly air’. However, the very use of words connoting a heavenly state, particularly when considered in the light of Catherine Earnshaw’s confession to Nelly Dean that she had no business to be in heaven, trouble the poem with a sense that Ula was an inauthentic home. The concern in these four verses is to establish the desirability of Gondal over the paradisiacal charms of ‘Ula’s bowers’. Reading ‘bowers’ in the sense of an idealised abode that is not realised in any dwelling, along with the luxuriant description of said bowers, situates the island of Ula as a deceptive paradise that the native Gondalians need to be saved from if they are to reach their real home.<sup>21</sup> When the speaker asks ‘Who that has breathed that heavenly air / To northern climes would come’ there is more than expressed meteorological preferences behind the question: it is to be seduced by the charms of the world. When the speaker asks ‘What will winter bring’, it is not meant as an unflattering evocation of the world of Gondal compared to Ula, even with Gondal’s ‘gifts of spring’, but rather a question of how sharp the vision is of the imagined addressee of the poem. The very conventional pairing of winter and spring in this verse is echoed in Lockwood’s observation of the locality of Wuthering Heights: ‘in

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<sup>21</sup> ‘bower’ n., def. 1b, *OED*.

winter nothing more dreary, in summer nothing more divine' (369/70). However, in this poem, Lockwood's judgement is questioned.

The final four stanzas concern homecoming. The poem returns to the idea of seeing with the inward eye with the reference to 'spirit's eye'. The idea of Ula being a bower that ensnares rather than frees is hinted at with the declaration that 'no calm southern port could chain'. The vitality in the description of the Ula climate a few verses earlier is here matched by the life in the sailors as they long 'To feel the frost-wind blow' (again there is an echo from *Wuthering Heights* where Catherine opens the window to feel the air come down from the moor). However, the denouement of the poem is in the following lines: 'What flower in Ula's gardens sweet / Is worth one flake of snow'. There is eschewal of the sensuous for the Spartan as well as, arguably, the rejection of the Burkean beautiful, suggested by 'gardens' for the sublime.

This embracing of a harsh northern sublime is developed in the following verse with the statement that the destructive wind is 'welcome as a friend'. There seems to be delight, on the part of the speaker, at the listener's incomprehension that such a place could be called home; it is the 'thundering gale' that brings them 'Home to their journey's end'. Brontë also inverts common imagery in hymnals of the day of storms as symbols of the world's dangers and tribulations – for the speaker in this poem they are harbingers of home and soothers of nostalgia. Indeed, lurking behind this envisioning of home are the words of Heathcliff that 'I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me' (409). Indeed, it is that statement that unlocks the heart of the poem. This poem is expressing the desire for a right to imaginative freedom in the choice of a home. Emily Brontë is creating a home in strong opposition to the home that she would be expected to make. Brontë scholars have seen her creation of the world of Gondal as a reaction to the

exotic African climes of Charlotte and Branwell's Angria.<sup>22</sup> In the world of Gondal, Emily Brontë was declaring her imaginative independence.

It is in consideration of such a declaration that the importance of Gondal is established for it prefigures the intent to surprise and unsettle in the choice of home that is felt in *Wuthering Heights*. The threefold repetition of home straddling the final two verses creates an emphatic tone that is uncharacteristic of Emily Brontë's poetry. The phrase, 'home to our souls' confirms this as a genuine dwelling of depth rather than the deceptive 'sweet' of Ula's 'bowers'. The energetic adjective, 'wearying', meets its answer in the emphatic homecoming. In 'M.G. for the U.S', Brontë is exploring possibilities of home and homecoming and considering the conditions that will satisfy a nostalgic longing rather than the inauthentic settling for something that is less than home. Yet one cannot escape the reality that this homecoming is imagined with the 'spirit's eye' so there is a Russian-doll effect of a poet imagining a homecoming through a character imagining a homecoming. With this the prospect of home becomes more elusive and shadowy.

*'Sticking by the Rascals': Gondal as the Answer to Nostalgia*

'M.G. for the U.S' shows Emily Brontë's confidence in an imagined possibility of returning home and in her created world of Gondal. This is borne out by a brief consideration of diary papers written by herself and Anne at the end of July, 1845. Anne states her opinion that the 'Gondals in general are not in first rate playing condition'.<sup>23</sup> Emily, in contrast writes that the 'Gondals still flourish as bright as ever'.<sup>24</sup> It is apparent that Emily was at home in

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<sup>22</sup> Christine Alexander, ed. introduction, p. xxxiv.

<sup>23</sup> Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 454

<sup>24</sup> Barker, *The Brontës*, p. 453

Gondal and presented searching for home as activating the lyrical vein in the narrative progress of the Gondal story.

Indeed, a notable feature of Emily Brontë's world of Gondal is the quality of its homeliness; the Gondal poems considered in this chapter feature homes, halls and firesides. Discernible in this homeliness is the Wordsworthian spark that actuated Brontë's imagination. The vignette considered earlier, 'Old Hall of [Elbë] ruined lonely now', arguably has its antecedents in Wordsworth's Book One of *The Excursion* where a former dwelling place is also mourned. What both Brontë and Wordsworth are doing is taking a former home and allowing it to evolve through, to borrow Geoffrey Hartman's phrase, 'A humanising glance'.<sup>25</sup> Bachelard expresses it poetically when he writes: 'If we return to the old home as to a nest, it is because memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy'.<sup>26</sup> Emily Brontë's preoccupation with states of home-longing in Gondal is also seen in the way she presents sea voyages not as adventures but as a nostos: 'Only in the context of their homecoming [is] the sea voyage...evoked with any real enthusiasm' (a motif that Tennyson would later use in his poem 'Crossing the Bar').<sup>27</sup>

Gondal is a statement of Emily Brontë's sense of exile in the world she inhabited which led her to make a home in a created world where she explored what it was to feel exiled from a home. Considered in this light, Gondal becomes an effort by Brontë to explore her own alienation and possibilities of homecoming. One way of expressing it would be to say that Gondal was like 'a gymnasium where we would finally learn a better way of being in the world'.<sup>28</sup> So Gondal and home are entwined in the mind of Emily Brontë.

Gondal was not a place from which Emily moved and she firmly resisted, as seen through the diary papers, any threat to it from the demands of growing up. So it was an end

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<sup>25</sup> Hartman, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994). p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Enid L. Duthie, *The Brontës and Nature*, (St Martin's Press: NY, 1986). p. 200.

<sup>28</sup> Natalia Ginzburg and Peggy Boyers, 'The Imaginary Life', *Salmagundi*, (112.1996), 27-40. p. 30.

in itself rather than an apprenticeship for a life in the 'world without' that had been rejected. The poems considered in the middle section of this chapter provide insights into how Brontë kept Gondal alive well into adulthood. Charlotte expressed her anguished decision to leave the world of Angria behind in terms of leaving home: 'When I depart from these I feel almost as if I stood on the threshold of a home and were bidding farewell to its inmates'.<sup>29</sup> Emily, as shall be considered further in the next chapter, eschewed the world of adulthood in favour of the visions of her childhood. She never left home.

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<sup>29</sup> Christine Alexander, ed. p. 314.



*Chapter Five: Childhood Nostalgia*

*The Homeless Child's 'Obstinate Questionings'*

As seen in the previous chapter, one who creates an imaginary world is ill at ease in the one they inhabit. Emily Brontë would have seen her own sense of unfitness for the world mirrored in her reading of William Cowper's, *The Task*. In the opening to book three, Cowper illustrates his feeling of being at odds with the world around him: 'I was a stricken deer that left the herd / Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt' (Vol 2, line 107-8).<sup>1</sup> The sentiment echoes a line from Emily Brontë's 'It is not pride it is not shame' that describes a child separated from their peers: 'An unmarked and an unloved child'. The Brontës were familiar with the work of Cowper; his poems were particularly precious to Anne in whose voice she found one to echo her own struggling against the harsh dictates of Calvinism. In her poem, entitled 'To Cowper' she admits that she 'little knew what wilder woe / Had filled the poet's heart'.<sup>2</sup> However, in Emily's poetry, 'wilder woe' is accentuated in the way she presents children as utterly cut off from the world around them.

For Irene Tayler, 'wilder woe' is Emily Brontë rejecting the 'spiritual resource' of childhood recollections in Wordsworth's 'Ode'.<sup>3</sup> Quoting Wordsworth's own recollection of childhood that 'nothing was more difficult... than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being', Tayler tersely comments that, for Emily Brontë, the

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<sup>1</sup> The Brontës would have had access to Cowper's poems. He is listed as part of the Keighley Mechanics' Institute catalogue. See Clifford Whone, 'Where the Brontës Borrowed Books: The Keighley Mechanics' Institute', *Brontë Society Transactions*, (11.5.1950), 344-358, p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> References to Anne Brontë's poems taken from: Anne Brontë, *The Poems of Anne Brontë: A New Text and Commentary*, (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 84, lines 11 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 32.

‘application was only too obvious’.<sup>4</sup> Tayler’s neat dichotomy relies on comparing Emily Brontë’s treatment of childhood with only the first eight stanzas of Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’. This chapter argues that, while Brontë rejects Wordsworth’s conception of the child as ‘best philosopher’ (110), ‘Mighty Prophet!’ and ‘Seer blest!’ (114), she does not swerve from the ‘Ode’ in its entirety. Instead, like Wordsworth in the ninth stanza of the ‘Ode’, she moves from the ‘simple creed / Of childhood’ (139-40) to imaginatively explore ‘obstinate questionings’ (144) and the child who trembles ‘like a guilty Thing surpriz’d’ (150).

Emily Brontë’s exploration of childhood questioning and trembling is why, like the girl in Hofer’s case study, children in her writing are presented as nostalgic. Brontë celebrates ‘careless childhood’s sunny time’; however, children are more often without origin. Homesickness is not the best word because there is no sense of a longed-for home. The child is radically dislocated; fundamentally homeless and alone. Emily Brontë’s child experiences the world as ‘naked anguish’ from the simple fact that they ‘exist in time’.<sup>5</sup> Whereas Wordsworth’s idea that growing up is the process of forgetting an original glory suggests an original point of origin: ‘Our birth is but a sleep and a *forgetting*’ (emphasis added), the child in Emily Brontë’s writing is denied the comfort, as they grow up, of ever looking back to such a moment of original glory. There is nothing there. The growing child can only remember their original lostness. Wordsworth, in the first eight stanzas of the ‘Ode’, moves in the direction of forgetting an original unity whereas Emily Brontë moves in the direction of remembering an original lostness (which is the experience of Wordsworth’s child in the Ode’s ninth stanza). So, any homesickness is profound in the sense that there is no home to be homesick for. Nina Auerbach puts it thus when writing about the poem ‘Tell me, tell me, smiling child’: the child ‘seems to have no eternal home to miss’.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Gezari, *Last Things*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) p. 215.

Emily Brontë's first dated poem sets the tone for her treatment of childhood:

Cold clear and blue the morning heaven

Expands its arch on high

Cold clear and blue Lake Werna's water

Reflects that winter's sky

The moon has set but Venus shines

A silent silvery star.

Morning is visualised using the 'moon has set' rather than the rising sun, reflecting Emily Brontë's preference for the world of night over that of day. Indeed, the paradox is that it adumbrates the idea of a rising that is really a setting. This poem is an aubade that describes a clear winter's morning yet ending is suggested by the setting of the moon and the silence of the star. Stillness and even lifelessness is suggested by the use of 'cold' with its association with the crisp frozen nature of a winter's morning. Emily Brontë, in this unconventional treatment of morning that portrays motionlessness, hints that the arrival of the child in the world is a stillbirth.

In the 'Ode', Wordsworth also writes of how the child comes into the world:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting

And cometh from afar:

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home: (59-65)

There are fruitful parallels to be drawn between this extract and Emily Brontë's poem when considered as poems of origin. The coldness and clearness in Brontë's poem help picture the

sense of nakedness and vacancy which is aided by the clear reflection in the lake: there is nothing to interrupt the cameo. The only fixed point in the poem is the star, Venus, which as the morning and evening star is suggestive of a merging of beginnings and endings, like Wordsworth's poem where the soul that 'rises' has also had 'its setting'. In the 'Ode', however, there is more sense of process created by the clothing of memory which is suggested by the 'clouds of glory'. Home also has a definite location: it is to be with God. So the vision of Wordsworth's poem is of moving away from a definite home; however, with Emily Brontë there is absence and dislocation. For example, the expansive way her poem describes the sky that 'expands its arch on high' suggests emptiness and lack of defining features. The poem is strongly photographic in its description of a place that is deserted and has a lunar-like barrenness. The sky and water can do nothing but to mutually reflect back as there is nothing to disturb the emptiness of either. It is this feeling of desertion that is a useful point from which to discuss the radical lostness of the child in Brontë's poetry.

*Challenging Wordsworth's 'Seer Blest'*

'Faith and Despondency', below, is thought by Janet Gezari to have its antecedents in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven'.<sup>7</sup>

The winter wind is loud and wild,  
 Come close to me, my darling child;  
 Forsake thy books, and mateless play;  
 And, while the night is gathering grey,  
 We'll talk its pensive hours away;-

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<sup>7</sup> Gezari, ed. *The Complete Poems*, p. 225.

'Iernë, round our sheltered hall  
November's gusts unheeded call;  
Not one faint breath can enter here  
Enough to wave my daughter's hair,  
And I am glad to watch the blaze  
Glance from her eyes, with mimic rays;  
To feel her cheek so softly pressed,  
In happy quiet on my breast.

'But, yet, even this tranquillity  
Brings bitter, restless thoughts to me;  
And, in the red fire's cheerful glow,  
I think of deep glens, blocked with snow;  
I dream of moor, and misty hill,  
Where evening closes dark and chill;  
For, lone, among the mountains cold,  
Lie those that I have loved of old.  
And my heart aches, in hopeless pain  
Exhausted with repinings vain,  
That I shall greet them ne'er again!'

'Father, in early infancy,  
When you were far beyond the sea,  
Such thoughts were tyrants over me!

I often sat, for hours together,  
Through the long nights of angry weather,  
Raised on my pillow, to descry  
The dim moon struggling in the sky;  
Or, with strained ear, to catch the shock,  
Of rock with wave, and wave with rock;  
So would I fearful vigil keep,  
And, all for listening, never sleep.  
But this world's life has much to dread,  
Not so, my Father, with the dead.

‘Oh! not for them, should we despair,  
The grave is drear, but they are not there;  
Their dust is mingled with the sod,  
Their happy souls are gone to God!  
You told me this, and yet you sigh,  
And murmur that your friends must die.  
Ah! My dear father, tell me why?  
For, if your former words were true,  
How useless would such sorrow be;  
As wise, to mourn the seed which grew  
Unnoticed on its parent tree,  
Because it fell in fertile earth,  
And sprang up to a glorious birth –  
Struck deep its root, and lifted high

Its green boughs, in the breezy sky.

‘But, I’ll not fear, I will not weep  
 For those whose bodies rest in sleep, -  
 I know there is a blessed shore,  
 Opening its ports for me, and mine;  
 And, gazing Time’s wide waters o’er,  
     I weary for that land divine,  
 Where we were born, where you and I  
 Shall meet our dearest when we die;  
 From suffering and corruption free,  
 Restored into the Deity.’

    ‘Well hast thou spoken, sweet, trustful child!  
     And wiser than thy sire;  
 And worldly tempests, raging wild,  
 Shall strengthen thy desire –  
 Thy fervent hope, through storm and foam,  
     Through wind and ocean’s roar,  
 To reach, at last, the eternal home,  
 The steadfast, changeless, shore!’

Iernë, the daughter whom the father says, ‘is wiser than thy sire’, is a figure that is also present in Wordsworth’s ‘We are seven’. The vision in ‘We are seven’ is of a child’s world where death is not admitted. There is also an unbridgeable chasm between the world of the

adult and that of the child adumbrated by the use of insistent exclamation marks to highlight the words of the child and the adult's despairing observation that he was 'throwing words away'.<sup>8</sup> In 'We are seven', the doubting adult is chastened by the believing child and Wordsworth, through the child's naïve certainty, situates her as having access to a deeper truth. This thinking and questing child is developed in Wordsworth's prose; in the essay, 'Upon Epitaphs' he writes of the 'early, obstinate, and unappeasable inquisitiveness of children upon the subject of origination'.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, while there is much that resonates between the two poems, in 'Faith and Despondency', Emily Brontë presents the child's relationship to the world around her very differently. The title postulates a straightforward dichotomy; it suggests a Socratic discussion between two characters which, unlike 'We are seven', appears to reach a confident resolution which has as its synecdoche, 'The steadfast, changeless, shore'. Wordsworth also uses the image of reaching a shore when he discusses a child pondering a 'running stream' in 'Upon Epitaphs'; he imagines the child considering 'towards what abyss it is in progress'.<sup>10</sup> So, the idea of a child contemplating big questions is a common theme of exploration for both poets. However, one is suspicious of the idea of Emily Brontë being more reductive than Wordsworth; as has already been discussed she refuses the compensatory consolation that Wordsworth offers in the 'Ode'. Yet, it is inescapable to avoid considering the idea that the straightforward resolution in 'Faith and Despondency' is at odds with the rich complexities present in other Brontë poems where stasis and ending are so strongly resisted. For example, fixity is resisted through present continuous verbs in 'High Waving Heather' as the scene is 'Changing forever from midnight to noon'. To return to 'Faith and Despondency' it is the case that, as Harriet Martineau commented when discussing one of her own works, the poet is

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<sup>8</sup> References to 'We Are Seven' taken from: William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992). line 67

<sup>9</sup> Rev. Alexander B. Grosart, ed. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, Vol 2, (London: Moxon, 1876.) p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Grosart, ed. p. 29.



‘unconsciously trying to gain strength of conviction through vigour of assertion’.<sup>11</sup>

However, when Brontë’s poem is considered further, what emerges is that she gives to the father the sublimity that Wordsworth gives to the child: he vocalises Wordsworthian ‘obstinate questionings’.

‘Faith and Despondency’ opens with a topos that is familiar in Emily Brontë’s poetry; it is that of a wind blowing outside that functions as the harbinger of visionary release. What is intriguing here, by contrast, is that the wind ‘unheeded’ calls. In other words, it is not the prelude to a longed-for visionary experience of other Brontë poems. Indeed, there is something stifling about the opening lines to the poem where the usual agent of liberation is unable to gain access; the father’s confident assertion that ‘Not one faint breath can enter here’ suggests lifelessness. This statement takes on the hue of an attempt by the father and his daughter to insulate themselves from the call of the wind. The ‘sheltered hall’ gives security but it is apparent, later in the poem, that the father is trying to convince himself that he is at home, emotionally as well as literally, when, in reality, he feels deep nostalgia. Therefore, shutting himself in is a way of adumbrating his attempts to repress homesickness.

Paradoxically given the fact that it connotes the safe centre of the home, it is the hearth that stirs this nostalgia to life as the ‘cheerful glow’ brings to mind the open moor and memories of lost ones. The glens that he remembers are ‘*blocked* with snow’ (emphasis added) as he has blocked himself into the hall. This is a moment of ‘stirrings rising from forgotten depths’. The pairing of ‘hopeless pain’ and ‘repinings vain’ as part of a rhyming triplet intensifies the unassuageability of his longing for the past and the fear that, in the phrase that completes the triplet, he will be reunited with his loved ones ‘ne’er again’. The verbal complexities at ending a sentence with such a word have been touched on previously; however, it seems that here, through the tightness of the triplet, the word is divested of its

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in: Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870*, (Yale: Yale UP, 1985) p. 156.

ambiguities and is, instead, presented as a complete and final thought. The sense of resignation is strong as there is not the energetic probing performed in other poems such as an undated fragment where Brontë questions the term directly: ‘Never again? Why not again? / Memory has power as real as thine’.<sup>12</sup> However, so far, ‘Faith and Despondency’ shuts down rather than opens up.

It is Iernë, the child of ‘happy quiet’, who endeavours to console her father with ideas that are deeply antithetical to those expressed elsewhere in Brontë’s poetry. For example, the rhyming couplet of ‘sod’ and ‘God’ gestures towards the pious idea that the soul will leave its sufferings on Earth to ascend to glory in heaven. In other poems, Emily Brontë strongly resists this idea that heaven is home and expresses such resistance most strongly in her well-known poem of visionary intensity, ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’; there she states that ‘Earth’s hope was not so dead heaven’s home was not so dear’ (111). In ‘Faith and Despondency’ Iernë intends the vertical dichotomy of ‘sod’ and ‘God’ to provide comfort through its hint of an ascent into heaven. She also employs biblical language in the idea of the seed that ‘fell in fertile earth’ rising up ‘to a glorious birth’. This reinforces the idea of ascent into heaven and, for Iernë, should comfort her father. However, this contradicts Emily Brontë’s often expressed idea that Earth is home.

Iernë’s cure for the nostalgia of her father in the assurance of a blissful hereafter is administered at the expense of fidelity to the past. Her statement concerning the grave that ‘they are not there’ and her assertion that the friends of her father lost are ‘gone to God’ (emphasis added), unwittingly communicate absence rather than presence. When she alludes to past separation from her father and denominates her worries about his absence, ‘tyrants’, what is at stake is the replacing of this ‘fearful vigil’ with the consolation of resurrection. However, this consolation corresponds to the ‘Other hopes and desires’ which ‘beset’ the

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<sup>12</sup> See Gezari, ed. *Complete Poems*, p. 193.

speaker in 'Remembrance'. The concern for the speaker in 'Remembrance' is that she will be seduced by false consolations that will lead her to actually forget the dead beloved. So, the remembrance of the dead (absent) beloved, far from being a 'fearful vigil' is a paradoxical experience of 'memory's rapturous pain'. The speaker in 'Remembrance' eschews the premature closure of Victorian consolation for the pain of keeping a memory alive: Iernë's emotional journey is in the opposite direction, articulated preachily with heavy irony.

Iernë's perspective on death contrasts with that of the child in 'We are Seven'. Wordsworth's child simply denies any original loss. It seems as if Emily Brontë takes this Romantic icon of the spiritually-attuned child and re-works it into an image of pious Victorian consolation. The hymn-like metre of the final stanza strengthens this feeling where the 'worldly tempests', which elsewhere in Brontë's poetry can be harbingers of visionary freedom, become adverse forces that are to be endured in order to get to the 'steadfast, changeless shore'. So, this very un-Brontëan home that Iernë creates for her father takes on the hue of the heaven that Linton Heathcliff imagines for himself, a heaven of which Cathy Linton comments disparagingly: 'He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle, and dance in a glorious jubilee' (302).

The tenor of 'Faith and Despondency', in the treatment of childhood, strikes a discordant note with other poems imagining childhood that will be discussed in this chapter; this is because of the radical lostness of the child in those poems. Also, the way Emily Brontë recasts Wordsworth's numinous child, into one that would not be out of place in one of Carus Wilson's books of instruction for children, is a strange manoeuvre for the poet.<sup>13</sup> A key to understanding these strange moves by Emily Brontë is to realise that her sympathy lies with the adult, which is the inverse of 'We are seven'. So, while it could be argued that the

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<sup>13</sup> The Reverend William Carus Wilson established the Clergy Daughters' school at Cowan Bridge. Both Emily and Charlotte attended this school. Williams wrote moralising stories for children in his *Child's First Tales*. See Barker, *The Brontës*, pp. 136-7.

child is, in the words of the father, ‘wiser than thy sire’, Brontë’s sympathy is with the Father’s engagement with his visions in the hearth. Iernë is somewhat enigmatic in her certainty.

However, much of this certainty is only apparent. The father’s words to Iernë, ‘Well hast thou spoken, sweet, trustful child! / And wiser than thy sire’, are equivocal in their praise. They suggest the air of a father wishing to affirm the positive perspective of a child, regardless of whether or not it is true: that Iernë is ‘trustful’ does not make her view convincing. The use of this adjective, along with ‘sweet’ connotes that the father is exaggerating his praise of the daughter while he knows that her future will not withstand the ‘storm and foam’. The last line of the poem, with the father’s hymn-like image of the ‘steadfast, changeless shore’, is his mirroring of Iernë’s own convictions rather than his own. It is as if he is trying to shield Iernë from the ‘worldly tempests’ through an uncomplicated affirmation of her convictions. The pronoun in ‘*Thy* fervent hope’ (emphasis added) shows that Iernë’s hope is, ultimately, a hope that he does not share. Indeed, there is a strained certainty about the father’s final words to Iernë. The elevation of questing longing into rhetorical certainty seems, ironically, to undermine its convincingness as a piece of piety, through a suspicion that it is affected. Underneath the seeming orthodoxy of this final section of the poem, there is a hint of the father’s non-participation in the apocalyptically inflected imagery of storm and tempest leading to eternal bliss. Michael O’Neill puts it thus: ‘The father, despite himself, emphasises the subjective nature of desire and hope, not the objective reality of their fulfilment’.<sup>14</sup> The hope is there but its realisation is far from certain.

So, in ‘Faith and Despondency’ it is the father that is alone and isolated rather than the child; he is insulated from Iernë’s confidence just as he attempted to shield himself from the wind in the opening lines. Despite this attempt, and the desertion of visionary realisation

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<sup>14</sup> Michael O’Neill, ‘What thou art: Emily Brontë’s Visionary Religion’, *Brontë Studies* (37.4.2012): 366-372. p. 369.

through Iernë's pious consolations, the pain of his lostness is increased at the end of the poem even as he voices an affected rhetorical confidence to his daughter. Perhaps this is Emily Brontë's insight into her own father's pain over his bereavement; Patrick Brontë would have had to hold out consolation to his congregation whilst mourning the death of his wife. What is apparent through this discussion of 'Faith and Despondency' is that Brontë does not acquiesce in the confidence of Iernë and the father's doubts remain unanswered.

However, it is possible to scratch Iernë's confidence and discover a more ambiguous world underneath. For example, as part of her exhortation to her father, when she says 'should we despair' there is the ambiguity whether 'should' possesses the confidence of an injunction or the uncertainty of a question. Even Iernë's choice of a metaphor for the resurrection, that of a seed falling from the parent tree, betrays the possibility that, despite her pointing towards heaven, 'Earth's hope was not so dead'. Perhaps the 'sod' has more involvement in the resurrection than she appreciates. The use of 'weary' with its connotations of intense expenditure of emotional energy works against the sense that Iernë is possessed of settled convictions. Finally, the repetition in 'I'll not fear, I will not weep' with its insistence sounds like one who is attempting to protect themselves from a potentially consuming fear; this increasing insistence is underlined by the move from the contracted to the full form of 'will'.

'Weary', when used as an adjective, denotes tiredness but, as a verb connotes energising force and expression of longing. Iernë uses it to stir desire and, as such, belies her apparent secure confidence in which she exhorts her father to participate. Rather, it echoes Catherine Linton who, immediately before her death, is 'Wearying to escape into that glorious world' (197). At first glance, this poem may be read as a dialogue in which conventional pieties about heaven are affirmed; however, there are some hints that heaven is not the object of the longing. Iernë's reference to 'That land divine / Where we were born',

echoes Wordsworth's statement, in the 'Ode', that we come from 'God, who is our home'. However, Brontë's use of 'land divine', while suggesting the Christian heaven, makes its location ambiguous and keeps open the possibility that Iernë's hope is, in fact, earthly.

Notwithstanding her ambiguities, the child, Iernë, seems to exude confidence that is in keeping with Wordsworth's 'best Philosopher' (110). However, it is possible to read the poem as an invitation to exercise a sympathetic imagination in consideration of the father as one whose nostalgic longings are overrun by the unfeeling certainties of Christian consolation. This poem shows Emily Brontë's swerve from Wordsworth's presentation of the child answering adult nostalgic longing. Brontë's presentation of the child is dogmatic rather than sublime and is no repository of spiritual connection.

#### *The Homeless Child in Emily Brontë's Poetry*

In the following poem, Brontë also swerves from Wordsworth's 'simple creed / Of childhood' (139/40), not in the direction of exaggerated assumed certainty but of crippling lostness without bearings and imagining the child 'like a guilty Thing surpriz'd' (150):

It is not pride it is not shame  
 That makes her leave the gorgeous hall  
 And though neglect her heart might tame  
 She mourns not for her sudden fall  
  
 'Tis true she stands among the crowd  
 An unmarked and an unloved child  
 While each young comrade blithe and proud

Glides through the maze of pleasure wild

And all do homage to their will

And all seem glad their voice to hear

She heeds not that but hardly still

Her eye can hold the quivering tear

What made her weep what made her glide

Out to the park this dreary day

And cast her jewelled chains aside

And seek a rough and lonely way

And down beneath a cedar's shade

On the wet grass regardless lie

With nothing but its gloomy head

Between her and the showery sky

I saw her stand in the gallery long

Watching the little children there

As they were playing the pillars among

And bounding down the marble stair

The first line foregrounds the emotion rather than the child as the speaker exonerates the child through affirming that they have not fallen into the opposing traps of 'pride' or 'shame'. However, the child's leaving of the 'gorgeous hall' situates her as an exile, unlike

Iernë who is within the ‘sheltered hall’. The sense of isolation is strengthened with the speaker not divulging why she leaves. The implication, through the naming of two emotional states in the opening line, is that another emotional state has caused her to leave the hall.

The second stanza intensifies the isolation with the solitariness of the child emphasised in how she ‘stands’ – a still centre amongst a whirl of movement. There is also, as in the first stanza, the impression that the narrator is endeavouring to defend the child. The phrase, ‘’Tis true’ connotes a concession granted to the child’s critics but with an intention to defend. The child is not among ‘new-born blisses’ but ‘unmarked’ and ‘unloved’; this contrasts unfavourably with her ‘comrades’ in the second part of the verse who are ‘blithe’ and ‘proud’. Ironic injustice is highlighted in these adjectives considering that one of the accusations rebuffed in the opening line to the poem was of ‘pride’; it is clearly the other children who are demonstrating pride. The adjective, ‘blithe’ suggests mirth and merriment which makes the isolation of this girl all the more poignant. The other children also exhibit unthinking enjoyment as they glide ‘through the maze of pleasure wild’ with ‘maze’ and ‘wild’ suggesting the possibility of confusion and danger respectively. However, the ease of ‘glide’ suggests that the children are at home in this environment which compounds the exile of this ‘unloved’ child.

