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**Emily Brontë and Four Romantic and Post-Romantic Writers**  
**— Intellectual Trends in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe**

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## Abstract

This thesis looks at the intellectual and philosophical aspects of Emily Brontë's writings in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century European literary and cultural context, through the comparisons of her works with those of four other Romantic and Victorian authors – the German Romantics Hölderlin and Novalis, and the English Victorians Tennyson and Arnold.

The main texts the thesis deals with include Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), her poems, and the Belgian essays (1842), Hölderlin's *Hyperion* (1797-1799), Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* (1800), Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850) and Arnold's early poems. Apart from having a specific focus on Emily Brontë's relationship with the European Romantic movement, the thesis also covers topics such as the decline of Christianity in the early Victorian period, the rise of Darwinian discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the transmutation of Romanticism in the Victorian context.

The thesis has found that there are two ultimately incongruent paradigms of thought in Brontë's writings, one derived from the Romantic tradition of the previous generation, the other from the scientific discourse of the early Victorian period. Many of the conflicts and tensions in Brontë's writings are generated from this. Thus Brontë's situation offers an unusual example of an author who is perpetually caught up in the spiritual dilemma of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, by comparing Brontë's thinking with those of four other authors who occupy prominent places in the literary and philosophical canon of the Romantic and post-Romantic periods, the thesis has illustrated part of a larger trend of European literary and intellectual movements.

To Mum and Dad

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# Introduction

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## Description of Project

As the author of *Wuthering Heights*, today Emily Brontë is one of the most popular writers of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, with critics and the public continuing to be fascinated by her story. Apart from this, interest in Brontë's poems has increased since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the effort of elevating her to be a distinctive poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the publication of her Belgian essays at the end of the last century sheds new light on her thinking, and reveals to the world an intellectual mind with a power for logical reasoning.

Needless to say, a plethora of works have been written on Emily Brontë, which adopt widely divergent approaches, ranging from the traditional biographical perspective to Feminist, Marxist, and post-colonialist theories. While acknowledging the inherent merits of these studies, the present thesis seeks to study Emily Brontë from a somewhat different angle. It focuses on the intellectual and philosophical aspects of her works, and is in particular an effort to explore the literary and philosophical significance of her writings within the 19<sup>th</sup>-century European literary and intellectual contexts. The thesis seeks to achieve this goal by associating Brontë's writings with the writings of her literary predecessors and other writers of her own era, who share the same intellectual concerns.

Apart from the writings of Emily Brontë, the main texts this thesis will introduce include Hölderlin's *Hyperion* (1797-1799), Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* (1800), Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), Arnold's "Dover Beach", Switzerland poems, "Empedocles on Etna" (1852) and several other of his early poems. Two of these main texts are from the early Romantic period, which immediately precedes Emily Brontë's time, and the two others are from the early Victorian period, which is contemporaneous with Brontë. By relating these texts individually to the works of Emily Brontë, and exploring the common themes or issues they engage with, I seek to demonstrate Brontë's intimate connection with the 19<sup>th</sup> century European Romantic movement, as well as the cultural and intellectual environments of the early Victorian period. While on a larger scale, by delineating the evolution of relevant Romantic concepts and ideas from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the thesis will also illustrate the development of Romantic thinking in European literary and intellectual history along with its variations among individual thinkers, among whom Emily Brontë is one.

## Literature Review

Once referred to as “the sphinx of our modern literature,”<sup>1</sup> Emily Brontë emerged on the literary stage as a somewhat mysterious figure, whose work baffled many of its contemporary readers and critics. At the same time the scarcity of biographical information about the author, who apparently led a solitary and secluded life, certainly did not help to alleviate the situation. Her novel *Wuthering Heights*, powerful but enigmatic, popular but controversial, has generated much discussion among the public since its publication in 1847. But it was not until almost half a century later, with the publication of Mary Ward’s Introduction to the Haworth edition of the Brontës’ work that the true merits of this work started to be recognized. Following this, Brontë’s literary reputation rose to prominence when David Cecil published his seminal essay on Charlotte and Emily Brontë in his *Early Victorian Novelists* in 1934.

Needless to say, today the entire corpus of literary scholarship on Emily Brontë is enormous. The present literature review endeavors to present a detailed account of the critical works on Emily Brontë to date, and will also highlight the works that are particularly relevant to the discussions of the present thesis.

### Early Criticism

Although *Wuthering Heights* is the best-known work by its author, the publishing career of Emily Brontë started off when her and her sisters’ *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* was published in the spring of 1846. The *Poems* sold only two copies, but received a few encouraging reviews by contemporary magazines, which tended to single out Emily’s verse as of the best quality.<sup>2</sup> The little book was to receive renewed attention after the publication of *Wuthering Heights*. As time went on, the entire corpus of Emily Brontë’s poems would be further expanded, first by her sister Charlotte, then by later biographers, to some two hundred poems. The shaping and formation of Brontë’s poetic work has proved to have a considerable influence on Brontë’s reputation and literary status in later years.

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<sup>1</sup> Clement K. Shorter, *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896), Kindle edition, chap. 6.

<sup>2</sup> For example, one critic commented, “It is shared, however, by the three brothers – as we suppose them to be – in very unequal proportions; requiring in the case of Acton Bell, the indulgences of affection ... and rising, in that of Ellis, into an inspiration, which may yet find an audience in the outer world.” “2. From an unsigned notice, *Athenaeum*, 4 July 1846,” in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Routledge, 2007), Kindle edition.

*Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847, after the tremendous success of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in the book market. The earliest critics of the book therefore often tended to confuse and conflate the identity of the two sisters.<sup>3</sup> Along with other Brontë sisters' novels, *Wuthering Heights* was criticized for its "coarseness",<sup>4</sup> "vulgarity",<sup>5</sup> and moral ambiguity. On the other hand, the novel's originality, vigor and dramatic style were acknowledged. As a result, the critical articles during this period could often be seen to contain an oddly mingled expression of admiration and repugnance.<sup>6</sup> This was accompanied with the puzzlement and consequent disturbance about what kind of message the novelist was trying to deliver, which was partly derived from the author's refusal to assign an authoritative voice to define the nature of the opposing and seemingly irreconcilable forces in the novel. "Strange" was one of the most commonly used words to describe the novel. To most of the Victorian audience, the startling and subversive passages in *Wuthering Heights* were far reaching, to the extent that they could not be fully understood.

Despite this, there appeared at least one favourable response before Charlotte Brontë's 1850 *Preface* of the second edition of *Wuthering Heights* came out. Sydney Dobell, writing for the *Palladium* in early 1850, commented that each character and place in the novel bore "the stamp of high genius", and praised the work as "the unformed writing of a giant's hand; the 'large utterance' of a baby god."<sup>7</sup> He also shrewdly pointed out the poetic quality of the novel. The Shakespearean lineage of the novel and the novel's parallel with Hoffmann's work were also acknowledged for the first time during these few years.<sup>8</sup>

In 1850, Charlotte Brontë published the famous *Biographical Notice* on her two sisters, who were both dead by that time. In the *Preface*, in an effort to defend Emily Brontë's name, Charlotte attributed the "rude", "rustic"<sup>9</sup> and shocking features of *Wuthering Heights* to the fact that Emily Brontë led a reclusive life, and was therefore unaware of and untamed by the social norms and conventions of Victorian society. Her novel was as a consequence referred to as a natural product,

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<sup>3</sup> Other factors which contributed to the confusion of the identities of the authors: the Brontës' choice to use pseudonyms, the deliberate exploitation of Emily Brontë's publisher.

<sup>4</sup> "64. From an unsigned notice of *Wuthering Heights*, *Literary World*, April 1848," in Allott, *The Critical Heritage*, Kindle edition.

<sup>5</sup> "65. G. W. Peck, from an unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights*, *American Review*, June 1848," *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> A notable example is G. W. Peck's review. *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> "80. Sydney Dobell on 'Currer Bell' and *Wuthering Heights*, *Palladium*, September 1850," in Allott, *The Critical Heritage*, Kindle edition.

<sup>8</sup> One of the comments on the novel's Shakespearean affinity is "In conversation we have heard of it spoken of by some as next in merit to Shakespeare for depth of insight and dramatic power" "65. G. W. Peck, from an unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights*, *American Review*, June 1848," *ibid*; the parallel with Hoffmann's writing could be seen in "102. Emile Montégut, from an article, *Revue des deux mondes*, 1 July 1857", *ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> "81. Charlotte Brontë on *Wuthering Heights*, 1850," *ibid*.

“hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials.”<sup>10</sup> The article was to have a profound and lasting impact on Emily Brontë’s literary image, and significantly influence the way her novel and other works were perceived by the critics and the general public.

The year 1857 saw the publication of Elizabeth Gaskell’s influential *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, which is a milestone in the early reception history of the Brontës. It fanned the public’s interest in the biographical information about the Brontës further, and also served to validate the literary figure of Emily Brontë, who now has become a mysterious, reclusive, and solitary genius. The release of *Life* also promoted a number of reviews and comments on Emily Brontë and her works. The previous harsh statements directed towards *Wuthering Heights* along with its author were to some extent softened. Critics started to compare the novel with poetic drama, and recognize more and more the author’s imaginative gifts.<sup>11</sup> The spiritual struggles in her works were also duly taken notice of. For example, in 1857, E. S. Dallas commented that “Ellis, [...] is somewhat of a heathen, and writes in the utmost despair: she writes calmly, but with intensity; and from the intensity of her woe there issues a music of expression which Currer [...] never attained.”<sup>12</sup> Dallas also associated the work with Greek tragedy.<sup>13</sup>

During the next two decades, biographical criticism continued to dominate the public’s interest in the Brontë sisters. In 1877, Sir Thomas Wemyss Reid published his book on the Brontës, calling *Wuthering Heights* “the weirdest story in the English language.”<sup>14</sup> Reid was, like many others, both awed and revolted by the novel itself. And so like many others, he regarded Emily Brontë as the outstanding poet within the family, who is “a rare and splendid genius,”<sup>15</sup> and a marvel to all, but reserved the highest praise to her sister Charlotte. Nevertheless, he saw *Wuthering Heights* as a work produced by a powerful and intellectual mind, which never showed a lack of mastery in the novel’s narrative. He was also among the earliest to notice that the novel was neatly and carefully structured – “Every date fits into its place, and so does every incident... Emily permits no fact however minute

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> For example, one critic commented, “Yet the book does not altogether lack the gentler graces of poetry. In the concise realism of Currer there is little indeed of that abstract and ethereal spirit men call the imagination; but it inspired the wild and plaintive music of many of Ellis’s songs.” “95. John Skelton, from an unsigned review, *Fraser’s Magazine*, May 1857,” in Allott, *The Critical Heritage*, Kindle edition

<sup>12</sup> “99. E. S. Dallas, from an unsigned review, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, July 1857,” *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> “The whole gloomy tale is in its idea the nearest approach that has been made in our time to the pitiless fatality which is the dominant idea of Greek tragedy.” *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Wemyss Reid, *Charlotte Brontë: A Monograph* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997), 209, first published 1877 by Scribner, Armstrong.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

to drop from her grasp”,<sup>16</sup> thus invalidating the claim of some early critics that the novel was badly written and constructed. But it was to take another half a century for the critics to discover the novel’s detailed and meticulously arranged timeline, and work out the story’s chronology in its full scale.

Following Reid’s article was Swinburne’s in the same year. It was generally regarded as one of the first to celebrate the genius of Emily with full vigor. The article also pointed out the primitive worship of Nature in the novel, and furthermore stated that Brontë’s “clear stern verse” exhibited “such grandeur of anti-Christian fortitude and self-controlling self-reliance.”<sup>17</sup> The general rise of Emily Brontë’s reputation after the 1870s was affected by the loosening of moral codes during that historical period, and it went hand in hand with the canonization process of the Brontë sisters during the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1883, A. Mary F. Robinson published *Emily Brontë*, which was the first individual biography on Emily Brontë. It added little new biographical information, whereas, the review of the book by Swinburne later in the year was more valuable.<sup>18</sup> In this review Swinburne further likened *Wuthering Heights* to tragedy, and praised its poetic quality, setting the final seal in literary history on *Wuthering Heights* as an outstanding work of poetic imagination. A couple of years earlier, in 1881, Peter Bayne also published his second critical analysis of the Brontës.<sup>19</sup> It contains a new analysis of Emily Brontë’s metaphysical belief, and begins by delving into one of her most enigmatic poems – “The Philosopher” – in order to do so. Part of the article is quite shrewd and insightful, particularly in that Bayne sought to interpret the theme of the novel (which was a subject rarely touched upon then) by first analysing Brontë’s poems. Bayne also pointed out that the world Emily depicted was devoid of God, while there was also no “divine force to be counted on to ‘make for’ righteousness.”<sup>20</sup>

During this period, the general trend of the critics leaning more and more in Emily’s favour found its ultimate expression in Mary Ward’s Introduction to the Haworth edition of the Brontës’ work, published in 1890, which confidently asserted that “Emily’s genius was the greater of the two

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 209-210.

<sup>17</sup> “108. Swinburne, a note on Charlotte Brontë, 1877,” in Allott, *The Critical Heritage*, Kindle edition.

<sup>18</sup> “112. Swinburne on Emily Brontë, *Athenaeum*, 16 June 1883,” *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Bayne commented on Emily Brontë in his *Two Great Englishwomen: Mrs Browning and Charlotte Brontë* (1881). The criticism expands on his earlier criticism on the Brontë sisters in 1857 prior to the release of *Life*.

<sup>20</sup> “110. Peter Bayne on the Brontës, 1881,” in Allott, *The Critical Heritage*, Kindle edition.

(Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë)".<sup>21</sup> The article furthermore recognized that *Wuthering Heights* had "much more than a mere local or personal significance", but belonged to "a particular European moment."<sup>22</sup> It in particular singled out German Romanticism's influence on Emily Brontë's work. By doing so, the article prepared the way for better understanding of Brontë's works within the 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary and intellectual contexts. Ward in her article also praised some of Emily's poems as belonging to "what is noblest and most vital in English verse",<sup>23</sup> though the author's religious faith for her remained a mystery.

## 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Criticism

### *Formalist Readings*

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the continuing growth of Emily Brontë's literary reputation, which was directly related to the gradual ascendancy of formalist literary methods. This trend culminated in Russian formalist and New Criticism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Virginia Woolf's chapter "*Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights*", first published in 1916 in her book *The Common Reader*, was a forerunner of this kind of critical approach. The chapter regarded Emily Brontë's writing as superior to her sisters', on the ground that it exhibits more fully mastered artistic control. Woolf also praised *Wuthering Heights* for its effacement of an authorial voice, which presented to the reader a relatively objectified world. According to Woolf, this distinguished the novel from Charlotte's "self-centered and self-limited" writing.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, Woolf shared a similar viewpoint with Mary Ward.