The third stanza focuses on the other children with whom this lone child is contrasted. There is an awkward contrast in the first line between the obeisance of ‘homage’ and the arrogance of ‘their will’. These characters love the sound of their own voices. However, despite the egotism that surrounds the child, it cannot be taken for granted that it is the others who cause the ‘quivering tear’ as the girl ‘heeds not’ what goes on around her. Yet she is ‘isolated in the midst of numbers’.<sup>15</sup> So, it is important to exercise some caution in assuming that the watcher is implicitly censuring the other children. The point is that the child whom

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<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, May 1842, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, Vol 1, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 284.



the speaker watches is isolated, not in Wordsworthian sublimity, but in unassuageable isolation. This is not the child seer of 'We are Seven', or her more precocious equivalent in 'Faith and Despondency', but one who is in the grip of restless nostalgia.

However, it is possible to overdo the differentiation of this child from her peers. The repeated 'all' in the third stanza can be read as emphasising the child's isolation but also as encompassing her. Inflecting 'all' to include the lone child means that she partakes of their narcissism. Seen in this light, the placing of this child in the poem shows Emily Brontë challenging the simple creed of childhood; she eschews Romantic sublimity for stoical realism. The sharpest articulation of this is expressed, with all the pithiness of an epigram, in another poem:

'Twas grief enough to think mankind  
 All hollow servile insincere –  
 But worse to trust to my own mind  
 And find the same corruption there (p. 100)

When 'It was not pride' is read as an expression of Brontë's resistance to sublimity, the tears that are shed by the child could signify an increasing awareness of her own 'corruption'. So, in her poetry, as well as *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë is reluctant to give any of her characters the moral high ground.

However, notwithstanding the possibility that Emily Brontë highlights the child's common 'corruption' with the other children, the child is still set apart by the poet by the fact that Brontë has her leave the other children. The use of the verb, 'glide', to describe the child's movement gives her a ghostlike and ethereal ambience that would not be out of place in Wordsworth's Lucy poems; however, 'glides' also connects her with the other children who glide 'through the maze of pleasure wild'. In any case, this poem is too troubled by the

human condition to attain to the suspended out-of-time atmosphere evoked by the Lucy poems.

Yet this child has her own mystery in that her motivation for leaving is not revealed; what is implied is that there is a hurt too deep for words: the speaker can only narrow the field by stating what did not cause her to leave. Casting ‘her jewelled chains aside’ suggests renunciation particularly with the wealth implied in ‘jewelled’. However, using ‘chains’ suggests an escape from a type of prison which brings this poem into the orbit of Emily Brontë’s later visionary writings – albeit in a much more downbeat manner. Her seeking a ‘rough and lonely way’ is redolent of a search for authenticity and adds to the penance-like sense of renunciation. There is an element of *nostos* to the child’s search and behind the seeking of a ‘rough and lonely way’ lies the Miltonic expulsion of Adam and Eve as they ‘Through Eden took their solitary way’.<sup>16</sup>

The next stanza carries a sense of abandonment with the exchange of the ‘gorgeous hall’ for the ‘cedar’s shade’ as the girl resigns herself to the protection of the elements. Though the girl is ‘regardless’, she is protected by the maternal cedar from the ‘showery sky’. There is an echo in this image of the Old Testament prophet, Jonah, being shaded by a tree in his own self-imposed exile of anger at God’s mercy towards the people of Nineveh: ‘And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief’ (Jonah 3:6). The alliteration connecting ‘gloomy’ and ‘showery’ strengthens a sense of foreboding. It alludes to one of Emily Brontë’s early poems where a child is offered three scenarios as to how her life will develop. The weather is the determining factor:

If it darken but a shadow

Quench his rays and summon rain

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<sup>16</sup> References taken from: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1968, ed. Alastair Fowler, (Harlow: Longman, 2007), XII: 649. Book and line number given.

Flowers may open buds may blossom

Bud and flower alike are vain

Her days shall pass like a mournful story in care and tears

And pain (p.32)

The relentless certainty of the child's doom, put so strongly in the final enjambed line, with the delayed rhyme slaying any hope arising from the initial incompleteness of the couplet, is felt in 'It is not Pride'. The child is impelled by fate. She is in the double bind of being alone yet not having a Wordsworthian comfort of nature for a substitute mother: what nature gives in the 'cedar's shade' she takes away in the 'wet grass'. The child is not permitted by Brontë to have the moral high ground: she participates in the weaknesses of the children without sharing in their community.

The child is further isolated by Brontë in the final stanza through the structure of the speaker watching the child who is watching the other children. So the speaker of the poem is a mediator between the reader and the child; yet no insight has been received as to the motivation of the child. The passivity of 'watching' in its separateness contrasts with the energetic activity of the children in the verbs 'playing' and 'bounding'. The speaker can only tell the reader what they see without offering insight; the sense of an elusive being that moves further away is confirmed in the addition of a second layer of watching. So the enigma of the child is protected by the speaker, thus creating, despite the swerving from Wordsworth, an enigmatic Lucy-like figure.

This second-hand narrating is used in *Wuthering Heights*. As well as increasing the mystery it also highlights the depth of suffering. There is a possibility that we are blocked from a full understanding of the child, not out of a caprice on the part of the poet, but for our protection. For such is the abandonment of the child in this poem that, were we to gain unmediated understanding, the poet anticipates that we would experience unbearable pain.

Emily Brontë's placing of the child in the world in the next poem is more unsparing in its rejection of Wordsworth's 'Mighty prophet':

Sleep not dream not this bright day

Will not cannot last for aye

Bliss like thine is bought by years

Dark with torment and with tears

Sweeter far than placid pleasure

Purer higher beyond measure

Yet alas the sooner turning

Into hopeless endless mourning

I love thee boy for all divine

All full of God thy features shine

Darling enthusiast holy child

Too good for this world's warring wild

Too heavenly now but doomed to be

Hell-like in heart and misery

And what shall change that angel brow

And quench that spirit's glorious glow

Relentless laws that disallow

True virtue and true joy below

And blame me not if when the dread

Of suffering clouds thy youthful head  
 If when by crime and sorrow tos[t]  
 Thy wandering bark is wrecked and los[t]

I too depart I too decline  
 And make thy path no longer mine  
 'Tis thus that human minds will turn  
 All doomed alike to sin and mourn  
 Yet all with long gaze fixed afar  
 Adoring virtue's distant star

The opening insistence that the 'bright day' will not last for ever and precedes hubristic years of torment, as counterbalance to bliss, challenges Wordsworth's idea that recollection of childhood will lead to and is worthy of, 'Perpetual benedictions' (137). For Emily Brontë, there is only regret and nostalgia. The inevitability of regret is driven home in the modification of 'will not' to 'cannot'; it is as if, in the second line, the possibility of any imagined future consolation is snuffed out. The opening injunction to 'Sleep not' reveals the haunting of this poem by *Macbeth*, particularly words expressing the absence of any consolation as his own nemesis approaches: 'that which should accompany old age / As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, / I must not look to have' (V.iii.25-27). Brontë's opening two words recall the voice that proclaims 'Sleep no more' (II.ii.39) in *Macbeth* and connect the poem with the Shakespearean hero whose early promise becomes a source of regret rather than an occasion for 'benedictions'. Wordsworth's 'trailing clouds of glory' become an ominous portent of torment and tears. The sense of hubris is also evoked by the language of transaction. The child's 'bliss' will be paid for, 'bought', by suffering. The

phrasing of 'bliss *like* thine' (emphasis added) suggests that, because the child has been singled out for particular favour, inevitable suffering will follow.

Irene Tayler has commented on this poem, when comparing it with the 'Ode', that 'Emily's vision is far more dark and comfortless'.<sup>17</sup> It is a sharp nostalgia for childhood that cannot be returned to as a form of imaginative compensation in the way Wordsworth does in the 'Ode'. Moreover, this change is inevitable without any of the gradualism of '*fades* into the light of common day' (emphasis added) but a more radical switch from 'heavenly' to 'hell-like'.

Yet there is something that is to be desired in this state of unsettlement; the something is the 'obstinate questionings' for which Wordsworth raises 'The song of thanks and praise' (143). The preference of this bliss to 'placid pleasure' anticipates the energy elsewhere in Brontë's poetry, such as in 'High waving heather', as well as Cathy's description of her heaven: 'Rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright, white clouds flitting above' (301). Brontë's vision of childhood is the falling of a star. The hubris in 'Purer higher beyond measure' with its limitless reaching for the horizon invokes the 'sooner turning' of the child's fortune. Behind this state of extremes is another faint echo from Shakespeare, this time *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'So quick bright things come to confusion' (I.i.149). While the child's experience of bliss may soar spatially, it cannot replicate the bliss through time. There is a strong link between the intensity of the experience and its transience. It is as if Brontë has distilled Wordsworth's gradual fading into two opposite emotional poles.

The third stanza strongly echoes the 'Ode'. The boy being 'all full of God' alludes to the state where 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy!' (66) in Wordsworth's poem. Both Brontë's and Wordsworth's boy mirror each other as they perceive the 'vision splendid' fade

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<sup>17</sup> Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 42.

into common day. However, Brontë reworks the stealthy gradualism of Wordsworth into something that is much more tragic; hence the echoes of *Macbeth*. Emily Brontë's child will also be unable to find accommodation in a world where childhood memories breed 'perpetual benedictions'. The gendering of the child as a boy opens up the possibility that this vision of childhood is one that Brontë develops in the character of Heathcliff, a figure who moves from his early bliss with Catherine to being in an 'abyss' – 'Hell-like in heart and misery'. The vision in the third stanza is Blakean in its insistence on contraries. The hyperbolic 'too good' and 'too heavenly' plunge into their 'hell-like' opposite in a Brontëan inversion of Blake's 'The Little Boy Lost' and 'The Little Boy Found'.

The fourth stanza explains why the boy must undergo this change. Put simply it is the 'Relentless laws'. The 'disallowing' of 'joy *below*' (emphasis added) situates the world as the abode of suffering and trial and implies that bliss is attained in heaven. Yet, from other poems and *Wuthering Heights*, it is clear that heaven is rejected as home. The 'angel brow', with its suggestion of heavenly origination, being crushed by laws that themselves originate in heaven (again, implied by the preposition, 'below') implies a conflicted paradise and Brontë's disdain for such a place. Again, Blake is felt as a presence in this verse with a Urizen-like God shackling a boy that is truly heavenly with relentless laws.<sup>18</sup> Yet there is a modifying echo in the use of 'relentless' for it is the word that Heathcliff uses to describe the presence of Catherine after her death (410). This means that the disallowing of true joy below takes on a new complexion. It stirs nostalgia as Brontë's child (that grows in her mind into Heathcliff) continually searches for home.

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<sup>18</sup> Currently there is very little to suggest that Emily Brontë read William Blake's writings. However, affinities have been pointed out. See, for example, Simon Marsden's conclusion that Blake and Brontë were similar in their treatment of the Bible: Simon Marsden, "'Vain are the thousand creeds": *Wuthering Heights*, the Bible and Liberal Protestantism', *Literature and Theology*, (20.3.2006), 236-250, p. 248. John Jordan insightfully sees the extreme behaviour of characters in *Wuthering Heights* in the light of Blake's *Proverbs of Hell*: John E. Jordan, 'The Ironic Vision of Emily Brontë', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, (20.1.1965), 1-18, p. 12.

In the penultimate stanza the relationship between the speaker and the child begins to become clear as the speaker articulates her response to the increasing lostness of the child. The child is not trailed by clouds of glory but by the ‘dread / Of suffering’. By way of developing the connection that Gezari makes to *Macbeth*, in the image of the ‘wandering bark’ that is ‘wrecked and los[t]’, Shakespeare’s weird sister affirms that even though the bark ‘shall be tempest-tossed’ yet it ‘cannot be lost’ (I.iii.23-24). Brontë’s implicit echo of *Macbeth* in the opening stanza of the poem is deepened into a stronger allusion where she recasts Shakespeare’s imagining of a narrow escape from the powers of evil into a complete overwhelming by them.<sup>19</sup> The ultimate helplessness of the child to withstand the storms of the world is emphasised in this allusion.

The final stanza cements the separation between the speaker and the child; the intentionality of this decision is emphasised by the verb, ‘make’. The speaker conceives of this separation as a necessity as, with an undertone of inevitability, she states that ‘’Tis thus that human minds will turn’ which echoes Nelly Dean’s words justifying her actions to Lockwood: ‘Well, we *must* be for ourselves in the long run’ (114). For Brontë, there is a bent to human nature that leads to isolation, the acknowledgement of which seems like an admission of the doctrine of original sin, however for Emily Brontë it is more of a stoical realism. The statement that we are ‘All doomed alike to sin and mourn’ is counterpointed with the futile act of ‘Adoring virtue’s distant star’; that is, despite the bent of our nature we still persist in looking for a fixed point. However, the ‘distant star’ eludes our grasp and is ultimately delusional. The reality is that we are destined to be lost on the sea inverting the direction of travel in the ‘Ode’ away from the ocean until ‘inland far we be’ (165). The ocean on whose shore Wordsworth’s children ‘sport’ is for Emily Brontë where the child is lost.

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<sup>19</sup> Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 243.



The next poem to be discussed intensifies the sense of the child as object of another's gaze. The gaze is a knowing one that sees the years bringing the inevitable yoke so preventing any temporary indulgence in the world of childhood:

I saw thee child one summer's day

Suddenly leave thy cheerful play

And in the green grass lowly lying

I listened to thy mournful sighing

I knew the wish that waked that wail

I knew the source whence sprung those tears

You longed for fate to raise the veil

That darkened over coming years

The anxious prayer was heard and power

Was given me in that silent hour

To open to an infant's eye

The portals of futurity

But child of dust the fragrant flowers

The bright blue sky and velvet sod

Were strange conductors to the bowers

Thy daring footsteps must have trod

I watched my time and summer passed

And autumn waning fled by  
And doleful winter nights at last  
In cloudy mourning clothed the sky

And now I'm come this evening fell  
Not stormily but stilly drear  
A sound sweeps o'er thee like a knell  
To banish joy and welcome care

A fluttering blast that shakes the leaves  
And whistles round the gloomy wall  
And lingering long lamenting grieves  
For 'tis the spectre's call

He hears me what a sudden start  
Sent the blood icy to that heart  
He wakens and how ghastly white  
That face looks in the dim lamplight

Those tiny hands in vain essay  
To thrust the shadowy fiend away  
There is a horror on his brow  
An anguish in his bosom now

A fearful anguish in his eyes

Fixed strainedly on the vacant air  
 Heavily bursts in long drawn sighs  
 His panting breath enchained by fear

Poor child if spirits such as I  
 Could weep o'er human misery  
 A tear might flow aye many a tear  
 To see the road that lies before  
 To see the sunshine disappear  
 And hear the stormy waters roar  
 Breaking upon a desolate shore

Cut off from hope in early day  
 From power and glory cut away  
 But it is doomed and morning's light  
 Must image forth the scowl of night  
 And childhood's flower must waste its bloom  
 Beneath the shadow of the tomb

The watcher in this poem reveals himself as a spectre; he could be seen as a guardian angel. The spirit observes the child leave 'thy cheerful play' and his lying 'in the green grass' connects him with the child in 'It was not shame'. With both children there is a heavy mental burden but in this poem there is more insight into the source; the spirit is not so coy about revealing the child's preoccupations: it is the desire to know the future. Emily Brontë's child is foreboding; he is not allowed to be comforted by Wordsworth's 'homely Nurse' (81).

To use a phrase from *The Prelude*, the spirit subjects the child to ‘sterner ministrations’.

While Brontë would have been unable to read *The Prelude* in its completed form, there is an affinity with the young Wordsworth in the ice skating episode with the way that Wordsworth, and Brontë’s child both leave the ‘tumultuous throng’ for deeper visionary communing.

However, the child in Brontë’s poem soon experiences Coleridgean terrors rather than Wordsworthian ministrations.

Indeed, the identity of this spirit is a puzzle. In the third stanza he is given power which implies that he is under authority himself. There is also the absence of bliss that is brought, albeit temporarily, by visionary visitors in later poems. The spectral visitor deepens the boy’s anguish rather than provides comfort and is incapable of exercising empathy as he is unable to ‘weep o’er human misery’. So, like the previous poem, Brontë situates the child as fundamentally isolated.

Emily Brontë, despite sharing the common image of the world as a prison, is rewriting William Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ in ‘I saw thee child’. What, for Wordsworth, are the imperceptible ‘Shades of the prison-house’ that ‘begin to close’ (67), become, for Brontë a sudden horrified recognition. Wordsworth’s use of words indicating gradual change such as ‘fade’ to denominate the distancing of the child from their origins is less traumatic than the catastrophic realisation of Brontë’s child. The violent emotion builds from the calm before the storm of ‘stilly drear’, through the portentous ‘fluttering blast’ to the ‘sudden start’. It is as if all the boy’s senses are being fully stretched. This perception, which for Wordsworth will lead to an imaginative recompense, will lead, for Brontë, to a terrifying awareness of fundamental isolation in the world. Wordsworth’s boy grows up into a loss of memory, being lulled by ‘custom’ into forgetting his past; in contrast, Emily Brontë’s boy is shocked awake by the horrific revelation of his future. The gendering of the child in ‘I saw thee child’ as a boy adds to a sense of the poem as an answer to Wordsworth’s ‘growing Boy’ (68) in his

‘Ode’. The trauma of the boy’s awakening to his true condition in Emily Brontë’s poem anticipates the pain of return from visionary release in ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’:

Oh, dreadful is the check – intense the agony  
 When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see;  
 When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to see again,  
 The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain!

The boy in Emily Brontë’s poem exists in a state of anguish and this is adumbrated vividly towards the end of the poem in the description of his breath that, ‘Heavily bursts in long drawn sighs / His panting breath enchained by fear’. Breath is a recurring motif in her poetry and, by the time Brontë wrote ‘No Coward soul is mine’, breath has become her God and source of strength; however, in ‘I saw thee child’, breath expresses anxiety and forms a crescendo of panic and fear.

The spirit reflects on the future of the boy in the last two stanzas; his inability to ‘weep o’er human misery’ as the boy’s future is contemplated suggestively alludes to Wordsworth’s ‘Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears’. However, Emily Brontë takes the occasion for these thoughts which is Wordsworth’s assurance that, when he contemplates nature, he need ‘Think not of any severing of our loves’ and undercuts them through presenting the boy as severed from any connection: her boy is ‘cut off’ and ‘cut away’. Also, Brontë challenges Iernë’s confidence (pointed out earlier when discussing ‘Faith and Despondency’) in the ‘steadfast, changeless, shore’ with her recasting of it into a ‘desolate shore’. Indeed the image of the shore conjures up Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ in another respect:

Though inland far we be,  
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
 Which brought us hither,  
 Can in a moment travel thither

And see the Children sport upon the shore,

And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore. (165-170)

The final two lines of the above quotation echo bitterly in Brontë's poem with the couplet in the penultimate verse: 'And hear the stormy waters roar / Breaking upon a desolate shore'.

Wordsworth's sustaining hope in an originating state of bliss is metamorphosed by Emily Brontë into a place that is bleak and empty.

The final stanza continues to echo the 'Ode'. Wordsworth's, 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy!' becomes Brontë's, 'Cut off from hope in early day'; the earlier poet's exclamatory insistence on original glory is answered by Emily Brontë's monosyllabic erasure of any such beatitude.<sup>20</sup> The chiasmic phrasing and parallelism of Brontë's opening couplet underlies the finality of this idea. The second couplet in the stanza articulates a non-comforting dichotomy between day and night and, like the ways in which Brontë uses imagery of breath and the shore, provides a stark echo of this dichotomy in other poems. For example, in 'Stars', the night is release from the tyranny of day, yet here the personified night and day mirror the 'scowl' of one back to the other. The final couplet of the poem can be read as an answer to the final thought in Wordsworth's 'Ode'. His 'meanest flower' that leads to thoughts 'too deep for tears' becomes Brontë's flower that must 'waste its bloom' and that lives 'beneath the shadow of the tomb'. Wordsworth's recollections of childhood that 'breed / Perpetual benedictions' are undermined by Brontë's portrayal of a child who, when 'The portals of futurity' are opened to him, discovers the 'shadow of the tomb' (which alludes to the 'shadow of death' in the twenty-third psalm but Brontë's boy is denied any comforter). Wordsworth's adult is sustained by visions of a beatific childhood where home is found and Brontë's child is terrified by a bleak future in which is seen only exile.

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<sup>20</sup> Irene Tayler also connects the two poems. See *Holy Ghosts*, p. 33.

*The Truth That Will Not Wake: Failure of Childhood Recollection*

Two years later, Emily Brontë wrote a poem that can be read as presenting the boy in ‘I saw thee child’ grown into an adult. It shows the same partial faithfulness to Wordsworth’s vision of childhood in the ‘Ode’ but her rendering of it as a time that is much more bleak and comfortless. What Brontë establishes through these poems is a refusal to accept that childhood is a source of comfort:

The soft unclouded blue of air

The earth as golden-green and fair

And bright as Eden’s used to be

That air and earth have rested me

Laid on the grass I lapsed away

Sank back again to childhood’s day

All harsh thoughts perished memory mild

Subdued both grief and passion wild

But did the sunshine even now

That bathed his stern and swarthy brow

Oh did it wake I long to know

One whisper one sweet dream in hi[m]

One lingering joy that years ago

Had faded – lost in distance di[m]

That iron man was born like me

And he was once an ardent boy

He must have felt in infancy

The glory of a summer sky

Though storms untold his mind have tossed

He cannot utterly have lost

Remembrance of his early home

So lost that not a gleam may come

No vision of his mother's face

When she so fondly would set free

Her darling child from her embrace

To roam till eve at liberty –

Nor of his haunts nor of the flowers

His tiny hand would grateful bear

Returning from the darkening bowers

To weave into her glossy hair

I saw the light breeze kiss his cheek

His fingers 'mid the roses twined

I watched to mark one transient streak

Of pensive softness shade his mind

The open window showed around

A glowing park and glorious sky



And thick woods swelling with the sound  
Of Nature's mingled harmony

Silent he sat. That stormy breast  
At length, I said has deigned to rest  
At length above that spirit flows  
The waveless ocean of repose

Let me draw near 'twill soothe to view  
His dark eyes dimmed with holy dew  
Remorse even now may wake within  
And half unchain his soul from sin

Perhaps this is the destined hour  
When hell shall lose its fatal power  
And heaven itself shall bend above  
To hail the soul redeemed by love

Unmarked I gazed my idle thought  
Passed with the ray whose shine it caught  
One glance revealed how little care  
He felt for all the beauty there

Oh crime can make the heart grow old  
Sooner than years of wearing woe

Can turn the warmest bosom cold

As winter wind or polar snow

The opening two stanzas situate the speaker as experiencing Wordsworthian ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’. The direct statement in the first line suggests a restfulness that is not straining for metaphorical comparison; the world is as found. However, a faint discordance is heard in the second and third lines where the building of promising adjectives falls away in the thinly-masked disappointment of acknowledging post-lapsarian reality in ‘as Eden’s used to be’. However, this does not seriously undermine the key-note of content effected by the soft rhyming in air/fair and be/me with the latter rhyme gesturing towards the idea of someone at rest with herself; the narrator moves from subject to object as she is ‘rested’ by ‘air and earth’. The sibilance in the first couplet of the second stanza signals a state of reverie as childhood is remembered. Notwithstanding the softening influence of Shelleyan reverie and Wordsworthian recollection discordant notes still make themselves heard, most notably in the rhyming of ‘mild’ and ‘wild’ where the iambic stress falls on the latter word, placed at the end of the stanza, with foreboding finality. The tantalising image of a recollected childhood is afflicted by discordant notes. Emily Brontë constructs a scenario that promises a brief glimpse of ‘Eden’ only to frustrate its application later in the poem.

The poem’s narrator evinces an unprepossessing self-confidence that echoes the confident assertions of Iernë in ‘Faith and Despondency’. It is illustrated by her placement in the poem as an observer. She is watching another and hoping that the softening influence of nature around him will ‘wake’ memories that will soften the ‘iron-man’. As the speaker considers him, she articulates a presumptive certainty as to what compelled the man in the past: ‘He *must* have felt in infancy’ (emphasis added). This dogmatic certainty is also present in the narrator’s confidence that the man ‘*cannot* utterly have lost’ (emphasis added) which suggestively alludes to Wordsworth’s insistence that there must be some recollection of

original glory, we cannot be ‘in utter nakedness’ (63). Emily Brontë frustrates these hopes of the man’s ultimate redemption but what is interesting about the narrator’s perspective is her confidence in the softening influence of nature. Emily Brontë thwarts this attempt to find a resting place in nature through her portrayal of a chasm between nature and the human spirit in such a way as to allude to lines from another poem, ‘I know not how it falls on me’:

Forgive me if I’ve shunned so long  
Your gentle greeting earth and air  
But sorrow withers even the strong  
And who can fight against despair

Air and earth, contrary to the experience of the narrator, are unable to provide a resting place; any recollections of childhood do not provide ‘perpetual benedictions’ for the man observed.

The confident overstatement of the narrator causes imaginative sympathy with the mystery of the one observed. Her confidence in the ministering influence of nature, as well as her anticipation of his repentance, is not one that Brontë shares. The effect of this unfounded certainty is to engender a faint disquiet as the reader observes the watcher observing. As in ‘Faith and Despondency’, Emily Brontë is showing the ultimate overreaching of attempts to find rest for anxieties and fears.

However the narrator is not free from the lostness that she imagines for the man watched. She ‘longs to know’ if the ‘sunshine’ has awakened any ‘Remembrance of his early home’. At the end of the poem it becomes clear what the answer is: ‘One glance revealed how little care / He felt for all the beauty there’. This is the failure of Wordsworth’s declaration in the ‘Ode’ concerning the lingering of sympathy between people and nature:

Oh joy! that in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers

What was so fugitive! (132-135)

Indeed, it can be argued that remembering ‘What was so fugitive’ is problematic for Emily Brontë. Janet Gezari, in her analysis of ‘Remembrance’ discusses how the act of remembrance is involuntary whereas recollection is the deliberate bringing of the past into the present. She reads the poem as being preoccupied with the fear of forgetting and employs a Freudian insight: ‘remembering is, as Freud suggests, the beginning of a process of wearing away, while one of the uses of forgetting is to preserve the past intact’.<sup>21</sup> Considered in this light, the confidence of the narrator in the man’s ‘Remembrance of his early home’ as a link in a chain to his redemption is turned on its head. This is because, considered in Freudian terms, remembrance is the admission of air to an incorrupt body that starts the process of decomposition. So, the knowing of the narrator in this poem as well as that of Iernë in ‘Faith and Despondency’ is actually an unknowing. Their rather loud evangelical confidence actually obfuscates the ability to see in the heart of the subject of their meditations and acts as a smokescreen for their own lostness.

Wordsworthian confidence in the connecting possibilities of recollection is implicitly challenged by Emily Brontë in ‘Remembrance’:

Sweet love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,  
 While the world’s tide is bearing me along;  
 Other desires and other hopes beset me,  
 Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!

Even though the speaker craves forgiveness from her ‘Sweet love of youth’ for the possibility that she will ‘forget thee’, there is no implicit connection between forgetting and doing ‘wrong’ by her lover. Indeed, in this stanza it is apparent that the speaker sees forgetting as inevitable but it ‘cannot’ harm the connection between them. So Emily Brontë contests more

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<sup>21</sup> Gezari, *Last Things*, p. 44.

forcefully, in 'Remembrance', what is implicit in 'The soft unclouded blue of air':  
 remembrance does not necessarily bring beatitude and forgetting does not imply severance.  
 An unknowing is actually a protective embalming by the poet who is guarding the 'world  
 within' of the man whose redemption the narrator is longing after with her remembering.

Emily Brontë emphasises the observed man's exile from the world around him. The contrast between the recollected (by the narrator) eagerness of gifts to his mother of 'flowers / His tiny hand would grateful bear' and the present observed hesitancy of 'His fingers 'mid the roses twined' suggests that for him, like Wordsworth, 'there hath passed away a glory from the earth'. This idea is subsequently strengthened through the juxtaposition of the world 'Of Nature's mingled harmony' and the man's lack of response. The activity of nature is struck stone-dead with the answering of the luxuriant description of nature in the eighth stanza with the simple statement at the start of the next stanza: 'Silent he sat'. The placing of 'silent' as the opening word clearly shows Brontë's intention to contrast it with the activity of the previous lines. The narrator's confident assertion that the man 'has deigned to rest' is unconvincing, evoked by the very intentness of her watching previously for 'one transient streak / Of pensive softness'. The narrator, like Lockwood at the end of *Wuthering Heights*, is looking for rest where there may be none. Indeed, the intensity of the narrator's imagining of rest for the man she watches, with the repetition of 'At length' (with its connotations of something long-desired) puts her in a contrasting state of restlessness.

Indeed, the repetition of 'At length', along with similar repetitions in the first and third stanzas suggest misplaced confidence in the power of lyric language to bring about the man's conversion and contrasts awkwardly with his utter silence. The narrator's anticipatory intensity grows as she states 'Let me draw near' with the building hope for a Damascene conversion experience, signalled by the heavy presence of religious imagery over two stanzas. The repentant tears of 'holy dew' lead to 'remorse' which will 'half unchain his soul

from sin'. The conversion process continues in the next verse with the culmination in Heaven hailing 'the soul redeemed by love'. This language also echoes hymns of the Wesleyan revival. However, this build-up is unmasked as a wish-fulfilment fantasy by the first word of the penultimate stanza: 'Unmarked'.

'Unmarked' echoes the 'unmarked child' in 'It is not pride'. Even though there it is the beheld who is unmarked and here it is the beholder, in both poems the word carries the sense of being unnoticed and the resultant inability to understand. This lack of understanding is all the speaker is left with after the puncturing of her illusion. The first couplet of the penultimate stanza suggests a hopeful possibility, an 'idle thought' that is as transient as a 'ray' of the sun. The brevity of a momentary illumination that quickly dissipates is highlighted by the idea that 'One glance' was all it took to dispel the illusion that this man was changed. After the laboured build-up to an anticipated conversion in the previous verses, the two couplets in this penultimate verse are brutal in the way they dash hopes. This harsh reality is aided by the masculine rhyme of 'thought' and 'caught', with the subsequent rhyming of 'care' and 'there' with its sound of falling away, intensifies the settling conviction of a man's nature that cannot be reached or changed. After all the hopes, the narcissistic fancy of a man's heart being softened, all it takes is one 'glance' to know the reality of the situation. The situation between two people in this poem, one secluded in himself and the other powerless to reach or change him foreshadows the relationship between Heathcliff and Isabella.

Before considering the final stanza, it is worth reiterating how this poem relates to Emily Brontë's vision of the fundamental lost state of childhood. Through the narrator, Brontë probes the Wordsworthian hope of finding, in childhood, a home that the grown adult has moved away from. Emily Brontë, by placing her Wordsworthian advocate as one projecting a narcissistic fantasy onto another, shows how ineffectual the simple creed of

childhood is. This is also aided by the narrator's overstatement; her insistence that 'he *must* have felt in infancy' (emphasis added) implies that there was probably no such feeling. Catherine Linton's yearning for a childhood where she was free is, in this poem, resolutely resisted and portrayed as an illusion.

The final stanza suggests moral judgement that would not be out of place coming from the mouth of Nelly Dean. Brontë places rhetorical tropes in the mouth of her narrator that she treats with great subtlety elsewhere in her poetry. The effect of the man's 'crime' is pictured by the idea of cold: 'cold', 'winter wind' and 'polar snow'. The alternate rhyme of 'snow' with 'woe' belies the image of snow as a portent of liberation in 'To a Wreath of Snow'. The return of such images from their unconventional associations with freedom elsewhere in Emily Brontë's poetry to conventional tropes makes the reader suspicious of the perspective of the narrator. This is also applicable with the 'ray' in the previous stanza. The desired 'ray', with the freight of the 'heaven' that bends 'above' in the previous stanza, can be uncomfortably juxtaposed with the sun that 'does not warm, but burn' in 'Stars'. This use of sun imagery as a harbinger of an imagined conversion experience rather than of the death of night time reverie distances the poem's narrator from the poet. This strengthens the idea that the narrator's confidence in the fructifying influence of childhood recollection is scrutinised and found wanting by Emily Brontë.

*Giving us the 'Slip': Emily Brontë's Exiled Children*

While Emily Brontë's imagining of childhood may be steeped in Wordsworthian antecedents (for example, she refers to 'careless childhood's sunny time'), she differs from Wordsworth in that the children she portrays in her poetry are just as exiled as her adults. This is seen in even a cursory glance at the 'Lucy' poems. The enigmatic Lucy is

surprisingly well-housed. In ‘Song’ she ‘*dwelt among th’ untrodden ways*’ (1) (emphasis added). Even her after-life, imagined so mysteriously in ‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ is to be ‘Roll’d around in earth’s diurnal course / With rocks and stones and trees!’ (7-8).<sup>22</sup> She is cradled in earth and secure even if the narrator in the ‘Lucy’ poems is faltering in his apprehension of her. By contrast, the final poem that Emily Brontë was known to have written (which will be considered in-depth as part of the conclusion) is the casting off of a child. For Emily Brontë, there is no sublimity – only abandonment.

Indeed, there is bewilderment as the children in ‘It is not shame’ and ‘I saw thee child’ are observed by their respective narrators. It is as if they cannot be accommodated in the world and, as ‘The soft unclouded blue of air’ goes on to prove, any attempt to imagine accommodation through the redeeming power of recollection is ultimately futile. What this chapter has established is that, while Emily Brontë is the heir of Wordsworth in the gaze she places on the child and the recognisably Wordsworthian tropes she employs, she rejects any sentimental or mystical consolation in the idea of childhood. So she does not conceive of her children as sages to sophisticated adults (and reverses this dichotomy in ‘Faith and Despondency’). She also rejects the Lucy-like sublimity of the child who is more connected with ‘God who is our home’. Yet this is not to argue that Emily Brontë’s children possess no mystery; the child in ‘It is not pride’, through the solicitous withholding of the narrator, possesses a mystery of her own but Emily Brontë does not let her child-figures rest in possession of mystery: instead she sets them on a journey like the girl in ‘It is not pride’ who leaves the hall.

Emily Brontë’s rejection of elements of Wordsworth’s simple creed of childhood in favour of his ‘obstinate questionings’ is seen in a conversation between Catherine Earnshaw and her father at the start of *Wuthering Heights*, just before Mr Earnshaw dies. The setting is

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<sup>22</sup> References taken from: William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992). Line numbers given in text.



the same as that in 'Faith and Despondency' as 'A high wind blustered around the house' (52). The cameo of the young Catherine, 'leant against her father's knee' also echoes the father and Iernë in Brontë's poem. However, Catherine does not attain to the piety of Iernë as Mr Earnshaw asks 'Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?' Catherine's response demonstrates Brontë's swerve from portraying children as harbingers of sublimity as she puckishly (but with, arguably, a much shrewder grasp of human nature) responds with 'Why cannot you always be a good man, father?' (53). Shortly before Nelly Dean narrates this part of the story to Lockwood, she observes that Catherine was a 'Wild, wick slip' (51).

The children in Emily Brontë's poetry also give us the 'slip'. This is because they are leaving for unfathomable reasons, are inexplicably isolated or face an inexpressible terror of the future and are forced to move. Stasis is resisted. Brontë's children are not 'father to the man' but are as lost as the man. Indeed, Nelly Dean's narration starts with a lost child; 'houseless' (45) is the word Mr Earnshaw uses. This homelessness of Heathcliff succinctly reflects Emily Brontë's preoccupation with homesickness in its development of the nostalgic children in her early poetry.

*Chapter Six: 'Wuthering Heights'*

*Wuthering Heights*, as the title states, foregrounds a home and the novel is, arguably, the story of the acquisition of a home.<sup>1</sup> This important detail can often be lost in a preoccupation with the drama between Heathcliff and Catherine. Not only is it a novel about a home, however, it also dwells on the consequences of exile from that home, particularly Catherine Earnshaw's exile from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange and Heathcliff's self-imposed exile of three years from Wuthering Heights. So the location of home is an important preoccupation; this is pointed out by Steven Vine in an article on *Wuthering Heights* where he argues that Catherine Earnshaw figures her belonging in 'terms of homelessness'.<sup>2</sup>

During her final illness, in exile at Thrushcross Grange, Nelly notices that Catherine is listening to the beck and comes to the conclusion that 'Of Wuthering Heights Catherine was thinking as she listened' (193). It may come as a surprise that she is not thinking about Heathcliff; the home occupies all her energies (this draws the imaginative centre of *Wuthering Heights* away from a romance to a novel about home). Three chapters earlier, Nelly describes Catherine's vision of Wuthering Heights while she was in a delirium. She has a vision of her childhood room at Wuthering Heights 'with the candle in it and the trees swaying before it' (154). The light is suggestive of a guiding light to a childhood home and it can be seen as guiding Catherine home. That she sees it as such is discerned in her avowal that Joseph is 'waiting till I come home that he may lock the gate' (154) (it is perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Katrina Simpson anticipates the founding idea in this chapter in a short article when she writes: '*Wuthering Heights* is the story of a woman's love for her home'. Katrina Simpson, '*Wuthering Heights* – A Personal Interpretation', *Brontë Studies*, (30.1.2005): 69-70, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Vine, 'The Wuther of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, (49.3.1994): 339-359. p. 349.

surprising that Catherine imagines a hospitality in Joseph that is not discerned in the words he utters). The tender domesticity of this image, with the imagining of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights expecting Catherine to return home, lays bare a vein of homesickness that runs through *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine's fevered ability to visualise her home so vividly is the corollary to the argument that 'home is invisible while one lives in it' and that, in exile at Thrushcross Grange the 'loss of domestic security [in *Wuthering Heights*] brings its value sharply into focus'.<sup>3</sup> That the journey home will be difficult is underlined when Catherine says, 'It's a rough journey and a sad heart to travel it' (154) (again, there is also an unexpected connection with Lockwood who also had a rough journey to *Wuthering Heights*). So, in this section of the novel where Catherine is dying, a desire to be reunited with her childhood home is given, briefly, more prominence than her desire for Heathcliff. The novel is about a woman who has lost her home and spends the rest of her life trying to find it again; a nostos of the Yorkshire moors.

Also, in the afterlife of Catherine, she is presented as leading Heathcliff home. When Heathcliff describes his feeling when he dug down and reached Catherine's coffin to Nelly, his language is imbued with the sense of a religious conversion:

A sudden sense of relief flowed from my heart through every limb. I relinquished my labour of agony, and turned consoled at once, unspeakably consoled. Her presence was with me; it remained while I refilled the grave, and led me home (350).

The idea of pushing through difficulty and arriving at a home of consolation is echoed in John Newton's hymn, 'Amazing Grace':

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come  
Tis grace that brought me safe thus far

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<sup>3</sup> Stabler, p. 144.

And grace will lead me home.

The motif of being led home safely through the snares of the world is appropriated by Emily Brontë in a way that situates *Wuthering Heights* as being a novel that contains, at its core, a desire for homecoming.

This chapter will consider *Wuthering Heights* as a novel that is afflicted with homesickness in three respects. First, through close reading of the ways in which Emily Brontë uses imagery associated with the domestic sphere, the chapter will discuss how *Wuthering Heights* evokes home. Arising from this evocation of home, it will be argued, secondly, that Emily Brontë uses it to give rise to a yearning for home that is discerned through the whole novel. The third element in the discussion will be to contend that the vision that energises *Wuthering Heights* and the poetry is the same: longing for home. This will establish more firmly the idea that the same poetic vision energises both the poetry and prose. There are also the traces of Wordsworth's influence. Hartman's statement about Wordsworth's poetry applies with equal force to Emily Brontë's writing: he argues that Wordsworth's poems, 'show us people cleaving to one thing or idea with a tenaciousness both pathetic and frightening'.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Domestic Sphere*

In the first two chapters of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë both evokes a home and through the narrator, Lockwood, denies entry to that home. It is as if the reader of the novel anticipates an invitation to be welcomed into the world of *Wuthering Heights* but, because we view events from Lockwood's perspective, we are denied entrance. As David Sonestrom

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<sup>4</sup> Hartman, p.143

expresses it, this is because Emily Brontë frustrates any alliance with her reader.<sup>5</sup> Lockwood, like the reader, is not allowed to feel at home. Indeed when he encounters the ghost at the window in chapter three, what is apparent is that, in Freud's terms, it is an experience of the *Unheimlich*. For Freud, what Lockwood experiences is unhomey as it 'ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.<sup>6</sup> A further comment in Freud's essay is also relevant to Lockwood. He states that there are writers who deceive 'us by promising to give us the sober truth and then after all overstepping it'.<sup>7</sup> Emily Brontë's choice of her common-sense narrator raises expectations of a rational account, but Lockwood's 'overstepping' (through his apparent ignoring of the instruction to 'hide the candle' (23)) unleashes the supernatural. This then takes the novel down into the next level of Nelly Dean's narration as Lockwood has been unable to lead the reader beyond the 'introductory lobby' (5) of *Wuthering Heights*.

However, notwithstanding supernatural disruption (the ramifications of which for a poetics of homesickness will be discussed in the next chapter), the space of *Wuthering Heights* is intensely domestic. The room that Lockwood enters is described as being 'nothing extraordinary as belonging to a *homely*, northern farmer' (6) (emphasis added). In the following chapter he additionally observes that the fire glowed 'delightfully' (12). Even after Lockwood's ghostly encounter, when he takes refuge in the back kitchen of *Wuthering Heights*, there is a 'gleam of fire' (35). The hearth at the heart of the house is constantly burning. It is worth noticing Emily Brontë's close attention to domestic detail. The fire by which Lockwood sits is 'raked compactly together' (35). This practice of smooing (as the speading of the ashes over the fireplace to keep it smouldering was known) carries the suggestion of a practice in Celtic Ireland and Scotland.

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<sup>5</sup> David Sonstroem, 'Wuthering Heights and the Limits of Vision', *PMLA*, (86.1.1971) 51-62. p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> 'The "Uncanny"', p. 250.

The domesticity retains its presence throughout the events of the novel. Even when Brontë portrays Heathcliff at his most malevolent, when Nelly Dean delivers Linton to him, there is still careful attention to domestic detail. It seems incongruous that, at this moment of drama, Heathcliff is listening to Joseph ‘telling some tale concerning a lame horse’ (253). Furthermore, even when, towards the end of the novel, Heathcliff is in the throes of the anticipated advent of the ghostly Catherine, Brontë still writes (again, in the context of a discussion about a horse) that Heathcliff gave ‘*clear, minute* directions about the matter discussed’ (emphasis added) (404). It is as if Emily Brontë is determined not to let the reader forget that *Wuthering Heights* is, in fact, a working farm. She also reveals herself as a Romantic heir in her ‘heightening of the everyday’.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is in the evocation of the hearth that Emily Brontë’s situating of *Wuthering Heights* as a domestic space is felt most strongly. Susan Stewart helpfully draws attention to this when she argues that the fires at *Wuthering Heights* are blazing and those at *Thrushcross Grange* are weak.<sup>9</sup> Enid Duthie, in a development of this idea argues that the main passions of the characters spring from the hearth: ‘It is rather the blazing fires on the hearth at the Heights, the focus of comfort in a northern farmstead, which seems also best to suggest the fire in their natures’.<sup>10</sup> Edward Chitham, when discussing Emily Brontë’s creation of *Wuthering Heights* as a home, concludes that it ‘is a house approved of by the author for its mystery, its ghosts and its *warm fires*’ (emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> That the hearth is a synecdoche for being at home is also seen when the young Heathcliff and Catherine are exiled from that home. When Hindley exiles the two children to the back kitchen, he does so, ‘from his paradise on the hearth’ (26). The sense that the hearth is a Miltonic scene of prelapsarian bliss is confirmed when Joseph taunts them in the back kitchen that “‘owd Nick”

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<sup>8</sup> Stabler, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Stewart, ‘The Ballad in *Wuthering Heights*’, *Representations* (86.1.2004), 175-197. p. 187.

<sup>10</sup> Duthie, p. 239.

<sup>11</sup> Chitham, *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems*, p. 100.

would fetch us as sure as we were living' (26). So in the hell of the back kitchen they are exiled from the paradise of the hearth. This also foreshadows Catherine's rejoicing in her dream that she was thrown out of heaven and landed in Wuthering Heights.

When Lockwood states, in his smitten tourist fashion, that he is sure that people in places like Wuthering Heights '*do* live more in earnest' (77), arguably the seat of that earnestness is the hearth. *Earnestness* is used by Thomas Carlyle in his discussion of Oliver Cromwell as hero.<sup>12</sup> When he exclaims how Cromwell 'looked so strange, among the elegant Euphemisms; dainty little Falklands...' it sounds similar to Heathcliff among the Lintons.<sup>13</sup> The description of Cromwell 'with his whole soul *seeing* and struggling to see' resonates with the intensity of Heathcliff's quest for Catherine.<sup>14</sup>

The reader, through Lockwood, has to navigate this home but, despite the fires being inviting, we are blocked by Lockwood's inability to navigate the passages, both literal and metaphorical, of Wuthering Heights. After Lockwood passed the 'threshold' (5) (with the subtle freighting of this word as a boundary between one world and another) he takes a seat at the 'end of the hearthstone' (again with Lockwood's positioning suggesting border connotations). This suggestion, through Lockwood not reaching the centre of the hearth, that he is on the periphery of the domestic space of Wuthering Heights is intensified after his encounter with the ghost. After his screams have woken Heathcliff, Lockwood leaves him in the bedroom to supplicate the ghost of Catherine. Lockwood, being 'ignorant where the narrow lobbies led' (35), is forced to stand still and then witnesses Heathcliff's cries. Lockwood's inability to navigate the space of Wuthering Heights is hinted at earlier when he pleads with Catherine Linton to 'point out some landmarks by which I may know my way home' (19). So, getting to the heart of the home is a desire that awakens through

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<sup>12</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 187.

Lockwood's inability to navigate the home. This is compounded by the irony of him sleeping in the very bed that Catherine slept in, 'the innermost sanctuary of the Heights'.<sup>15</sup>

Emily Brontë creates an admixture of the sacred and the profane in her creation of the domestic space in *Wuthering Heights*. The importance that Emily Brontë attaches to the conception of *Wuthering Heights* as a domestic space is underlined by her choice of the word 'sanctum' to describe the kitchen. This tilts the novel away from being a Gothic story as the domesticity lends a matter-of-factness to what could be conceived as more supernatural elements. When Heathcliff, in a discourse from the hearth (392), is explaining to Nelly how everything that he sees reminds him of Catherine, he states that 'I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags!' (394). Heathcliff using an image like this situates the house as a place where memories are imprinted on the stones. Indeed, as Catherine herself discovers, the very furniture of the house is capable of taking a ghostly hue as, in her delirium she saw the 'black press' (150) from her room at *Wuthering Heights* that Lockwood observed as he entered the room twenty years later and saw 'a clothes press' (23). Also, the inscribing of Heathcliff and Catherine's names on the window ledge suggests that the physical space of the house has incorporated the story into itself. So *Wuthering Heights* is the *genius loci* of *Wuthering Heights*.

This sense of *Wuthering Heights* as a house with depths is pointed up by Emily Brontë through Lockwood. Its status as a superficial rather than a storied space for Lockwood is emphasised when, in the manner of an urbane southerner, before he enters, he states that 'I would have made a few comments and requested a short history of the place' (5). This reduces *Wuthering Heights* from being a repository of a story to being the object of a gaze. However, as Lockwood enters the 'family sitting-room' (5) he 'distinguished a chatter of tongues' from 'deep within'. *Wuthering Heights* is evoked as a place that exists

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<sup>15</sup> Torgerson, p. 90.



deep in space (and also through the manifestation of the ghost wandering for twenty years, in time) aided by the personification of the kitchen being ‘forced to retreat altogether into another quarter’ (5). Emily Brontë makes Lockwood’s incomprehension of the domestic space very clear as he tries to piece together the culinary domestic arrangements of the place.

Foregrounding Brontë’s imaginative use of the hearth, particularly when considered in the light of Synge’s words, already cited in chapter three, that ‘an outrage to the hearth is the supreme catastrophe’, can also lead to a resituating of the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine. Catherine’s betrayal of her deepest self in choosing Edgar over Heathcliff can also be seen as a choosing of Thrushcross Grange over Wuthering Heights: it is a betrayal of the hearth as well as of the heart.

A final observation is that it is in this evocation of *Wuthering Heights* as foregrounding the domestic space that possibilities of redeeming Joseph inhere; the idea that Joseph’s sole function in the novel is to satirise Calvinistic religion is one that can be contested: indeed, he is the custodian of the hearth. There is a certain poignancy when the growing intimacy of Hareton and Catherine signals the changing of the status quo at Wuthering Heights. I quote Joseph’s words at length:

Aw mun hev my wage, and Aw mun goa! Aw *hed* aimed tuh dee where A’wd sarved fur sixty year; un’ Aw thowt A’wd lug my books up intuh t’ garret, un’ all my bits uh stuff, un’ they sud hev t’ kitchen tuh theirseln; fur t’ sake uh quietness. It wur hard tuh gie up my awn hearthstun, bud Aw thowt aw *could* do that! Bud, nah, shoo’s taan my garden from me, un’ by th’ heart! Maister, Aw cannot stand it! (387)

This is Joseph’s response to Hareton digging up his gooseberry bushes to make a garden for Cathy (which has an uncomfortable echo of Hindley changing the house to suit his new wife, Frances). The way he frames his lament reveals the centrality of the hearth. The difficulty with which Joseph would give up his ‘hearthstun’ is accentuated by the use of the possessive

pronoun highlighting his role as guardian of the hearth. This is hinted at after Lockwood's early morning visit to the back kitchen. After Lockwood is by the fire, Joseph comes down from the garret and Lockwood observes that he 'cast a sinister look at the little flame which I had enticed to play between the ribs' (36). It is as if it was an act of sacrilege for Lockwood to light his candle from the fire. Lockwood's invasion of the hearth is a synecdoche for his invasion of the home. Brontë's use of 'his sanctum' to describe Joseph's relationship to the hearth evokes his guardianship of *Wuthering Heights* with a religious zeal which belies any Calvinist disdain for attachment to all things earthly. That, for Joseph, the hearth means the home can be established by noticing the verbal echo between hearth and heart when he appeals to Heathcliff at the end of the passage quoted. Joseph's attachment to *Wuthering Heights* is clear in his aspiration to die in the house where he had lived for sixty years. Emily Brontë evokes Joseph as a guardian for *Wuthering Heights* in Lockwood's observation that his occupation of the kitchen will leave the rest of the house free 'for the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it'; Joseph is seen by Lockwood as inhabiting *Wuthering Heights* with the permanence of a ghost. Emily Brontë's attention, and even solicitude for the domestic sphere is shown in how he is resident in the kitchen; his fear of exile that arose from the ascendancy of Hareton and Catherine has proved groundless.

*'Yearning to Behold'*

Emily Brontë's evocation of home leads to yearning to experience being inside that home. This is seen, albeit in a crude way, with Lockwood when he discovers that no one will answer the door on his second visit to *Wuthering Heights*: 'At least, I would not keep my doors barred in the daytime – I don't care – I will get in!' (11). Lockwood's vehement shaking of the latch ironically foreshadows his concern that the latch of the window remains

shut when Catherine's ghost, like Lockwood, is trying to get in. Indeed, Lockwood's exclamations of a desire to be admitted echo Catherine's ghost. Brontë's choice of Lockwood as narrator to arouse homesickness is made stronger through her presentation of a home that is near-impossible to get into. It is not Lockwood who experiences homesickness but he stirs it elsewhere as seen in the unexpected connection between his desire to be let in and Catherine's ghost.

Emily Brontë's conception of Lockwood is as a consumer of fiction. For example, when he encourages Nelly to continue telling Heathcliff's story, he refers to it in novelistic terms, using phrases such as 'chief incidents', 'hero' and 'heroine' (112). His conceiving of the story as an activity to conjure away the ennui of a bored man from the city is incommensurate with the strong passions that are delineated in the story. The irony of this, however, is that Lockwood has learnt that reading can be a very dangerous activity as he found out when perusing Catherine's diary; his experience of reading then was, to use the words of Carlyle who quotes Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'an "apocalypse of nature", a revealing of the "open secret"'.<sup>16</sup> However, by the time he is holed up in his bedroom, with Nelly nursing him, Lockwood has reverted to type.

In the matter of being a consumer of books, Lockwood parallels Edgar Linton. When Catherine Linton learns from Nelly that, despite her histrionics, Edgar Linton is still in the library, she exclaims, 'Among his books... and I dying!' (148). Edgar's apparent unconcern while there is dying around him is similar to Lockwood's breezy enjoyment of the tale while the world as it is, at Wuthering Heights, is dying around him. This irony is accentuated by his imagining a future for himself with Catherine Heathcliff and even Nelly Dean's willingness to entertain such a possibility. Her observation to Lockwood, on the impending marriage of Hareton to Catherine, that, 'it was easy enough to win Mrs Heathcliff's heart; but

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<sup>16</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 141.

now, I'm glad you did not try' (384), comes as a surprise especially given his blunders in *Wuthering Heights* at the start of the novel.

Lockwood's inability to perceive what is the true state of affairs at *Wuthering Heights* is used by Emily Brontë to comic effect in the opening two chapters. However, this lack of perception goes further than a few embarrassing *faux-pas*. It is the fact that these incidents underline his irrevocable status as an outsider and, by implication, as Lockwood is the reader's representative, so are we also. A forceful example is the innocuous delivery by Heathcliff of a brace of grouse to the sick Lockwood. The Heathcliff who is 'charitable enough to sit at my bedside a good hour' (112) in his politeness and consideration for the sick is incommensurate with the Heathcliff who exclaims to Hareton 'you'll go with him to hell!' (20) when he offers to guide Lockwood across the moor. It is as if, in the opening chapters Lockwood was previously afforded a glimpse of the stormy centre of *Wuthering Heights*, but now the curtain has been drawn and all Lockwood has is a visit from a respectable landowner. Any subsequent discoveries of the heart of *Wuthering Heights* will be mediated through Nelly's story-telling. Lockwood is denied access to the intimate spaces of *Wuthering Heights*. The ideas in Gaston Bachelard's poetic meditation on the intimate spaces of home are useful in explicating Lockwood's status as outsider: '...the first task... is to find the original shell' and not describe the home 'as it actually is, without really experiencing its primitiveness'.<sup>17</sup> Lockwood's reduction of *Wuthering Heights* to an artefact, foreshadowed in the fact that his first utterance is a date, and confirmed by his interest in artefacts and carvings, means that, ultimately, he is blocked from the primitiveness of the house.

Including a character who misapprehends the human story that is part of a dwelling suggests a possible reading of *The Excursion* where, in book one, we are caught between the poet's inability to comprehend and the wanderer's inability to tell the story. The Wanderer

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<sup>17</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 4.

exclaims to the Poet that, when he met Margaret again ‘O Sir! / I cannot *tell* how she pronounced my name’ (I.686-7) (this sense of awe in the face of strong emotion is not felt by Lockwood). What Wordsworth has the Wanderer confess to (emphasised through his italicisation of *tell*), that he is unable to do justice to the colourings of Margaret’s feelings in words, is not admitted by Emily Brontë’s two narrators. Brontë’s framing of over-confident narrators increases a sense that the world of *Wuthering Heights* is misapprehended and that the reader is locked out by the narrator. There is an antecedent for Lockwood’s trivialisation of Heathcliff’s story as a means of passing the time while he recovers from his ill-judged journey over the moors in the Wanderer’s rebuke to the Poet. The Poet, like Lockwood, is eager to hear the rest of Margaret’s story. The Wanderer’s reply, that the Poet should not seek to ‘hold vain dalliance with the misery / Even of the dead’ (I.659-60), resonates with Lockwood’s fantasies of a marriage between himself and Catherine Heathcliff with no appreciation of the sufferings in her history. Subtle Wordsworthian echoes such as the placement of characters in relationship to one another, help situate *Wuthering Heights* as ‘The most “Romantic” English novel ever written’.<sup>18</sup>

Situating Lockwood as the narrator focuses the gaze on *Wuthering Heights* and Lockwood’s incomprehension acts as a prism through which an ache for a way-of-being that has departed is refracted. As well as his blunders at *Wuthering Heights*, this evocation of longing is seen in how he relates to the interlocutor of Heathcliff’s story, Nelly Dean. Rather like Linton Heathcliff, the sickly nature of Lockwood compares unfavourably with the animal spirits of Heathcliff. When Nelly Dean, who has adopted a maternal role in relationship to Lockwood, reminds him of his medicines, the petulant ‘Away, away with it!’ (112) is reminiscent of a child wanting his bedtime story. It is as if one degree of man has been replaced with another. The narrating of Heathcliff’s passionate intensity is in thrall to the

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<sup>18</sup> Derek Colville, *Victorian Poetry and the Romantic Religion*, (Albany: State University of NY Press, 1970) p. 72.

demands of a petulant consumer of fiction. This highlights that the world which Heathcliff represented has passed into the realm of story. In fact, Emily Brontë with ironic effect reins in Lockwood's conjectures about Heathcliff's possible occupations during his absence from Wuthering Heights. His vigorous imaginings of 'escape to America' (113) and 'drawing blood from his foster country' (113) are met with the prosaic and condescending enquiry from Nelly Dean: 'Are you feeling better this morning?' (113). It is as if the real dangers of Heathcliff are now tamed into a story suitable for an invalid's bedside.

Indeed, Wuthering Heights as the dwelling of Heathcliff and Catherine takes on a dream-like hue. Brontë, in this situation of the relationship between Lockwood and Nelly Dean, returns to the objectifying of Heathcliff as a narrative rather than a man 'till the sense aches with gazing to behold / The scenes our earliest dreams have dwelt upon' (Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto two, verse LXXXVIII). Any such aching 'to behold' that Emily Brontë's narrative technique creates is not felt by the recipient of the story. Nelly speaks more truly than she knows when, finishing the account of Heathcliff's childhood years, she says, 'But, Mr. Lockwood, I forget these tales cannot divert you' (76). This underlines Lockwood's imperviousness to Nelly's narrative and this is underlined later in the novel when, at the end of Nelly's narrative, Lockwood's conclusion is to express his wish to return to London and he reflects dismissively upon the locale in which he has found himself: 'I would not pass another winter here, for much' (361). This conclusion is hinted at when, upon reflecting earlier on the possibility of an attachment between himself and Catherine, Lockwood states that 'I doubt it too much to venture my tranquillity by running into temptation; and then my home is not here. I'm of the busy world and to its arms I must return' (312). Lockwood's statement that his home is not at Thrushcross Grange is, of course, an ironic reflection of Catherine Linton's similar longing to be away from Thrushcross Grange. This unwitting connection between Lockwood and Catherine is

testimony to the power of the story that Lockwood denies through his preference for the state of ‘tranquillity’, a repose that is also the stated choice of the other male invalid in *Wuthering Heights*: Linton Heathcliff. Lockwood’s other observation on the progress of Nelly’s narrative also connects him unwittingly with another character. Lockwood’s choice of metaphor for his annoyance at Nelly breaking-off her narrative as watching a cat ‘licking its kitten’ (77) and leaving ‘one ear’ neglected echoes Nelly’s own comparison of Linton’s unwillingness to leave Catherine Earnshaw to a cat that cannot leave a mouse unfinished. The two metaphors of consumption cast both their subjects in an unfavourable light.

The thread of Lockwood’s attraction to Catherine is a metaphor for his misapprehension. The irony is that, after his waxing lyrical about his idea that the locals he finds himself among live ‘less in surface change’ (77), Lockwood then states that ‘I could fancy a love for life here *almost* possible’ (emphasis added). Some lines from Wordsworth’s *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* encapsulate the nature of Lockwood’s misapprehension:

While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things. (47-49)

Lockwood fails to ‘see into the life of things’ and the parodic way in which Emily Brontë highlights this rouses a desire to attain this sight. However, the non-perception of Lockwood (the clue is in the name) frustrates this desire to see ‘into the life’ of *Wuthering Heights* and so transcend the narrator. One critic, J. F. Goodridge, highlights this point when he compares the curiosity that is aroused by Sir Walter Scott’s narrators with those of Emily Brontë; he states that the reader may be satisfied by Scott’s narrators but never by Brontë’s.<sup>19</sup> Marianne Thormählen’s discussion of Heathcliff’s feeling, towards the end of the novel, that Catherine

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<sup>19</sup> J. F. Goodridge, ‘A New Heaven and a New Earth’, Anne Smith, ed. *The Art of Emily Brontë*, (London: Vision, 1976) p. 161.

is ‘near, but never close enough for him to grasp’ as a ‘case of tantalising torment’ also parallels the way that Lockwood locks out the possibility of an apprehension of the centre of *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>20</sup> Through Lockwood, Brontë is frustrating the desire to know, in the most metaphysical sense of the word and, therefore, causing restlessness and stirring homesickness.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the goal of yearning is the lost childhood home. As shall be discussed in the next section of this chapter, the home is very earthly. This search for a home in earth is portrayed dramatically through Heathcliff digging down to Catherine’s coffin the day she is buried. The stacking of clauses evokes the build-up to a climactic moment of revelation:

‘...began to delve with all my might – it scraped the coffin; I fell to work with my hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws’ (350)

Compare this earthly form of the excitement of visionary anticipation with the advent of a more aerial spirit in ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’:

Its wings are almost free - its home, its harbour found;  
Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final bound.