Ten years later, in 1926, C. P. Sanger published his *The Structure of Wuthering Heights*. In this book Sanger offered a comprehensive and detailed account of the novel's chronology and overall structure, which showed that the dates of the events and the ages of the characters were carefully worked out; pointed out that the symmetrical pedigree of the two families was intricate but balanced; demonstrated that the author had an accurate knowledge of the contemporary law concerning property ownership and inheritance, and applied this knowledge to the construction of the novel. Sanger's work validated and enhanced Woolf's earlier claim about the novelist's artistic control,

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Ward, "Introduction," in *The Brontë Sisters: Critical Assessments*, ed. Eleanor McNeese, vol. 2, *Responses to the Novels: "Agnes Grey", "Wuthering Heights", and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall"* (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1996), 42. Anne was never seriously considered.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Virginia Woolf, "*Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights*," in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth, 1951), 199.

tellingly revealed Emily Brontë's literary craftsmanship, and counteracted the long-existing view that saw the novel as an immature product by a talented but self-taught genius.

In 1934 came David Cecil's seminal essay on Charlotte and Emily Brontë, which was included in his *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*. Cecil's essay was essentially another structure-focused reading of Brontë's work. He regarded *Wuthering Heights* a metaphysical novel, which took on the subject matter of tragedy or epic. Cecil believed that the primary concern of Brontë in the novel was human beings' relation to "time and eternity", "death and fate", and "the cosmic scheme" of which their lives form a part.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he pointed out that Brontë's fictional world was symmetrically constructed based on the organizing principle of "storm" and that of "calm". The two opposing natural forces were respectively inhabited by the Earnshaw family, who lived in Wuthering Heights, and the Linton family, who lived in the Grange. The antagonism and dynamic movements of these two forces formed the basic pattern of the novel, until the novel ended in the restoration of peace and harmony. Cecil's reading of the novel has gained a wide currency, while his proposal that the novel is structured under two opposing but interactive principles has been adapted and revised in numerous ways by later critics, which can still be seen in today's criticism.

Apart from giving a persuasive account of the novel's structure, Cecil also commented on the novel's take on the issue of morality. He pointed out that the author's outlook was not "immoral", but "pre-moral", which concerns itself not with established moral standards existing in the society, but with those conditions of life upon which "the naïve erections of the human mind we call moral standards are built up."<sup>26</sup> And by arguing that Emily Brontë "illustrates some aspects of human nature more fully than the other Victorians,"<sup>27</sup> Cecil grappled with the novel's treatment of human nature and human beings' place within the natural world, which was to be given a fuller account by Joseph Carroll much later. Cecil's chapter successfully put *Wuthering Heights* into the existing literary canon, which makes Emily Brontë perhaps the only writer in English literature to have secured a place in the canon with a single novel.

However, not all interpretations of *Wuthering Heights* saw the opposing forces in the novel as mythical archetypes. French critic Jacques Blondel in his thesis *Emily Brontë: Expérience Spirituelle et Création Poétique*, which was published in 1955, regarded the novel as a commingling of Romanticism and Realism, which grounded the work in its own historical context. Blondel offered a

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<sup>25</sup> David Cecil, "Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*," in McNees, *Critical Assessments*, vol. 2, 104.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

comprehensive account of both Emily Brontë's novel and poems, and in particular saw a theological and philosophical mind in her poetry, which was rare among his contemporary critics.

During the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the height of New Criticism, more and more critics adopted the method of close reading and paid attention to the deployment of symbols and metaphors within a given text. This moved the study of Emily Brontë's writings into a more formalist hermeneutic direction. In 1949 Mark Schorer showed that *Wuthering Heights* used a matrix of natural images, such as fire, wind, water, to express the characters' different personalities.<sup>28</sup> In 1952 Dorothy Van Ghent's essay "The Window Figure and the Two Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*" showed how the image of the window in the novel was used as a symbol for the boundary between the natural and the civilized world. Van Ghent commented on the mystical aspect of *Wuthering Heights*, stating that those "powers of darkness"<sup>29</sup> which worked their way into Lockwood's dreams are autonomous, "not only in the 'outsideness' of external nature, beyond the physical windowpane, but also within, even in the soul least prone to passionate excursion."<sup>30</sup> Van Ghent thus points to the mystical power of the universe both within and without the self indicated in the novel, which is simultaneously associated with the domain of Night, dream and even death. The essay also emphasized the coherence of the novel's narrative structure, by pointing out the narrative frames of the two main narrators, and the presence of the "two children figure" throughout the novel. A stream of similar readings followed in the 1950s and 1960s. Most notable was Elizabeth Van de Laar's *The Inner Structure of "Wuthering Heights"*, published in 1969.

In the 1950s formalist readings also drew particular attention to the narrators in *Wuthering Heights*. Notions such as the "unreliable narrator" have stimulated essays such as John K. Mathison's "Nelly Dean and the Power of *Wuthering Heights*" (1956), Carl R. Woodring's "The Narrators of *Wuthering Heights*" (1957), and James Hafley's "The Villain in *Wuthering Heights*" (1958), which reflected the critics' interest in narrative strategy and different viewpoints of the novel at the time.

### *Biographical and Historical Readings*

Starting from the 1920s, the growing availability of Emily Brontë's juvenile writings, such as her Gondal poems, changed the way Brontë was perceived by the literary critics and the general public.

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Schorer, "Fiction and the Matrix of Analogy," *Kenyon review* 11, no. 4 (Autumn, 1949): 539-560, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4333087>.

<sup>29</sup> Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 7, no. 3 (Dec. 1952), 190.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

These writings revealed that Emily Brontë had a literary apprenticeship long before the publication of her works, thus discrediting the view that she was an amateur or inexperienced writer. As a result her novel and poems were no longer seen as unconscious autobiographical outpourings, but as the mature literary productions of a practiced writer.

During this period, a couple of attempts were made to study Brontë's early poems in relation to her other writings. These included Leicester Bradner's "The Growth of *Wuthering Heights*" (1933), and Helen Brown and Joan Mott's "The Gondal Saga" (1938). In 1941, C. W. Hatfield produced the first complete edition of Brontë's poems. Following this, Fannie Ratchford wrote two books in an effort to reconstruct Brontë's Gondal world, the prose part of which did not survive. These are *The Brontës' Web of Childhood* in 1941, and *Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse* in 1955.

With the publication of the relatively accurate and comprehensive edition of Emily Brontë's poems by Hatfield, critics started to draw attention to Brontë's relationship with Romantic poets. Efforts were made to trace the influence of early Romantic writers, such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, in her poems. These were followed by the claim that Emily Brontë shared aspects of Romantic ideology and its political agenda, while her writings manifested the transgressing force of the Romantic sublime. A notable example of this strand of interpretation is Georges Bataille's chapter on Emily Brontë in his *Literature and Evil* (1957), in which he called *Wuthering Heights* "the late masterpiece" of the Romantic movement.<sup>31</sup>

Bataille interpreted the novel as primarily an exploration of the irrational transgressive energy embedded in a person's childhood, which sought to subvert the established order of the society. Under this reading, Heathcliff is the tragic romantic hero who defies the law of the society and rejects its rationality. He seeks to transcend the limitation of ordinary existence so as to embrace life in its fullness. Catherine is a figure who is tempted by Heathcliff and the subversive force he represents. In the end she dies for her transgression of the natural law. Bataille also saw the anguish in Brontë's poems and novel as a sign of spiritual struggle, and the mystical state transiently achieved, which appears not infrequently in Brontë's writings, as a state of divine intoxication. Bataille's reading has an autobiographical tendency, which has its limitations, but it serves as an exemplary case in which Brontë's writings are examined and evaluated within the context of the Romantic movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>31</sup> Georges Bataille, "Emily Brontë," in *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alistair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyars, 2001), 24, first published in 1957.

In 1963, J. Hillis Miller offered a similar but revised view of Bataille's reading. In his book *The Disappearance of God*, Miller examined Emily Brontë's works alongside those of four other Victorian writers, Thomas De Quincey, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Though Miller also saw Brontë as an author who was within the Romantic tradition, he differed from Bataille in claiming that in the Victorian era, when "the spiritual power" had become "altogether beyond the world,"<sup>32</sup> writers like Brontë could no longer experience a Wordsworthian presence in Nature. Therefore as the task of bridging the gap between the human and the divine became more formidable, Brontë's situation was more desperate than that of her literary predecessors. Based on this understanding, Miller saw Heathcliff and Catherine as the ones who attempted to bring God back into the world in the novel. While unlike Bataille, he believed that the novel ended in triumph rather than defeat: the love of Heathcliff and Catherine purged the world and restored it to peace, where God became an immanent presence. Miller's placement of Emily Brontë as a post-Romantic author is more accurate than Bataille's view. In addition, both Miller and Bataille's interpretations revealed that the world of *Wuthering Heights* lacked a divine presence at its center, whether it was a Romantic sublime force that counteracted the mundane ordinary life, or a traditional Christian God who had deserted the world. They furthermore pointed out that the experience of this lack of divine presence was the driving force behind the behaviors of the characters in the novel.

Several critical works were produced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which tended to draw upon Brontë's biographical and historical background to facilitate the interpretation of her works. In 1969 John Hewish published his *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study*, which gave an insightful and in-depth analysis of Brontë writings as a whole. In this book Hewish asserted that Emily Brontë had "an essentially religious or philosophical preoccupation with the meaning of human existence."<sup>33</sup> He furthermore stated that Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* consists of "a state of semi-permanent rebellion against the inadequacy of the Christian eschatology"<sup>34</sup> to provide an adequate answer to the existence of pain and evil in this world, while it is at the same time "perhaps, unique for its time among English novels in that a strictly rationalist view of human life as part of nature is one of its organizing principles."<sup>35</sup> Hewish also gave a comprehensive account of the literary sources that may have influenced Emily Brontë, the most prominent being the Romantic writings of the previous generation. But he believed that to see *Wuthering Heights* as "a work of high

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<sup>32</sup> J. Hillis Miller, introduction to *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-century Writers* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 14.

<sup>33</sup> John Hewish, *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

romantic protest” was “attractive”, but possibly inadequate, for it failed to account for the irony and ambiguity which were also part of the narrative.<sup>36</sup> Hewish also argued that Brontë exhibited ability for logical reasoning by drawing attention to her Belgian essays. Hewish’s reading of Emily Brontë uncovered a literary mind which was not only well-informed by the literary traditions of her day, but also possessed a strong intellectual vigor.

Similarly, in her book *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, which was first published in 1988, Stevie Davies referred to Brontë as “the sole major English novelist with a full understanding of a dialectical philosophy”, whose mind, “whilst capable of boundless imaginative extension, is also essentially systematic and logical.”<sup>37</sup> Davies commented in particular on several aspects of Brontë’s association with German Romanticism. These include: the systematic dualism of *Wuthering Heights*, and its affinity to Schelling; the application of “romantic irony” in her writing, as elaborated by Schlegel; the psychopathology of the “double personality”, which was a distinct feature of Hoffmann’s work; and most notably, the emphasis on dream, the concern with night and the unconscious, and their connection with the inner world of the infinite, which were a preoccupation of Novalis’ work.<sup>38</sup> Davies believed that Brontë’s writings could be better explained and understood by being put back into the contemporary context, and examined within the literary and intellectual trends of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1971, Winifred Gerin published *Emily Brontë: A Biography*, which also adopted an autobiographical reading of Brontë’s works. Other similar efforts made during this period include Stevie Davies’s *Emily Brontë: The Artist as a Free-Woman* (1983), Edward Chitham’s *A Life of Emily Brontë* (1987), Katherine Frank’s 1990 *Emily Brontë: A Chainless Soul* (1990), and Steve Vine’s *Emily Brontë* (1998).

#### *Psycho-analytical, Feminist, Marxist, Deconstructionist, Post-colonial and Cultural Theories*

It has been said that “*Wuthering Heights* has suffered more than most novels from a surfeit of theoretical criticism.”<sup>39</sup> Criticism on Emily Brontë since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century has largely developed in line with the popular trends of literary theories. Apart from the formalistic approach, which was mentioned earlier, various methods of literary criticism have been applied in the analysis of

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>37</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: Women’s Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Walter Simpson, *Emily Brontë* (London: Country Life, 1929), 156.

*Wuthering Heights*, along with Brontë's other writings. These critical approaches include psycho-analytical theories, feminist theories, Marxist criticism, deconstructionist theories, post-colonial theories, and cultural criticism.

Influenced by the predominant interests in Brontë's biography in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, early psycho-analytical readings are biographically-oriented. These include Romer Wilson's *All Alone: The Life and Private History of Emily Jane Brontë* (1928), and Virginia Moore's *The Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë* (1936). Starting from the 1960s, more text-based psycho-analytical readings began to appear. These include Eric Solomon's "The Incest Theme in *Wuthering Heights*" (1959), Thomas Moser's "What's the Matter with Emily Jane? Conflicting Impulses in *Wuthering Heights*" (1962), Wade Thompson's "Infanticide and Sadism in *Wuthering Heights*" (1963), Juliet Mitchell's chapter "*Wuthering Heights: Romanticism and Rationality*" (1984), and Philip K. Wion's "The Absent Mother in *Wuthering Heights*" (2003).

Feminist readings started to appear after the 1960s, and became dominant in the 1970s. Notable works in this field are Inga-Stina Ewbank's *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early Victorian Female Novelists* (1966), and Margaret Homans's 1978 essay "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*".

The first Marxist criticism on *Wuthering Heights* appeared in 1947. It was titled "Emily Brontë: The First of the Moderns", written by David Wilson. Four years later, Arnold Kettle claimed in his chapter "Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*" that the subject of *Wuthering Heights* was "England in 1847".<sup>40</sup> By stating that the novel's primary concern was not love in the abstract but the passions of the living people, Kettle grounded the novel within its contemporary context. Kettle saw *Wuthering Heights* as essentially a story about Heathcliff's rebellion against capitalism in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, although he was in the end assimilated into the ruling class. In 1975, Terry Eagleton's chapter on *Wuthering Heights*, in his *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, offered an influential Marxist reading of the novel. Eagleton claimed the novel was structured upon the opposing social and economic interests of two different classes: the industrial bourgeoisie, which was represented by the Lintons; and the landed gentry or aristocracy, represented by the Earnshaws. Building upon Kettle's reading of the novel, Eagleton saw Heathcliff as an individual who sought to subvert the oppressive social structure and obtain triumph, by infiltrating the structure itself and becoming part

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<sup>40</sup> Arnold Kettle, "Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*," in *An Introduction to the English Novel*, vol. 1, *To George Eliot* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 130.

of it. Eagleton's reading is most notable for its concentration on class struggle and its Marxist interpretation of the novel's plot.

Evolving from the establishment of basic contradictions in structuralist theories, deconstructionist readings emphasized the indeterminacy of the interpretation of the novel, which constantly generates further interpretations. Notable examples are Carol Jacobs's "*Wuthering Heights: At the Threshold of Interpretation*" (1979), and J. Hillis Miller's chapter on *Wuthering Heights* in his *Fiction and Repetition in Seven English Novels* (1982). These two articles both argued that *Wuthering Heights* constantly eluded and resisted coherent interpretation. Though the novel gave the impression that there was a secret core at the center, which could account for everything happening in the story, such an impression only served as a stimulus to drive interpretation further. Miller also mentioned the fundamental heterogeneity of the novel, which presents "a definite group of possible meanings" which were "logically incompatible",<sup>41</sup> thus pointing out the ideological schism in the text. Other deconstructionist readings during this period are John T. Matthews's "Framing in *Wuthering Heights*" (1985), Michael S. Macovski's "*Wuthering Heights* and the Rhetoric of Interpretation" (1987), and John Allen Stevenson's "Heathcliff Is Me: *Wuthering Heights* and the Question of Likeness" (1988). Macovski's article appeared to be more optimistic, by concluding that the novel "continually keeps the possibility of interpretation open by sustaining a rhetorical process of understanding".<sup>42</sup>

Post-colonial readings of *Wuthering Heights* mainly focused upon the depiction of Heathcliff and his racial background. Maja-Lisa Von Sneidern's "*Wuthering Heights* and the Liverpool Slave Trade" (1995) associated the story's historical background with the Liverpool slave trade. Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995) discussed Heathcliff in relation to the Irish famine and Irish immigration. Other post-colonial readings also identified Heathcliff with the gypsy population in 19<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>43</sup>

Cultural criticism, which flourished after the 1980s, sought to analyze Emily Brontë's works within large historical and social contexts. Nancy Armstrong in her *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987) described how *Wuthering Heights* helped to produce the

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<sup>41</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "*Wuthering Heights: Repetition and the 'Uncanny'*," in *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 51.

<sup>42</sup> Michael S. Macovski, "*Wuthering Heights* and the Rhetoric of Interpretation," *ELH* 54, no. 2 (Summer, 1987): 368, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873028>.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Abby Bardi, "'Gypsies' and Property in British Literature: *Orlando* and *Wuthering Heights*," in *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture: Studies in European Culture and History*, ed. Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 105-122.

modern female subject. Patsy Stoneman's *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights"* (1996), articulated comprehensively how Emily Brontë's writings had transformed and been transformed by popular culture from their publication to the present day.

From the 1980s onward, literary criticism on Emily Brontë tended to combine multiple critical theories and literary approaches. Most notable was feminism's engagement with other critical perspectives. For example, Nancy Armstrong's above-mentioned work was at the same time an effort to examine how Brontë's writings reconfigured the female self in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century social context. Apart from this, James Kavanagh's *Emily Brontë* (1985) served as an exemplary case that consisted of a synthesis of different perspectives from several theorists and literary fields. The book combined Freudian notions of family romance, the Lacanian concept of "Imaginary", Marxist emphasis on social and economic conditions, with feminist insight from Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and provided what was essentially a structuralist reading of *Wuthering Heights*.

## 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Criticism

Into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, criticism on Emily Brontë continued the tendency of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with different critical approaches combined with each other. There was at the same time an increasing emphasis on cultural studies, which called for renewed attention to the historical and cultural context of the novel. Lamenting 19<sup>th</sup> century biographers' obsession with Brontë's personal life rather than the text itself, Lucasta Miller in her *The Brontë Myth* (2001) claimed "it is time to turn the tables and put the writings first".<sup>44</sup> Miller's work is an effort to re-focus on the writings themselves, and evaluate them within the contemporary context.

During this period, studies of Emily Brontë became increasingly diverse and interdisciplinary. Traditional literary theories were frequently brought together, or joined with studies of other fields. For example, the increasing interaction between science and literature during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century generated new critical fields such as "literature and medicine", and "literature and psychology". Under this trend, critics began to explore the symptoms of illness in Emily Brontë's writings, such as depression, self-starvation, alcoholism, addiction, nostalgia and homesickness. Books and articles adopting this perspective include Eric P. Levy's "The Psychology of Loneliness in *Wuthering Heights*" (1996), Susan Rubibow Gorsky's "I'll Cry Myself Sick: Illness in *Wuthering Heights*"

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<sup>44</sup> Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), 255.

(1999), Beth Torgerson's *Reading the Brontë Body: Disease, Desire and the Constraints of Culture* (2005), and Alexandra Lewis's "Memory Possessed: Trauma and Pathologies of Remembrance in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*" (2010).

Other aspects of Emily Brontë's writings were also explored in this period, which were often associated with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural context. Marianne Thormählen's *The Brontës and Education* (2007), along with Elizabeth Gargano, and Laura C. Berry's works,<sup>45</sup> focused on the representation of learning process and child rearing in the Brontës' novels. On the Brontës' acquaintance with German, Thormählen in particular mentioned that because of the popularity and marketability of the German language during the period, that "instruction in German was ... part of the package for the Brontës at the Pensionnat Héger."<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, "it is hard to guess how much German Emily Brontë knew."<sup>47</sup> Thormählen's other book *The Brontës and Religion* (1999), investigated the different views on religion, and experiences of faith in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England, as well as their manifestations in the Brontës' works. Ian Ward's more recent book *Law and the Brontës* (2012), examined the Brontës' knowledge of contemporary law through a close reading of the novels. Comparative studies were also conducted, most notably the comparison between Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson's poetry. Representative works in this field are Michael Moon's "No Coward Souls: Poetic Engagements between Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson" (2008), and Gary Lee Stonum's "Emily's Heathcliff: Metaphysical Love in Dickinson and Brontë" (2011).

Into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, interest in Emily Brontë's works also expanded to other areas. Several works explored Brontë's accomplishment in music and drawing, as well as the adaptations of her novel on screen and in theater. These include Robert K. Wallace's *Emily Brontë and Beethoven: Romantic Equilibrium in Fiction and Music* (1986), Christine Alexander and Jane Sellars's *The Art of the Brontës* (1995), Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells's *The Brontës in the World of the Arts* (2008), and Shouhua Qi and Jacqueline Padgett's *The Brontë Sisters in Other Worlds* (2014), the last of which also considers the works in a translingual, transnational and transcultural setting.

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<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Gargano, *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms: Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Laura C. Berry, *The Child, the State and the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999)

<sup>46</sup> Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), kindle edition, chap. 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Within this climate, biographical studies on Emily Brontë continued. Juliet Barker's family biography *The Brontës* (1994), sought to demythologize the literary figure of Brontë, and ground her within the 19<sup>th</sup> century historical context, while it also shed new lights on Emily Brontë's childhood.

Starting from the 1990s, Emily Brontë's lesser-known writings began to draw critics' attention. In 1992, Janet Gezari's newly edited *Emily Jane Brontë: The Complete Poems* was published, which endeavored to comprise all the existing poems of Brontë, including the Gondal poems. Building upon this effort, in 2007, Gezari published her *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems*. The book offered a critical reading of Emily Brontë's poems. Besides this, Gezari also tried to engage with Brontë's works as a whole. For example, after analysing her essays "The Butterfly" and "The Palace of Death", Gezari went on to comment that "...therefore what she [Emily Brontë] was trying to do in her novel, was but a criticism of the existing world, the existing human condition, our taken-for-granted way of leading the life. There was obviously defiance, anger and contempt in her novel, but beneath all these, was a deep sympathy, an anguish flowing below..."<sup>48</sup> This offers an exceptionally rare insight into the nature of Brontë's work. Gezari's approach, which tends to treat the entire corpus of Brontë's work as an organic whole, each part serving to illuminate the others, has yielded good results and is particularly illuminating to me. Through giving insightful interpretations and in-depth analysis of Brontë's works, Gezari's book re-evaluated their literary and philosophical merits of Brontë's, and reinstated them at the heart of Romantic and Victorian intellectual concerns.

Besides the new edition of Emily Brontë's poems, another important scholarly endeavor made during this period was the translation and editing of Brontë's Belgian essays, which were originally written in French. In 1996, Sue Lonoff published *The Belgian Essays*, which consisted of 9 essays by Emily Brontë. These essays were writing exercises completed during Brontë's school year at Belgium in 1842, under the direction of her then teacher Héger.<sup>49</sup> Though Brontë's poems and novel have gained the critics' attention in recent decades, the importance of these essays is easily over-looked. In one of her exceptionally insightful comments on her sister's work, Charlotte Brontë once commented, "I should say Ellis (Emily Brontë) will not be seen in his full strength till he is seen as an essayist."<sup>50</sup> While their teacher Héger's words also resonated with Charlotte's own:

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<sup>48</sup> Janet Gezari, *Last Things: Emily Brontë's Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 270.

<sup>49</sup> The Brontë sisters planned to open a school of their own at the time, which led to the decision of having Charlotte and Emily go overseas to receive additional education and qualifications. The plan of running a school, however, never materialised.

<sup>50</sup> Charlotte Brontë, "To W. S. Williams," 15 February 1848, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. 2, 1848-1851 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 28, electronic edition.

[she had] a head for logic, and a capability of argument, [...] She should have been a man – a great navigator. Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty, never have given way but with life.<sup>51</sup>

The publication of Brontë's Belgian essays therefore reveals to the world a powerful intellectual mind capable of logical reasoning. Karen E. Laird for example, recently commented in her article in *A Companion to the Brontës* (2016) that the essays “reveal extraordinary powers of imagination and argument,” in which the author “managed to convey her original voice” based on potentially constricting writing materials.<sup>52</sup> Laird also believes that “Emily's later essays contain intimations of *Wuthering Heights*.”<sup>53</sup> The speakers in the essays, for instance, foreshadow fictional characters such as Linton Heathcliff and Lockwood. While the “intensely urgent question on the purpose of the universe”<sup>54</sup> asked by the speaker in “The Butterfly”, “sets Emily's essay far apart from typical student *devoirs*.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the subjects Brontë takes on in these essays shed light on her views on the mechanism of Nature, human nature and a few other issues, which are relevant to the concerns of the present thesis.

Accompanying the new edition of Emily Brontë's works, in particular her poems, was a resurgence of critical articles which associated Brontë with other poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the critics re-visited the Romantic lineage of Brontë's writings. For example, Michael O'Neill in his “‘Visions Rise, and Change’: Emily Brontë's poetry and Male Romantic Poetry” (2011), puts Brontë alongside major British Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron.

Maggie Allen, on the other hand, in her “Emily Brontë and the Influence of the German Romantic Poets” (2005) singled out the possible influence of German Romantic writers on Emily Brontë, such as Goethe, Schiller and Novalis. Allen stated that the works of these German writers “was frequently published in Blackwood's and Fraser's literary magazine,” while Madame de Stael's *De L'Allemagne*, a popular book on German literature, also appeared in 1813. Allen suggests that Emily Brontë's Gondal poems may have been subject to German Gothic influences. Allen in particular points out the thematic affinities between Novalis and Brontë's writings, stating that “the night and yearning for death are familiar themes running through the poetry of both Novalis and Emily

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<sup>51</sup> Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Hachette Digital, 2010), Kindle edition, chap. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Karen E. Laird, “The Letters and Brussels Essays,” in *A Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Deborah Denenholz Morse (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), 270.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

Brontë.”<sup>56</sup> She furthermore identifies the visionary aspects of the works which both authors adopted, suggesting that “‘The Visionary’ poem by Emily Brontë has its analogue with Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night*,” and that “both poets use the silence of the night in which to perceive the spirit world.”<sup>57</sup> Emphasizing the symbol of night and its relation with the immortal sphere, Allen also explores the parallels between Brontë’s poems and those of Goethe and Schiller. The article finally comes to the conclusion that “there are strong similarities of interest between Emily Brontë and poets such as Goethe and Novalis, nature and Gothic, for example, and their imaginative and spiritual vision,”<sup>58</sup> and “while no single definitive factor links Emily Brontë directly to the German poets, the German influence was clearly present.”<sup>59</sup> Allen’s article gives rare insights into the link between Brontë’s poetry and German Romantic literature and philosophy, while the parallel themes of Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night* and Brontë’s visionary poems are particularly illuminating, and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Apart from this, there was also a growing tendency to position Emily Brontë as a poet of the early Victorian period. As early as 1868, there were critics who placed Emily Brontë alongside Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and commented that she was one of the few female poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who possessed a “true poetic faculty”.<sup>60</sup> But it was not until recently that comprehensive critical works which saw Brontë as one of the prominent Victorian female writers started to appear,<sup>61</sup> the phenomenon of which is concurrent with feminism’s ascendancy in literary criticism since the 1990s.

Efforts have also been made to examine Brontë’s poems outside the boundary of feminist study. For example, Michael O’Neill in his chapter “Emily Brontë, Arnold, Clough”, which was included in his *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, put Emily Brontë together with Arnold and Clough, and refers to them as “three post-Romantic poets”.<sup>62</sup> The chapter aims at exploring the three authors’

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<sup>56</sup> Maggie Allen, “Emily Brontë and the Influence of the German Romantic Poets,” *Brontë Studies* 30, no. 1 (Mar. 2005): 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>60</sup> “Poetesses,” *Littell’s Living Age* 97 (June 1868), 819, quoted in Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, “Mid-nineteenth-century Critical Responses to the Brontës,” in *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 177.

<sup>61</sup> These works include Joseph Bristow ed., *Victorian Women Poets: Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), Angela Leighton ed., *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), and Tess Cosslett ed., *Victorian Women Poets*, (London: Longman, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> Michael O’Neill, “Emily Brontë, Arnold, Clough,” in *The Cambridge History of English Poetry*, ed. Michael O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 635.

“markedly individual responses to and versions of crises troubling Victorian culture,”<sup>63</sup> thus examining and comparing Brontë’s intellectual and spiritual situation alongside that of her contemporaries. O’Neill believes that “the lyrical experience” Brontë’s poetry “communicates has a sinuous inseparability from larger cultural significances and shared, subterranean human desires,”<sup>64</sup> and “though it gives the sense ... of a strongly individual voice, the poetry has productive commerce with Brontë’s Romantic forebears.”<sup>65</sup> O’Neill goes on to discuss poems such as “Stars”, “The Prisoner”, and “Remembrance”, and comments on the visionary aspects of Brontë’s poetry and her ability to “mingle emotional depth and bare restraints.”<sup>66</sup> O’Neill also mentions Arnold’s “Haworth Churchyard”, his elegy for the Brontës in which the poet expressed his “knotted admiration”<sup>67</sup> for Brontë, and suggests that for Arnold, Emily Brontë “might be an example of the fate of genius in a ‘Baffled’ culture which had lost its bearing.”<sup>68</sup> O’Neill states that Arnold’s poetry is “often at its finest when expressing elegiac feeling, often feeling that succeeds in assuming a larger cultural resonance.”<sup>69</sup> We can see, for example, through “The Buried Life”, Arnold’s “power of restraint, of the withheld, of the marshalling and disciplined mind bringing its will to bear on emotion.”<sup>70</sup> The poems discussed also include “Empedocles on Etna”, “Dover Beach” and “Sohrab and Rustum.” O’Neill’s discussion on Emily Brontë and Matthew Arnold provides useful guidelines for my analysis of the spiritual journeys the two authors went through, which is the main topic of Chapter Four.

From these studies on Brontë’s poetry, it can be seen that in recent years there has been an increasing tendency among critics to regard Emily Brontë as a post-Romantic writer, whose works exhibit not only a strong influence from her Romantic predecessors, but also a critical analysis and examination of the Romantic heritage in the early Victorian cultural context.