This evocation of being on the brink is matched by the concomitant inability to sustain this visionary release.

The earthiness of Emily Brontë’s imagining of home in *Wuthering Heights*, particularly in Heathcliff’s request to the sexton that the side of the coffin be removed so he could dissolve with Catherine, bears another discernible trace of a Wordsworthian influence. Wordsworth’s evocation, in ‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ of Lucy being ‘Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course / With rocks and stones and trees’ (7-8) bears the same employment of soil and earth that Heathcliff uses to express his longing for the consummation of Catherine’s

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<sup>20</sup> Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) p. 109.



declaration: 'I *am* Heathcliff' (102): 'Of dissolving with her, and being more happy still' (349). Indeed this is the ultimate manifestation of Lockwood's misapprehension. The activity of being 'rolled around' and 'dissolving' is incommensurate with Lockwood's graveside evocation of the heaven of Linton Heathcliff with the 'soft wind', the 'benign sky' and the 'moths fluttering' (414). Indeed, even the elemental focus is different and Lockwood, consistent with his first arrival at Wuthering Heights, is unable to 'imagine unquiet slumbers' (414).

Lockwood creates the sense of being exiled from the dwelling of Wuthering Heights and so aggravates a longing homesickness in the sense of a desire to be at the heart of a dwelling. This is felt with great imaginative force in Catherine Linton's delirium when, upon coming out of a fever in which she dreamt she was at Wuthering Heights, she regains awareness that she is actually at Thrushcross Grange. Of course, the situation parallels that of the prisoner's growing awareness of her prison cell in 'Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle'. That Brontë herself had this connection in mind is suggested by Catherine's declaration that 'what irks me most is this shattered prison' (197). The inability of Catherine to fully approximate the dwelling that she longs for is felt in her recounting of her delirium to Nelly that, as she came to, her 'heart ached with some great grief which, just waking, I could not recollect'. It is interesting, that even in the depths of this dream experience, furniture is foregrounded. It is as if Brontë will never lose sight of the domestic space of Wuthering Heights and as if the longing that Catherine has for Wuthering Heights has had its ground laid by Emily Brontë in her delicate conception of the domestic space as considered in the previous section of this chapter. Notwithstanding this fact, it is the case that Catherine is unable to name the dwelling that she exhibits so much yearning for. With great deftness, Brontë frustrates any pious expectations that the place she refers to is heaven to which the phrase, 'that glorious world' stubbornly refuses to be allied. Also, there is a connection to be

made between Catherine's threat to jump out of the window and the prisoner who is pondering whether to dare the final bound. Ultimately, the nostalgic longing in *Wuthering Heights*, and the direction of that longing coalesces with a poetic vision of home found in Brontë's poetry. It is this poetic vision that the next section shall consider.

*The Homesick Vision of 'Wuthering Heights'*

*Wuthering Heights* has been recognised for its poetic qualities since publication. Sydney Dobell's 1850 review praises it as 'the masterpiece of the poet, rather than the hybrid creation of the novelist'.<sup>21</sup> There are passages that attain the lyrical concentration of the poet and imagine homesickness. Lockwood's ill-timed second visit to *Wuthering Heights* results in an enforced stay at the house: 'A sorrowful sight I saw; dark night coming down prematurely, and sky and hills mingled in one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow.' (17). Amid the awkwardness of Lockwood's misapprehension as to the identity of Cathy and Hareton, this cameo possesses the quality of an arrest. For a moment, Lockwood exists in suspended animation. 'Sorrowful' expresses more than Lockwood's realisation that there is a difficult journey ahead. In this image is suggested the mingling that Heathcliff longs to achieve with the dead Catherine. It is as if, what Lockwood cannot perceive inside the house, he is receptive to when he looks outside the window. For a moment, Lockwood is lost ontologically in the scene outside the window, before he is recalled to the pressing question of how he is going to get back to Thrushcross Grange. As well as this Wordsworthian sense of arrest, the poetic quality in this line inheres in the alliterative relentlessness sounding out the falling of the snow. Also, notwithstanding the unifying influence of any imaginative arrest for Lockwood, he still views the snow as an obstacle to reaching home. However,

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<sup>21</sup> Miriam Allot, ed. p. 58.

seeing the sight in the context of a unifying poetic vision, it becomes home. In it is found the music of November, discussed in the introduction, and the homeliness of a landscape that is harsh, as evoked in Brontë's 'Now trust a heart that trusts in you' (the idea of snow as bringing to the fore past memories, is discussed by Bachelard: 'On snowy days, the house, too is old. It is as though it were living in the past of centuries gone by'<sup>22</sup>):

The mountain peasant loves the heath  
 Better than richest plains beneath  
 He would not give one moorland wild  
 For all the fields that ever smiled

Lockwood, albeit briefly, glimpses the homeliness that, for most of the novel, he misses.

A yearning for home is present in the way that *Wuthering Heights* posits the same vision that actuates the poetry of attachment to earth and rejection of heaven. This is unwittingly hinted at by Nelly when she is taking Linton Heathcliff to Wuthering Heights and endeavouring to cheer his foreboding thoughts: 'now and then, your uncle may join you in a walk; he does, frequently, walk out on the hills' (252). After Heathcliff dies, Nelly explains to Lockwood that 'country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their bibles that he *walks*' (412). There is a striking continuity between what Heathcliff does before death and his activity after it. The necessity for another dwelling place has been obviated and reflects an idea expressed by Emily Brontë in 'Shall earth no more inspire thee':

Few hearts to mortals given  
 On earth so wildly pine  
 Yet none would ask a Heaven  
 More like this Earth than thine – (p.130)

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<sup>22</sup> Bachelard, p. 41.

What this expresses is reluctance to leave the earth; this is expressed by Marianne Thormählen, who contends that ‘the most noteworthy parallels between Emily Brontë’s poetry and the world of *Wuthering Heights* are found in representations of childhood love and the idea that ‘one’s earthly home is heaven enough’.<sup>23</sup>

In considering this homesick vision, that energises both the novel and the poetry, as one that longs for earth, it is worthwhile considering the inflections of ‘abyss’ in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine Earnshaw uses the word to describe Thrushcross Grange whereas Heathcliff begs the newly dead Catherine not to leave him in the abyss where he cannot find her. When one considers the connotations of abyss as an absence, a space without coordinates, one realises that it is the lack of the fixed and continuous that so terrifies Heathcliff and Catherine. It is the antithesis of the ‘eternal rocks beneath’, to which Catherine likens her love for Heathcliff. J. Hillis Miller expresses this idea when he writes that Catherine’s ‘feeling at home in the universe depends on the presence in it of a grounding bottom’.<sup>24</sup> So, in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë posits and then rejects Nelly Dean’s expression of ‘assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter’ (202) in favour of a home that is on the ground. Essentially, Brontë rejects the ‘boundless’ nature of Nelly Dean’s heaven. In ‘No Coward Soul is Mine’, she writes, evoking all the creeds that people can believe as ‘Idlest froth amid the *boundless* main’ (emphasis added). So the boundlessness of eternity is the abyss. Both Heathcliff and Catherine find their home either on or below the earth. Indeed, Catherine describes the abyss as being exiled from what had been ‘my world’ (153).

Both the central characters of *Wuthering Heights* struggle to locate their home. When Catherine is expressing her love for Heathcliff to Nelly Dean, she tries to situate the part of

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<sup>23</sup> Thormählen, *The Brontës and Religion*, p.106.

<sup>24</sup> J. Hillis Miller, ‘*Wuthering Heights* and the Ellipses of Interpretation’, *Notre Dame English Journal* (12.2.1980): 85-100. p. 98.

her body that gives the inward check to marrying Edgar and all she can say is ‘*Here!* and *Here!*...in whichever place the soul lives’ (98). Similarly, after Catherine’s death, Heathcliff expresses his sense that Catherine must be somewhere: ‘Where is she? Not *there* – not in heaven – not perished – where?’ (204). What seems to energise this frenzied searching is fear of being lost in the abyss. The parts in the story where they seem to attain their goal are marked as moments of visionary intensity that parallel such moments in Brontë’s poetry. At the end of Catherine’s famous evocation of her love for Heathcliff to Nelly, she says ‘What did I say, Nelly? I’ve forgotten’ (103); this is suggestive of Catherine being in the grip, like Brontë’s prisoner, of some visionary experience and returning to the light of ‘common day’ after a period when her ‘inward essence felt’ (‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’). What frames this longing however, both in her previous dream of being thrown out of Wuthering Heights and her later delirium where she imagines being in her childhood bedroom, is that it is a longing for a home. Catherine’s Eden is Wuthering Heights.

When homesickness is considered as a preoccupation in Emily Brontë’s writing, Catherine’s declaration to Nelly that ‘heaven did not seem to be my home’ (99) carries additional resonance. The rejection of a self-evident home, whether by virtue of its climate, setting or, as is the case here, the assumed goal of all people’s longing, is a recurring pattern in Emily Brontë’s writing. An example of this as quoted two pages previously:

The mountain peasant loves the heath

Better than richest plains beneath

He would not give one moorland wild

For all the fields that ever smiled

Brontë evokes a home that she invites the reader to prefer (in the quoted poem through the personification of the fields and, in the quotation from *Wuthering Heights*, through her anticipated assumption of a shared theological understanding) and then enacts a rejection of

that home. Nelly Dean, as the reader's representative, is shocked and responds with a moralism that many of Brontë's original readers, at least, would have been likely to share: 'all sinners would be miserable in heaven' (99). This parallels, for example, the preference of the music of November over May in 'Loud without'.

Catherine's claim that she 'broke [her] heart with weeping to come back to earth' (99) inverts her later husband's longing to reach heaven so as to be reunited with his wife. Describing Edgar's final moments and his words to the younger Catherine, Nelly narrates, initially quoting Edgar's own words: "I am going to her, and you, darling child, shall come to us;" and never stirred or spoke again, but continued that rapt, radiant gaze, till his pulse imperceptibly stopped, and his soul departed. None could have noticed the exact minute of his death, it was so entirely without a struggle' (344). The resigned manner of Edgar's passing is a stark contrast to the ravings of Catherine's final hours and is one of the ways in which Brontë suggests that the affection for heaven can never be raised to the pitch of that for earth. Indeed, Catherine's 'sobbing for joy' (100) when she was thrown out of heaven back onto Wuthering Heights echoes Heathcliff's 'uncontrollable passion of tears' (35) as he tries to reach out to the ghostly Catherine who has come back to Wuthering Heights.

These two contraries of heaven and hell are expressed by Heathcliff when, during Catherine's final illness, he puts pressure on Nelly Dean to allow him to visit her. He states to Nelly that 'Oh, I've no doubt she's in hell among you!' (187). Here again is the rejection of a home that would be commonly assumed to be preferred, but what is striking is that the vitality of the emotional connection between Heathcliff and Catherine is figured out along the line that runs from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff's analogy of planting an oak in a flower pot as an analogy for Edgar's love for Catherine (187) can also be applied to the two houses in the story. Deep affections cannot take root in Thrushcross Grange.

The spurning of a home that one would be expected to adopt actuates both Brontë's poetry and prose as does the longed for anticipation of a visionary home that ends in disappointment. After Lockwood's ghostly encounter, Heathcliff enters the room and, not realising Lockwood is behind the closet, says, according to Lockwood: 'At last, he said in a half whisper, plainly not expecting an answer, "Is anyone here?"' (32). These words are heavily freighted with the hope that Catherine may have come to take Heathcliff home. That that hope was present is strongly suggested by Heathcliff's subsequent lamentings when Lockwood refers to an apparition of Catherine. Heathcliff's response is a parody of the Wordsworthian idea of emotion recollected in tranquillity as Heathcliff 'struggled to vanquish an access of violent emotion' (34). Indeed, Brontë presents Heathcliff as resisting the 'inevitable yoke' that the years bring in the 'Ode'. Heathcliff's longing and subsequent disappointment mirror the experience that Emily Brontë presents in 'Stars': 'Oh, stars, and dreams, and gentle night; / Oh night and stars return!' Impassioned invocation in Brontë's poetry and prose recalls Gezari's idea that Brontë was actuated by an existential terror at being alive in the world of time.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in Lockwood's encounter with the ghost, Brontë is pushing at the limits of both. The warping of time is felt in Lockwood's observation that 'time stagnates here' (34) and that of space in the conflation of Lockwood's stay in the room with Catherine's earlier delirium and vision of being back in that room. It is as if there is an attempt to force space and time to fit Heathcliff and Catherine's longings for home. Heathcliff's subsequent clear recollection of the household's rising and retiring times is another example of Brontë not letting the reader forget that *Wuthering Heights* is a working farm. More existentially, however, the piece of 'superstition on the part of my landlord, which belied, oddly, his apparent sense' (35) was that of two people trying to find their way

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<sup>25</sup> See Gezari, *Last Things*, p. 18.

home. However, as Brontë portrays in her poetry, this visionary intensity is not equal, in the final analysis, to a leading home.

It is the quest for a home that energises the great passions in *Wuthering Heights* and, in the articulation of an attachment to earth, and the choosing of a home that others may naturally reject, one discerns the same imaginative preoccupations energising both the poetry and the prose. Catherine and Heathcliff's fidelity to one spot as somewhere that can house their love is echoed in the words of Thomas Carlyle: 'It were well for *us* to live not as fools and simulacra, but as wise and realities. The world's being saved will not save us; nor the world's being lost destroy us. We should look to ourselves: there is great merit here in the "duty of staying at home!"'<sup>26</sup>

*Wuthering Heights* as a novel that encourages a staying-at-home is discussed by Anne Williams in her article on natural supernaturalism in the novel. She argues that the novel is a paradise lost and regained narrative and that paradise is 'regained in a transformed version of the lost childhood home'.<sup>27</sup> This is a variant on an idea expressed in a Gondal poem called 'A Death Scene', where the narrator is protesting at her beloved, Edward, leaving the world while it is still day. She says to the dying Edward:

Believe not what they urge  
Of Eden Isles beyond;  
Turn back, from that tempestuous surge,  
To thy own native land

This same dichotomy is expressed in a conversation between Heathcliff and Nelly Dean where Nelly is urging concerning 'Eden Isles beyond' in the last days of Heathcliff's life: 'Could it be hurtful to send for someone – some minister of any denomination, it does not

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<sup>26</sup> Carlyle, *Hero Worship*, p. 151.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Williams, 'Natural Supernaturalism in *Wuthering Heights*', *Studies in Philology*, (82.1.1985): 104-127. p. 116.



matter which, to explain it, and show how very far you have erred from its precepts, and how unfit you will be for heaven, unless a change take place before you die' (408). Heathcliff's response, 'I tell you, I have nearly attained my heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me' is a turning back 'from that tempestuous surge'. Indeed, the phrase echoes the description of various creeds as 'idlest froth amid the boundless main' in 'No Coward Soul is Mine'. The straightforward imperative tones of Heathcliff's words to Nelly when he says 'I tell you' (which has the quiet authority of a gospel proclamation) juxtaposes uneasily with the earnest and verbose pleading of Nelly.

The downwards pull to an earthly home is felt strongly in the writing of Emily Brontë and this is a rejection of the heaven of conventional Christian morality as felt, most forcefully, in the meeting between Heathcliff and Nelly immediately after Catherine Linton's death. Nelly's expression of her Christian hope, 'Gone to heaven, I hope, where we may, everyone, join her, if we take due warning, and leave our evil ways to follow good!' (203), is met by Heathcliff's questioning of the destination of Catherine's soul. There are some grounds for Heathcliff's questioning in the words of Catherine herself before she died. She advised Heathcliff, should any words of hers trouble him after her death, to 'think I feel the same distress *underground*' (emphasis added) (196). Also, after she reproaches Heathcliff for the likelihood of his living to forget her, she expresses this anxiety through an image that powerfully evokes a downward pull: "'I wish I could hold you", she continued, bitterly, "until we were both dead!"' (195). This existential gravitational pull is Emily Brontë asserting the power of the old familiar place over the ethereal and the unknown. It is this earthiness that acts as a portal to the supernatural. For Heathcliff, Nelly failing to follow his instructions in the removal of the sides to the coffins so Heathcliff could dissolve together with Catherine, would lead to the raising of ghosts: 'If you neglect it, you shall prove, practically, that the dead are not annihilated!' (409).

So the same vein of an attachment to the earth runs through Emily Brontë's poetry and prose. In *Wuthering Heights* the ordinary and commonplace is presented with as much imaginative intensity as the supernatural. Albeit unconsciously, Emily Brontë is participating in the Wordsworthian project of 'dramatising imaginative power through experiences of the supernatural in the commonplace.'<sup>28</sup> As has already been discussed, the *locus classicus* of Brontë's imagination is in the hearthstone. Arguably it is Heathcliff's heaven. When Nelly, prompted by her Wordsworthian encounter with the guidestone, visits Wuthering Heights to enquire as to the state of Isabella after her marriage, she observed that Isabella's 'husband took his stand on the hearthstone' (180). The intentionality of where Heathcliff places himself, and the proprietorial stance of his positioning, expresses both his possession of Isabella and intense attachment to Wuthering Heights; this last idea is evoked by the phrase, 'took his stand' with its connotations of a place hard won and readiness to defend.

This action is repeated later in the novel when Heathcliff comes to take Catherine Linton back to Wuthering Heights after the death of Edgar. Nelly narrates that, as Heathcliff entered the library, he 'advanced to the hearth' (346). This action, as well as its overtones of assault and conquest, is strongly suggestive of the search for a home, evoked by Heathcliff's words to Catherine, 'I'm come to fetch you home' (347). His mock-paternalism is also present in his reply to Nelly Dean's question as to why Catherine could not continue as resident at Thrushcross Grange: 'I want my children about me' (347). This echoes Heathcliff's explanation to Catherine concerning his proprietorial return to Wuthering Heights earlier in the novel following her puzzlement that he would take up residence with his old oppressor. Heathcliff's sentiments concerning the house are revealing as he expressed an 'attachment to the house where we lived together' (122). It is as if Heathcliff conceives of owning Wuthering Heights as a way of attaining closeness to Catherine, as if he senses that to

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Williams, p. 106.

get to the heart, one has to get to the hearth. Heathcliff's mysterious 'strange change' (393) is precipitated by a change in his relationship to the house. The energy with which he gained possession, represented in the getting of 'levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules' (392), dissipates so he is unwilling to 'lift a slate' (392). It is as if the house as a symbol is no longer relevant now that he has attained his goal of union with Catherine. Wuthering Heights has ceased to occupy Heathcliff's energies and, like Heathcliff himself, is 'swallowed in the anticipation of its fulfilment' (395). However, a final inhabiting of Wuthering Heights is hinted at in Nelly's narration to Lockwood where she describes how Joseph affirms 'he has seen two on 'em, looking out of his chamber window, on every rainy night since his death' (412). The ghost that was trying to get in now inhabits the house and is looking out.

*'I am of the Busy World': Lockwood's Leaving of Wuthering Heights*

It is the lack of a fire that sends Lockwood to Wuthering Heights at both the beginning and the end of the story. The servant girl who 'extinguished the flames with heaps of cinders' (11), thus inadvertently prompting Lockwood's second journey to Heathcliff's dwelling, is repeated in another unready fire when Lockwood returns to Thrushcross Grange with the purpose of settling the tenancy. Here the tenant finds that, due to his arrival not being expected there are, again, no fires. After his instructions to the servants that 'only good fires and dry sheets were necessary' (370), Lockwood once again sets out for Wuthering Heights.

This repeated detail is telling as it is a metaphor for Lockwood's homelessness in the story; it is also in stark contrast to the strong fires burning at Wuthering Heights considered earlier in this chapter. The empty fireplace is suggestive of Lockwood not finding a

dwelling. It is apparent that his dream of finding hermit-like seclusion has failed, underlined by his statement that ‘I would not pass another winter here, for much’ (361). When considered in the light of the evocation of the season as a longed-for home in Brontë’s poetry, and the lyricism with which the season is evoked in *Wuthering Heights*, it is clear that Lockwood is merely articulating the expected response anticipated by Brontë. So Lockwood is not at home in the home presented in the novel; consequently, what this means for a reading of *Wuthering Heights* is, that it is an experience of homesickness.

What is telling about Lockwood’s visit to Wuthering Heights towards the end of the novel is the way Emily Brontë presents him as completely invisible. When Lockwood enters the house, bearing a message from Nelly for Cathy, ‘she hardly raised her eyes to notice me, and continued her employment with the same disregard to common forms of politeness, as before; never returning my bow and good morning by the slightest acknowledgement’ (362). Lockwood is reduced to the status of observer rather than participant in the story working itself out at Wuthering Heights. This is despite his effort to appropriate a part in Catherine’s narrative; he says to her: ‘You are not aware that I am an acquaintance of yours? So intimate, that I think it strange you won’t come and speak to me’ (363). Lockwood’s presumptive question, arising from an overdeveloped sense of his own welcome, has more resonant and poignant effects than the satire of a pompous southern gentleman. These effects lie in the evocation of a world that is shut off to Lockwood and, by implication, the reader for the relationship that Brontë sets up with her reader through the choice of narrators is one of being distanced. This is a world that has slipped from our grasp and our sense of being intruders in a world that will not accommodate us is reinforced in Lockwood’s declaration: ‘I am of the busy world and to its arms I must return’ (312).

This is pointed up by Lockwood’s fantasy, which recurs throughout the novel, of a relationship starting between himself and Catherine: ‘What a realisation of something more

romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs Linton Heathcliff had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town' (368). What is at stake here is more than Brontë's satirical intent in presenting a deluded Lockwood: rather Lockwood's musings serve to underline the impossibility of forging any connection with Wuthering Heights; the house is imaginatively self-sufficient and any practice upon its hospitality is delusion (this is seen in Lockwood's decision to make a second visit to Wuthering Heights at the start of the novel). This placing of the narrator in relation to the events of the story also serves to ensure that, for the reader, home is not found. When taken with the powerful outpourings of homesick longing from Heathcliff and Catherine, this non-finding firmly situates *Wuthering Heights* as a novel of homesickness. Lockwood's words to Catherine on her approach to teaching Hareton to read serve as a metaphor for this inability to reach home: 'But, Mrs Heathcliff, we have each had a commencement, and each stumbled and tottered on the threshold' (365). Lockwood's whole encounter with Wuthering Heights could be described as a stumbling and tottering 'on the threshold'.

The unhoused Lockwood is drawn to our attention on the final page of the novel before his meditations by the graveside. As Lockwood watches Hareton and Catherine return from their walk he observes: "'*They* are afraid of nothing", I grumbled' (413). The italicised collective pronoun is suggestive of some resentment as if Lockwood envies their fearlessness. It may be that their fearlessness arises from their returning home; a state that Lockwood is not familiar with. A few chapters earlier, when Heathcliff is speculating on Lockwood's motivation for ending the tenancy of Thrushcross Grange, his choice of words is revealing: 'You're tired of being *banished* from the world, are you' (emphasis added) (367). Lockwood's banishment, like Joseph's inhabitation of Wuthering Heights, is a constant at the beginning and the end of the novel. He does not find home and his witnessing of the

blossoming love between Hareton and Catherine perhaps recalls his own failure to reach out and his mother's prophecy that 'I should never have a comfortable home' (7). So Emily Brontë conceives of Lockwood as someone unable to find home. This distancing effect is also felt in the 'pressing a remembrance into the hand of Mrs Dean' (413). This confirms the relationship of Lockwood to the story he has heard as that of a consumer, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Any ties that might bind Lockwood to the area are loosened by the passing of a coin. Lockwood, who spends a lot of time walking, as befits his wanderer status, on his way back to Thrushcross Grange stops by the graveside; Lockwood finishes the novel between two houses, homesick.

In his study of intimate spaces, Gaston Bachelard devotes a chapter to the nest as a symbol of homeliness; he describes his disappointment at finding a nest too late: 'An empty nest found belatedly in the woods in winter mocks the finder' (94).<sup>29</sup> Bachelard continues his meditation on the nest with his contention that 'the nest we pluck from the hedge like a dead flower, is nothing but a thing'.<sup>30</sup> Considering *Wuthering Heights* as an empty nest that teases Lockwood with its secrets and leaves him wandering by the graveside at the end of the story is a way of seeing the novel as considering possibilities of inhabitation. A home is evoked but it is one that is not reachable.

The image of a nest is present at the start of Catherine Earnshaw's delirium. At its commencement, she pulls feathers from the pillows on her bed; a lapwing's feather prompts a memory: 'This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot – we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dare not come' (150). The deadness of the nest is a metaphor for Catherine's lifelessness in Thrushcross Grange and the act of Heathcliff setting a trap over the nest could be seen as foreshadowing his forbidding of rest to Catherine's spirit when she dies; she will not be able

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<sup>29</sup> Bachelard, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Bachelard, p. 94.

to rest in a state of at-homeness and she will have to metaphorically wander on the moor until Heathcliff joins her.

Lockwood is presented by Emily Brontë as being unable to inhabit *Wuthering Heights* due to his misinterpretation and misapprehension of the environment in which he finds himself. This is shown in his often remarked-on inadequacy as a narrator; however, this inability to narrate is actually an inability to find home. This is portrayed literally when Lockwood asks Catherine Heathcliff for a guide to get him back to Thrushcross Grange: ‘I have no more idea how to get there than you would have how to get to London!’ (19). His choosing of London as part of a frame of reference to articulate a sense of being lost is curious: it assumes that Catherine would want to visit the place and also seems like the intrusion of another world into the insular world of *Wuthering Heights*. The articulation of an irrelevant coordinate underlies Lockwood’s inability to reach home, both in a literal and metaphysical sense. This means that there is no way that Lockwood could be conceived as anything else but a stranger. He himself seems to be at pains to emphasise that he will not stay in the part of the world to which *Wuthering Heights* belongs: ‘my home is not here’ (312). Indeed, the return of Lockwood to Thrushcross Grange after a prolonged absence and his surprised discovery of the death of Heathcliff is suggestive of the return of the world of process after a time of suspended animation when Lockwood actually touched the supernatural core of *Wuthering Heights*. There is the sense that while, in the early part of the novel, Lockwood briefly participated in the world of storm, now that possibility has receded for ever.

Arnold Krupat suggests that *Wuthering Heights* is a story where ‘no telling can properly convey this tale’.<sup>31</sup> There is an inability on the part of the narrators to get to the heart of the story. Krupat sees this in terms of the speech of the narrators being characterised

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<sup>31</sup> Arnold Krupat, ‘The Strangeness of *Wuthering Heights*’, *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, (25.3.1970): pp. 269-280, p.272.

by fixity while the speech of the characters is characterised by flux; therefore, the narrators are never able to catch up with the vitality of the characters. It is as if the narrators of *Wuthering Heights* bring news from a country that cannot be reached. During the course of her narration to Lockwood, Nelly Dean says, in response to Lockwood's insistence that in the vicinity of Wuthering Heights 'they *do* live more in earnest' (77), that 'here we are the same as anywhere else, when you get to know us' (78). But Nelly Dean, as a narrator, frustrates Lockwood's attempts to get to the heart of the story, just as Lockwood does for the reader.

Nelly Dean's final anecdote of the story is of the shepherd boy who claims to have seen the spirits of Heathcliff and Catherine. That there is an inability to inhabit Wuthering Heights is confirmed by Nelly Dean when she says, of Hareton and Catherine's continued residence at Wuthering Heights, 'I shall be glad when they leave it, and shift to the Grange' (413). This leads to Lockwood's quip that Wuthering Heights will be clear for 'such ghosts as choose to *inhabit it*' (emphasis added). Nelly's conventional Christian instincts counter this by stating that the dead are at 'rest' (413). However, what she sees as a dichotomy, haunting or resting peacefully in the grave, Brontë sees as one state as the spirits now 'inhabit' Wuthering Heights. It is a mark of Brontë's esteem for Joseph that he also finally inhabits the house.

There are many ironies in Lockwood's final observations. He observes Hareton and Catherine, the 'ramblers' who have returned home. However, through his dismissal of Nelly Dean's anecdote about the shepherd boy, he also misses the ghostly ramblers of Heathcliff and Catherine who have also returned home. Lockwood creates his own pastoral resolution of the story through his meditation by the graveside but misses out on a deeper resolution. This is one witnessed by the shepherd boy, a child who is perhaps a herald of the truth of presence just as the child is in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven'. For Emily Brontë, to go home



is not to go to heaven but remain on the earth which is why the ghostly is so important for her poetry of homesickness.

*Chapter Seven: Ghosts and Haunting in Emily Brontë's writing*

*Yearning to Embrace the Phantom*

At the end of *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood's wondering how anyone could imagine 'unquiet slumbers' (414) for Heathcliff and Catherine juxtaposes awkwardly with the restlessness and possibility of haunting that form the imaginative centre of the novel. After Catherine's death, Heathcliff expresses his desire for haunting: 'I pray one prayer – I repeat it till my tongue stiffens – Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You say I killed you – haunt me then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers. I believe – I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth' (204). Heathcliff appropriates the language of religious belief for what is his credo; his words mingle the solemnity of a curse being uttered with the intense certainty of the religious zealot with the italicised words covering both past and present reality. Heathcliff's 'one prayer' is, as discussed in the previous chapter, the metaphysical mesh he places over the nest to prevent Catherine being at rest. This is in order to guarantee her continued presence and haunting. *Wuthering Heights* is a ghost story. Rachel Trickett argues that Emily Brontë set out to write the story of a haunting when she wrote *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>1</sup>

Haunting symbolises a home that has been lost and the desire for it to be regained. Lucy Snowe, in the opening chapter of *Villette*, notices Pauline Bassompierre pining for her father in the room where they were both staying, and observes that the 'room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted' (15). The implication that haunting is a deeper form of inhabiting

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Trickett, 'Wuthering Heights: The Story of a Haunting', *Bronte Society Transactions*, (16.5.1975) 338-349, p. 338. Patrick Parrinder is even more emphatic: 'Wuthering Heights is, first and last, a ghost story'. Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day*, (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 261.

is revealing and opens the possibility that it represents an assuaging of homesickness as well as a symptom of it. This recalls Sigmund Freud's essay on 'The Uncanny' where he opens the essay with a definition of *heimlich*. He explains how it means homely but that another inflection is to express being hidden. Freud quotes from Klinger: 'At times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is *heimlich* and full of terrors for him'.<sup>2</sup> So, using the terms of Freud's essay, to be at home is to be haunted.

The conclusion of this way of viewing ghosts is to endeavour to raise rather than lay them. During Catherine's delirium, she tells Nelly concerning herself and Heathcliff in Gimmerton Kirk that 'We've braved its ghosts often together, and dared each other to stand among the graves and ask them to come' (154). It is apparent that ghosts are being conceived by Catherine as by Shelley in *Alastor* where the questing narrator speaks of:

Hoping to still these obstinate questionings  
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost,  
Thy messenger, to render up the tale  
Of what we are.<sup>3</sup>

The ballad that Nelly Dean sings to the young Hareton is 'The Ghaist's Warning', the narrative of the spirit of a mother that comes to haunt those that are treating her child badly. Implicit in these presentations of the ghost is the idea that they can assuage existential terror and answer some form of nostalgia. This idea is also hinted at in an article by Georgina Banita where she writes of 'specters of a new world that haunts us – not as the past conventionally haunts the present, but as the uncanny footsteps of a future yet to come'.<sup>4</sup> The tenor of this article is accommodating ghosts rather than repressing them so as to bring about healing. This idea is expressed when Rachel Trickett argues that Catherine's haunting of

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<sup>2</sup> 'The Uncanny', p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley, ed. vol. 1, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Georgiana Banita, 'Shadow of the Colossus: The Spectral Lives of 9/11', *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture*, Eds., María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, (NY: Continuum, 2010). p. 95.

Heathcliff is ‘expiatory’ in that it has the effect of removing the ability to take revenge.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, like the quotation cited from Banita’s article, Catherine’s haunting of Heathcliff can be seen as anticipatory, a preparation for a future where they are united.

This reading of the presentation of haunting in *Wuthering Heights* challenges a view of ghosts as needing to be exorcised; instead, the novel accepts Derrida’s challenge to accept ghosts and live with them (an idea implicit in Lockwood’s quip to Nelly Dean about ghosts choosing to inhabit Wuthering Heights).<sup>6</sup> This idea is found in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Aeneas’ father, Anchises, explaining why spirits in the underworld long to return to earth, states that ‘each of us must suffer his own demanding ghost’ (6:859). So, the ghost opens up possibilities of inhabiting and intimations of home that can assuage homesickness.

*Hamlet in Purgatory* is a useful work to return to at this stage in the argument.

Greenblatt’s idea, already considered in chapter two, that the Catholic idea of purgatory was a promise of connection, can also be inflected to build an idea that home was found in ghostliness. The ghostly and the Catholic were fused in the Gothic novel in a twist on the Freudian idea of the *heimlich* being full of hidden terrors. However, Brontë swerves from a Gothic inflection of the ghostly as evoking terror. Joyce Carol Oates, in an article on *Wuthering Heights*, expresses it well when she writes that the novel is ‘A “gothic” that evolves – with an absolutely inevitable grace – into its temperamental opposite’.<sup>7</sup> This statement resonates with Greenblatt’s discussion of the story of the Ghost of Gy. He argues of the appearance of the ghost, the purpose of which was to secure prayers for the spirit in purgatory, that ‘what looks like cruelty – the terrible fear that he has aroused in her, the writhing, screams and grimaces that his presence has provoked – is in fact the purest expression of his love’.<sup>8</sup> This idea of a ghost that expresses love rather than terror is an

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<sup>5</sup> Trickett, p. 341.

<sup>6</sup> See *Popular Ghosts*, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Joyce Carol Oates, ‘The Magnanimity of *Wuthering Heights*’, *Critical Inquiry*, (9.2.1982), 435-449, p. 436.

<sup>8</sup> Greenblatt, p. 131.

important one for the novel and can be seen in the respective reactions of Heathcliff and Lockwood to the ghost of Catherine. The meaning of the ghost for Heathcliff can be expressed in Greenblatt's comment on Thomas More's views on purgatory: 'More's souls do not speak about sin, they speak about connectedness'.<sup>9</sup> The idea that disinterring bodies, ghostly visitations, masochistic imaginings and mysterious origins betray the influence of the Gothic on Emily Brontë has been much examined. What merits further consideration is the idea, building on discussion of Brontë's Catholic imagination, that the ghostly is a way for Emily Brontë to express her homesick longings. This imagining of the ghostly can be juxtaposed with the more conventional Protestantism of Charlotte; *Villette* articulates the idea that, for the living at least, the dead stay dead until the final judgement. Lucy Snowe, under the impression that Justine Marie is the name of the dead nun, is consequently surprised to hear her named and soliloquises: 'You shall go to her, but she shall not come to you' (670). However, the nature of Lucy Snowe's misapprehension is that Justine Marie is a living ward of Paul Emmanuel; the pleasing irony is that, despite the theologically Protestant sentiments uttered by Lucy Snowe, Justine Marie enacts a Catholic return from the dead. Protestant severance and exile, through the figure of the ghost, become the promise of home.

This idea of the ghost as a promise of connection infuses Heathcliff's longing to be haunted; it foregrounds the purgatorial elements of a Catholic imagination. For the Protestant, what is problematic is that ghosts call into question the idea of an all-sufficient God who can meet all needs; it also implies that the human relationship is worth more than the divine. When Heathcliff rebukes the dying Catherine with, 'Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us' (198), his words are more than hubristic Byronism – they represent a privileging of the human over the divine. The cadences of his sentence allude ironically to St Paul's words in

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<sup>9</sup> Greenblatt, p. 143.

the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans: ‘For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:28). Brontë is turning this longing for the divine into one for the human and indeed seems to render the divine irrelevant. In a very Blakean manner, God is conflated with Satan in the above quotation from *Wuthering Heights*.

In this respect there are affinities between Emily Brontë’s treatment of the ghostly and classical texts such as the *Aeneid*. Aeneas is urged by the ghost of his father to continue the quest and find his home in Italy. The ghost is not presented as a signpost to reunion in another world for Aeneas is sent back into that world. Rather it points him back to the earth. Homer’s evocation of the meeting between Aeneas and his ghostly father anticipates that of Heathcliff and Catherine’s ghost in the sending-back of the reluctant bereaved to the world from which they came:

Three times he tried to fling his arms around his neck,  
 Three times he embraced – nothing... the phantom  
 Sifting through his fingers,  
 Light as wind, quick as a dream in flight (6:808-811)

This near-miss is present in Heathcliff’s longing for Catherine’s ghost to manifest: ‘Oh! my heart’s darling, hear me *this* time’ (35). So the ghost becomes an expression of the yearning to be haunted. Stephen Greenblatt argues that the Protestant rejection of purgatory was not just a question of supposed theological error but its status as poetry in the way that it enabled the pre-Reformation population of England to imagine connection with their deceased relatives.<sup>10</sup> So what matters for Emily Brontë is not the question of the existence of ghosts

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<sup>10</sup> Greenblatt, p. 47.

but rather their status as walking poems in being eloquent expressions of yearning homesickness. The premise of this chapter is that the ghost is a promise of home.

Brontë's vision of ghosts is one where either the haunted or the haunter is endeavouring to get back home. Ghosts are ideal beings to be homesick. Alluding to this idea, Tom Winnifrith writes that 'ghosts seem to have no very clear defined place in an orthodox theological framework, their sufferings being neither substantial nor severe enough for hell, and their restlessness not making them very good candidates for heaven'.<sup>11</sup> This simultaneously decreases and increases the terror of the ghost. As already implied, Brontë divests her supernaturalism of much of its Gothic lurid terror but the terror of lostness and exile increases. The ghost is an object of desire.

So Stephen Greenblatt's idea of the ghost as a promise of connection will inform readings of three poems in the next section of this chapter tracing the ghost as a manifestation of homesickness. Considering Emily Brontë as an heir of Wordsworth, as previously in the thesis, will also be of aid in analysing how she writes about the ghostly. Wordsworth's influence on Brontë inheres in the ambiguity both writers evoke about the veracity of ghostly experience but also the reality of the longing that such experience raises.

In *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth elides questions about the veracity of ghosts by focusing on their psychological effects. In the opening stanzas of the third part, Wordsworth describes the experience of a man reading a book where the light from the candle has 'form'd itself upon the paper' (799) and the 'ghostly letters' have 'perplex'd the good man's gentle soul'. (805)<sup>12</sup> There is an obvious echo of this in Lockwood's own reading where 'a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres' (24). In both cases, reading leads to ghostly vision. The reality of what they see is not the issue and, indeed, is deliberately kept

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<sup>11</sup> *Brontës and their Background*, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> References to *Peter Bell* taken from: William Wordsworth, *Peter Bell*, John E. Jordan, ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985). Line numbers refer to the 1819 edition.

ambiguous so as to retain a state of perplexity. So the ghostly becomes an intimation in the sense that Wordsworth describes in *Tintern Abbey*:

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

The image of the sunset implies a border state which raises the possibility of ghostly visitings that both ‘disturb’ and bring ‘joy’. This is a far more nuanced vision of the ghostly than is present in the Gothic novels that are cited as being the wellspring of supernatural influence in *Wuthering Heights*.

Wordsworth situates the ghostly as holding out a tantalising promise of connection in ‘Lucy Gray’. His use of ‘chanc’d to see’ (3) in the first stanza means that the narrator’s sighting of Lucy can be viewed as a grace moment unconnected with any searching on his part. The narrator then toys with the reader’s desire to be admitted to the world of the poem and denies any direct experience of Lucy herself: ‘But the sweet face of Lucy Gray / Will never more be seen’ (11-12). This denial is also present in *Wuthering Heights*. However, Wordsworth resists the elegiac in ‘Lucy Gray’ and teases with some hope of connection: ‘Yet some maintain that to this day / She is a living child’ (57-58). This alternate laying and conjuring of the ghost is a recurrent motif in ghost stories but Wordsworth is seeking to do more than tell a ghost story. Through this evocation of ‘half-seeing’ he arouses longing. This creative endeavour marks Wordsworth moving on from the graveyard school of poetry to one where people are half-glimpsed rather than simply dead. A comment that Yopie Prins, in her study of Sappho, made on the reworking of elegy is relevant here. Commenting on



Thomas Hardy's 'A Singer Asleep', his elegy for Algernon Charles Swinburne, she writes that, 'The more we reread Hardy's elegy, the more it resists elegiac reconstitution'.<sup>13</sup>

Emily Brontë is Wordsworth's heir in that she swerves from Gothic sensationalism in her presentation of the ghostly to the presentation of the ghost as a provoker and expression of yearning. A biographical anecdote will help illustrate this point. In her biography of Wordsworth, Juliet Barker writes of Mary Wordsworth's concerns about William's response to the death of Dora, their daughter. She wrote in a letter: 'where can we find a place or an object on earth to look upon that is not beset with like hauntings! Could but the thoughts be *fixed* upon that blessed haven where we trust she now is, we should there find comfort'.<sup>14</sup> What is implied in this comment is that Wordsworth found comfort in a haunting rather than a heaven. Mary's expression of her inability to find anywhere that was unhaunted recalls Heathcliff's words: 'The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!' (394). The idea of fixing thoughts upon that 'blessed haven' recalls the words of Iernë to her father in Brontë's 'Faith and Despondency'. What is clear is that the haunting on earth has more energetic force than the reunion in heaven. The ghost as an expression of longing with its concomitant rejection of the sensational Gothic is commented on by Geoffrey Hartman in an analysis of 'Michael'. He states that it is Wordsworth's opinion that a 'debased supernaturalism' divorced man from the earth in the same way as the industrial revolution.<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth makes the same point positively: 'He [Wordsworth] is as always validating his trust in emotion by tying it to

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<sup>13</sup> Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), p. 168. Also see, Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poems*, 1976, ed., James Gibson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 323.

<sup>14</sup> Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life*, (London: Penguin, 2000) p. 792.

<sup>15</sup> Hartman, p. 262.

place'.<sup>16</sup> For both Wordsworth and Emily Brontë, it is the ghost that brings the subject back down to earth.

At the end of her article, Rachel Trickett argues that the reader is left 'half in, half out of the ghost world'.<sup>17</sup> The preceding discussion has considered how this quality is suggestive of her poetic inheritance from Wordsworth. This inheritance is raising ghosts rather than laying them and seeing the ghostly as a promise of connection. In an article on Wordsworth's early unpublished poem, 'The Vale of Esthwaite', as part of a discussion on the supernatural, Kurt Fosso argues that the rustic child in 'We are Seven' refuses to distinguish between the world of the dead and the living.<sup>18</sup> As his argument develops, Fosso draws on Wordsworth's fascination with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, arguing that what the poet found so compelling was the failure of Orpheus to return his beloved to the physical world, so she is left half in and half out of the ghost world (this attempt finds a crude parallel in Heathcliff's digging down to Catherine's coffin in what could be described as an Orphic act).<sup>19</sup> He also argues that Wordsworth's poetry of mourning pursues the dead beyond mourning, pursuing the promise of presence.<sup>20</sup> So ghosts are used as a way of feeling towards one's home. The subsequent discussion will be organised around a close reading of three poems considering the ghost as an object of longing and an awakener of homesickness.

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, 'Wordsworthian Transformations: The Pitcher at the Fountain', Wordsworth, *The Invisible World: Lectures from the Wordsworth Summer Conference and Wordsworth Winter School*, ed., Richard Haynes, (N.p.: Richard Haynes, 2015), 226-253, p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Trickett, p. 347.

<sup>18</sup> Kurt Fosso, 'A "World of Shades": Mourning Poesis and Community in William Wordsworth's "The Vale of Esthwaite"', *The Modern Language Review*, (93.3.1998), 629-641. p. 629.

<sup>19</sup> Fosso, p. 635.

<sup>20</sup> Fosso, p. 637.

*The Ghostly in Emily Brontë's poetry*

'The night was dark yet winter breathed' (hereafter 'The night was dark') is a poem where the speaker is narrating a past experience that took place under 'such a starless dome' as the sky in the present of the narrator's telling of the story. He is a survivor which bodes well for an assuaging of his homesickness.

The night was dark yet winter breathed  
With softened sighs on Gondal's shore  
And though its wind repining grieved  
It chained the snow swollen streams no more

How deep into the wilderness  
My horse had strayed, I cannot say  
But neither morsel nor caress  
Would urge him farther on the way

So loosening from his neck the rein  
I set my worn companion free  
And billowy hill and boundless plain  
Full soon divided him from me

The sullen clouds lay all unbroken  
And blackening round the horizon drear  
But still they gave no certain token  
Of heavy rain or tempests near

I paused confounded and distressed  
Down in the heath my limbs I threw  
Yet wilder as I longed for rest  
More wakeful heart and eyelids grew

It was about the middle night  
And under such a starless dome  
When gliding from the mountain's height  
I saw a shadowy spirit come

Her wavy hair on her shoulders bare  
It shone like soft clouds round the moon  
Her noiseless feet like melting sleet  
Gleamed white a moment then were gone

'What seek you now on this bleak moor's brow  
Where wanders that form from heaven descending?'  
It was thus I said as her graceful head  
The spirit above my couch was bending

'This is my home where whirlwinds blow  
Where snowdrifts round my path are swelling  
'Tis many a year 'tis long ago  
Since I beheld another dwelling

'When thick and fast the smothering blast  
O'erwhelmed the hunter on the plain  
If my cheek grew pale in its loudest gale  
May I never tread the hills again

'The shepherd had died on the mountainside  
But my ready aid was near him then  
I led him back o'er the hidden track  
And gave him to his native glen

'When tempests roar on the lonely shore  
I light my beacon with sea-weeds dry  
And it flings its fire through the darkness dire  
And gladdens the sailor's hopeless eye

'And the scattered sheep I love to keep  
Their timid forms to guard from harm  
I have a spell and they know it well  
And I save them with a powerful charm

'Thy own good steed on his friendless bed  
A few hours since you left to die  
But I knelt by his side and the saddle untied  
And life returned to his glazing eye

‘And deem thou not that quite forgot

My mercy will forsake me now

I bring thee care and not Despair

Abasement but not overthrow

‘To a silent home thy foot may come

And years may follow of toilsome pain

But yet I swear by that Burning Tear

The loved shall meet on its hearth again’

The figure of a lost horseman who experiences a ghostly epiphany echoes

Wordsworth’s ‘Strange Fits of Passion I have known’ and looks ahead to Robert Frost’s ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’. In Wordsworth’s poem, as in ‘The night was dark’, the moonlessness is significant and gives rise to disorientation and portents. When Wordsworth writes, ‘At once the planet dropp’d’ (24), the suddenness gestures towards supernatural intervention; in Brontë’s poem, the iambic tetrameter in ‘And under such a starless dome’ lays stress on ‘such’, with its sense that the night described has superseded other nights. The ‘more wakeful heart’ in Brontë’s poem finds its echo in the ‘fond and wayward thoughts’ (25) of ‘Strange fits’.

The rider in Frost’s poem also experiences a sense of the uncanny evoked by the horse’s recognition of strange behaviour as it ‘gives his harness bells a shake / To ask if there is some mistake’. The house of the wood’s owner is in the ‘village’ and the ‘lovely, dark and deep woods’ are ultimately eschewed, despite their spell-like grip on the rider, in favour of onward progress. There is a permanent sense of loss in this poem that the woods were never

entered. The willed determination of Frost's rider to move on contrasts with the willingness of Brontë's speakers to give themselves up to the experience of enchantment as in 'The night was dark' and 'Spellbound' where the 'will not go' becomes the 'cannot go'.

These three riders are all lost, but Brontë's is the most dislocated. He 'cannot say' how 'deep' he has gone into the wilderness while Frost's rider stops on the edge of the woods and rejects them. It is also only in Brontë's poem that ghostly possibilities are realised. It will never be known what ghosts may dwell in Frost's woods, and as the death of Lucy is only postulated as a possibility, her possibilities of return from the underworld are never proven.

The three riders open with the image of, to use Hartman's phrase, a 'halted traveller'.<sup>21</sup> In Hartman's analysis, Wordsworth's traveller is halted by something that causes a 'turning of the mind'<sup>22</sup>; however, this new state of mind leads to the traveller proceeding on his journey and the 'vital rhythm is restored'.<sup>23</sup> The experience itself remains as a consoling echo, much in the same way that childhood memory in the 'Ode' comforts the poet in the disenchantment of adulthood. As has been argued previously, Emily Brontë, while inheriting much from Wordsworth, swerves from his imaginative compromise that such experience can be left in the past for occasional access in reflective moments. Emily Brontë's travellers remain rooted, bound by a 'tyrant spell'. Indeed, the only halted traveller in Emily Brontë's writing who continues his journey is Lockwood, as discussed in the last chapter. For this reason, we have grounds to suspect a deficiency of vision in Lockwood as he continues his journey too easily, despite his moment of Wordsworthian reflection at the end of the novel. So, Emily Brontë makes Wordsworth's and Frost's means to an end, her end. The price that one has to pay for moving on arouses a deep homesickness.

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<sup>21</sup> Hartman, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Hartman, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Hartman, p. 17.

The opening stanza of 'The Night was dark' juxtaposes a sense of grief with an incipient release, contained in the idea of the streams no longer being 'chained'. The word 'Yet' in the first line draws attention to the personified breathing of winter with 'softened sighs', despite the 'dark' winter. The truism that the darkest hour is before the dawn is borne out by Brontë's opening of the poem. This is because the keynote is the promise of homecoming (not an uncomplicated one as shall be discussed later): hence the restrained and whispered hope in the first verse (in Emily Brontë's writing, hope is often a 'timid friend'). The harbinger of this homecoming is a supernatural visitation which is suggestive that the ghostly leads people home. This idea is present in Peter Ackroyd's comment in a collection of traditional ghost stories that 'the yearnings associated with the Romantic movement found fruition in the spectacle of the melancholy ghost'.<sup>24</sup>

In the second stanza, there is the familiar lostness that has already been discussed in Emily Brontë's poetry with the disorientation in the use of 'strayed'. This spatial amnesia is strengthened with the rider not being able to tell how 'deep into the wilderness' he had gone. Again, one can note the parallel with Lockwood as a lost traveller; Van De Laar contends in her study of imagery in *Wuthering Heights* that he is 'represented as a traveller, seeking escape. Emotional disturbances have brought him to this lonely spot'.<sup>25</sup> It could be that the speaker is fleeing but for his passivity conveyed by the fact that it was his horse, rather than he, who had 'strayed'; it is apparent that he is abandoned to fate. The second verse presents a narrator who has reached the end of the journey; his horse cannot be urged any further so he is released. The impossibility of urging any further is returned to at the end of the last poem it is known that Emily Brontë wrote: 'Why ask to know the date the clime' (this poem shall be considered in depth during the conclusion); this poem is narrated by a mercenary who

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The English Ghost: Spectres Through Time*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 2010), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Th. M. van de Laar, *The Inner Structure of Wuthering Heights: A Study of an Imaginative Field*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1969) p. 46.



kidnapped a child but, in a gesture of resignation, at the end of the poem he lets her go. What connects both these poems is a narrator who has reached the end of their tether and consequently is condemned to a life of drifting.

However the difference is that, in 'The night was dark' (written seven years earlier than 'Why ask to know the date the clime'), the poem does not end with abandonment; it comes from the same period of time as Emily Brontë's Law Hill poems and represents her at the height of confidence; as commented on in the introduction when discussing 'Loud Without'. However, in the third and fourth verses the trajectory is still moving towards a state of isolation and bewilderment heightened by the immensity of the 'billowy hill and boundless plain' and the clouds that give no 'certain' token. The weather that can so often, in Brontë's poetry, be a portent is here merely 'sullen' and 'blackening'. The rider is utterly lost.

It is not until the fifth stanza that there are harbingers of visionary experience. The rider, 'confounded' in an act of resignation 'threw' (again enacting being at the end of one's tether) himself 'down in the heath'. This is a sapping weariness, rather than the energising weariness of 'Loud without' and in Brontë's poetry such resignation can be the advent of the visionary or supernatural encounter. One is reminded of the narrator in 'A Day Dream' who was resting 'on a heathy bank' or the speaker in 'To Imagination' who is 'weary with the long day's care'. There is a strong sense of things being 'out of joint' (*Hamlet* I.v.189) which is evoked by the syntax in 'I paused confounded and distressed' with its dominance of polysyllabic words which place stress on the lyrical and simple ballad-like metre in the rest of the poem. 'Distressed' creates a jarring note. Emily Brontë's visionary experience is never easily won but has as its precursor a state of weariness. This precondition of the attainment of the beatific vision is present in Heathcliff's final agonising: 'O, God! It is a long fight, I wish it were over!' (395). That this weariness and giving up leads to visionary release is

suggested in the rhyming of ‘threw’, with its connotations of giving up, and ‘grew’, with its evocation of new life. Interestingly, it is both the ‘heart’ and ‘eyelids’ that grow ‘more wakeful’. This combination of the seat of inner emotion and the organ by which the outer world is perceived is a harmonising juxtaposition and an operation of the Coleridgean imagination that brings a fragmented world into harmony.

The next verse brings the spirit in the darkest part of the night in which even the comfort of stars is denied (however, ‘The night was dark’ is not without the comforting mother figure that Irene Tayler also sees in ‘Stars’).<sup>26</sup> This spirit is gentle and so of a different order to the one that appears in ‘I saw thee child’ (discussed in chapter five) which ‘Sent the blood icy to that heart’. The spirit’s gentleness is conveyed through its ‘noiseless feet like melting sleet’ which echo the release of the ‘snow swollen’ streams in the first stanza; the susurrating quality of that line renders it the most beautiful line in the poem. From this gentleness it is apparent that what the spirit is bringing is liberation. The wavy hair’s soft shining echoes Geraldine in Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’ who was ‘Drest in a silken robe of white, / That shadowy in the moonlight shone’ (67), but also modifies it to a quality much gentler, which reinforces the idea that this spirit, unlike Geraldine, has not come to terrify. One is also reminded of the visit of the spirit of Elvira, Antonia’s mother, in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, where the spirit promises Antonia: ‘Yet three days and we meet again’.<sup>27</sup> The ghost that appears to Antonia, and the spirit that appears to Brontë’s rider promise a home where there will be safety from the terrors of the world. Indeed, contrary to the idea expressed earlier, that the Gothic terrifies, it seems that the ghostly is a source of solace and a return to the safety of the womb and it is the living that are to be feared.

This lack of terror is borne out in the next stanza as the lost rider expresses wonder as he asks ‘Where wanders that form from heaven descending’. Behind this questioning of the

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<sup>26</sup> Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed., Howard Anderson, 1980, (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 318.

spirit lies Lockwood's questioning at the end of *Wuthering Heights* concerning the possibilities of spirits wandering. Indeed, there is irony in the questioning of the spirit in terms of what it seeks and where it wanders as, considered in psychological terms, this could be the rider's projection of his own wandering and seeking onto the spirit. The maternal image of the spirit bending 'her graceful head' over the rider echoes the return to the womb as the first home; however, the spirit, at this point in the poem, is inscrutable as the rider questions it in the same way as Heathcliff questions the ghost of his dead love.

Whereas the spirit of Catherine Linton in *Wuthering Heights* had lost her 'way on the moor' (31) and 'been a waif for twenty years' (31), the spirit that the rider encounters is more securely at home as her opening words state: 'This is my home'. The orientation of this spirit towards home is also present in the wanderings of the ghostly Catherine as she states to the terrified Lockwood: 'I'm come home' (31). At the end of the novel, when Lockwood with levity remarks to Nelly that ghosts may choose to 'inhabit' *Wuthering Heights*, he is unwittingly recalling his own brush with a supernatural visitor. It is as if Lockwood, in imagining a home for ghosts, is blind to his own lack of a home.

This same dynamic is present in 'The night was dark'. After the first two lines of speech, the narrator states at the start of the third line: 'It was thus I said'. The iambic stress patterning presses on 'I' as if the narrator, anticipating some confusion as to who spoke the lines, is seeking to provide clarification. This is because questions about wandering might seem more appropriately directed from the spirit to the rider. Emily Brontë, in laying stress that it was, in fact, the rider who spoke these words, emphasises his ironic ignorance of his own lost state and, concomitantly, the fact that this place is the spirit's home. 'This is my home where whirlwinds blow' is one of the strongest statements about being at home in Emily Brontë's poetry.

This is the crux of the poem where the partiality of the rider's vision comes to the fore. The life that returns to 'his glazing eye', referring to the rider's horse, also applies to the rider himself by the end of the poem but, when the spirit begins to speak, it is as if the rider is ignorant of his homesick condition which is suggested by the peremptory way in which he questions her. The spirit here is haunting in the literal sense as given by the OED of 'customary resort'.<sup>28</sup> In the dictionary definition of haunting the word is linked to an accustomed place, a home, but the person who is haunted is unsettled and unhoused. In this poem, the dynamics are reversed. This relates to Emily Brontë's choosing of homesickness as a state because it is as if the rider is dwelling in a false home. For Brontë, it is better to be honest about one's exile rather than be borne along on the 'world's tide' (though the poem from which this quotation is taken, 'Remembrance', accepts that this dulling of one's grief is an inevitability). To use the terms in which Irene Talyer sees the development of Emily Brontë as a poet, the rider is being taken back to the womb in order to be reoriented, as suggested by the spirit bending over the rider in a maternal gaze. There is an echo of the 'glorious eyes / gazing down in mine' in 'Stars' and the personified fancy, who in 'How clear she shines' will 'bend my lonely couch above'. The rider is now experiencing the gaze of the spirit. There is a telling contrast between the inactivity of this part of the poem and the first three verses that feature the straining activity of the rider.

This sense of the spirit being at home 'where whirlwinds blow / Where snowdrifts round my path are swelling' echoes the poet finding a home in the music of November in 'Loud without', as discussed in the introduction and it will be the spirit who leads the rider home. One could argue that the spirit in this poem is the genesis of the ghost wandering for twenty years on the moor who leads Heathcliff home in the same way that the spirit promises to lead the rider home. Indeed, that the *raison d'être* of the spirit is to lead people home is

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<sup>28</sup> 'haunting' n., def. 1b, *OED*.

expressed most strongly with the shepherd when the spirit ‘gave him to his native glen’. The ghost is conceived of as a way of finding home and reorientation in a world of confusion, as Peter Ackroyd expressed it: ‘A bridge of light between the past and present’.<sup>29</sup> Heathcliff bases his hope of reunion with Catherine on his conviction that ghosts have walked ‘among us’ with its implied rejection of the pious hope of meeting in heaven. The irony is that this longed-for supernatural encounter is, in fact, very earthly. This is borne out by Juliet McMaster in her contention that *Wuthering Heights* is a ‘haven for the mother’.<sup>30</sup> The word, haunting, as discussed earlier, is very connected to a place. Emily Brontë embodies the ghostly as a bulwark against the abstraction of heaven.

This idea of having found home is also felt in the enigmatic words of the spirit: ‘Tis many a year tis long ago / Since I beheld another dwelling’. The word, ‘dwelling’, can be inflected either as accentuating her isolation in that she has not seen another one for a long time or her content in that she has not needed to find another dwelling. The curious point about these lines is that they give the ghost, as Duke Theseus states in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a ‘local habitation and a name’ (V.i.17) which contrasts with the spirit’s disembodied arrival from the mountain height earlier in the poem. The ghost in this poem is not used to connote transcendence; the idea is not to point to another world but to express an earthly connection.

The verses that follow are the spirit’s account of how she protects and guides and the objects of her protection are varied: hunters, shepherds, sailors, sheep and the horse and rider. Emily Brontë inverts abstract ideas about ghosts as this spirit admits of the possibility of failing in the storm: ‘If my cheek grew pale in its loudest gale’. There are two surprising inflections in this line. The first is that it suggests the possibility the spirit may fail in her task

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<sup>29</sup> Ackroyd, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Juliet McMaster, ‘The Courtship and Honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff: Emily Brontë’s Sexual Imagery’, *Victorian Review* (18.1.1992), 1-12, p. 11.

to save the overwhelmed hunter which contradicts the idea that ghosts partake of a lesser form of omnipotence; they are susceptible to the same limitations as their embodied counterparts. This subtly echoes the ‘ordinary caprice’ (35) of the ghost in *Wuthering Heights* as ironically observed by Lockwood (when he adds to Nelly’s observation that Joseph will continue to live in the kitchen at Wuthering Heights with the rest of the house left empty by saying ‘for the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it’ (413) he is evincing the same urbane disdain for the supernatural). The idea that the cheek of the ghost can grow pale also renders the spirit surprisingly animated by the blood of a human. This means that the spirit in this poem is earthed in a way that suggests they are bound up with their environment more than the disembodied spirits of Gothic fiction. Brontë’s spirit is also tasked with a mission as she ‘led him back o’er the hidden track’, suggesting that she is a ministering spirit of place. The spirit implies that her right to remain in the hills is dependent on fulfilment of her duties as a guide through her self-inflicted curse of ‘may I never tread the hills again’ if she failed to save the hunter from the storm.