The influence of pre-Darwinian science on Emily Brontë’s writings is another aspect that has long been taken notice of. Though her novel’s depiction of the brutality of human behavior was among the first traits to be picked up by the early critics, it took a long time for modern critics to associate this trenchant illustration of human nature in the novel with the growing pre-Darwinian science

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 636.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 636.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 639.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 635.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 639.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

discourses in Brontë's time. Stevie Davies in her *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (1988) mentioned that Brontë was contemporaneous with Charles Darwin, and was actively engaged with the "raging controversy of the age".<sup>71</sup> Davies argued that this could be seen from both the naturalistic depiction of human beings as a species in her novel and the portrayal of Nature in her essay "Le Papillon" (translated as "The Butterfly"). Further recognition came in 2009, when Heather Glen in her chapter "Emily Brontë" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, observed of *Wuthering Heights* that "The novel's imagery of growth and fruition and destruction and renewal, of the cycle of the seasons, of birth and death and heredity, draws on the languages of both Romantic poetry (especially Wordsworth and Shelley) and of the pre-Darwinian science that Emily Brontë seems to have known."<sup>72</sup> Glen's reading acknowledged both the influence of Romantic tradition and the impact of contemporary science on Brontë's work. Besides these works, Joseph Carroll's chapter "The Cuckoo's History: Human Nature in *Wuthering Heights*", in his *Reading Human Nature* (2012), also offered a detailed account of the ideological conflicts of the novel from a Darwinist perspective.

Recent works on Emily Brontë continue the Post-structuralist interest of the present century. Sarah Wootton's "Emily Brontë's Darkling Tales" (2016) explores the interplay of the image of "light" and "darkness" in *Wuthering Heights*, a novel which is "poised on a literary fault-line, as an heir to the Romantic tradition that simultaneously heralds the advent of Modernism."<sup>73</sup> Anat Rosenberg's "Liberal Anguish: *Wuthering Heights* and the Structures of Liberal Thought" (2014), regards the duality of the social and the psychic as a tension that runs through the novel.

Simon Marsden's *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (2014), on the other hand, seeks to explain the doubts and quandaries in Emily Brontë's writings as a necessary part of the Christian belief system. As a critical work, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* is stimulated by the so-called "return of religion" phenomenon in the postmodern cultural and theoretical practice during recent years, which, when applied to Emily Brontë's writings, seeks to explain the doubts and quandaries in her work as a necessary part of Christian belief. Although this new postmodern way of upholding faith consists of a constant dialectic movement (which is a distinct feature of Emily Brontë's belief system), in my view, it differentiates itself from Emily Brontë's actual situation by pre-supposing a "center"(or God) which Emily Brontë is supposed to indefinitely work towards in her works. In other words, this religious "return" derived from postmodern theory is based on the

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<sup>71</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> Heather Glen, "Emily Brontë," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, ed. Adrian Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 186.

<sup>73</sup> Wootton, "Emily Brontë's Darkling Tales," *Romanticism* 22, no. 3 (2016), 299, doi: 10.3366/rom.2016.0291.

assumption that such a “center” in Brontë’s writings does exist, and incorporates doubts as an integral part of Brontë’s belief in God. Thus the doubts, the uncertainties, the absence of faith are all to be encompassed within the post-modern Christian belief, which Marsden believes Brontë upholds. Seen in this light, Marsden’s book is guided by a specific theoretical agenda, which may not always be derived from analyzing the texts themselves, but precede this process. However when we, as Lucasta Miller suggests, “turn the tables and put the writings first,”<sup>74</sup> it may be easier to see that Brontë does not hold a fluid belief in orthodox Christianity, since her critique of Christianity does not circle back to consolidate a “living faith”, but instead compels her to break out of it, searching for answers elsewhere.

Though I do not agree with Marsden’s overall approach to Brontë’s work, nor with his conclusions, Marsden’s interpretation of Emily Brontë’s “The Butterfly” and other works offers another perspective on Emily Brontë’s work, and holds its own value, just like the scholarly productions arising out of Feminism, Marxism or Post-colonialism.

In view of the process of contextualization of Emily Brontë’s works, as well as the increasing adoption of multiple critical approaches, *The Brontës in Context* (2012) could be seen as an effort to encapsulate the various literary approaches and critical interests in the field of Brontë studies into a single book. Besides having a biographical section and an overall articulation of Brontë studies to date, the topics it includes range from Arts, Music, Natural History to Politics, Class, to Marriage and Family life.

Janet Gezari in her chapter “The Brontës and Poetry”, claims,

Emily is the only one of the Brontës whose experience and its record in the poems were, from the beginning, nourished by both mysticism and Stoic philosophy ... her mysticism feels both authentic and original: what she seeks and writes about in several poems is not union with a transcendent deity, but release into a state of undifferentiated being where subject and object are one, and the imagination has sovereign authority.<sup>75</sup>

Gezari’s analysis of the characteristics of Brontë’s mysticism is shrewd and accurate, and as we will see in the second chapter, such features bear similarities with those in German Romanticism, in particular Novalis’s work. Gezari also comments on the musicality of Brontë’s poems: “her ear is

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<sup>74</sup> Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001), 255.

<sup>75</sup> Janet Gezari, “The Poetry of the Brontës,” *The Brontës in Context*, ed. Marianne Thormählen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Kindle edition

more musical than the ears of her siblings, and her poems register more fully than theirs the urgencies of her distinctive voice.”<sup>76</sup> Such musicality extends further into *Wuthering Heights*.

A couple of chapters trace new sources that may have influenced Emily Brontë’s writings. Stephen Prickett in his “The Philosophical-intellectual Context,” suggests that the Hare brothers’ *Guesses at Truth* was among the books commented upon by Charlotte Brontë, while “for much of the British reading public *Guesses at Truth* was probably their main introduction to the ideas and works of Goethe, Herder and the Jena Romantics...”<sup>77</sup> Thus Prickett identifies another potential source for the Brontë household’s acquaintance with German literature and philosophy. Barbara T. Gates in her “Natural History”, on the other hand, tries to fathom the Brontës’ knowledge on natural history, science and biology from the private collections owned by Patrick Brontë, which the Brontë children would have had access to; the content of *Blackwood’s Magazine*, which “published essays on the growing popularity of natural history as early as 1818 and encouraged the reading of White’s *Selborne* and Knapp’s *Journal of a Naturalist*”<sup>78</sup>; and Charlotte’s book recommendation to her friend Ellen Nussey, which includes naturalists such as Bewick, Audubon and Goldsmith.

Similar to *The Brontës in Context* (2012), the more recent *A Companion to the Brontës* (2016) endeavors to approach the Brontës’ works from a variety of critical perspectives. Below I discuss in more detail a few essays that are in particular pertinent to the scope and subject matter of the present thesis.

In the chapter “Poetry of Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë”, John Maynard comments, “Emily’s reputation as a major poet and as a member of the relatively small group of canonized Victorian women poets ... is in fact based on only a rather few fine poems,”<sup>79</sup> and these fine poems are a “handful – or two – of poems where focus is on the intensity of self-consciousness of the speaker.”<sup>80</sup> This points to the fact that currently, there is a need to explore further Emily Brontë’s poems, in regard to both scope and theme. Maynard also offers fresh insight into Emily Brontë’s works, by stating that while the two other sisters grew out of their imaginative fantasy world, where they produced much of their early poems, and transitioned into the adult world of prose, Emily successfully “elevated the novel to the emotional and metaphorical poetic level she sought in the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Prickett, “The Philosophical-intellectual Context,” *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> John Maynard, “Poetry of Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë”, in *A Companion to the Brontës*, 238.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 240.

Gondal monologues.”<sup>81</sup> This reveals the poetic nature of *Wuthering Heights*, and its continuity with Brontë’s Gondal world. Maynard also sees in Brontë’s poetry “an original and pathbreaking way to the major Victorian mode of dramatic monologue,”<sup>82</sup> which she uses to explore different positions and possibilities. The dialectical nature of Brontë’s work is thus manifested here.

Elisha Cohn in her chapter “The Intellectual and Philosophical Contexts”, also proposes that the Brontës’ work may be read as a kind of dramatic monologue. She introduces Isobel Armstrong’s “double text” as one that “expresses emotion (...), but it also reflects upon itself to historicize the cultural conditions that make the emotion possible.”<sup>83</sup> Cohn furthermore points out that “this duality”<sup>84</sup> which Armstrong “traces to continental dialectical philosophy,”<sup>85</sup> “came to England in the 1820s through the 1840s, often in the magazines the Brontës read.”<sup>86</sup> Proceeding from this, Cohn tries to unearth the dual nature of Emily Brontë’s work by analyzing a couple of her poems. Cohn’s chapter situates Emily Brontë in the larger intellectual and Romantic traditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and rightly suggests that she, along with her siblings, is susceptible to the influences of the outer world, albeit in “complex, mediated forms.”<sup>87</sup> This study thus to some extent supplements Isobel Armstrong’s discussion in *Victorian Poetry*, where Emily Brontë is not mentioned.

Emily Brontë’s Romantic lineage may also be seen elsewhere in the book. Miriam Burstein, in her chapter “The Religion(s) of the Brontës”, commented that “Emily’s organic sense as the divine as something *within* the human mind instead of outside it”<sup>88</sup> is alarmingly different from her sister Anne’s, and the “moments of revelatory vision”<sup>89</sup> in her poems are not linked “to a personal God,”<sup>90</sup> but instead “to her own imagination.”<sup>91</sup> This argument points to the Romantic traits of Brontë’s thinking, which puts an emphasis on the individual mind in its ability to transform the universe. Burstein also mentions Brontë’s “near total disinterest in the afterlife”.<sup>92</sup> But the “afterlife” referred to here seems to be specifically the kind of afterlife provided by orthodox Christianity. Going beyond

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>83</sup> Elisha Cohn, “The Intellectual and Philosophical Contexts”, *ibid.*, 419.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>88</sup> Miriam Burstein, in her chapter “The Religion(s) of the Brontës”, *ibid.*, 440

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 444.

the constraints of orthodox religion, Emily Brontë was always fascinated by Death and what it means to die. Often in her poems and novel, the rejection of a Christian heaven only leads the characters to explore and secure other forms of afterlife, whether it is forming part of Nature or becoming a ghostly existence.

On the subject of death and the afterlife, Carol Davison, in her chapter “The Brontës and the Death Question”, comments that “the Brontës’ insistent reference to, and representations of, a contiguous postmortem universe, and a sense of Providence, set their fictional worlds apart.”<sup>93</sup> Then by a reference to Francis O’Gorman, she points out that such a pre-occupation with the Death Question shows the Victorian concern with not Death itself, but Eternal Life.<sup>94</sup> Davidson also makes reference to Brontë’s “death/grave obsession,”<sup>95</sup> seen in her novel and her discussions of death and bereavement featured in poems such as “Faith and Despondency,” and “Remembrance.” Such frequent dwelling upon the question of Death, in my view, can be seen as a kind of symptom associated with the spiritual crisis and insecurity experienced by the author which were not uncharacteristic in her period.

Apart from these articles, *A Companion to the Brontës* (2016) also includes essays on less studied materials such as the Brussels Essays and Branwell’s poetry. These show the recently developed trends in Brontë studies.

## Thesis Structure

The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe saw drastic political, social and ideological changes. A general feeling of uncertainty and dislocation permeated the public sphere and the intellectual field. According to Azade Seyhan, following the failure of the French Revolution, “Romanticism emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe...as simultaneously a cultural, political and socio-economic movement of revolutionary vision and ambition.”<sup>96</sup>

However, by the time of Emily Brontë, the Romantic movement was heading towards its end. Emily Brontë’s works, in this respect, are not typical products of the high Romantic protest against the

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<sup>93</sup> Carol Davison, in her chapter “The Brontës and the Death Question”, 386

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 388

<sup>96</sup> Azade Seyhan, “What is Romanticism, and where did it come from?”, in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

existing political and social status quo, but instead offer a view back towards a past era, and consist of a powerful reflection upon the legacy of Romanticism in the early Victorian social and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the fact that Brontë's works bear the distinct mark of Romanticism is undeniable, as Romantic tradition forms an irreplaceable part of her work. Indeed, the various traits of Romanticism in Brontë's writings have long been noticed. From central themes, traditional images, to the language used, it is clear that Brontë follows the steps of the Romantic writers preceding her. Critics have long recognized the influence of British writers on Brontë, such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Scott and Byron, whose works Brontë was evidently familiar with. But how much Brontë was acquainted with German Romanticism remains unclear.

There has been much speculation on Brontë's knowledge of German and German literature. When the sisters were in Brussels, Charlotte mentioned in a letter that Emily Brontë "is making rapid progress in... German".<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* also said that after coming back from abroad, "any one passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen her [Emily Brontë] studying German out of an open book, propped up before her, as she kneaded the dough."<sup>98</sup> After this, Mary Ward went on to suggest that "*Wuthering Heights* is a book of the later Romantic movement, betraying the influences of German Romantic imagination."<sup>99</sup> Ward also went so far as to state that "the peculiar force of Emily's work lies in the fact that it represents the grafting of a European tradition upon a mind already richly stored with English and local reality,"<sup>100</sup> while the European tradition she referred to is specifically German. In 1969, John Hewish in his book further claimed that though *Wuthering Heights*'s parallel with Hoffmann had been noted by early critics, the novel's "symmetry and schematisation, its technical sophistication and treatment of a romantic attachment as a sacred and fatal mission are characteristic of more 'serious' German fiction than Hoffmann's."<sup>101</sup> Other critics, such as Stevie Davies and Maggie Allen, sought to explore Brontë's affinity with German literature by focusing on the parallel themes and central concerns in her writing which parallel those of other German authors, including Novalis, Schelling, Schlegel and Goethe.<sup>102</sup> More recently, Elisha Cohn, apart from the dialectical feature which she believed the Brontës adopted from German Romantic philosophy, also singled out the possible influence of Thomas

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<sup>97</sup> Charlotte Brontë, "To Ellen Nussey," Brussels, July, 1842, in Smith, *Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, vol. 1, 1829-1847, 290, electronic edition.

<sup>98</sup> Gaskell, *Life*, 110.

<sup>99</sup> Ward, "Introduction," 48.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>101</sup> Hewish, *Critical and Biographical Study*, 126.

<sup>102</sup> Stevie Davies and Maggie Allen have been discussed in more detail in the earlier sections of the thesis.

Carlyle's writings on the Brontës, stating that his *Sartor Resartus*, was "serialized in *Fraser's* in 1833-1834,"<sup>103</sup> a magazine that the Brontë household subscribed to at the time.<sup>104</sup>

Although due to the scarcity of biographical information on Emily Brontë, there is little historical evidence to point out the scale and depth of Brontë's knowledge of German Romantic literature and metaphysical thinking, the one year spent in Brussels certainly seems to be a crucial period for Brontë to be exposed to German literature. At the same time, German Romantic concepts and ideas were available to the general Victorian public, by the introductory works of critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle. In particular, Carlyle's article "Novalis", which was published in 1829, introduced German Idealism and Novalis's works in considerable detail and comprehensiveness. Therefore, from the thematic and ideological affinities<sup>105</sup> shown through Brontë's writings to the relevant historical contexts Brontë lived in, these all suggest that the influence of German Romanticism on Emily Brontë may be greater than is usually recognized.