The ghostly duty of giving ‘ready aid’ to the shepherd is expressed in the curious syntax of ‘gave him to his native glen’. This is leading a lost person home (and foreshadows Lockwood’s misadventure on the moor without a guide) but the verb, ‘give’, implies a protective solicitude that would be absent from the verb, ‘lead’. It suggests that the shepherd and the spirit are bound by strong ties in the rescue that has been performed. It also foreshadows the ghostly Catherine’s leading of Heathcliff home during a night that blew ‘bleak as winter’ (349) as he phrases it himself: ‘her presence... led me home’ (350). The ghostly is imagined by Emily Brontë as being bound up in being able to find home.

The idea of rescue and leading home is imagined boldly in the next stanza when the spirit describes how she lights a beacon to gladden the sailor’s ‘hopeless eye’. The action of the shining beacon is evoked with the monosyllabic alliterative energy of ‘flings its fire’ as it

confronts the 'darkness dire'. With this image, the spirit partakes of a mythic quality, partially evoked by powerful verbs such as 'roar', 'light' and 'flings', that suggests Blake's Los (Blakean lineaments in the way that Brontë conceived of this spirit are further suggested in the following verse where 'a powerful charm' replaced 'my single arm' in the manuscript, the pronoun and adjective emphasising the powerful agency of the spirit) as well as the light-bearing Prometheus, and it is clear that this spirit is bound to provide navigation home to humanity. However, this force juxtaposes tenderly with the protection of the 'timid forms' of the sheep from harm. So, in this poem Emily Brontë swerves from both Gothic supernaturalism and mythic grandeur that do not have a healthy admixture of the domestic.

The final three stanzas of the poem narrate the restoration of the rider's horse and the final words of the spirit. The rider's callousness in letting his horse go while still saddled is contrasted with the solicitude of the spirit. Embedded in this verse, through the rhyming of 'die' and 'eye', is the idea that the rider is starting to see with new eyes. That this spirit is not an avenging ghost is underlined by her reassurance that, despite the rider's neglect of his horse, she will still be merciful to him. This rejects Gothic dramatic revenge narrative but that does not mean that the rider is let off lightly. The spirit states that she brings 'care' and 'Abasement' with its implication that there will be difficult times ahead for the rider. The final verse reinforces this with the prophetic warning, 'To a silent home your foot may come / And years may follow of toilsome pain'. This anticipates Heathcliff's existential sufferings between the death of Catherine and his own death. The spirit appears to be seeing into the future and making the same predictions as the ghost in 'I saw thee child' as it terrifies the child with grim portents. Yet this spirit is different as there is a promise of reaching home. Of particular interest is the swearing by 'that Burning Tear', with the capitalisation accentuating its portentousness. The relative pronoun, 'that', suggests that the tear is coming from the speaker. There is the possibility that this is due to the emotion of terror but what

seems more likely is that it is a Coleridgean epiphany like that experienced by the wedding guest in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Like Coleridge's poem, a form of ghostly intervention has broken psychological deadlock and enabled the halted traveller to continue on their way home. The adjective, 'burning' connotes that this is not the wearisome despair of the poem's opening, but the germinating seeds of resolution to which the spirit is seeking to bring encouragement. This will, however, be a difficult journey, from the deserted home of the first line of the final verse, through years of 'toilsome pain' to the meeting on the 'hearth again'. This is a poem that is nostalgic in the truest sense as there is a search for home but the nostalgia is not crippling – it is possible that home may be reached.

In his biography of Emily Brontë, Edward Chitham observes that she did not write another poem like 'The night was dark'. It is certainly unparalleled, with the exception of 'No Coward Soul is mine', in its assurance. He writes that Emily Brontë seemed to identify with this spirit and suggests that 'The night was dark' marked a time of content within Emily Brontë.<sup>31</sup> A hallmark of the poem is the conviction with which it holds out the possibility of reaching home; this contrasts with Brontë's denial of a reaching home in Wordsworthian recollections of childhood. It is as if the ghostly is key to assuaging nostalgia for it promises connection in that the dead are not really gone. The spirit in 'The night was dark' is also very connected with place.

This sense of the ghost as a localised entity and its promise of a return home carries over into a Gondal poem that was begun in Brussels in 1842.<sup>32</sup> The story in the poem, 'Lines written in Aspin castle', is that of the spirit of Lord Aspin returning to the castle that bears his name with interweaved undertones of a previous entanglement with Gondal's femme fatale – Augusta Geraldine Imelda:

How do I love on summer nights

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<sup>31</sup> Chitham, *Life of Emily Brontë*, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 268.



To sit within this Norman door  
Whose sombre portal hides the lights  
Thickening above me evermore!

How do I love to hear the flow  
Of Aspin's water murmuring low  
And hours long listen to the breeze  
That sighs in Rockden's waving trees

Tonight, there is no wind to wake  
One ripple on the lonely lake –  
Tonight the clouds subdued and grey  
Starlight and moonlight shut away

'Tis calm and still and almost drear  
So utter is the solitude;  
But still I love to linger here  
And form my mood to nature's mood –

There's a wild walk beneath the rocks  
Following the bend of Aspin's side  
'Tis worn by feet of mountain-flocks  
That wander down to drink the tide

Never by cliff and gnarled tree

Wound fairy path so sweet to me  
Yet of the native shepherds none  
In open day and cheerful sun  
Will tread its labyrinths alone

Far less when evening's pensive hour  
Hushes the bird and shuts the flower  
And gives to Fancy magic power  
O'er each familiar tone

For round their hearths they'll tell the tale  
And every listener swears it true  
How wanders there a phantom pale  
With spirit-eyes of dreamy blue –

It always walks with head declined  
Its long curls move not in the wind  
Its face is fair – divinely fair;  
But brooding on that angel brow  
Rests such a shade of deep despair  
As nought divine could ever know

How oft in twilight lingering lone  
I've stood to watch that phantom rise  
And seen in mist and moonlit stone

Its gleaming hair and solemn eyes

The ancient men in secret say

'Tis the first chief of Aspin grey

That haunts his feudal home

But why, around that alien grave

Three thousand miles beyond the wave –

Where his exiled ashes lie

Under the cope of England's sky –

Doth he not rather roam?

I've seen his picture in the hall;

It hangs upon an eastern wall

And often when the sun declines

That picture like an angel shines –

And when the moonbeam chill and blue

Streams the spectral windows through

That picture's like a spectre too –

The hall is full of portraits rare;

Beauty and mystery mingle there –

At his right hand an infant fair

Looks from its golden frame –

And just like his its ringlets bright  
Its large dark eye of shadowy light  
Its cheek's pure hue, its forehead white  
And like its noble name –

Daughter divine! and could his gaze  
Fall coldly on thy peerless face?  
And did he never smile to see  
Himself restored to infancy?

Never part back that golden flow  
Of curls, and kiss that pearly brow  
And feel no other earthly bliss  
Was equal to that parent's kiss?

No; turn towards the western side  
There stands Sidonia's deity!  
In all her glory, all her pride!  
And truly like a god she seems  
Some god of wild enthusiast's dreams  
And this is she for whom he died!  
For whom his spirit unforgiven  
Wanders unsheltered shut from heaven  
An outcast for eternity –

Those eyes are dust – those lips are clay –  
That form is mouldered all away  
Nor thought, nor sense, nor pulse, nor breath  
The whole devoured and lost in death!

There is no worm, however mean,  
That living, is not nobler now  
Than she – Lord Alfred's idol queen  
So loved – so worshipped long ago –

O come away! The Norman door  
Is silvered with a sudden shine –  
Come leave these dreams o'er things of yore  
And turn to Nature's face divine –

O'er wood and wold, o'er flood and fell  
O'er flashing lake and gleaming dell  
The harvest moon looks down

And when heaven smiles with love and light  
And earth looks back so dazzling bright  
In such a scene, on such a night  
Earth's children should not frown –

‘Written in Aspin Castle’ is set in a known place that is loved by the narrator. The ‘sombre portal’ contains a subtle echo of a setting for a Gothic tale with ‘portal’ intimating liminality. The historical specificity of ‘Norman’ also adds to this antiquated sense of a place that may be haunted. The ‘lights / Thickening’ echo the description of ‘thickening stars’ in ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’ which is a portent for the arrival of a supernatural visitor. The same note of anticipation is created in ‘Written in Aspin Castle’. The verb, ‘sit’, suggests that the speaker, in forming ‘my mood to nature’s mood’, is composing himself for the arrival of a ghost. What is stirred is longing for a haunted world. However, in the opening stanzas, the supernatural is conspicuous by its absence. Even the statement that ‘Tonight, there is no wind to wake’, with ‘wake’ placed teasingly on the line end (suggesting the possibility of wakening ghosts), is not auspicious for the manifestation of any spirit. As discussed earlier in the chapter, ghosts are characterised by their ‘caprice’. Emily Brontë evokes a desire to raise, rather than lay, ghosts.

This desire is strengthened by the speaker’s statement that ‘How oft in twilight lingering lone / I’ve stood to watch that phantom rise’. The phrase, ‘How oft’, underlines the intensity of the speaker’s desire but he is rewarded by semblance and shadow rather than reality. ‘Its gleaming hair and solemn eyes’ were only seen through the obscurity and play of light and shadow conveyed through ‘mist and moonlit stone’. The speaker’s intent scrutiny of Aspin Castle for any signs of ghostly habitation, with the ensuing teasing of moonlight on the ‘moonlit stone’, recalls the longing that is enlivened through Brontë’s imagining of ‘that granite stone’ in ‘Loud without’. The inert object has the power to awaken past associations which is also the effect of the ghost. The idea of intimations of presence is also discerned in Heathcliff’s statement, to Nelly, about his awareness of the presence of Catherine, his feeling that ‘her features are shaped on the flags’ (394). Tangentially, this recalls Nelly’s words to Lockwood earlier in the narration of her pride in the preparation of the house for the Linton’s

visit on Christmas Day, in particular the ‘scoured and well-swept floor’ (68). In this focus on the stone flags the domestic and the ghostly are intertwined; the ghostly is inextricably linked with home. However, in this consideration of ghostly possibilities inhering in stone and rock, Emily Brontë refuses to answer the question: do ghosts really ‘exist, among us’ (*Wuthering Heights* 349)? Bachelard gives a helpful gloss when he argues that memories are fossilised in space as well as recalled in time: ‘Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are’.<sup>33</sup> The worlds of material reality and past story are held in tension.

The conflict between myth and reality is conveyed elsewhere in the poem. The setting of Aspin castle is explicitly in Gondal; however, the ‘exiled ashes’ of Lord Aspin lie ‘three thousand’ miles away in an ‘alien grave’ in England. The speaker wonders why he does not choose to haunt his grave in exile and instead haunt his ancestral home of Aspin Castle. The question, frustratingly, is not answered. As is traditional in many ghost stories, the ghost has come home to haunt ‘his feudal home’. In portraying a ghost as coming home to Gondal, Emily Brontë is asserting the primacy of her ‘world within’ over the ‘world without’. She is writing self-consciously about England as an other, placing it at ‘three thousand’ miles distance in a dissociative manoeuvre that enables an exploration of her own dislocation and homesickness. Brontë places at a far remove her here-and-now in order to privilege the world of Gondal. The possibility of a ghost’s haunting is a reason for not accepting the authenticity of England as a home. What Emily Brontë is doing, in giving ‘to Fancy magic power / O’er each familiar tone’, is using ‘Fancy’ to rend the veil of familiarity to create a feeling of being unsettled.

This dynamic is also seen in ‘Lines by Claudia’ where the speaker is a spirit who has been buried in England but whose ghost returns to Gondal. The spirit utters the lines, ‘Yet if

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<sup>33</sup> Bachelard, p. 9.

the soul can thus return / I need not and I will not mourn'. In these lines is the seed of Catherine's relief at being thrown out of heaven back to Wuthering Heights, for it means that return is possible. So Emily Brontë is using ghosts to explore the possibility of returning home and assuaging homesickness.

To return to a discussion of the possibility of haunting in 'Aspin Castle', the hint of a possible haunting is evoked by the setting sun lighting up the portrait of Lord Aspin. Again, the idea of a picture that comes alive is redolent with Gothic possibilities, but here the speaker is pondering how the chief could look so unfeelingly on his daughter who is also in the portrait. There are hints of a Brontëan revision of the Wordsworthian project in the 'Ode' when the speaker ponders how Lord Aspin, in the picture, could 'never smile to see / Himself restored to infancy'. Again, there is the seed here of Heathcliff's inability to be redeemed through viewing his own child. What Emily Brontë is doing here, in swerving from Wordsworth's finding of solace in recollections of childhood, is privileging the ghostly as a means of finding home. The Wordsworthian Edgar Linton is comforted having Cathy nearby while he is dying. As Heathcliff's end nears, as if inviting her to his anticipated reunion with Catherine, he says to Cathy: 'Will *you* come, chuck?' (410) Cathy's response, which is to draw 'behind' Nelly emphasises lack of connection.

The questions that the speaker asks about the relationship between father and child are rhetorical. When he wonders how the father could not have felt that 'no other earthly bliss / was equal to that parent's kiss', he is marvelling at the lack of relationship between the parent and child in the portrait. The father is not prepared to see his features replicated in the child, and so live on in that manner, but he must haunt himself. Harold Bloom's idea of Tessera is helpful here from his *Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom's argument, put simply, is that some poets



deal with past influences by trying to complete them.<sup>34</sup> In the portrait, however, the speaker sees that the father is refusing to allow himself to be completed by the child. This is no Edgar-like solicitude for the daughter but rather a Heathcliffian refusal to have anything but the original. This means that the next generation is circumvented and haunting ensues.

The tone of the poem abruptly changes with the abruptness of ‘No’ where it emerges that Lord Aspin was seduced by Augusta and died because of her; the poem ends with a Lockwoodian meditation on how any unquiet slumbers could disturb such a peaceful scene. ‘Nature’s face divine’ is preferred to the possibility of a supernatural haunting. The speaker’s moralising, in his rejection of the possibility of haunting with his declaration that ‘Earth’s children should not frown’, works against his apparent longing for the manifestation of the supernatural at the start of the poem. The tone of imperative declamation in the last two lines of the poem, like that of Iernë in ‘Faith and Despondency’, has the air of a hurried smoothing over of the conflict earlier in the poem.

A few stanzas earlier, the speaker is angry (emphasised by the liberal use of the exclamation mark and the uncontrolled rant of a nine-line stanza) that Lord Aspin’s love for ‘Sidonia’s Deity’ has caused his spirit to wander ‘unsheltered shut from heaven’ (the phrase, ‘Sidonia’s Deity’ anticipates the appellation of ‘sullen Sidonia’ that Lucy Snowe uses for Madame Walvarens in *Villette*, the woman who has shut Paul Emmanuel out from the possibility of a happy marriage). Aspin’s predicament reflects the purgatorial belief that ghosts were caught between two worlds but one should be careful about trusting the indignant exclamation of the narrator. The moralising tone in the situating of Aspin as a ‘spirit unforgiven’, like the imperative conclusion, suggests a failure on the part of the narrator to, using a phrase from *Tintern Abbey*, ‘see into the life of things’. It is apparent that the narrator’s indignation is generating more heat than light. This reading of the position of the

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<sup>34</sup> Bloom’s reconceiving of the poet’s longing for enough time to find their originality as a ‘homesickness for a house as large as his spirit’ resonates with Emily Brontë’s fear of being found in an inauthentic home. Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 61.

narrator gathers strength when one is reminded that he is not graced with a vision of the ghostly.

When considered in the light of Catherine Earnshaw's Miltonic expulsion from heaven back onto the heath above Wuthering Heights, Aspin's sentence of being 'shut from heaven / An outcast for eternity', takes on the colouring of a homecoming. This is implicitly recognised by the narrator when he soliloquizes to himself, in a turning away from 'things of yore', concerning turning 'to nature's face divine'. He also belies his pious regret that Aspin's ghost is shut out from heaven in his use of the phrase, 'Earth's children' in a clinamen-like swerve from the 'Ode' where the child comes from God.<sup>35</sup> The speaker's focus on heaven as the location of home is undermined by his inability to perceive the ghostly. This inability to perceive is intensified by the fact that the scene for this near-ghostly apparition is a door that is not walked through. Indeed, when the hitherto moonless poem is 'Is silvered with a sudden shine', the reaction of the narrator is stark. His words of retreat, 'O come away', uncannily anticipate the chorus in Yeats' 'The Stolen Child'. In Yeats' poem, about the fairies' stealing of a child, the refrain is 'Come away, O human child'.<sup>36</sup> These words that are an invitation to the supernatural world, in the words of Brontë's narrator move away from the supernatural. It is as if at the first hint of a ghostly manifestation, the 'sudden shine', the narrator retreats into a world where such supernatural possibilities are safely 'dreams o'er things of yore'. This is the same swerve that Lockwood makes in his effort to quash ghostly possibilities at the end of *Wuthering Heights*. However, what for Lockwood and the narrator of 'Written in Aspin Castle' is postulated as exile, for there is an undercurrent that is suggestive of home; the existence of the ghost is the refusal of heaven as a home.

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<sup>35</sup> Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Reference taken from, W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed., Daniel Albright, (London: Dent, 1990), p. 44.

The narrator in this poem, as has already been implied, is a precursor of Lockwood in that he is unable to make sense of supernatural occurrences. Lockwood's refusal to answer Nelly Dean's question, concerning Catherine's afterlife, whether 'such people *are* happy in the other world' (202) is revealing. His refusal to answer is based on his assessment of the question as 'heterodox' (202); this refusal could mean that, for Lockwood, the happiness of people in heaven is a given and dwelling on the possibility that they are still on earth is deeply disturbing. Nelly Dean, perhaps recalling her conversation about Catherine's dream, implicitly concedes that heaven would not be a fit home for her 'wayward and impatient existence' (202). Her statement about Catherine's corpse that 'it asserted its own tranquillity' (202) is undermined by her own knowledge of Catherine. In any case, the insistent haunting by Catherine's ghost would indicate that she is not happy in the other world. The efforts of Lockwood, and the narrator in 'Written in Aspin Castle' to lay ghosts to rest are thwarted.

This is not to say that ghosts are uncapricious. The spectral possibility in the line, 'the Norman door / Is silvered with a sudden shine', evokes the possibility of a portal opening in the manifestation of moonlight. The speaker who, at the start of the poem, loved to 'sit within this Norman door', flees (that this is not too strong a word is suggested by the use of an exclamation mark) when the breaking moonlight acts as a harbinger of the spectral. The narrator's situation here echoes that of the Gondal speaker in Emily Brontë's lyric, 'Why do I hate that lone green dell' where, in a moment of visionary release, 'A breath of old times over me came'. Both places contain strong associative powers that are too much to bear.

However, what the speaker in this poem gives herself up to, the narrator in 'Written in Aspin Castle' eschews just at the point of revelation. The word, 'sudden' jars with the rest of the poem; the irony is that the longed-for haunting is about to happen but the narrator is hurrying away just at the liminal moment where there could be a supernatural visitation. In a few lines the ghostly possibilities of the 'silvered' door have reverted to the naturalistic 'harvest moon'.

Yet even this move from kairos time of the opportune moment to chronos time of the calendar does not entirely eliminate the possibility of ghostly raisings. It was under a harvest moon, ‘on a mellow evening in September’ (114), that Heathcliff returned to Wuthering Heights from his three-year absence: it is as if the moon beckons ghosts to return. In ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, the moon opens the possibility of returning to a ghostly world that is home.

The narrator’s opening exclamation, ‘How do I love’, suggests that he welcomes the ‘sombre portal’ that ‘hides the lights / thickening above me evermore!’ Consequently, from the opening of the poem, Emily Brontë is distancing herself from the narrator. This is because of the impression that he is hiding from the ‘lights’ that, elsewhere in Brontë’s poetry, are so desired. The use of ‘thickening’ is significant because of its connection with visionary revelation. In the section of ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’ that describes the advent of the narrator’s visionary visitant, the narrator states that, ‘He comes... With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars’. The welcome of the ‘clear dusk’ and the sight of the stars contrasts with the perspective of the narrator in ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ standing under a door that ‘hides the lights’. It is apparent, from the narrator’s consideration of the ghost story of Lord Aspin, that he is aware of a state of liminality. However, the consideration of the portraits causes him to pull back just at the moment when the ghostly may be breaking through. By contrast, in *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë conceives of Heathcliff as embracing his equally elusive supernatural manifestation. This embrace is suggested by ‘the lattice, flapping to and fro’ (298) upon Nelly’s discovery of Heathcliff’s death. Unlike the narrator in ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, Heathcliff answers the ghostly beckoning.

*The Ghostly Manifestation of Longing for Earth*

The third poem to be considered, 'I see around me tombstones grey', unlike 'The night was dark' and 'Written in Aspin Castle', does not feature a ghost but it does explore convictions that underpin a restless recourse to images of ghosts and haunting; the poem's contention is that, if there is a final resting place, it is in and on the earth. When coupled with Emily Brontë's fear of annihilation, the logical conclusion is that there is an earthly resurrection. This is fertile ground for the creation of ghosts:

I see around me tombstones grey  
 Stretching their shadow far away.  
 Beneath the turf my footsteps tread  
 Lie low and lone the silent dead –  
 Beneath the turf – beneath the mould –  
 Forever dark, forever cold –  
 And my eyes cannot hold the tears  
 That memory hoards from vanished years  
 For Time and Death and Mortal pain  
 Give wounds that will not heal again –  
 Let me remember half the woe  
 I've seen and heard and felt below  
 And heaven itself – so pure and blest  
 Could never give my spirit rest –  
 Sweet land of light! thy children fair  
 Know naught akin to our despair –  
 Nor have they felt, nor can they tell

What tenants haunt each mortal cell  
What gloomy guests we hold within –  
Torments and madness, tears and sin!  
Well – may they live in ecstasy  
Their long eternity of joy;  
At least we would not bring them down  
With us to weep, with us to groan,  
No – Earth would wish no other sphere  
To taste her cup of sufferings drear;  
She turns from Heaven a careless eye  
And only mourns that *we* must die!  
Ah mother, what shall comfort thee  
In all this boundless misery?  
To cheer our eager eyes a while  
We see thee smile, how fondly smile!  
But who reads not through that tender glow  
Thy deep, unutterable woe?  
Indeed no dazzling land above  
Can cheat thee of thy children's love –  
We all in life's departing shine  
Our last dear longings blend with thine;  
And struggle still, and strive to trace  
With clouded gaze thy darling face  
We would not leave our native home  
For *any* world beyond the Tomb

No – rather on thy kindly breast  
 Let us be laid in lasting rest  
 Or waken but to share with thee  
 A mutual immortality –

The first six lines of the poem do not suggest the possibility of a haunting. The dead are ‘silent’ and the repetition and internal consonantal rhyming emphasise the tightness of this finality in ‘Forever dead, forever cold’. The tone is emphatic. Nevertheless, in a poetic act of metaphysical escapology Brontë performs a flight from such finality. The poem is preoccupied with remembrance. The argument is that if the narrator was able to remember ‘half the woe / I’ve seen’, there would be no possibility of heaven giving ‘my spirit rest’. So it would not be a consolation for earthly suffering. The traditional Victorian idea that earthly trials and tribulations could be washed away in heavenly bliss is challenged. The redeemed in heaven are unable to identify with their earthly counterparts: ‘Nor have they felt, nor can they tell / What tenants haunt each mortal cell’. In this idea there is an inversion of the Miltonic project in *Paradise Lost* to ‘justify the ways of God to men’ (I:26) in that there is a need for those in heaven to be educated in what it is like to be on earth. This develops the idea expressed by Emily Brontë in her Belgian essay, ‘The Butterfly’ where, in a riposte to the idea that heavenly glory compensates for earthly suffering, she states that, ‘it is true that there is a heaven for the saint, but the saint leaves enough misery below to sadden him even before the throne of God’.<sup>37</sup> In juxtaposition to heaven’s inability to provide rest, the narrator states, ‘let us be laid in lasting rest’ in Earth. So earth is able to provide what heaven is not. Earth is also the preferred home to heaven; there is an echo of this in ‘How Clear She Shines’ where Emily Brontë writes that she longs ‘to hope that all the woe / Creation knows, is held in thee!’. These longings for earth are not suggestive of pantheism but rather homesickness.

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<sup>37</sup> Sue Lonoff, ed. *The Belgian Essays*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), p. 178.

If a location for the deity can be spoken of in Brontë's thought, it is, as implied in 'No Coward Soul Is Mine', within her breast rather than within the earth. Rather, in this poem, rather than seeking a God to worship Brontë is exploring her sense of home. She eschews heaven for earth and, at the end of the poem, postulates an alternative to being 'laid in lasting rest'. This is to 'waken' to share 'A mutual immortality'. Although ghosts are not the focus of this poem, what is implied is that the 'wakening' is to haunting and wandering. The poem privileges restlessness or movement over quietude and rest. As discussed when considering 'Written in Aspin Castle', what incites this restlessness is a desire to return home.

However, this restlessness is internalised and the haunting more psychological in timbre. When the narrator evokes heaven's ineptitude at understanding 'what tenants haunt each mortal cell', the noun, 'cell', carries neurological overtones. In the notes to her edition of the poems, Janet Gezari situates cells as the 'imagined compartments of the brain' by comparing this line with Cowper's reference, in the sixth book of *The Task*, to 'All the cells / Where mem'ry slept' (Vol. II. p.237. lines 11-12). Brontë is situating the 'gloomy guests we hold within' as memories haunting the mind. The 'Torments and madness, tears and sin' may refer to inner demons. However, the turning of a 'careless eye' from heaven strongly conveys the disdain that the narrator shows for that place as a desired rest. The speaker goes further and posits the idea that the 'dazzling land above' could 'cheat [earth] of thy children's love'. Indeed, there is the rejection of 'any world beyond the tomb'.

The juxtaposition between rest in heaven and struggle on earth is striking. In exploring 'life's departing', the speaker is clear that 'we...struggle still'. The adverb, 'still' (meaning 'continually') conveys that even in life's last moments there is still struggle. Through the use of this word, it is as if the narrator is trying to correct any preconception that what is happening is a resigned departure to the afterlife. What is emphasised is continuity rather than departure. Moreover, the longings, that in conventional Christian imagination



would be directed upwards, here ‘blend with thine’. The strong earthiness of this longing to merge echoes Heathcliff’s longing to be ‘dissolving with her, and being more happy still’ (349).

This tone of struggle appears to be modified by the image of ‘on thy kindly breast / Let us be laid in lasting rest’. The return to a conventional Christian understanding of death is signalled by the Biblical echoes in this image. In the Gospel of St John, Jesus reclines on the breast of his beloved disciple in the hours before his death. When one considers the passion narrative, the ending of this poem follows the same trajectory with ‘laid’ connoting being placed in the tomb. However, the ‘waken’ or resurrection in the final line is ‘but to share with thee / A mutual immortality’. The qualifying ‘but’ is again seeking to correct an orthodox Christian perspective that considers that the ‘waken’ is to attain heaven. Yet it is also important that this poem is not seen as a pantheist wish-fulfilment. Contented rest in the earth is not the final note but rather that we ‘waken’ to share immortality with the earth. This wakening is more suggestive of being on the earth rather than in it. Emily Brontë, in the last couple of lines, is correcting the nature of her earthly longings to swerve from the possibility of annihilation. What is implicit from this swerving is that haunting ensues. The same modification occurs in *Wuthering Heights*, with the annihilating dream of ‘dissolving’ in the earth becoming the possibility of a haunting by the end of the novel.

‘I see around me tombstones grey’ strongly refuses resolution. The final swerve from the possibility of annihilation is but the culmination of other moments in the poem where closure is undermined. The use of active verbs to describe the struggle of death has already been discussed. The rhyming couplet, ‘For Time and Death and Mortal pain / Give wounds that will not heal again - ’, is also worthy of further consideration. The personifying capitalisation of nouns in the first line suggests a God-like finality. The characteristic use of ‘again’ by Brontë in the second line of the couplet, however, challenges the idea that the

injuries inflicted by the Godlike personifications in the previous line will never heal. The word, 'again', undermines the finality it endeavours to underscore. The half-rhyme between 'pain' and 'again', notwithstanding the likelihood of it being unintended, is also revealing. It implies a chink in the armour for there is a loophole in the ability of the personified forces listed in the previous line to cause final harm.

In the poem, Emily Brontë refuses to concede to the idea that the human person is annihilated but also that there is departure for an abstracted 'dazzling land' (the statement, 'We all in life's departing shine' seems intended as a riposte to the idea of going to a 'dazzling land', as if to say we can shine enough on earth). Indeed, there is some beautiful expression in the poem conveying love for the earth as 'Our last dear longings blend with thine' [earth's]. The blending of the individual and earth recalls the ending of Wordsworth's 'A slumber did my spirit seal' as the individual in the poem is 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal course' (the coexistence of timelessness, 'the touch of earthly years' and process, 'diurnal course', is also felt in Brontë's poem with the idea of sharing 'immortality' with earth which is dependent on season and process). Nonetheless, Emily Brontë, in a swerve from Wordsworth, continues 'A slumber did my spirit seal' to include the idea of waking. This strong connection with earth is also evoked in the struggle 'to trace / With clouded gaze thy darling face'. What is conveyed here is the child seeking reassurance from the mother in moments of great perplexity. Lurking behind this image is the blissful interchange between the poet and the stars in 'Stars'. There is a poignant juxtaposition between the heightened energies of 'strive' and the weakened perception conveyed by 'clouded'. However, what is important is that the last thoughts are of earth rather than the 'dazzling land' of heaven. Crucially, in this reading of the poem, Emily Brontë does not settle for this pantheistic consummation but disturbs the Wordsworthian rest in the final line. Her homesick nostalgia

does not permit such a resolution. The necessary concomitant to such an ending is the raising of ghosts.

Emily Brontë's presentation of ghosts is a symptom of restlessness epitomised by the ending of 'I see around me tombstones grey'. It is also actuated by her determination to refuse artificial homes; the consequence of the rejection of heaven is that her ghosts wander on earth. The capricious glimpses of the ghostly in Emily Brontë's writing adumbrate the difficulty of finding home as it seems about to be grasped and then fades. It is as Byron states in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

...Our outward sense  
 Is but of gradual grasp – and as it is  
 That which we have of feeling most intense  
 Outstrips our faint expression; ( vol. 2, CLVIII).

There is an echo of Byron's phrasing in 'Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle' when the advent of the visionary visitor is described: 'My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels'. Eschewing the 'gradual grasp' of the 'outward sense' extends hospitality to the spectral but this risks being at the mercy of the capricious and the fleeting. The price of leaving the world of 'outward sense' is that home is hard to come by. Jerome McGann, writing about *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, argues that Harold has 'been driven by the idea that, if one searches long enough, a place will be found that will answer to all human aspirations'.<sup>38</sup> In 'The Philosopher', Emily Brontë questions the possibility of finding a home that will answer to 'all human aspirations': 'No promised heaven, these wild desires / Could all, or half fulfil' (p.7). The inauthentic home is rejected and the energising of the spectral in Emily Brontë's writing testifies how hard it is to find somewhere that will answer to all 'human aspirations'.

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<sup>38</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development*, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1968) p. 36.

As stated earlier, Emily Brontë's treatment of the supernatural connects her with Wordsworth. An example of this is in Wordsworth's, 'The Two April Mornings' where the narrator states, 'Matthew is in his grave, yet now / Methinks I see him stand' (p.214 lines 57-58) where the possibilities of non- and continued existence are held in tantalising equipoise. Yet, it can be argued that Brontë is less willing to evoke a state of rest than Wordsworth is. For example, in his poem, 'To A Sexton', which was also published in *Lyrical Ballads*, the emotion conveyed is that of resolved rest in the final line: 'Let one grave hold the lov'd and lover!' (32). This echoes Lockwood's meditations at the end of *Wuthering Heights* but Emily Brontë rejects this closing of accounts. Especially in *Wuthering Heights*, ghosts are used to facilitate the past and future breaking into the present; the *locus classicus* of this is the appearance of Catherine's ghost to Lockwood who has wandered for twenty years but who comes to be reunited with Heathcliff in a future of spectral wanderings on the moors. It is, as Geoffrey Hartman expresses it, 'An apocalyptic moment in which past and future overtake the present.'<sup>39</sup> Emily Brontë uses ghosts to articulate a restless and cyclical vision of the relationship of the past and future to the present that presses beyond Wordsworth. The ghostly enables her to remain on the 'kindly breast' of earth.

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<sup>39</sup> Hartman, p. 46.

*Conclusion*

*'And I Confess that Hate of Rest': Confessing to Nostalgia*

As part of a scheme to set up their own school, Charlotte and (after some persuading) Emily travelled to Brussels in February 1842 to polish their French and German. The Pensionnat Héger, just outside the city, was enthusiastically seen by Charlotte as the ideal place to perfect their studies. In November, due to the death of Aunt Branwell, they returned to Haworth. Subsequently, Charlotte returned to Brussels alone.

Charlotte wrote to Emily of an encounter with the Roman Catholic rite of confession while in the church of *Ste. Gudule* in Brussels; with tongue firmly in cheek, she stated, 'I took a fancy to change myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like'.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, due to Charlotte's own anxieties about Catholicism and the imagined reaction of her father (Charlotte wrote that Patrick 'will not understand'), the letter has the tone of a confession.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, it is apparent from the tone of the letter that Charlotte was confident that Emily would be a sympathetic listener. Charlotte anticipates Emily's reaction of surprise at the visit: 'Which procedure you will say is not much like me', in a manner that evinces confidence in her sister's knowledge of her character and disposition.<sup>3</sup> One can only imagine her taciturn sister's bemusement at Charlotte's scruples of conscience. In one of her rare letters, Emily wrote to Ellen Nussey the week before the likely date of Charlotte's return; with satirical good humour she stated that Charlotte 'may vegetate there until the age of

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1843, Smith ed. *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, ed. *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 330.

<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 329.

Methuselah for mere lack of courage to face the voyage'.<sup>4</sup> It is evident that Emily took the twists and turns of Charlotte's ponderings with a pinch of salt.

As has been explored in the thesis, Emily Brontë's poetry and prose is the expression of nostalgia and homesickness. One way in which this desire for a home reveals itself is when Emily Brontë's characters confess. This is not so much an owning up, but a narration of their journey and a means of orientation. In religious terms, confession is seen as a rite of passage for those who are psychically lost and a way of gaining clarity of direction. It could even be argued that it is an expression of nostalgia as the penitent has a mental and spiritual state to which he or she longs to attain. This process also requires a detached and sympathetic listener.

Confession happens in Emily Brontë's writing. In *Wuthering Heights*, Nelly has the office of a confessor. Catherine, when she asks, 'Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?' (96) seeks the seal of the confessional. Towards the end of the novel, Heathcliff says to Nelly that 'my confessions have not relieved me' (395). In both cases, the confession has a cathartic effect and drives the plot forward. In the first instance, it drives Heathcliff into a self-imposed exile and, in the second, it prepares the way for the 'strange change' (393) as Heathcliff comes closer to reaching his longed-for union with Catherine.

So, Emily Brontë being enough of a listener for Charlotte to confide in her is reflected in the placement of listeners in her writing. Listening also features in the last-known poem written by her but, this time, it is the reader who is placed in the position of confessor. As one reads 'Why ask to know the date, the clime' (henceforth known as 'Why ask' and, due to length, not reproduced in body of thesis but as a separate appendix) one notices the speaker justifying his actions to the reader. By this, Emily Brontë takes her judgement out of the equation; it is difficult to tell whether she feels scorn or sympathy for her interlocutor. Such

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<sup>4</sup> Juliet Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters*, (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1998), p. 117.

complexities in terms of second-guessing Emily Brontë's response to her own creation were articulated by Charlotte in the preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*: 'Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know' (444). Our response to the narrator in this poem is reflected in the Earnshaws' difficulty concerning what to do with Heathcliff as Nelly asks Earnshaw 'what he meant to do with it [Heathcliff]' (45). In 'Why ask', Emily Brontë leans heavily on the reader's moral compass as they are forced to listen and judge for themselves – the poet as interpreter of character is absent. Such a position is precarious for if, as Nelly Dean does, we endeavour to impose a morality on the speaker, we risk losing, as Nelly Dean does, an authenticity that the subject retains (due to their active searching for home). A little listening can be a dangerous thing

*'Weaned me from my Country's Breast': Abandonment and Dislocation in 'Why ask to know the date – the clime?'*

'Why ask' imagines a Gondal character, a mercenary, seeking orientation through confession. His confession is an admission of homesickness and nostalgia as well as a means to talk his way to a home; however, 'Why ask' intensifies the atmosphere of dislocation to present the totality of its speaker's lostness; the poem brings homesickness to its highest pitch. The poem is discussed to facilitate the conclusion of this thesis which is that, even at the end of her writing career, Emily Brontë chose to remain in a state of nostalgia and homesickness rather than accept the false consolation of an inauthentic home. To elucidate this quality of lostness, 'Why ask' will be considered alongside Byron's *The Giaour* whose protagonist is also lost and echoes Brontë's mercenary in their respective situations.

'Why ask' tells the story of the mercenary who evokes the gigantic world-weariness of a man who is displaced and comes to a 'land of woe' (30) having been 'weaned' from his

‘country’s breast’ (29). He is clearly imagined as an exile. This is reinforced by the maternal imagery used to describe his homeland. The mercenary also echoes Heathcliff’s three-year absence and the ponderings of Nelly Dean considering that his ‘Upright carriage’ suggested that he was in the army (118). We are on the same imaginative nexus in ‘Why ask’. Like Heathcliff, the protagonist is on the run as well as someone who is past caring. The faces that could move ‘A moment’s flash of human love’ (48) were not necessarily those of other soldiers but rather an interpersonal relationship that has gone wrong. The italicisation of ‘were’ (47) suggests the bitterness of past trauma and a slow hardening process, so the shadow of love spurned lies heavy across ‘Why ask’. There is also the echo of a poem such as ‘Sleep not’ (discussed in chapter five) where the child is doomed to be ‘Hell-like in heart and misery’. In ‘Sleep not’, the narrator considers the future of a child and, in a variation on the theme of summer’s promise changing to ‘November’s sullen time’, contemplates the inevitable triumph of sin. The words ‘crime’ (3) and ‘enthusiast’ (31) anticipate the actions of the mercenary who in his zeal has participated in acts of crime. He has been corrupted by the world: ‘by crime and sorrow tos[t]’. Just as, in ‘Sleep not’ there is no sense that Brontë is blaming the child for what he may do as an adult, it is the case that, in ‘Why ask’, there is a remarkable absence of blame attached to the protagonist by the poet. What is apparent, in both these poems, is that the world is too strong for the protagonists; the choking of virtue is a consequence of living in the world. These ideas need to be borne in mind when reacting to the callousness of the mercenary in ‘Why ask’.

Leaving questions of morality aside, the main idea of interest when considering homesickness is the lostness of the mercenary. His experience of ‘civil war and anarchy’ (6) has altered the way he perceives the world but, as he starts to feel ‘ruth’ for his captive, the captive denies and the mercenary is denied the home of a clear conscience – he is left an exile. This same sense of being led home only to have it ultimately denied is felt at the start



of the poem. Emily Brontë effects a change of perspective from security to exile by playing with the expectations aroused by association. The pastoral, almost Keatsian, imagery of ‘labouring peasants’ (10), ‘milky sweet’ (16) and ‘threshing floor’ (17) is abruptly switched to ‘mire of tears and human gore’ (18). From the ninth line of the poem to the eighteenth, in one long sentence, Emily Brontë pushes us forward only to come to an abrupt halt at ‘gore’. It is as if, through the metre, we have been taken before we realise it to a place of brutality. The lulling octosyllabic rhythm means that we do not pick up the dark hints in ‘never hand a sickle held’ (13) and ‘ground by horses’ feet’ (15) until we are led to a full stop at ‘gore’. Like the mercenary, we are now at a place we do not wish to be.

To compound this impression, Brontë also emphasises nature’s benign indifference: ‘heaven’s pure rain’ (19) still blesses the field even though it is watering the slain and ‘No harvest time could be more fair’ (25). Nature continues its business, unaffected by the vicissitudes of human fortune and indifferent to the human drama that is being played out. This is a rejection of the pathetic fallacy in *Macbeth*, for example, with the portents in the natural world that accompany the murder of King Duncan as ‘the earth / was feverous and did shake’ (II.iii.56-57). Nature is not centred on man. There is callousness about how the reader is stopped at ‘gore’, and in the following lines Brontë brings our attention to the indifference of nature to human suffering. Brontë completes her swerve from a Wordsworthian view of nature in this poem which is, arguably, why Jonathan Wordsworth states that it is one of her ‘least Wordsworthian poems’.<sup>5</sup> There are thoughts that ‘lie too deep for tears’ (206) but these are despairing rather than compensatory. Emily Brontë is here unequivocal in rejecting the idea that nature will mirror the twists and turns of human fate. It has to be accepted on its own terms. Indeed, in ‘Why ask’, nature resembles Brontë’s ghostly visions: capricious and unreliable.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, ‘Wordsworth and the Poetry of Emily Brontë’, *Brontë Society Transactions*, (16.2 .1972): 85-100. p. 85.

At this point, it is illuminating to point-up a comparison with Byron's *The Giaour*. The exclamatory, 'Fair clime!' (vol. 2 p. 161) with the stress on 'clime' through its repetition four times sends the reader straight back to the opening line of 'Why ask'. Notwithstanding the octosyllabics that are common to both poems, there is a marked difference in tone. Byron's eulogy for the lost arcadia of Greece contrasts with Emily Brontë's impatience with the reader in her opening line. Whereas, for Byron, the 'clime' that is lost matters much, for Brontë it is pointless to ask for a 'date' or 'clime' as human misery is universal through time and space (ironic perhaps, given Brontë's meticulous attention to date in *Wuthering Heights*).

So, the opening philosophical question of 'Why Ask' reads like a riposte to Byron's stress on 'clime' in *The Giaour*. The first three instances of the word are linked with Greece and Byron's mourning that the 'Clime of the unforgotten brave!' (Vol. 2, p. 164) is now in the past. By contrast, in 'Why Ask', such mourning is futile and spurned as the world will 'soon forget' a 'noble name' (151-2). Indeed, Emily Brontë sets at nought her earlier investment in remembered heroism in Gondal; the concerns in 'Remembrance' grate awkwardly with her dismissal of remembering in 'Why ask'. What is developing is a Gondal Ragnorak where all is futile. So, the past is truly a foreign land.

Byron's next reference to clime occurs when he writes of a time 'when man *was* worthy of thy clime' (Vol. 2, p. 166 emphasis added). Again, this strengthens the tone of elegy while, as previously discussed, Brontë has moved beyond mourning. However, notwithstanding these differences, Byron's use of 'clime' in *The Giaour* plots a climbing despair that is 'stronger than my will' and this is recognisable in Emily Brontë's short lyric, 'I know not how it falls on me': 'Sorrow withers even the strong / And who can fight against despair'. Mostly, for Emily Brontë, this despair is not the 'lethargy of grief' but an active wearying that can open the door to vision. Just as the Giaour has the vision of Leila after endeavours to defeat his enemies, so Heathcliff's despair of defeating his old enemies leads

to an intensifying of his perception of Catherine. Jerome McGann makes this connection between the ‘convulsion of longing’ in Heathcliff and the Giaour.<sup>6</sup>

If she read *The Giaour*, Emily Brontë may have considered it ill-advised of Byron to place any trust in a heroic age or heroic qualities; ‘Why ask’ can be read as a reworking of Byron’s poem in the light of her contemplative stoicism. In the opening line, she is pouring scorn on the notion of eulogising a particular place and replacing it with the universality of the worship of crime and crushing of the weak. Arguably, the Giaour is also guilty of attributing evil to specific climates and temperaments. As he narrates his story to the friar he articulates a fixed point for human evil as he suggests that those who live in cold lands are not passionate: ‘The cold in clime are cold in blood’ (Vol. 2, p. 197). This line has particular resonance when one considers the passions unleashed on a northern moor in *Wuthering Heights*: trying to fix a local ‘habitation and a name’ on human suffering is futile.

Yet traces of *The Giaour* can be discerned in ‘Why ask’ not only in a turn from it but in the use of a similar structure. Byron starts by evoking a Greek idyll and Brontë an idyllic harvest time. Both poems subtly insinuate an evil presence – though Brontë’s handling of the shift is rather more abrupt than Byron’s ‘gradually increasing sense of foreboding’. Also, in both poems a troubled narrator is introduced. In ‘Why ask’, the mercenary himself is the narrator; in *The Giaour*, the unbeliever is introduced by a Muslim narrator who, despite his evident distaste, unwittingly presents the Giaour as a hero, thus losing control of our reception of the protagonist, in much the same way that Lockwood and Nelly Dean are unable to control how readers respond to Heathcliff. In both poems there is a dark secret withheld which reinforces the tone of confession.

‘Why ask’ starts with a question and quickly rounds on the reader with a dismissal of that question: ‘More than mere words they cannot be’ (2). The sense behind the initial asking

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<sup>6</sup> McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 158.

of the question is to cast doubt upon the idea of compartmentalising the subsequent narration into a particular time and place as the suffering and wrongdoing described is happening all the time. It is wrong to give a privileged position to a particular incident of human suffering, as it is universal. However, alongside this deep pessimism (which Brontë is determined not to allow us to shirk), is strong sympathy. The opening lines are a shot across the bows for anyone who would distance themselves from the narrator and adopt a morally judgemental position – that is to privilege one ‘date’ and ‘clime’ over another. This quickness to judge is to make the same error as Lockwood and be condemned as an outsider: the confessional tone of the poem requires a sympathetic listener. In fact, the narrator gains our trust; his unflinching assessment of human nature suggests that he has nothing to hide. Trust is also conveyed by the narrator not separating himself from the rest of humanity; the use of the pronoun ‘we’ (4) links him and the reader in a community of guilt. As Janet Gezari has pointed out, the ‘we’ could be either the innocent helpless or those that crush the helpless.<sup>7</sup> The ambiguity is strengthened when it is realised that the men who ‘knelt to God’ also ‘worshipped crime’ (3). There is a Blakean inversion here where good and evil are blurred so it is difficult to tell one from another. This ambiguity is important for it reinforces the confessional tone of the poem and the need for the reader to ‘give ear’ and be a careful listener. It also shows the poet’s reluctance to pass judgement or condemn. This inability to discern moral boundaries is also another manifestation of Brontë’s resistance to closure. In the last analysis, the mercenary is presented as someone who is lost rather than damned.

The word, ‘learnt’ (5) is repeated, for example, men had ‘learnt’ to view life with ‘somewhat lighter sympathy’ (8). In contrast to the pronoun ‘we’, ‘they’ (5) creates a comfortable distance. The *us* of the reader and, at this point, the narrator, would surely never view life with ‘lighter sympathy’. This is part of the process of the narrator establishing

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<sup>7</sup> Gezari, *Last Things*, p. 65.

themselves as someone trustworthy. However, in the same way that Emily Brontë rounds on us with the opening question and the abruptness of ‘gore’ puncturing an idyllic harvest, she hits the reader hard with the repetition of ‘I’ in line 39. It is at this point that we realise the nature of the narrator, rather like learning that a familiar friend is actually a murderer; Brontë’s dash before the second ‘I’ emphasises this point. Again, ‘learnt’ recurs three times at this point in the poem (lines 39, 41 and 43). It is ironic that the first two uses of the word are to do with the mercenary stopping listening, cutting himself off from human sympathy as this is precisely what he requires from his listener. The third use of ‘learnt’ relates to powerlessness emphasised by the placing of ‘I’ at the end of the line (43). There is a feeling of despair and the pointlessness of showing mercy. The mercenary had learnt hardness and a turning away from his former ‘chivalry’ (37). He asks the question why he should spare life when ‘hundreds daily filled the grave’ (46). This is a man who has lost his centre and is presented by Brontë as being hollow to the core yet the gradual centring of his thoughts on one incident belies his ability to view life with ‘somewhat lighter sympathy’.

Notwithstanding this glimmer of human kindness, it is a bleak prospect for this mercenary who is presented as unable to find a place to rest.

As the mercenary begins to narrate his encounter with the captive, the reader is once more led into a pastoral landscape with distinctly Brontëan overtones. The description of the moon in its ‘glorious noon’ (67), as well as recalling the ‘noon of night’ in Brontë’s ‘There shines the moon’ (p.36) reminds us of Emily Brontë’s preference for night over day. The ‘solemn landscape, wide and still’ (68) pictures the peace of moorland by night. Yet this portrayal of pastoral calm follows the same trajectory as the start of the poem, leading to ‘charred beams’ and ‘blackened stones’ (72) with the vivid image of the ‘lurid flames’ (74) that ‘quenched their glare in pools of blood’ (75). The personification of the flames endows them with a vampiric life seeking for blood to quench their thirst. The exclamation of ‘but

yestereve' (as an exclamation of how so much can change in so little time) suggests lamenting and mourning for lost innocence. 'No! never care' (76) speaks forcefully of a determination to forget as if remembrance would be too painful. The mercenary is choosing a state of lostness because he knows that getting back home or returning to a state of innocence is impossible. There are hints of Heathcliff's mental state during his three years' absence trying to forget Catherine. This determination is a change of tone for Emily Brontë given that much of her other writing is preoccupied with remembering. The mercenary by his own choice is un-remembered because he knows that trying to find home or innocence is futile. Her conclusion, in 'Why ask' is that remembrance is futile and she resists the elegiac mourning in *The Giaour* with stoical indifference. This resistance is Emily Brontë refusing what she sees as an inauthentic home and choosing exile.

It is, nonetheless, true that 'Why ask' shares with *The Giaour* a sudden transition from beauty to destruction when Brontë surprises her reader with the suddenness with which harvest field becomes a field of battle. Similarly, a reader of *The Giaour* may greet with surprise the appearance of the pirate. The 'sheltering cove' that holds him for a 'guest' recalls the tree that holds the serpent in the Garden of Eden. This echo is apposite given that the situation in both poems is a fall from innocence. It is ironic that the pirate is held in a 'sheltering' place; the word, with its connotations of nurture, is at loggerheads with the masculine violence of its 'guest'. The following lines return briefly to an idyllic vision with the alliterative plosive peacefulness of 'passing peaceful prow' and 'gay mariner's guitar' which makes the turning of the mariner's 'roundelay' to 'groans' all the more unexpected and shocking. Byron declaims on a place that has fallen from grace with the ensuing political overtones building on the imagery of the biblical fall. Byron wonders how man could mar such a wonderful place into 'wilderness' (all references to *The Giaour* in this paragraph from

Vol. 2, p. 162). As has already been discussed, Emily Brontë has moved beyond such musings in ‘Why ask’.

Brontë views differently the overtaking of natural beauty by human evil; she avoids Byron’s dichotomy of innocence and fall by giving nature a life of its own. As considered earlier, the natural world is indifferent to the various twists and turns of human fate – it carries on regardless. If ‘Why Ask’ is influenced by *The Giaour*, then Emily Brontë significantly reworks the opening. For her, there is no dramatic foregrounding or pathetic fallacy; the protagonist in her poem does not have the comfort that nature reflects his fall. ‘Heaven’s *pure* rain’ (emphasis added) will still ‘bless’ the fields (19-20). Nature’s purity is not tainted by human misery; however, despite this rejection of a sympathetic nature, Emily Brontë’s conceiving of nature in ‘Why ask’ carries reassurance in its very immunity to human vicissitudes. So, while Emily Brontë underlines nature’s indifference to increase the sense of the mercenary as a lost man, Nature is also, to use Catherine’s words in *Wuthering Heights*, ‘like the eternal rocks beneath’ (101). Nature is not fickle enough to mirror human nature.

Lostness is strengthened through the portrayal of power politics of life and death in the next section of the poem. The cruelty of the enemy could be seen to reach its culmination in the ending of a life but instead it is seen in the granting of a life: to die is described as the ‘pleasant privilege (95). This death wish echoes the final days of Heathcliff who also longed for death: ‘It is a long fight, I wish it were over’ (395). There is irony in the mockery of the mercenary as he describes the secure castles that kings live in ‘guarded well, with chain and bolt and sentinel’ (98-99), yet they cannot enjoy the security of choosing the time and place of their death. This situation makes the once proud leader an ‘Infant in the after calm’ (111) in a situation of dependence. Yet, despite the priest’s statement that the fallen leader’s days of favour are over, ‘Of good things he had his share’ (119), the fallen leader is still favoured. The moon, that harbinger of visionary release, ‘shone beaming on his face’ (121), which hints

at, using the words of ‘The Prisoner (A fragment)’, ‘A sentence... overruled by Heaven’. This sense of a favoured prisoner is strengthened by the mercenary’s misplaced priorities in wishing his captive dead so that he can get some sleep. The callousness is emphasised by his own faltering attempt to justify his wishes: ‘’Twas hard, I know, ’twas harsh to say’ (128), which again emphasises the mercenary’s lostness. This man who did once know ‘A moment’s flash of human love’ (48) has completely hardened himself. What compounds his lostness is the suspicion that he has arrived at this position of ‘lighter sympathy’ intentionally and has chosen to reject all softer feelings.

The line that starts a new section, ‘Slow, slow it came!’ (136) is a deceptive harbinger of a visionary experience. The comma slows the pace and the indeterminate pronoun evokes a sense of mystery. This line gives the reader the same gaze as the narrator in ‘Lines’ (discussed in chapter five) as she hopes for the redemption of the man she is watching: ‘Remorse even now may wake within / And half unchain his soul from sin’. This road to Damascus moment for the mercenary is strengthened by the mention of the west wind: ‘Yet as the west wind warmly blew’ (138). The wind recalls Brontë’s visionary visitor in ‘Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle’ who comes ‘with western winds’. Yet here, as in the imagining of a pastoral landscape at the start of the poem, Emily Brontë is setting up a scenario in order to frustrate its application. The clue to vision’s abandonment is discerned in the time of day: ‘Our dreary room / Grew drearier with departing gloom’ (136-7). The plosive *d* sounds, onomatopoeic as they enact plumbing the depths from which visionary experience may come, suggest an imminent epiphany. The intensifying of ‘dreary’ to ‘drearier’ suggests the arrival of night, which in Brontë’s poetry is the time of visionary release, yet the ‘gloom’ is ‘departing’ as morning arrives. So, as Emily Brontë hints at the possibility of visionary transformation, and seemingly enacts the deepening gloom of night, she is, in fact, referring to the metaphorical gloom that comes with morning in ‘Stars’, with the ‘hostile light... that



drains the blood of suffering men'. Brontë's link between the return of day and the return of suffering is, in 'Why ask', exemplified. This fresh impetus to cause suffering is confirmed by the mercenary's description of 'I felt my pulses bound anew' (139) with 'bound' suggesting both the return of energy and dedication to the task of perpetuating evil. Yet, hope, in the sense of our anticipation that the mercenary is on the cusp of a change of heart, is brought to a new pitch with the detail, 'And turned to him' (140).

Yet this turning is only literal; there is no change of heart. The mercenary plunders some of his captive's possessions, among which are a:

...locket fair

Where rival curls of silken hair,

Sable and brown revealed to me

A tale of doubtful constancy (145-8).

This acquisition of the mercenary, with its 'rival curls', recalls the locket around the dead Catherine's neck from which Heathcliff removes a lock of Linton's fair hair and replaces it with one of his own black hair. Nelly Dean tells Lockwood how she 'twisted the two and enclosed them together' (205). The 'doubtful constancy' contrasts with the monomaniacal faithfulness of Heathcliff and also echoes the conflicting claims of 'Loyalty' and 'Liberty' that actuate the mercenary (34). So the power of vision and the power of love are set at naught.

The mercenary's words to his captive, 'The world, poor wretch, will soon forget' (151), are surprising when compared with the investment Emily Brontë makes in questions of remembrance elsewhere in her poetry. The agonising of a poem such as 'Remembrance' is dismissed in one sentence. Yet the mercenary is unable to entirely set the powers of memory at naught. The fact that he is recalling in the act of narrating the poem belies the ability to 'soon forget'. In addition, the language that the mercenary uses subscribes to an orthodox

Christian belief in divine retribution. He states that his conscience now whispers ‘God will repay’ (171) which suggests a subsequent revision of his ideas about memory’s efficacy after the events narrated in the poem. However, the simple orthodox nature of these confessions is modified by the mercenary’s conception of the sin for which he will have to give an account, ‘Of stifling mercy’s voice within’ (164). This shift from an external God (who requires an account [155]) to the ‘God within my breast’ of ‘No Coward Soul is mine’ situates the mercenary’s betrayal as being of the same order as when Catherine chooses Edgar over Heathcliff. They both betray the ‘voice within’. Emily Brontë is relentless in her insistence on human responsibility.

Byron’s words in *The Giaour*, ‘Enough – no foreign foe could quell / Thy soul, till from itself it fell’ (Vol. 2, p. 165) anticipate the words of Heathcliff to the dying Catherine: ‘Nothing that God or satan could inflict would have parted us, *you*, of your own will, did it’ (198). With the italicisation of ‘you’, the influence of the ‘world without’ is set to nought – the full weight of responsibility is placed on the human spirit. Brontë shows how stifling the ‘voice within’ can bring tragic consequences. It is this sin that drives the confessional tone in both ‘Why ask’ and *The Giaour*. However, this confession is not a vindication for the representatives of the world to whom they are confessing. The mercenary and the Giaour are not about to be assimilated, humbled and repentant, into the company of the blessed. Indeed, they stand strangely alone, untouchable and any attempt at connection from those listening to their confessions would be strongly repulsed. The mercenary and the Giaour have the same attitude as Heathcliff; the heaven of others is altogether uncoveted by them. One feels that, as the Giaour and the mercenary confess, to use Heathcliff’s words, there is a ‘strange change approaching’ (393). This gives the words in both poems the air of a last will and testament.

The sin against the self, the God within one’s breast, with its overtones of the sin against the Holy Spirit, that Emily Brontë alludes to in *Wuthering Heights*, is a preoccupation

throughout her writing career.<sup>8</sup> In dealing with the ensuing sense of lostness and the impossibility of returning to a state of lost innocence, it is useful to consider the idea of ‘betrayal’. During Emily Brontë’s time at Cowan Bridge, when she was aged six, biographers consider that it is likely she would have witnessed the mistreatment of her sister, Maria. An example is given by Elizabeth Gaskell. One morning, when Maria was ill, she was urged by the other girls to remain in bed, but one superintendent dragged her into ‘the middle of the floor, abusing her all the time for her dirty and untidy habits’.<sup>9</sup> One can imagine a younger sibling helpless at witnessing such incidents, feeling the injustice and longing to intervene, yet understandably fearful. In his biography, Edward Chitham traces his idea, in three of Emily Brontë’s poems, that she felt guilty at a betrayal of her older sister. If this was the case, then there could be an element of self-identification with the mercenary, with his unflattering views on human nature; his voice can be heard in those who ‘do homage to their will / and all seem glad their voice to hear’. Emily’s older sister, Maria, like the captive was alone and a choice is made to observe suffering rather than to alleviate it. The point is that Emily Brontë does not shy away from the darker side of human nature and this includes her own ‘lifelong struggle with guilt arising from treachery’.<sup>10</sup>

This guilt is worked out through the child. The mercenary meets the daughter of the captive looking for her father. He rebuffs her. Then he hears the news that his own son has been taken captive by the enemy and begs the captive to order his son’s release. The captive grants this and subsequently dies. As an act of penitence, the mercenary adopts the child but, due to her hatred of him, he is forced to let her go.

It is not surprising that, in a poem that treats of guilt, there are a number of allusions to *Macbeth*. The voice, ‘whispering ever when I pray, / God will repay – God will repay!’

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<sup>8</sup> Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts*, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, (Dent: Everyman, 1997) p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily Brontë*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) p. 50.

(170/1), echoes Macbeth's unsettled state after overhearing two people pray (after the murder of King Duncan) and being unable to say "Amen" / When they did say "God bless us" (II.ii.26-27). Also, the visit of the mercenary to the 'ice cold well' has affinities with Macbeth's hyperbolic insistence that his blood-stained hands will 'The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red' (II.ii.60-61), suggested by the 'stranger tinge of fiery red' (200) remarked on by the mercenary as he drinks from the well. This detail also echoes Catherine's description to Nelly, when justifying her preference for Edgar over Heathcliff, of dreams that have 'gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind' (99). This image, as well as stirring Catherine's guilt, also gestures to the transformative nature of her dream. Such is the nature of the mercenary's recollections about his encounter with the captive and her daughter.