Therefore, in the first half of the thesis, I will introduce the works of two German Romantic writers, Hölderlin's *Hyperion* (1797-1799) and Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* (1800). By comparing the writings of these two prominent early German Romantic writers, who are central to the German Romantic movement, with those of Brontë, I seek to explore in detail the thematic parallels, schematic affinities, as well as the common concerns shared in Brontë's works and the works of these two German Romantic authors. In doing so, I hope to form a deepened understanding of Brontë's works, as well as identify for them a more accurate place within the European Romantic movement.

Chapter One mainly focuses on a comparison between Hölderlin's epistolary novel *Hyperion* (1797), and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The chapter first comments on the poetic quality of both novels, then goes on to explore the common themes that appear in both works, which include: Childhood, Human Fate and Suffering, Love and Death.<sup>106</sup> In the discussion of each theme, I will both look for the similar attitudes and positions adopted on these topics by the two authors, and highlight the differences between them. The chapter will also illustrate the schematic affinities

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<sup>103</sup> Cohn, "The Intellectual and Philosophical Contexts," 425.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> The methods of tracing the thematic and ideological affinities and parallels between Emily Brontë and German Romantic authors such as Novalis, Goethe and Schiller are adopted by critics such as Stevie Davis and Maggie Allen, and can be seen in their books and articles.

<sup>106</sup> On the theme of Human Fate and Suffering, the chapter will also draw on several of Brontë's poems.

between the two novels, and then conclude with a discussion on the novels' narrative structure and techniques, as seen in a broader Romantic context.

Chapter Two introduces Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* (1800), and focuses on an exploration of the mystical, or visionary aspects in both Novalis and Emily Brontë's writings. The chapter also shifts the focus from Brontë's novel to her poetry. It first gives a detailed account of Carlyle's article "Novalis", and points out the potential influence it may have had on Brontë. After this the chapter introduces the Romantics' changing perception of Art and Truth as well as their emphasis on the artist's creative Imagination in the late-18<sup>th</sup>-century historical context, the phenomena of which are closely associated with the descriptions of mystical vision or visionary experience in Novalis and Brontë's writings. After this I will talk more specifically about a group of images and concepts employed by both authors, all of which are linked to the state of mystical revelation in their writings. These are: Night, Dream, Slumber, Death and Love. The chapter ends with a discussion on Romantic conception of poetry, which could be seen in both *Hymns to the Night* and Brontë's lyrical works, albeit they take on different forms.

Apart from the influence of the European Romantic movement, Emily Brontë's works also manifest the powerful impact of pre-Darwinian science. In the early Victorian period, new fossil and geological discoveries, along with the study of animal and plant species, prompted a series of publications which aimed to provide an overarching theoretical framework for the rising natural science. These include Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-1832), and will eventually culminate in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Though Brontë could not have read Darwin in her lifetime, she was likely to have read Chambers and Lyell's work, and would have been familiar with the heated debate generated among the public in this field. Although the naturalistic depiction of the animal and human world in Brontë's writings has been briefly pointed out by critics such as Stevie Davies and Heather Glen, there still needs to be sustained and comprehensive discussion on this topic, in order to reveal in detail Brontë's response to and reception of this important intellectual trend of her time.

Thus in Chapter Three, I introduce Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), and several of Emily Brontë's Belgian essays such as "The Butterfly", "The Palace of Death", and "Filial Love", while I will also introduce Chambers' *Vestiges* to facilitate the discussion. The chapter focuses on a comparison between Tennyson and Brontë's different attitudes towards several central issues of the debate in their time, which were primarily generated by the conflict between the claims of religion and the

competing claims of natural science. These include: the nature of Nature, human beings' relationship with the natural world, and the future of human society and human civilization. By examining the two authors' markedly different responses to the challenges imposed by natural science discourse in their time, as well as the process they went through to reach their respective conclusions, I endeavor give an in-depth account of Emily Brontë's views towards science's naturalistic depictions of the world. While at the same time, by putting Tennyson alongside Brontë, the chapter will also demonstrate the unusual place Brontë occupies in the contemporary literary and intellectual spectrum.

The early Victorian era was a time of swift transition, an era where faith coexisted with doubt. Consequently, many of the literary works of the early Victorian period not only are characterized by a preoccupation with the legacy of Romanticism, but at the same time contain a distinct aspect of self-reflection and self-examination. These works often oscillate between different ideological positions, such as whether to rely on subjective consciousness or to trust the word of God, and whether to take the creative force of imagination or to submit to the power of Reason. Emily Brontë's writings also exhibit this distinctive feature of the early Victorian period. The last chapter of this thesis therefore intends to explore this particular aspect of Brontë's writings, through situating them within the larger intellectual and cultural contexts.

With this aim, Chapter Four introduces Arnold's early poems, which include "Dover Beach", the Switzerland poems, "Empedocles on Etna", "Haworth Churchyard," and a few other poems, and focuses again on Emily Brontë's poetry. The chapter first discusses the spiritual dilemma Arnold and Brontë faced within the early Victorian literary and cultural context. Then it goes on to give a detailed account of the two authors' different responses to the Romantic heritage, and in particular analyzes their different treatments of two central Romantic concepts: Nature and Love. After this I will explore the spiritual destinations Arnold and Brontë eventually arrived at. By drawing the ideological trajectories of the two authors, the chapter seeks to demonstrate Brontë's distinct attitudes and solutions to the spiritual doubts and quandaries of the Victorian era, when she and her generation were faced with the same kind of ideological challenge. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Arnold's "Haworth Churchyard", in which Arnold's direct comments on Emily Brontë shed new light on how she was perceived by her contemporaries.

The choices of the four authors in the four main chapters are determined by the primary goal of this thesis. The main objective of the thesis is to examine the literary merits and intellectual significance of Emily Brontë's works within the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary and cultural context, and assess Brontë's

place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century European literary and intellectual traditions. Therefore two of the authors I select are from the early Romantic period, and two are from the early Victorian period; two are continental writers, two are English. Together these authors' works serve as landmarks, the investigations of which will reflect back upon Brontë's own works – which are the central site of this thesis.

In addition, all of the four authors are prominent writers and poets of their time. Hölderlin (Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843) is a key figure of German Romanticism, and in particular an important thinker in the development of German Idealism. Hölderlin was acquainted with Fichte and Novalis during his youth in Jena, and published his *Hyperion* between 1797 and 1799, before falling mentally ill not long after. Today his works are recognized as one of the highest points of German Romanticism. Likewise, Novalis (pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, 1772-1801) is another central figure in the early German Romantic movement, who is not only a prose writer, but a poet and philosopher. Novalis produced several important literary and philosophical works, before he died at the age of 29. His *Hymns to the Night*, after its publication in 1800, is often considered to be the climax of his lyrical works and some of the most important poetry of early German Romanticism. For the two English authors, the cultural spokespersonship of Tennyson (Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1809-1992) in the early Victorian period has been widely acknowledged, while there needs little elaboration on the status of Arnold (Matthew Arnold, 1822-1888) as the leading “man of letters” in Victorian England. Though the literary careers of Tennyson and Arnold last well into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the present thesis focuses mainly on their early works, the productions of which are contemporaneous with those of Brontë.

The primary texts selected from these four authors have also been carefully chosen. They are the most important or representative works of these writers, and can therefore represent and reflect the larger intellectual trends of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the central concerns of these works are all fitted into the main subject each chapter seeks to explore. It is hoped that by examining Brontë's writings in relation to these prominent texts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, this thesis will be able to illuminate the intrinsic value of Brontë's work in its contemporary context, demonstrate a fuller scale of Brontë's engagement with the intellectual and literary climate of her day, and reveal the distinct place she occupies in 19<sup>th</sup> century literary and cultural history.

# Hölderlin's *Hyperion*

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*“To be one with all that lives, to return in blessed self-oblivion into the All of nature, that is the summit of thoughts and joys, that is the holy mountain height, the place of eternal repose.” – Hölderlin, *Hyperion*<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on a comparison between Hölderlin's major work *Hyperion* and Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (along with a few of her poems). It primarily aims to explore the thematic parallels and narrative affinities between *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*.

*Hyperion* is Hölderlin's only finished prose work, and is perhaps the most comprehensive manifestation of the poet's intellectual and spiritual preoccupations. The novel is told in the form of letters from the protagonist Hyperion, to his friend Bellarmin, with a few letters between Hyperion and his lover Diotima inserted into the main narrative. In the letters Hyperion revisits his journeys abroad since his youth, during which time he successively encountered his teacher Adamas, his friend Alabanda, and his lover Diotima. Hyperion suffers and recovers as each relationship comes to an end, and at last becomes a hermit living in the wilderness of Greece, where he embraces the beauty of nature.

Although written forty years earlier at the height of the Romantic movement, from its language, central concerns to its narrative style and technique, *Hyperion* shares many similarities with Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. In efforts to address their central issues, both novels deal with an array of individual but related themes central in Romantic literature, such as Childhood, Nature, human fate and suffering, Love and Death. The respective ways these concepts are conceived and represented demonstrate both affinities and development along the same literary and intellectual tradition. Apart from the main themes they deal with, the novels also show resemblances in their structure and narrative strategies.

I thus in this chapter introduce *Hyperion*, a work in many ways representative of early Romantic writings, and by drawing both the parallels and differences between *Hyperion* and *Wuthering*

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion; or, The Hermit in Greece*, trans. Ross Benjamin (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2008), Kindle edition, vol. 1, bk. 1.

*Heights*, I seek to demonstrate the thematic, ideological, and narrative affinities, as well as differences, between Brontë's writings and the early Romantic work.

## Poetry in Prose

As critics have pointed out, though formally both *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* take on the form of a novel, they at the same time bear recognizable features from another genre, namely poetry. This is a distinct characteristic of early Romantic writings. The language used in these texts, for example, is essentially poetic, and distinguished by its lyric-musicality. Furthermore, both works take on the subject matter of poetry or epic, which is ultimately about the search for the meaning of human existence, and human beings' place in the universe. Most significantly, both works deal with the issue of re-integration and re-unification, and thus manifest a close relationship with an important creed of the Romantic philosophy and literature, which is that all beings in the universe originate from the One and return to the One. These features all indicate that the two literary works are not novels in the conventional sense, but the products of the Romantic experimentation with literary forms. The novel as a traditional literary genre has been adapted and reformulated to fit into the two authors' respective literary agendas.

The essentially poetic nature of both works is not merely a coincidence, but derives from Emily Brontë and Hölderlin's self-conscious literary and philosophical pursuits. As Charles Larmore points out, the deep conviction that "poetry fares better than philosophy to express the full reality of the human condition," inspires Hölderlin as a poet.<sup>2</sup> He also at times speaks of the pleasure he takes in solitude and seclusion, and on occasion in his letters to friends plays with the idea of retreating from the bustle of ordinary life and becoming a hermit.<sup>3</sup>

In a similar way, there is evidence pointing to Brontë's self-conscious efforts at becoming a poet. At the age of 16, she was ridiculed in a piece of writing by her brother Branwell, about her intended poetic training "project":

to seek true poetry it is necessary to shut oneself out from Humanity from the stir and bustle of the world from the commonplace wearisomeness of its joys sorrows and greatnesses to look in

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Larmore, "Hölderlin and Novalis," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 149, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521651786.008.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Silz, *Hölderlin's Hyperion: A Critical Reading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 4.

solitude into one's own soul and conjure up there some visionary form alien from this world's fears or sympathies.<sup>4</sup>

The subsequent trajectory of Brontë's life indicates that it is a path that she deliberately pursues. She not only studiously cultivates her poetic instinct and creativity through self-teaching,<sup>5</sup> but is also the only one among her siblings to spend most of her life at home, which demonstrates both a reluctance and perhaps in the end an inability to part with the Haworth environment, her natural habitat so to speak.<sup>6</sup>

It is therefore not surprising to see that in their writings both Hölderlin and Brontë frequently take up the main subject of poetry. In both novels, there is a preoccupation with the meaning of human existence, and a deep concern with the future and destiny of humankind. While the ways they deal with these issues also show distinct features of the Romantic era, though with individual variation and adaptations.

In the first section of this chapter, by detailing how a series of traditional Romantic themes are treated in the two novels, and discussing the similarities and variations between them, I seek to demonstrate *Wuthering Heights'* thematic associations with and differences from *Hyperion*.

## Childhood

In the Romantic tradition, childhood signifies the human's initial undivided state with Nature.<sup>7</sup> The child, because it is yet un-reflexive, exists in harmonious unity with the world. The blissful simplicity

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<sup>4</sup> Branwell Brontë, *The Works of Patrick Branwell Brontë: An Edition*, ed. Victor A. Neufeldt, vol. 2 (New York: Garland, 1998), 149, quoted in Christine Alexander and Margaret Smith, *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 391.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the reading of English books and literary magazines, "There is evidence that at the age of 20 she [Emily Brontë] was learning Latin in order to read Horace in the original and the text she chose (*Ars Poetica*) indicates a special interest in the nature of poetry and the role of the poet." Alexander and Smith, *Oxford Companion*, 391.

<sup>6</sup> When Emily went to school at the age of 17, "Her homesickness became so overpowering that she became literally ill". As a result she was sent home shortly after that. Subsequently at her post at Law Hill as a teacher, she "wrote three outstanding poems which expressed her personal misery and homesickness", and the six months also "were to be her first and last experiment in earning her own living". While in Brussels, the last time Emily left home, it was reported that "Once more she seemed sinking". Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Little, Brown, 2010), Kindle edition, chap. 9, chap. 11, chap. 14.

<sup>7</sup> This analogue has a long history in western culture, which goes back to the analogy of child-father figure in Plotinus's universe when the soul is in search of a spiritual home. It is then further specified and developed in Christian cosmology, when the correspondence between the spiritual history of the individual and the Christian history of the entire human race was further extended to incorporate and equate the innocence of childhood to the state of Eden before the fall. For an extended discussion on this topic, see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 149, 51-52.

of childhood has thus been one of the favorite subjects in Romantic writings, and it likewise finds its expression in those of Brontë and Hölderlin. For example, Brontë, in one of her poems, wrote:

Sweeter far than placid pleasure  
Purer higher beyond measure  
...  
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<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Hölderlin's *Hyperion* also exalts the purity of childhood:

In the child is peace; it is not yet at odds with itself. Wealth is in the child; it knows not its heart, nor the destitution of life. It is immortal, for it knows nothing of death.<sup>9</sup>

However, divisive intellect, or analytical thought, tears the child away from the embrace of Nature, and sets him in contradiction with himself and the world. But this "fall", for many early German Romantics, was but a fortunate one, for it is the first step from a paradise given, towards a future paradise earned by human endeavor, which is infinitely superior to the one in the past. As Hegel said, "The hand that inflicts the wound is also the hand which heals it."<sup>10</sup> After Man sets his foot on the laborious journey, through increasing division, conflicts and unforeseeable evil, he will at last reach the place where he again finds unity with Nature, but on a higher, conscious level.

## The Desire to Go Back to Childhood

Interestingly, in both *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*, the characters express the desire to go back and become a child of Nature again, which is uncommon in Romantic literature. M. H. Abrams mentions Schiller as an example, who once stated that "civilized man cannot go back again", and valued the higher unity humans achieve by conscious acquisition of knowledge, more than the simplicity of unconscious unity humans had with Nature at the beginning of life.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this attempt, or mere expressing of a wish, to revert back to the innocence of childhood also does not appear in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, whose plot and narrative strategy could be seen as being modeled

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<sup>8</sup> Emily Brontë, "Sleep not Dream not this Bright Day", in Janet Gezari, ed., *Emily Jane Brontë: The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 42, lines 5-6, 9-12.

<sup>9</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 1.

<sup>10</sup> William Wallace ed., *The Logic of Hegel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 242.

on *Hyperion*.<sup>12</sup> However, Hyperion, even towards the end of the story, still doesn't relinquish the desire to become a child again:

I would have so gladly become a child so as to be nearer to her (Nature), I would have so gladly known less and become like the pure ray of light so as to be nearer to her! O to feel myself for an instant in her peace, in her beauty, how much more that meant to me than years full of thoughts, than all attempts of all-attempting men! Like ice, what I had learned, what I had done in life melted away, and all projects of youth died away in me...<sup>13</sup>

As Hyperion also states elsewhere: "For when I was still a serene child, and knew nothing of all that surrounds us, was I not then more than I am now, after all the troubles of my heart and all the reflection and struggle?"<sup>14</sup> For Hyperion, to be for an instant in the peace and beauty of Nature surpasses all that human thoughts could give him. In the face of the beauty of Nature, all the attempts to seek for unity with the world through reflection, all the acquisitions and learning of human knowledge, melt away like ice.

In a similar way, in *Wuthering Heights*, we see Catherine, in her illness, confiding to Nelly the meaninglessness of her pursuits after her childhood. But here the futile efforts to find true happiness after her childhood take on a more extreme form: in Catherine's delirium, Childhood becomes the only human experience that remains recognizable to her, whereas the last seven years since her departure from that period turns into a total blank, so that she cannot even recall its existence.<sup>15</sup> Upon coming back to consciousness and to her present state of affairs, the anguish of being severed from her childhood memories leaves Catherine in a swamp of despair. Just like Hyperion, Catherine desires to become a child again, playing freely in Nature:

"Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors – I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free ... and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills ..."<sup>16</sup>

Catherine fervently believes that once she is back in Nature, its nurturing power alone will be enough to heal her, and restore her to her childhood spirit. For Catherine, the desires and pursuits of her adult life are not only pointless, but also poisonous and distorting. For they alienate her from her natural

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Eldridge, "Poetic Closure, Romanticism, and Hölderlin's Solution," *Essays in Romanticism* 15, no. 1 (Jan. 2007): 163, doi:10.3828/EIR.15.1.7.

<sup>13</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, bk. 1.

<sup>15</sup> "[M]ost strangely, the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all." Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

state, and have changed her from what she once was. In the end, Catherine is not able to recognize herself in the mirror, an incidence indicating a displacement of her self-identity.<sup>17</sup>

In *Wuthering Heights*, human life after childhood is seen as a regrettable deviation from the perfect, original union with Nature, where one's true identity lies. Life's rejuvenating power therefore lies forever in Nature, in one's past. In her illness when Nelly warns Catherine the cold wind from the moor will make her die of cold, Catherine instead insists on opening the window, convinced that the wind, as it blows from the direction of Wuthering Heights, and comes all the way across the moor (hence is associated with both her childhood home and Nature), will give her renewed strength.<sup>18</sup>

To conclude, from the above quoted passages, we see the main characters of both novels prefer the simplicity of childhood to the years of strife adulthood brings. Both Hyperion and Catherine acknowledge that self-awareness, as the starting point for one's departure from mother Nature, is where the human pain and struggle starts. In the Romantic movement, reflection necessarily causes division and separation, brings loss, suffering and sorrows, and makes the individual life at war with itself and world. For both Hyperion and Catherine, the departure from the purity and simplicity of Childhood is therefore un-worthwhile compared to a simple repose in Nature, and oblivion of self-identity in Nature is seen as an eternal bliss.

But childhood lies forever in the past. It is a place that once setting out on the journey of life, we could never return to. Though both Hyperion and Catherine express the wish to go back, the perfect selfless unity with the world is lost, as soon as one falls out of Nature, and cannot be re-attained in this life. Therefore the next question is: whether a person could, or how a person should, journey on, to bear the consequence of self-awareness, to live with the sorrow accompanied by freedom. Though in both works the characters express the desire to go back to childhood, they hold different views when they look into the future.

## The Different Views on Human Life After Childhood

Even at the beginning of the novel, where Hyperion sees reflection as leading to only differentiation and alienation, he recognizes the value of reflection in its own right, as he asks himself:

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<sup>17</sup> As Nelly reminds her, "Wake up! That is the glass – the mirror, Mrs. Linton; and you see yourself in it." *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> "You won't give me a chance of life, you mean," she [Catherine] said sullenly. "However, I'm not helpless yet, I'll open it myself." *Ibid.*, 111.

And yet, who would not rather feel it in himself, like a seething oil, than confess that he was born for the whip and yoke? A raging war-horse or a nag with hanging ears – which is nobler?<sup>19</sup>

Hyperion clearly prefers to be “A raging war-horse” than a nag that exists in slumber. Though what he calls the “monstrous striving” tears us from the unity with nature, “beautiful, too, is the time of awakening.”<sup>20</sup> For reflection is an attribute of human freedom,<sup>21</sup> which distinguishes one from those “born for the whip and yoke”. In this passage Hyperion has not conceived of reflection as a path always leading back to Unity, which would then make the cycle of human life resemble the “beautiful cycle of nature.”<sup>22</sup> This discovery of the “hidden order” of his individual life specifically, and the human race in general, only dawns on him towards the end of the novel. But still at this stage he is able to say that reflection is a part of human existence he would not willingly part with, for the experience of seeking and striving for perfection it alone brings.

Furthermore, in a later passage Hyperion claims that the freedom reflection brings forms one of the greatest adventures of life, which allows one to experience the satisfaction of triumph and overcome differentiations once and again, as the cycle of life unfolds itself:

Should you be eternally like a child and slumber like nothingness? Dispense with triumph? Not traverse all perfections? Yes! yes! grief is worthy of lying at the heart of men, and of being your intimate...<sup>23</sup>

This exaltation of human freedom and power reaches its climax when Hyperion tries to articulate the cultural history of ancient Athens to a group of people, an occasion which is re-told to Bellarmin in the concluding letter of the first volume:

Leave man undisturbed from the cradle on! Do not drive him out of the tightly closed bud of his being, out of the small hut of his childhood! ... in short, do not let man know until late that there are men, that there is anything outside of him, for only thus shall he become a man. *But man is a god as soon as he is a man, And when he is a god, he is beautiful.*<sup>24</sup>

Blissful is the childhood, but equally fulfilling is to become a man, who has the full-fledged power to create his own world, to act, to decide, and to direct his own fate. This passage reflects the author Hölderlin’s pantheistic view on Nature, along with his humanistic doctrine, which is that “in a world where the Deity is the immanent life force or soul, man, being the most spiritual entity, is the highest

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<sup>19</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Larmore, “Hölderlin and Novalis,” 148.

<sup>22</sup> “All grows old and rejuvenates itself. Why are we excepted from the beautiful cycle of nature? Or does it also hold sway for us?” Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, bk. 2 (my italics).

conscious realization of this deity,<sup>25</sup> who has not only the freedom, but also the ability to transform the world, and re-establish the harmony with Nature through his own conscious endeavor. Here already is the germination of Nietzsche's idea, as decades later, he places Man at the center of the entire universe.<sup>26</sup>

Under Hölderlin's pen, Hyperion in the end comes to terms with life, not only acknowledging the departure from the original unity with Nature as an integral part of human experience, but at the same time seeing it as a sign to set Humanity on the road to Divinity. Brontë, on the other hand, sees the same matter a lot less favorably, and leans far less towards tranquil acceptance. In *Wuthering Heights*, the loss of Childhood, which coincides with the falling out of Nature and the separation from the ideal Love, leaves Catherine and Heathcliff in profound desolation, which lasts for the rest of their lives. They seem to have no way to compensate for this loss. All the struggling and striving are utterly useless, and meaningful only in that they can bring one closer to Death, where they can finally take rest. In a way, this depiction of the absolute loss in Catherine and Heathcliff's lives in the novel reflects Brontë's gloomy view on human life in general.

Unlike Hölderlin, Brontë does not adopt a progressive view on human history, which is based on the belief that the progression of human intellectual endeavor will eventually lead Man back to unity with Nature (both individually and as a race), nor does she look positively into the future of human civilization,<sup>27</sup> thus for Brontë there is no certainty of a higher paradise lying ahead, but only a distant childhood Eden lying behind. In addition, based on the belief in the progressive development of human history, Hölderlin regards returning to childhood as a regression, to an undifferentiated primitive state with Nature which should forever belong to the past, but since Emily Brontë does not adopt this view, the Childhood as a paradise is no longer lower, or less perfect, than the paradise that may lie ahead, but simply as a state of pure innocence and happiness, the only native home one has but can never return to.

Without the promise of Unity in the future, human freedom only brings about increasing differentiation and deviation from Nature, while the state of self-consciousness merely becomes a

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Unger, *Friedrich Hölderlin* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), 30.

<sup>26</sup> "[T]here is no reason why you should not go a step further: love yourselves through grace, and then you will no longer find your God necessary, and the entire drama of the Fall and Redemption of mankind will reach its last act in yourselves!" Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, trans. J. M. Kennedy, vol. 9 of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 83.

<sup>27</sup> This is partly reflected through Brontë's depiction of civilization in *Wuthering Heights*, and is more specifically related in her essay "The Palace of Death". The essay is included in *The Belgian Essays*, ed. and trans. Sue Lonoff (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 224-231.

constant reminder of the severance from Nature. Because of the lack of hope and promise in the future, the vision of human life in *Wuthering Heights* is resolutely retrospective, looking steadfastly into the past, at that Edenic period which an individual once possessed but has inevitably lost. Consequently the only effective method of pacifying the anguish of the soul, and granting it everlasting peace, is by returning to that original perfect state, at any cost:

“Let me in – let me in!”

“Who are you?” I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

“Catherine Linton,” it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton). “I’m come home, I’d lost my way on the moor!”

As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the window ...<sup>28</sup>

However, such unity could only come after death. But often it seems that a mere physical death is not enough to bring one back to Nature. The journey of returning to Eden thus goes past Death, persisting into the afterlife. Therefore Catherine does not rest in peace, but goes back to *Wuthering Heights*, her childhood home, as an errant child ghost, who has lost her way on the moor. Yet both her appearance as a lost child, and her name Linton in Lockwood’s dream, indicates an effacement of her original, true identity, and foreshadows the subsequent denial of her entry into the house. It is not until Heathcliff joins Catherine in death that she is granted the peace she seeks for for decades after her death. The restorations of Childhood, Nature and Love are hence indistinguishably linked.

To conclude, while *Hyperion* acknowledges the departure from childhood as one of differentiation and sorrow but not deprived of its intrinsic meaning, for Catherine there is little hope in the future. There is instead a constant gesture of looking back, and a persistent desire to return to childhood. Brontë’s fictional world is as a result more desolate and gloomy, which is a feature more commonly found in the late Romantic period.

## **Human Fate and Suffering**

One of the cardinal concerns of early Romantic philosophy and literature is the condition of human existence, and the reality of human suffering. As Abrams states, during the late eighteenth century, in a rapidly changing social and historical context, fewer and fewer people are still convinced that human suffering is a means for the Creator to select the few who are supposed to go up to heaven

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<sup>28</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 20.

after death. Early Romantic writers thus seek for other ways to explain the existence of evil and suffering in the world.<sup>29</sup> This preoccupation with the human condition on earth and the consequent response to it can also be seen in *Hyperion* and Brontë's lyrical works.

### The Song of Fate in *Hyperion*

In the novel *Hyperion*, as Hyperion waits for the ship to take him back to Diotima, in order to console himself for the sorrow of parting with his friend Alabanda, Hyperion sings himself a song which he learned from his teacher Adamas in his youth. This interpolated poem in the novel subsequently became "one of Hölderlin's best-known poems", according to Richard Unger:<sup>30</sup>

You walk up there in the light  
On soft ground, blessed Genii!  
Shining divine breezes  
Stir you lightly  
As the fingers of the artist  
Her holy strings.

Free of fate, like the sleeping  
Infant, the heavenly breathe;  
Chastely preserved  
In modest bud  
Their spirit  
Blooms eternally,  
And their blessed eyes  
Gaze in still  
Eternal clarity.

Yet to us is given  
No place to repose  
Suffering men  
Dwindle and fall  
Blindly from one  
Hour to the next,  
Like water hurled  
from cliff to cliff,  
downward for years into uncertainty.<sup>31</sup>

The poem makes a distinct contrast between the lives of the gods and that of the humans. The first two stanzas describe the lives of the gods as constant and unchanging. Their existence is characterized by stillness and unending bliss. They are like the "sleeping infant," free of care and

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<sup>29</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 443-44.

<sup>30</sup> Unger, *Friedrich Hölderlin*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

burden, bathed in eternal light, and repose in simple peacefulness. The last stanza describes the lives of humankind, who, unlike the Genii, has lost the original unity with the world, and is therefore subject to earthly sufferings and earthly cares. There is a deep sense of restlessness and insecurity shown in human life in the poem, as if no mortal can escape. Humans fumble on in the journey of life, with no assurance or ultimate knowledge of what lies ahead.

The stanzas of the poem are arranged like inverted staircases, imparting and strengthening the sense as one reads on that the river of life flows from up to down, from heaven to earth, channeling itself from its eternal source inevitably to the distant, uncertain future shared by all people. When Hyperion sings the song he already sees what happened to him as not an individual case, concerning himself alone, but as exemplifying the fate of the entire human race, which is in a sense, essentially tragic. Humans, as finite beings, are all caught up in the gigantic tide of fate, a larger process of the universe. And strive as they may as individuals, to attempt to direct the course of their lives, life itself is unavoidably peppered with sorrow and sufferings, and no total guarantee, or certainty for the future can be given.

Shortly after finishing the song, Hyperion receives a letter from his lover Diotima, telling him that she is dying, which echoes the ever changing and unpredictable character of human fate in the song.

### The Theme of Fate and Suffering in Brontë's Poems

Brontë in quite a few of her poems also talks about the fate of humans, as the child departs from the innocence of childhood. Her poem "I see around me tombstones grey" in particular, mirroring the song of fate in *Hyperion*, makes a comparison between the children of Heaven and the children of Earth:

Sweet land of light! thy children fair  
Know nought 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...<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Brontë, "I See around Me Tombstones Grey," in Janet Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 132, lines 15-24.