There is also a connection between the encounter between the mercenary and the child and that of Lockwood and the child ghost. Lockwood tries to banish his ghostly encounter in a similar way that the mercenary does the child. The callousness of the mercenary's words to the daughter in order to shake her off, 'Thy father's [face] is lifeless clay' (209), recalls Lockwood's response to the demand of the ghost: 'Let *me* go, if you want me to let you in!' (31). The desire to rid themselves of a ghostly disturber is felt in both the mercenary twice stabbing the child and Lockwood rubbing the wrist of the ghost across the broken window pane. In both cases 'stifling of the voice within' is apparent. Both Lockwood and the mercenary, one with piled up books and the other with mockery, endeavour to block out the voice that calls 'let me in' (31). In both cases this is a call to relationship; in one the acknowledgement of an obligation based on common humanity and in the other to the attainment of an earthly heaven after twenty years of purgatorial wandering. When these connections are considered, what emerges is that both Lockwood and the mercenary have cut themselves off from human sympathy.

This cutting off from human sympathy continues to the end of the poem where, after the captive's magnanimous act in ordering that the mercenary's son be spared, the captive dies. This means that the mercenary is unable to inform him that his daughter is alive – thus a settling of accounts and closure is forestalled. The final act, an attempt at penitence, is to take the daughter under his wing, but her 'anguish wild' (260) and 'savage woe' (262) forces him to, in the final words of the poem, 'let her go' (264). So the mercenary's attempt at human relationship fails and, left on his own, he has to take his own way. This sense of lostness is emphasised by the night being 'moonless' (264). A further sense of abandonment is provided in the finality of 'go' echoing Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden' where 'the world is all before them' but they 'with *wandering* steps... took their solitary way (XII: 648-649)'

One feels that there is more hope for the girl as it seems that the mercenary is dragged down by his complete lack of human sympathy. His lack of feeling, his admission that he is 'weary' is no match for her 'savage woe'. The mercenary's admission that she 'hated me like we hate hell' (261) is curious and ironic. The pronoun, 'we' seems to be a last-ditch attempt to evoke connection with the listener; this word is discordant after his evident rejection of human connection. The irony comes from the fact that the hell is largely of his own making despite the mercenary's gesturing towards hell which he hates. There is a hope, suggested by the freeing of the child, that she may find home but the mercenary seems completely burnt out. She is the one who has been 'let go'; the mercenary, despite his 'somewhat lighter sympathy' is still enslaved. It can be argued that the beating heart of this poem is the same one that Shelley had in mind when he was writing *Alastor*: that life without human sympathy is dead.

So the possibility of a Wordsworthian exchange between an adult who has lost their way and a child is denied and the mercenary is left without a means of repaying his debt of

gratitude. He is left with the God of certain vengeance who 'will repay'. By contrast, in *The Giaour* there is a clearer vision of redemption which is human rather than divine. When the Giaour describes how he shed Hassan's blood, he states, 'Twas shed for her, who died for me' (Vol 2, p. 195). This sentence echoes the phraseology that was found in hymnals extolling the release brought by the sacrifice of Christ. Indeed there is a double atonement in this line as Hassan was slain to atone for Leila's death, while Leila was killed by her father as an act of satisfaction for her trysts with Hassan.

So Leila redeemed the Giaour when the incredulous friar was unable. The Giaour's confession of his vision of Leila renders the ministrations of the monastery superfluous and, arguably, is a preparation for his death more effective than that of any last rites. This echoes the way that Heathcliff's increased awareness of Catherine's presence paves the way for his death. This human redemption is a strong feature in both texts and renders religious ministrations impotent. Another example of this is when Nelly points out to Heathcliff that he 'probably hardly had a Bible in [his] hands' (408) and warning him, in Nelly's moralistic tones, of an unfitness for heaven unless 'A *change* take place before you die' (409 emphasis added). Nelly Dean's mention of change recalls the words that Heathcliff uttered to her earlier when he spoke of a 'strange change' (393). However, the moralistic overtones of Nelly's conception of what such a change would be (namely, Heathcliff opening his Bible), lacks the resonance of human connection involved in Heathcliff's conception of change (it also shows that Heathcliff, unlike Edgar, will not be 'among his books' (148) when connection with Catherine is at stake). Nelly's ideas concerning change show that she is uncomprehending of what Heathcliff means. It also shows that Nelly Dean is now taking

Heathcliff's earlier utterances with 'curiously superstitious seriousness' and endeavouring to repoint Heathcliff's thoughts in a more orthodox direction.<sup>11</sup>

The human redemption sweeps aside the divine and Heathcliff sets religious ministrations at naught, 'no minister need come; nor need anything be said over me' (409). The Giaour, as he anticipates an equally shadowy reunion with his beloved, (I saw her, Friar! [Vol. 2, p. 203]) similarly rejects consolation from a friar just before he dies: 'I would not, if I might, be blest; / I want no paradise but rest' (Vol. 2, p. 203). However, this redemption is unrecognised by the religious ministrations of Nelly and the friar as they situate Heathcliff and the Giaour within the narrative of fall and retribution.

For both Heathcliff and the Giaour, redemption is in the eyes of the beloved rather than the church. This conclusion is also reached in one of Emily Brontë's Gondal poems, 'A.G.A. to A.S.', where Augusta Geraldine Almeda finds the 'beams divine' of 'heaven's sun' in her beloved, Lord Alfred, while others may see it 'In cell and cloister drear'. The word, 'let', implies the withholding of judgement but the monastic vision is essentially joyless along with the 'wretches uttering praise' in 'My Comforter'. For Heathcliff and the Giaour, heaven is not their home and they embrace the earthly in preference to the beatific vision.

However, the experience of the mercenary is different as no one comes to claim him at the end of the poem; there is no visionary compensation for his rejection of the world. It does need to be acknowledged at this point that it is likely that 'Why ask' is an unfinished poem and that, from line 156 onward, the rushed writing on the manuscripts suggests a first draft.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding this caveat, there is something very apposite about the final line.

The final phrase of the poem, 'I let her go', suggests both defeat and freedom. The mercenary has been unable to deal with the 'savage woe' of his captive's daughter. It is

<sup>11</sup> Graeme Tytler, 'The Power of the Spoken Word in *Wuthering Heights*', *Brontë Studies*, (39.1.2014), 58-70. p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> See Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 280.

ironic that the mercenary, who has forsaken all ties of place, provides the fixed point at the end of this poem. He provides the home from which the girl departs though the poignancy is that the mercenary is still homeless. The interlocutor has an investment in the fate of the girl as she leaves the poem actively. Like Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost*, something is opening up as well as closing. Yet the lostness in the mercenary also captures our imagination as he watches his one hope of connection ‘go’; ironically, he who guarded her father so closely, lets her ‘go’. There is no final act or existential actualising of the will. The mercenary just ‘let[s]’ – he has become passive.

This could be accounted for by the fact that the poem is unfinished and that Brontë had a stronger resolution in mind. However, I argue that this inconclusiveness could, in fact, be the conclusion that she wanted. There is a sense of finality a few lines earlier with the dash introducing the ‘*last* look of that agony’ (257 emphasis added) providing a hint of a point of completion and that the end of the poem is left awkwardly open. The point is that the possibility of redemption died with the death of the captive. There is also closure in that the mercenary’s world view has been unsettled through his encounter with his captive’s daughter and that he leaves the poem, like Coleridge’s wedding guest, ‘A sadder and a wiser man’ (66). It is this change in which faint glimmer of redemption inheres. Like Heathcliff, the mercenary has suffered a defeat within a victory and, just as with Heathcliff, for whom this defeat precipitates a reunion with Catherine, there is a possibility that the mercenary will be changed for the better by his encounter with the captive’s daughter. He may yet find his true home.

Emily Brontë did intend to revise ‘Why ask’ evidenced by a dated revision of the poem’s opening in her Gondal poems notebook, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1848, a few months before she died. Janet Gezari, in her notes, states that this poem intensifies an apocalyptic feeling by making it more immediate as the past tense in ‘crushed’ is replaced by the present continuous



in ‘crushing’.<sup>13</sup> Hypocrisy is replaced by undisguised evil. Men no longer kneel to God in an appearance of virtue but they kiss the feet of ‘triumphant crime’. The implication, in the earlier version, that kneeling to God and worshipping crime are logical extensions of one another is made explicit: in this version, God is crime. The relentlessness of evil in this version is created by the repetition of ‘what’ in the first line, a more insistent word than ‘the’ in the first version giving the question a much more impatiently aggressive feel. The repetition of the root word, ‘crush’, intensifies the feeling of relentlessness through the active verb. However, the sickening hopelessness comes not from the culmination of apocalypse where Brontë is seeking to shock with an end-of-time scenario but the fact that this state of affairs has been such ‘from earliest time’. The lust for power is all pervasive; it is ‘our own humanity’.

In the second version of the opening of ‘Why ask’, the conditional and the qualified; the somewhat and gradually lessening sympathy is replaced by the all-consuming nature of evil, emphasised by the repetition of ‘shedders’. The destruction extends even to the perpetrators of the violence for they are ‘self-cursers’: their evil acts rebound on them. ‘Avid’ shows how they seek to create distress which recalls the ‘enthusiast’ of the first version. This is humanity, rotten to the core, and Emily Brontë does not pull any punches in her delineation of such brutality.

However, the second version is consistent with the first in that nature carries on regardless in producing ideal harvest conditions evoked by the sun that ‘blazed’. Even here, though, Brontë’s selection of this word with its harsh consonant sounds evokes harshness hinting that even the natural world is corrupted like the blood-stained well in the first version. Also, nature is seen, but not noticed by the ‘unregarding eyes’ of the perpetrators of violence; they are in a state of estrangement not noticing the ripening corn but ‘panting earth’ and

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<sup>13</sup> Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 281.

‘glowing skies’, an image that gestures towards exertion and the sexual violence of a rape. The earth has been used and cast away; the usual husbandry that would accompany harvest-time abandoned: ‘no hand the reaper’s sickle held’. The last section of this fragment makes it clear that the harvest is destruction in an unseasonable time: ‘garnered *months before*’ [emphasis added].

Gezari’s use of ‘apocalyptic’ to capture the tone of this poem is helpful; however, it is in danger of missing the main point of the fragment which is that this has always been the state of affairs.<sup>14</sup> To describe something as apocalyptic implies that the world has arrived at its worst and was therefore once better. Emily Brontë forces upon us a world that has always been utterly destructive in all places in terms that anticipate the words of Gerald Manley Hopkins: ‘No worst, there is none’.<sup>15</sup> The irony is, in this vision of humanity (in a strange way, this could be seen as a visionary poem) which seems to confirm the Christian conception of original sin, Emily Brontë rejects the language of apocalypse that is the necessary collarary, indeed, there is remarkable nonchalance in the way she evokes this state of affairs with an absence of indignation or judgement.

This poem, written in the early summer of 1848, are the last known words written by Emily Brontë. The sense of dislocation and estrangement in ‘Fought neither for my home nor God’ is powerful. The ground for this is prepared by the reference to ‘doubly cursed’ in the previous line linking to ‘home’ and ‘God’: the mercenary is cursed as he fights for neither of these; futility is the element in which he moves. However, it is important to be reminded here that Brontë is not making a moral judgement. The mercenary is not in this position through the cause and effect of his own actions. It is simply as a result of the estrangement that comes from inhabiting the world. This state of being is a profound exile and an unbearable experience of separation that can only be ended by death.

<sup>14</sup> Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 281.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Manley Hopkins, *Gerald Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, Ed. Catherine Phillips, 1986, (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 167.

*'In Fluctuation Fixed': Emily Brontë's Home in Movement*

This bleakness contrasts with the seeming confidence of 'No Coward Soul is Mine', written over two years earlier in January 1846. When considered through the lens of homesickness, the poem seems to provide a confident evocation of at-homeness where the 'life, that in me hast rest' gestures towards an internalisation of the muse meaning that Brontë is not dependent on externalised visionary visitors. This state of rest is remarkably different from the tone in earlier poems where there is struggle. For example, in 'Plead for Me', the muse is an oxymoronic 'darling pain that wounds and sears'. This muse is strongly other and, as some feminist critics have argued, masculine (though in 'How clear she shines', the invocation of the muse, 'Yes, Fancy, come, my Fairy love! / Those throbbing temples softly kiss', sounds decidedly feminine). One such critic, Margaret Homans, has argued that 'Brontë is troubled by the apparent otherness of her mind's powers, which she imagines as a series of masculine visitants who bring visionary experience to her'.<sup>16</sup> While this is true it is not the whole story. 'No coward soul' presents a muse who is at home within the poet. It is the same confidence that is gestured towards in one of Emily Brontë's Belgian essays; in 'King Harold Before the Battle of Hastings', Brontë describes Harold's internalisation of his powers in the face of defeat: 'At that moment, the spirit of Harold *gathered within itself* the energy, the power, and the hopes of the nation' (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup> Homans goes on to argue that Emily Brontë could not believe 'that any poetic power can be at once internal and powerful'.<sup>18</sup> 'No Coward Soul' challenges that assertion as it is the poet's garnering up of experience into herself, like Harold's before the battle of Hastings, that enables her to be at

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Bristow, ed. *Victorian Women Poets*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) p.84.

<sup>17</sup> Sue Lonoff, ed. p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Bristow, ed. p. 90.

rest. Linda Hughes develops the point that Brontë makes her utterance from a position of rest rather than a rhetorical need to assert herself through hubristic bombast; for her, Hughes writes, if ‘God indeed resides within, a sense of unbounded power and certainty are theological correlates rather than prideful assertion’.<sup>19</sup> Herein lies an element of Brontë’s Wordsworthian inheritance which emphasises the privacy of Wordsworth’s experience in ‘Strange fits of passion I have known’ where the stress falls on ‘I’. Arguably, it is when such visionary restfulness breaks off from the self that it gives rise to ghosts that evoke homesickness and plead, like Catherine, to be let back into their home.

Assurance is the key note in Brontë’s poem. The anguished yearning for a night-time visitor is replaced by confidence in an ‘*ever-present* Deity’ (emphasis added). Brontë is coy concerning the nature of this deity; whether one sees it as the conventional Christian God or the poet’s confidence in her own powers is immaterial. Her declaration that ‘what thou art may never be destroyed’ masks the fact that Brontë never reveals what the ‘God within my breast’ is as clothing it in language would be an act of destruction: the silence preserves. When Charlotte revised ‘No coward soul’ she attempted to give a voice to the ‘thou’ through capitalisation as if, through magnification, she could get to the heart of its identity.<sup>20</sup>

The poet at home involves a shutting out from all community. Brontë uses apocalyptic diction to express her sense of the God within her who renders all else redundant; as long as her God, ‘Wert left alone / Every existence would exist in thee’. It is as if Brontë experiences her own private apocalypse as the lines, ‘Though Earth and moon were gone / And suns and universes cease to be’ suggest. Yet there is the sense that all this takes place within the poet so the divide between internal and external is made redundant. The phrase, ‘left alone’, carries the sense of being protected from interference as well as being a singular presence. The presentation of being at home in this poem is an intensely private affair that is

<sup>19</sup> Linda K. Hughes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> See Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 221.

outside the realm of public discourse. This idea is reflected in the statement that, ‘Vain are the thousand creeds’ as they are unable to ‘waken doubt in one’. The public realm cannot threaten a state of rest. Given Brontë’s preoccupations elsewhere, the line, ‘Though Earth and moon were gone’, comes as a surprise as both spheres were dear to the poet: there is a change and a new state has been attained.

However, this state of arrival is far from the Victorian Tennyson who, in ‘Crossing the Bar’ hopes to arrive safely at the harbour and ‘see my Pilot face to face’.<sup>21</sup> What is striking about ‘No coward soul’ is the way that images of solidity and fluidity coalesce necessitating the need not to be a coward. It seems that the poet is seeking shelter from the storm. In this orthodox Christian reading, ‘heaven’s glories shine’ to the poet ‘in the world’s storm troubled sphere’. This imagery is continued in the third stanza where the alliteration of ‘Worthless as withered weeds’ susurrates onomatopoeically as it evokes the movement of froth on the sea. What the poet holds on to is ‘infinity’ being anchored to the ‘steadfast rock of immortality’. This oxymoron blends the physicality of being anchored to states that are immaterial.

Brontë’s imagery in the following verses contradicts the stillness that is the aim of being anchored. The spirit that ‘animates eternal years’ is creating rather than stilling movement when it ‘broods above’ (recalling the moving of the Holy Spirit above the chaos in the act of creation in both the Bible and Milton).<sup>22</sup> Then there are the insistent and active verbs in the following line and this verse disturbs the rest that an anchor is supposed to provide. It also recalls the opposition of Linton and Catherine’s heaven which juxtaposes stillness and energy. ‘No coward soul’ can also be laid over Lockwood’s meditations by the tombstones to reinforce the irony of his inability to imagine unquiet slumbers. The poem also engages in dialogue with Heathcliff’s accusation to Catherine that she shall be at peace while

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<sup>21</sup> Ricks, ed. p. 666.

<sup>22</sup> See Genesis 1:2 and *Paradise Lost*, I:10

he is in torment: a state of rest is repudiated by Emily Brontë. So, as ever in Brontë's writing, there are cross currents; while being at home involves a rejection of the world as worthless, in another sense, the 'wide embracing love' requires the whole world for its scope. It was this expansiveness to which Virginia Woolf was alluding when she wrote that, in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë wanted to say something about the eternal powers rather than simply create a tale set on the Yorkshire moors.<sup>23</sup>

Spatially, 'No coward soul' moves between expansion and constriction. The 'wide embracing love' is condensed into the 'every existence' that 'exists in thee'. The use of 'in' alludes to the poet's preference for the 'world within'. This constriction ensures that 'there is not room for death' and there is an inability to affect even an 'atom'. The poem oscillates outwards and inwards.

As Emily Brontë chooses a state of flux for her home the anchor ends up being an inadequate image. 'Being and breath' are active and the movement of the poem echoes the pattern of breathing in and out. It is in 'No coward soul' that Emily Brontë comes the closest to articulating a home and yet, in order for it to remain home, she has to let it go which echoes the ending of 'Why ask'. It is the case that home is a state of being (or becoming) rather than a fixed place (something that over-literal considerations of Brontë's homesickness have not taken into account. With which state the poet feels most at home is explored in 'How still, how happy', and yet the supposed privilege of stillness involves watching the activity of 'the blue ice curdling on the stream'. Indeed, in 'High waving heather', it is impossible to stop. Emily Brontë reveals her inheritance from Wordsworth here whose own Lucy is 'rolled round in earth's diurnal course' (7) – moving through both space and time and rejecting the stillness of eternity. Brontë is expressing at-homeness in the world of time and space and engages in dialogue with Shelley's statement in *Adonais* that 'Life, like a dome of

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<sup>23</sup> Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p. 202.

many coloured glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity' by preferring the staining of eternity with the dynamism of process.<sup>24</sup>

'High waving heather' encapsulates this at-homeness in movement. The paradox of Wordsworth's oxymoron, uttered by the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, of the scudding clouds moving across the sky being 'in fluctuation fixed' (IV:35) says best the feeling that, in this poem, Brontë has found an Aristotelian fixed place in which to stand. As well as the connotation of rootedness, 'fixed' also gestures towards the idea of being in one's right mind. This fluctuation of the natural elements is one in which vision is achieved, as Wordsworth writes of his four year old son's search for God that, 'when the wind was tossing the fir trees... noting those fluctuations he exclaimed eagerly – 'There's a bit of him I see it there!'.<sup>25</sup> In 'High waving heather', the line-end still nouns are stirred into action by present continuous verbs; Francis O'Gorman writes that these give the poem 'energy and movement like a verbal *moto perpetuo*.'<sup>26</sup> Michael Hurley's description of Swinburne's rhythms that 'encourage a cantering and constellated reading that disburses words' meanings into aggregating motifs' succinctly summarises what is happening in Brontë's poem with the 'aggregating motif' being that of freedom.<sup>27</sup> 'Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars' with its skilful blending of onomatopoeia and alliteration anticipates the concerns of later poems.

The main concern of this analysis of the poem is the way it resists ending; the end-rhymes in the second and sixth lines of each verse lock the poem down and frustrate the freedom which it seeks ('noon' and 'soon' anticipate the preoccupation in 'Stars' with its antecedent despair in the arrival of day; both poems revel in the night). The force with which freedom is gained in the first verse gives way to the 'desolate desert' and the 'fading as soon' of the second and third verses. In other words, this is a poem of visionary failure in that it is

<sup>24</sup> Mary Shelley, ed., Vol. 4, p. 104

<sup>25</sup> Wordsworth's letter to Catherine Clarkson, 1815.

<sup>26</sup> Francis O'Gorman, ed, p. 217.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Bevis, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013) p. 30.

forced to accept the sense of an ending. However, what differentiates Emily Brontë from Romantic forebears such as Keats (Brontë's poem could be read as an ode to a storm) is that she refuses to celebrate this transience; she wishes for an eternity of movement.

So the restlessness that provokes nostalgia and homesickness becomes the object of those two states of longing. In movement is home but stillness invites homesickness. This hope of home in movement is what coalesces the sterner ending of being set on a journey in 'Why ask' and the celebratory and confident tone of reaching a journey's end in 'No coward soul'. Ultimately, this movement images Emily Brontë's inability to find a home adequate to her imaginings and her choice of a state of homesickness and stoical facing up to the world as it is until such a home is found. 'The Philosopher' expresses this determination:

No promised Heaven, these wild desires,  
Could all or half fulfil;  
No threatened hell, with quenchless fires,  
Subdue this quenchless will!



*Appendix: 'Why Ask to know the date – the clime?'*

Why ask to know the date – the clime?

More than mere words they cannot be:

Men knelt to God and worshipped crime,

And crushed the helpless even as we –

But, they had learnt, from length of strife –

Of civil war and anarchy

To laugh at death and look on life

With somewhat lighter sympathy.

It was the autumn of the year,

The time to labouring peasants, dear:

Week after week, from noon to noon,

September shone as bright as June –

Still, never hand a sickle held;

The crops were garnered in the field –

Trod out and ground by horses' feet

While every ear was milky sweet;

And kneaded on the threshing-floor

With mire of tears and human gore.

Some said they thought that heaven's pure rain

Would hardly bless those fields again:

Not so – the all benignant skies

Rebuked that fear of famished eyes –  
July passed on with showers and dew,  
And August glowed in showerless blue;  
No harvest time could be more fair  
Had harvest fruits but ripened there.

And I confess that hate of rest,  
And thirst for things abandoned now,  
Had weaned me from my country's breast  
And brought me to that land of woe.

Enthusiast – in a name delighting,  
My alien sword I drew to free  
One race, beneath two standards fighting,  
For Loyalty, and Liberty –  
When kindred strive, God help the weak!  
A brother's ruth 'tis vain to seek:  
At first, it hurt my chivalry  
To join them in their cruelty;  
But I grew hard – I learnt to wear  
An iron front to terror's prayer;  
I learnt to turn my ears away  
From torture's groans, as well as they.  
By force I learnt – what power had I  
To say the conquered should not die?

What heart, one trembling foe to save  
When hundreds daily filled the grave?  
Yet, there *were* faces that could move  
A moment's flash of human love;  
And there were fates that made me feel  
I was not to the centre, steel –

I've often witnessed wise men fear  
To meet distress which they foresaw;  
And seeming cowards nobly bear  
A doom that thrilled the brave with awe;

Strange proofs I've seen, how hearts could hide  
Their secrets with a life-long pride,  
And then reveal it as they died –  
Strange courage, and strange weakness too,  
In that last hour when most are true,  
And timid natures strangely nerved  
To deeds from which the desperate swerved.  
These I may tell, but leave them now.  
Go with me where my thoughts would go;  
Now all today and all last night  
I've had one scene before my sight –

Wood-shadowed dales; a harvest moon

Unclouded in its glorious noon;  
A solemn landscape, wide and still;  
A red fire on a distant hill –  
A line of fires, and deep below,  
Another dusker, drearier glow –  
Charred beams, and lime, and blackened stones  
Self-piled in cairns o'er burning bones,  
And lurid flames that licked the wood  
Then quenched their glare in pools of blood –  
But yestereve – No! never care;  
Let street and suburb smoulder there –  
Smoke-hidden, in the winding glen,  
They lay too far to vex my ken.  
Four score shot down – all veterans strong –  
One prisoner spared, their leader young –  
And he within his house was laid,  
Wounded, and weak and nearly dead.  
We gave him life against his will;  
For he entreated us to kill –  
But statue-like we saw his tears –  
And harshly fell our captain's sneers!  
  
'Now, heaven forbid!' with scorn he said –  
'That noble gore our hands should shed  
Like common blood – retain thy breath

Or scheme, if thou canst purchase death –  
When men are poor we sometimes hear  
And pitying grant that dastard prayer;  
When men are rich, we make them buy  
The pleasant privilege, to die –  
O, we have castles reared for kings  
Embattled towers and buttressed wings  
Thrice three feet thick, and guarded well  
With chain, and bolt, and sentinel!  
We build our despots' dwellings sure;  
Knowing they love to live secure –  
And our respect for royalty  
Extends to thy estate and thee!

The suppliant groaned; his moistened eye  
Swam wild and dim with agony –  
The gentle blood could ill sustain  
Degrading taunts, unhonoured pain.  
Bold had he shown himself to lead;  
Eager to smite and proud to bleed –  
A man amid the battle's storm;  
An infant in the after calm.

Beyond the town his mansion stood  
Girt round with pasture-land and wood;

And there our wounded soldiers lying  
Enjoyed the ease of wealth in dying:

For him, no mortal more than he  
Had softened life with luxury;  
And truly did our priest declare  
'Of good things he had had his share.'

We lodged him in an empty place,  
The full moon beaming on his face  
Through shivered glass, and ruins, made  
Where shell and ball the fiercest played.  
I watched his ghastly couch beside  
Regardless if he lived or died –  
Nay, muttering curses on the breast  
Whose ceaseless moans denied me rest:

'Twas hard, I know, 'twas harsh to say,  
'Hell snatch thy worthless soul away!'  
But then 'twas hard my lids to keep  
Through this long night, estranged from sleep.  
Captive and keeper, both outworn,  
Each in his misery yearned for morn;  
Even though returning morn should bring  
Intenser toil and suffering.

Slow, slow it came! Our dreary room  
Grew drearier with departing gloom;  
Yet as the west wind warmly blew  
I felt my pulses bound anew,  
And turned to him – nor breeze, nor ray  
Revived that mound of shattered clay,  
Scarce conscious of his pain he lay –  
Scarce conscious that my hands removed  
The glittering toys his lightness loved –  
The jewelled rings, and locket fair  
Where rival curls of silken hair,  
Sable and brown revealed to me  
A tale of doubtful constancy

‘Forsake the world without regret,’  
I murmured in contemptuous tone;  
‘The world, poor wretch, will soon forget  
Thy noble name when thou art gone!  
Happy, if years of slothful shame  
Could perish like a noble name –  
If God did no account require  
And being with breathing might expire!’  
And words of such [contempt] I said,  
Cold insults o’er a dying bed,

Which as they darken memory now  
Disturb my pulse and flush my brow;  
I know that justice holds in store,  
Reprisals for those days of gore –  
Not for the blood, but for the sin  
Of stifling mercy's voice within.  
The blood spilt gives no pang at all;  
It is my conscience haunting me,  
Telling how oft my lips shed gall  
On many a thing too weak to be,  
Even in thought, my [enemy] –  
And whispering ever, when I pray,  
'God will repay – God will repay!'  
He does repay and soon and well  
The deeds that turn his earth to hell  
The wrongs that aim a venom'd dart  
Through nature at the Eternal Heart –  
Surely my cruel tongue was cursed  
I know my prisoner heard me speak  
A transient gleam of feeling burst  
And wandered o'er his haggard cheek  
And from his quivering lips there stole  
A look to melt a demon's soul  
A silent prayer more powerful far  
Than any breathed petitions are



Pleading in mortal agony  
To mercy's Source but not to me –  
Now I recall that glance and groan  
And wring my hands in vain distress  
Then I was adamantine stone  
Nor felt one touch of tenderness –  
My plunder ta'en I left him there  
Without [one breath] of morning air  
To struggle with his last despair  
Regardless of the wildered cry  
Which wailed for death yet wailed to die  
I left him there unwatched alone  
And eager sought the court below  
Where o'er a trough of chiselled stone  
An ice cold well did gurgling flow  
The water in its basin shed  
A stranger tinge of fiery red.  
I drank and scarcely marked the hue  
My food was dyed with crimson too  
As I went out a [ragged] child  
With wasted cheek and ringlets wild  
A shape of fear and misery  
Raised up her [helpless] hands to me  
And begged her father's face to see  
I spurned the piteous wretch away

Thy father's [face] is lifeless clay  
As thine mayst be ere fall of day  
Unless the truth be quickly told  
Where thou hast hid thy father's gold  
Yet in the intervals of pain  
He heard my taunts and moaned again  
And mocking moans did I reply  
And asked him why he would not die  
In noble agony – uncomplaining.  
Was it not foul disgrace and shame  
To thus disgrace his ancient name?  
Just then a comrade came hurrying in  
Alas, he cried, sin genders sin  
For every soldier slain they've sworn  
To hang up five come morn.  
They've ta'en of stranglers sixty-three  
Full thirty from one company  
And all my father's family  
And comrade thou hadst only one  
They've ta'en thy all thy little son  
Down at my captive's feet I fell  
I had no option in despair  
As thou wouldst save thy soul from hell  
My heart's own darling bid them spare  
Or human hate and hate divine

Blight every orphan flower of thine  
He raised his head – from death beguiled  
He wakened up he almost smiled  
Twice in my arms twice on my knee  
You stabbed my child and laughed at me  
And so, with choking voice he said  
I trust I hope in God she's dead  
Yet not to thee not even to thee  
Would I return such misery  
Such is that [fearful] grief I know  
I will not cause thee equal woe  
Write that they harm no infant there  
Write that it is my latest prayer  
I wrote – he signed and thus did save  
My treasure from the gory grave  
And O my soul longed wildly then  
To give his saviour life again.  
But heedless of my gratitude  
The silent corpse before me lay  
And still methinks in gloomy mood  
I see it fresh as yesterday  
The sad face raised imploringly  
To mercy's God and not to me –  
The last [look] of that agony  
I could not rescue him his child

I found alive and tended well  
But she was full of anguish wild  
And hated me like we hate hell  
And weary with her savage woe  
One moonless night I let her go

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