Besides making a contrast between the divine being and the earthly creature, like the song of fate in *Hyperion*, what is added in Brontë's poem, is the interaction between the sphere of heaven and that of earth. Those living in the cloud are depicted as uncaring and indifferent to what happens below on earth in this poem. The speaker, as one of the earthly creatures, feels abandoned, which is then developed into a sense of resentfulness. In this poem we see that human life is not only unpredictable and full of sufferings, but more importantly, is unfair and unjust compared to the eternal bliss above. Thus, when *Hyperion* makes a simple parallel of the two opposite modes of existence, devoid of any comments, the stark contrast in Brontë's poem, along with its sad tone, discloses the speaker's feelings towards the lives of gods and the coldness of heaven. The speaker in the poem consequently wishes to stay on earth after death, because the motherly earth is the one who bears the woes and sufferings with her children, when heaven casts its indifferent eyes aside.

Here the two authors' stance on the orthodox belief in God can be clearly seen. For Hölderlin, the earth is the daughter of God,<sup>33</sup> the former is the manifestation of the latter in the present world that we dwell in. Whereas for Brontë, the earth is humankind's real and only home. God, along with his distant Heaven, is therefore often bitterly disputed and rejected in her works.

A more extended description of human fate appears in another of Brontë's poems "I saw thee child one summer's day", which is narrated by a ghost, who has already finished her journey of life, to a child, who longs to know the path of his future:

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

...

Poor child if spirit 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 water roar  
Breaking upon a desolate shore  
Cut off from hope in early day

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<sup>33</sup> "O if glorious nature is the daughter of a father, is not the daughter's heart then his heart?" Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 1.

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<sup>34</sup>

While in the song of fate in *Hyperion* there is predominantly the uncertainty and unpredictability of human fate, the dismal feeling is further strengthened and deepened into the belief that human life is essentially doomed in this poem. The fate of a child would inevitably “darken” over the “coming years”. Not only will there be unpredictable events in a person's life, they are also unpleasant ones. The path to the future is destined to be loaded with misery and tears.

### The Acceptance of Earthly Life vs The Anticipation of the Afterlife

Besides having a more desolate and darker view on human fate, and perhaps because of this, the consequent response to human fate and sufferings in Brontë's poems also differs from that in *Hyperion*.

*Hyperion* is characterized by acceptance. In one of the last few letters Hyperion writes to his friend Bellarmin, he tells him that he is now calm, after receiving the news of Diotima's death, for “the bliss that does not suffer is sleep, and without death there is no life”.<sup>35</sup> Hyperion accepts suffering as a necessary part of human experience, which constitutes who we are as human beings. Humans are noble, precisely because they are capable of suffering, of experiencing pain. It is therefore better to be awake, and suffer, than to be in peaceful slumber, but knowing and bearing nothing.

Here Hölderlin's handling of the problem of suffering in human life is exemplary of Romantic tradition, as he attempts to seek for justification for the experience of suffering within the limits of the experience itself. Suffering gives one deeper insights into things, and makes a person “more fully, consciously, integrally and maturely human.”<sup>36</sup> This acceptance of suffering then progresses into the acknowledgement and acceptance of death, which could be regarded as the last experience of suffering in the cycle of human life, which gives value to life itself.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Brontë, “I Saw Thee Child one Summer's Day”, in Janet Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 40-42, lines 5-12, 41-53.

<sup>35</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 444.

<sup>37</sup> “[T]he tragic paradox is that the values of life are valuable precisely because they are limited and defined by death.”  
Ibid.

Another example, which could shed further lights on the view of fate and suffering in *Hyperion*, is included in a letter Hyperion writes about the experience he had before leaving Germany, when a divine spring holds him back:

I had never experienced so fully that old, steadfast word of fate, *that a new bliss rises in the heart when it endures and suffers through the midnight of grief*, and that, like the nightingale's song in the darkness, the world's song of life first divinely sounds for us in deep suffering.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of the road there is light. Blissful are those who could bear the darkness of the night to arrive at the next spring of life. For Hyperion suffering consists of the renewal of life itself. As the circle of fate unravels, suffering and loss only lead a person from one bliss to another, through a contoured journey, and bring back renewed hope.

In a stark contrast, Brontë's hope lies resolutely elsewhere. In her poem "Anticipation", the speaker expresses the anticipation for the eternity that awaits him/her after death:

Gazed o'er the sands the waves efface,  
To the enduring seas –  
There cast my anchor of desire  
Deep in unknown eternity;  
Nor ever let my spirit tire,  
With looking for *what is to be!*  
...  
'Glad comforter! Will I not brave,  
Unawed, the darkness of the grave?  
Nay, smile to hear Death's billows rave –  
Sustained, my guide, by thee?  
The more unjust seems present fate,  
The more my spirit swells elate,  
Strong, in thy strength, to anticipate  
Rewarding destiny!<sup>39</sup>

In Death lies the final reward. Though Death is part of earthly sufferings, and therefore unjust and unfair for humans to bear, what death may in the end bring about is alluring. For death can open the portal to eternity. That glorious world which remains unknown and unfathomable in the earthly life could then finally become available for one to enter. In death there is defeat, in the sense that it marks the final point of life on earth, where an individual's endless war with the outer world is terminated by the perishing of the physical body; but in death there is also triumph, for the

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<sup>38</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2 (my italics).

<sup>39</sup> Brontë, "Anticipation," in Janet Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 13, lines 31-36, 45-52.

destruction of the body opens the possibility for the soul to return to Nature, and share an eternal life within it.<sup>40</sup>

If the existence of evil and suffering on earth needs to be explained within the limit of that experience itself, enough justification has to be provided in order to say that a negative human experience could or would turn out to be good or beneficial. Colin Jager in his *The Book of God*, mentions that one way for people to deal with this issue is to “focus upon the ‘total pattern’ at the expense of individual suffering.”<sup>41</sup> He further quotes a passage from Augustine’s *Confessions* to illustrate this point: “I no longer wished for a better world, because I was thinking of the whole of creation, and in the light of this clearer discernment I had come to see that though the higher things are better than the lower, the sum of all creation is better than the higher things alone.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, says Jager, “What appears to be evil will ultimately, with the proper perspective, be revealed as part of a larger good”<sup>43</sup>

Still, difficulty increases when suffering becomes excessive, that it has the potential to destroy the character him/herself. Thus for the early Romantics, it is crucial to achieve and maintain a balance between hope and dejection, the prospect of happiness in the future and the present reality. We see this balance in *Hyperion*, as the circle of life leads Hyperion from one mode of unity with the world and Nature to another, each in its contingent, incomplete and not fully realized form, but nevertheless brings temporary fulfillments.

However, it is much less so in Brontë’s works. For example, in *Wuthering Heights*, what the characters experience is termed by J. Hillis Miller as “absolute destitution”,<sup>44</sup> that once it occurs, could never be recovered in this life. At the time of Emily Brontë, the hope to achieve some harmonious whole with Nature became scarce and unsustainable, as Imagination’s power to integrate a fragmented world into a whole faded away, and the balance between differentiation and unity gradually collapsed. Thus in recognizing the occurrence of suffering and sorrow in human life, while

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<sup>40</sup> A similar example can be seen from these verses:

The long war closing in defeat,  
Defeat serenely borne,  
Thy midnight rest may still be sweet,  
And break in glorious morn!

Brontë, “Self-Interrogation”, in Janet Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 24, lines 45-48.

<sup>41</sup> Colin Jager, *The Book of God* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 191.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “Emily Brontë,” in *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 171.

*Hyperion* is still able to remain hopeful, what Brontë's characters constantly gaze at is the life beyond the "shore."<sup>45</sup>

## Love

### The Romantic Ideal of Love in *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*

In Romantic philosophy love takes on an ontological significance. Love is the all-pervasive energy in the universe which pulls the world together, uniting the world as a whole.<sup>46</sup> For example, "love", for Shelley, "is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man but with everything which exists."<sup>47</sup> As a result, among Romantic writers, all modes of human attraction are seen as one in kind, and differ only in degree and object. While this conception of love is further expanded to include non-human identities, such as nature, non-living things, and the universe itself.

In practice Romantic writers tend to use one specific type of love to represent this ideal version of all-encompassing love.<sup>48</sup> Hence the exaltation of Romantic love, especially that between lovers, has become a cardinal signature in the popular conception of what Romanticism is about. In *Hyperion*, Hyperion's pursuit of human relationships is in fact a chasing of this kind of idealistic love within the Romantic tradition. According to Larmore, Hyperion seeks for it successively through his relationship with Adamas (teacher, who represents nostalgia for the past), Alabanda (friend, representing moral sublimity), and at last Diotima (lover, representing natural beauty).<sup>49</sup> But the thing that Hyperion is really looking for, is once pointed out shrewdly by Diotima:

You wanted no men, believe me, you wanted a world. The loss of all golden centuries, as you felt them, compressed into one happy moment, the spirit of all spirits of a better time, the strength of all strengths of heroes – one man should replace these for you...<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Jager in his book proposes to "return the question of suffering" to "the place of reading and interpretation, ... the role of practices of pedagogy and discipline that train readers to view things in a particular way." This supposedly provides an alternative solution to the problem in a post-modern era. Emily Brontë, conditioned by the historical time she lives in, would hardly be able to see this.

<sup>46</sup> The application of this concept goes back to Neo-platonic philosophers, who use this term to signify all the cohesive forces in both the human and non-human world. (see M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 294)

<sup>47</sup> Percy Shelley, "Essay on Love," in *Shelley's Prose; or, The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), 170.

<sup>48</sup> Individual writers have varied preferences. For example, for Coleridge, friendship seems to be the kind of love he prefers, while Wordsworth's favorite is the love a mother bestows upon her baby. Shelley on the other hand picks sexual love, which at times gives trouble to his contemporary readers. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 297-299.

<sup>49</sup> Larmore, "Hölderlin and Novalis," 150.

<sup>50</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 2.

Hyperion's high expectation of love has led to the unfortunate result that none of his relationships with these individuals are enduring. As a consequence Hyperion is hurled into an abyss of sorrow every time he loses them, and his own experience of life takes on the extreme form of all or nothing. Thus when Hyperion once again declares his love to Diotima, she immediately warns him that she, too, is mortal, and therefore may not be able to fulfill the ideals in his heart. Nevertheless, the encounter with Diotima leaves Hyperion in a spiritual ecstasy, and he claims to have caught a glimpse of heaven through her:

They say that the battle will die away over the stars; and not until the future, they promise us, when our yeast has sunk, will fermenting life be transformed into the noble wine of joy; they no longer search on earth for the inner repose of the blessed. I know otherwise. I have come the shorter way. I stood before her and heard and saw the peace of heaven, and in the midst of sighing chaos, Urania appeared to me.

...

She was my Lethe, this soul, my holy Lethe, from which I drank the forgetting of existence, so that I stood before her like an immortal...<sup>51</sup>

Hyperion's love for Diotima takes on a transcendental significance, giving him the joy of heaven. The fallen, chaotic and fragmented world is transformed into a bright one under its spell. At the same time, the fact that Diotima symbolizes divine Nature indicates that Hyperion, by falling in love with her, has (temporarily) achieved a harmonious state with Nature. Love's capacity to unite one with the rest of the world is illustrated through the protagonist's symbolic union with a particular individual.<sup>52</sup>

Similar depiction of Love could also be found in *Wuthering Heights*. It is not difficult to see that the human relationships in this novel take on obvious Romantic traits. This is perhaps best represented through the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff:

“My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees – my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff – he's always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, anymore than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being...”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> As Ricarda Schmidt in explanation of what is Romantic love, similarly says, the typical Romantic concept of love is viewed as “the means of achieving an all-embracing harmony. Love for the beloved and love for the universe become one, leading towards harmony with nature and the whole universe.” Ricarda Schmidt, “From Early to Late Romanticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 72-73.

This famous speech made by Catherine explicates the true nature of the relationship between her and Heathcliff: the love between them, just as the love between Hyperion and Diotima in *Hyperion*, readily takes on an ontological significance, and a certain degree of symbolic connotation, which goes beyond mere earthly relationships. As Catherine declares herself and Heathcliff as one, sharing the same identity, it is clear that her love too is of a Romantic variety, and bears the Romantic extensive meaning of “Love”. Another similar point is that just like Diotima, Heathcliff is also associated with Nature,<sup>54</sup> so that in both works, the love and connection with a particular individual is associated with the love and connection with the divine Nature.

Furthermore, in both novels the feelings of the lovers are reciprocal. Like gravity, or magnetic force, each lover constantly draws the other towards him or her. Hyperion for instance has already described Diotima as a constant source of peace that can soothe the restlessness of his heart, and though Hyperion sees Diotima as “divinely self-sufficient,”<sup>55</sup> Diotima owes her illness and death to her longing for reunion with Hyperion. Similarly, what Heathcliff is for Catherine, is also what Catherine is for Heathcliff. Just as for Catherine existence would be void, empty and meaningless without Heathcliff, so does Heathcliff, after receiving the news of Catherine’s death, in a fit of despair, utter that he cannot live without his soul, without his life.<sup>56</sup> This kind of reciprocity, or interdependence, is significant in that neither side is self-sufficient but needs to depend on the other to achieve sufficiency.

At the same time, there is also a progression of ideas and intensification of feelings from *Hyperion* to *Wuthering Heights*. While Hyperion simply rejoices for his relationship with Diotima, the blessings of having such an ideal relationship on earth develops into being essential for a person’s survival in *Wuthering Heights*. This is shown from Catherine’s declaration from the quotation above, that “If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger”. Furthermore, whereas Hyperion seeks for the union with the world through different kinds of relationships in his journey of life, and in the end sees Diotima as *resembling* the divine beauty of heaven, the eternal source of Being, we see a step further, when Catherine exclusively identifies Heathcliff as her *own* being, which means two

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<sup>54</sup> This is indicated throughout the novel by different means. The name of Heathcliff, for example, is a juxtaposition of two different natural landscapes: heath, as being wild and immense; cliff, as being dangerous and remote. The name therefore both traces Heathcliff’s origin to Nature and reveals his natural dispositions.

<sup>55</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 2.

<sup>56</sup> “Oh, God! It is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!” Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 148.

individual identities have become one. For Catherine Heathcliff acts as the only agency on earth through which she could achieve unity with the world.

In addition, though Hyperion is able to recognize and articulate the significance of his relationship with Diotima when they are in love, Catherine only realizes the true meaning of her relationship with Heathcliff after her bond with Heathcliff is severed. Here again, just like the loss of Childhood and the falling out of Nature, the Love which leads to the fulfillment of life is depicted as transient and in the end unattainable in *Wuthering Heights*, while its possession can only be experienced retrospectively.<sup>57</sup> Hyperion and Diotima meet each other in their mature, adult life, and thus their love symbolizes a union after separation; whereas the love of Catherine and Heathcliff germinates in their childhood, which is lost as they grow up and are separated by life. Thus when one relationship is characterized with gain, the other is dominated by loss.

### The Attainability of Romantic Love in This Life

In both novels, the female characters pass away, leaving the male protagonists in a desolate state. The death of the lover is therefore an important event in both novels. But when paid close attention, it is clear that such an event has different implications in the two novels. To examine this issue in more detail, it may be helpful to see how Diotima and Catherine look at their own deaths on their deathbeds. This is what Diotima says:

Ask not how, do not seek to explain this death to yourself (Hyperion)! He who thinks to fathom such a fate in the end curses himself and everything, and yet no soul is guilty of it.

I will tell you exactly what I believe... My soul had become too powerful for me through you, it would also have become quiet again through you. You drew my life away from the earth, you would have taken my soul spellbound into your embracing arms as into a magic circle... O only when I fully believed that the storm of battle had burst open your prison, and that my Hyperion had flown up into the ancient freedom, then it was decided for me, that now will soon end.<sup>58</sup>

Diotima believes that her soul is drawn away from earth, into the embrace of Nature, where she would be reunited again with Hyperion, since she at the time thinks he has died on the battlefield. What is in particular significant in this passage is that though Diotima claims that her soul has grown too powerful through Hyperion, that in the end it seeks to break through its bodily prison, she at the

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<sup>57</sup> As J. Hillis Miller points out, "in Emily Brontë's dialectic of love: when you have it you cannot know that you have it, and to know it is to destroy it. It can only be known retrospectively, by exiles who look back in longing at the lost kingdom of joy." Miller, "Emily Brontë," 176.

<sup>58</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

same time states that it would *also* have become “quiet again” through him. She goes on to say that Hyperion would have taken her soul “spellbound” into his “embracing arms as into a magic circle”. In other words, had Diotima known Hyperion were still alive, his presence on earth would have been a sufficient means to sustain her soul and hold it back from flying into the sphere of death. This indicates that in the novel, true joy and happiness in this world is attainable, and could very well be pursued. Seen in this light, the death of Diotima is not so much an event that is doomed to happen as a misfortune, a regrettable occurrence, which tells about life’s unpredictability, when an individual is seized by the fluctuation of fate while he or she is least prepared.

But such is not the case in *Wuthering Heights*. When Catherine and Heathcliff meet for the last time, Catherine says:

“You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff! And you both come to bewail the deed to me, as if you were the people to be pitied! [...] you have killed me – and thrive on it, I think...”<sup>59</sup>

Heathcliff, on the other hand, sees Catherine choosing and marrying Edgar over him as a betrayal, which separated them years ago, and eventually leads to her own death:

“You teach me how cruel you’ve been – cruel and false. *Why* did you despise me? *Why* did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort – you deserve this. You have killed yourself [...] Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you*, of your own will, did it.”<sup>60</sup>

It is also helpful to recall here that the reason Catherine sinks into delirium is that Edgar demands that she make a choice between himself and Heathcliff:

“To get rid of me – answer my question,” persevered Mr. Linton. “You *must* answer it [...] Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be *my* friend and *his* at the same time; and I absolutely *require* to know which you choose.”<sup>61</sup>

Thus it becomes clear that the opposite wills of Heathcliff (representing Nature) and Edgar (representing Civilization) – both of which demand Catherine’s total commitment – lead to her death. The contrary demand from them accelerates the conflict, which eventually puts her into a dilemma that turns out to be fatal. She is, in the end, torn between the two and unable to make a decision.

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<sup>59</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 139-40.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

In a way both Heathcliff and Edgar represent a part of Catherine's own self – the desire to be at one with Nature, and the need to attend to one's own personal interests as one departs from Nature. The tension between the two becomes irreconcilable in the novel, and in the end leads to the failure to achieve any sort of harmony or balance between the two. The death of Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* is therefore not by mere chance, or accidental, like that of Diotima in *Hyperion*. In other words, it is not merely *possible*, but in fact *inevitable*. Therefore, though like the death of Diotima, Catherine's death plays an important part in communicating to the reader the essence of the human condition on earth, in *Wuthering Heights* a very different picture is given.

As Heathcliff claims, Catherine's choosing of Linton is a betrayal of her own heart, which desires to be at one with Nature (Heathcliff). But Catherine could not in fact have chosen otherwise. She could not have chosen to stay with or marry Heathcliff, whose love she has irretrievably lost since she slipped out of her childhood. The seamless union with Nature lies in Childhood, and Childhood alone. Humans' fall from Nature is not optional, but unavoidable. The force that separates Catherine from Heathcliff is much more profound and fatal than a mere individual circumstance can decide, but is under the dictation of a larger process, which no mortal is immune to. It is in the end the irrevocable direction of human life that separates them. Catherine could not, on the other hand, choose Edgar either, for to give up Heathcliff entirely is to relinquish the last bit of connection with Nature, thus the last bit of hope in this world.

On the other hand, the dilemma Catherine faced never appeared in *Hyperion*, which shows different concerns and understandings of human life by the two authors, reflecting the respective eras they lived in. At the threshold of death, *Hyperion* in its depiction of love is clearly more hopeful. For Diotima is, after all, not disappointed in her relationship. Her decease is not caused by the loss of *Hyperion's* love, but is prompted by her desire to join him in the afterlife.

The same cannot be said of Catherine and Heathcliff. In her last meeting with Heathcliff, Catherine's words indicate the inadequacy of her relationship with Heathcliff, as it falls short of her expectations: "That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me – he's in my soul..."<sup>62</sup> The actual Heathcliff has been distinguished from the Heathcliff she treasures in her own heart, the one that is "ideal". The love between Catherine and Heathcliff only has its fullness and completeness in childhood, which is inevitably lost as the two grow up. Catherine's attempt at retrieving their

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 141.

relationship after Heathcliff's return is in the end a failure. Unlike Diotima, it is the loss of hope in this world that compels Catherine to seek for fulfillment in the afterlife.

To conclude, the deaths of Diotima and Catherine have different meanings in the novels. One does not deny that love and true happiness in this world is attainable, whereas the other shows the irreversible loss of love in the earthly journey of life. Though in both *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* the Romantic idealization of Love is present, the two works differ as to whether Love, as a means to unite and integrate the self with the world, is accessible in this life. *Hyperion* is characterized by revived hope, and ever-renewed fulfillment in the face of misfortunes. By contrast, in *Wuthering Heights* Love as the binding force of the universe cannot draw the lovers together. There is only increasing alienation and isolation in life.

## Death

Death, a subject which is frequently taken up by Romantic writers, figures significantly in both *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*. Though the two works give similar depictions of death, it is rendered more appealingly in the latter. In this section I'd like to draw attention to both what death means for an individual character when she or he is dying, and what it means for their surviving partners.

### Death as Eternal Existence with Nature

In both works, death serves as a pathway through which an individual soul reaches the shore of Immortality, where it can share an eternity with Nature.

Both Diotima and Catherine express what death means for them at the end of their lives. Diotima, in one of her last letters to Hyperion, says:

I have risen above the piecework that human hands have made, I have felt *the life of nature that is higher than all thoughts*... How should I become lost from the sphere of life, in which the eternal love that is common to all holds together all natures? How should I part from the union that links all beings? ... No! ... We part only to be more intimately at one, more divinely at peace with all, with each other. We die so as to live.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2 (my italics).

The divine union with all things, which Diotima has felt in her life, will continue to enfold her after her physical body ceases to exist, as she becomes part of it. For Diotima, death is the end of life, but also signifies the beginning of a new life. We part with this life on earth, only so that we could exist more intimately with Nature, and with each other in the next life.

In the last meeting with Heathcliff, Catherine also expresses the feeling and desire to be reunified with Nature:

“[T]he 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. Nelly, you think you are better and more fortunate than I; in full health and strength – you are sorry for me – very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for *you*. I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all.”<sup>64</sup>

When compared to the previous quotation, there is a sense of the loss of connection with the divine Nature in Catherine’s speech. Whereas Diotima feels the life of Nature, the union of all that exists, presently in her life, Catherine can only see it “dimly through tears”, and yearn for it “through the walls of an aching heart”. The glorious world beyond forms a direct contrast with the shattered, broken world below. Furthermore, while Diotima has experienced the beauty of life in its fullness, and does not part from this world without lamentation, Catherine expresses the desire to escape from this world’s weariness, and to set the soul free from its bodily bondage with eagerness.

In both cases, and on a larger scale in Romantic writings in general, we see a clear antagonism between the body and the soul. This phenomenon is best explicated in the context of Romantic philosophy. Schelling, for example, thinks that “Nature is visible mind, and mind is invisible nature, by virtue of their being different stages in the development of living force.”<sup>65</sup> This puts mind as the highest manifestation of body (matter), and body the lowest manifestation of the mind. The ultimate freedom of the soul, which is achieved upon death, thus requires the perishing of the body. In the two quoted passages, both Diotima and Catherine refer to the body as a “prison”,<sup>66</sup> while the soul is confined in it, yearning to be free. There is an ongoing tension between the two. The stronger the spirit gets, the weaker the body seems to become. Diotima calls it a process of purification, which is

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<sup>64</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 141.

<sup>65</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 519.

<sup>66</sup> Diotima describes “the storm of battle” as “burst[ing open] Hyperion’s “prison”, while Catherine also refers to her physical existence as a “shattered prison”. Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2; Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 141.

natural to all living things: “All that is natural purifies itself, and everywhere the blossom of life wrests itself freer and freer from coarser matter.”<sup>67</sup>

While in *Wuthering Heights* the same course is carried to a somewhat cruel and morbid degree, as Heathcliff once exclaims,

“I’m too happy, and yet I’m not happy enough. My soul’s bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself.”<sup>68</sup>

It is a long fight, I wish it were over!”<sup>69</sup>

There is a clear conflict between what Heathcliff’s body needs and what his soul wants, that Heathcliff’s physical needs become nothing but a hindrance for his soul to reach its final destination. The kind of rest Nelly talks about in the novel, when she tries to persuade Heathcliff to take a meal and sleep, obviously refers to the rest of his body, when Heathcliff has another kind of rest in mind – the rest of his soul, which is far more important to him. In the end, as it turns out, the spirit does not yield to the needs of the body, but goes on a course to pursue its own freedom, so that it can obtain the true rest.

While this process may sometimes appear to be painful and frustrating to the spectators, for example Nelly, who has to witness a series of bizarre behaviors performed by Heathcliff that leads to his own demise, for the protagonist such a process is filled with a strange sense of exaltation. While it is also true that when compared to *Hyperion*, the anticipation for death is escalated to a new level in *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff in the end no longer sees death as merely part of life’s journey, which is to be accepted tranquilly. He anticipates it with a fervent, unquenchable desire that in the end he is swallowed by it.

There is thus a line of development between the two novels’ depictions of Death, as well as what it means for an individual soul. Though in both works death is presented as a way to liberate the soul from the confinement of the body, in *Hyperion*, death means more of a simple change of the mode of existence, as the characters can also find love, happiness and renewed hope in this life. Whereas in *Wuthering Heights* death becomes the only agency to bring the ultimate freedom and peace of the soul, as existence on earth becomes increasingly unbearable and devoid of hope.

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<sup>67</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 296.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

The kind of view which looks at death as an event that can release the soul back to Nature, where life initially comes from, is shared by both Hölderlin and Brontë, as well as many other writers in the Romantic tradition. This view sees life as cyclical and infinite, rather than linear and finite. In their effort to explicate the relationship between an individual life and mother Nature, both authors employ a particular image in their writings – that of “the Tree of Life”. It is a symbol typically used in both religious writings and Romantic poetry. We find it in *Hyperion*:

Men fall like rotten fruit from you (Nature), O let them perish, for thus they return to your root, and so shall I, O tree of life, so that I may again grow green with you, and breathe amidst your crown with all your budding branches! Peacefully and profoundly, for we all sprouted up from the golden seed!<sup>70</sup>

Similar lines also appear in Brontë’s poem “Death”:

Death! that struck when I was most confiding.  
In my certain faith of joy to be--  
Strike again, Time's withered branch dividing  
From the fresh root of Eternity!  
...  
Strike it down, that other boughs may flourish  
Where that perished sapling used to be;  
Thus, at least, its mouldering corpse will nourish  
That from which it sprung – Eternity.<sup>71</sup>

Like the shift of the four seasons or the change of the color of the sky, death is seen as part of Nature’s course. As the individual life perishes, it is also absorbed into an eternity with Nature. As foliage falls onto the ground, it then becomes part of the Earth. But still a slightly different tone can be discerned in Brontë’s poem. While *Hyperion* articulates that the individual life rejoices in the embrace of Nature, Brontë’s “Death” puts an emphasis on how the termination of a singular life can contribute to the infinite life of Nature as a whole.

Nevertheless, a common point is that in both instances, Death is depicted as the end of life, but also signals a new beginning. Through death, a singular life is assimilated into a larger identity, and preserved in a different, transformed form. When the individual life parts with time’s linear dimension, it enters into eternity, which is immune to time, sorrow and changes. This kind of thinking that the individual life can achieve its immortality by being absorbed into an all-encompassing Nature after death, reflects human beings’ ancient longing for Infinity, and our desire

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<sup>70</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Brontë, “Death,” in Janet Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 25, lines 1-4, 29-32.

to belong to a larger course of the universe.<sup>72</sup> Although it is also worth pointing out that, by the time of Brontë this idea becomes only one of the views on Death, and what death means for an individual, which is accompanied by an increasing sense of uncertainty.

## Whether Death Erects An Insurmountable Barrier for the Lovers

In both novels, the pair of lovers is separated by the passing away of the female character, causing pain and agony for the surviving male character. But when Hyperion and Heathcliff in the midst of despair reach out and seek for signs of their deceased lovers in Nature, it becomes clear that their deaths lead to different consequences for them.

In *Hyperion*, the communication between the lovers is not severed by death. We see this in the concluding letter of the novel, when Hyperion cries into the midst of Nature, asking Diotima where she is:

Diotima, I cried, where are you, O where are you? And I felt as if I heard Diotima's voice, the voice that once cheered me in the days of joy –

I am with mine, she cried, with yours, with those that the errant human spirit does not recognize!

A gentle terror seized me and my thought fell asleep in me.

O dear word from holy mouth, I cried, when I had again awakened, dear riddle, do I grasp you?

“O you,” so I thought, “with your gods, nature! ...”<sup>73</sup>

The voice of Diotima answers Hyperion's cry, and tells him that she is now with Nature, the home of all beings. Death in the end does not impose an abyss between Hyperion and Diotima, and they could still, by some mystical means, communicate with each other.

After Hyperion perceives Diotima's presence in Nature, he for the first time comes to an understanding that he and Diotima are not lost to each other, but are still unified in an all-encompassing life permeating the universe: “We are living tones, we harmonize in your euphony, nature!”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> This is derivative of and built upon Plotinus's monism. For a detailed discussion on this topic, see Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 146-154.

<sup>73</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

All lives originate from Nature, and in the end rest in it, forming an endless chain. Whether Diotima is alive or dead, they are forever connected to each other, through the eternal presence of Nature, which weaves the world into a whole. Hyperion's grasp of the meaning of Diotima's death in the end of the novel, thus illustrates life's resilience in the face of the unpredictability of fate, and the faith in the eternal love permeating the universe.

Such is not the case for Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine's death leaves Heathcliff in profound desolation. From the moment Heathcliff learns about Catherine's death, he sets out on a restless journey searching for her existence on earth:

“Where is she? Not *there* – not in heaven – not perished, where?”<sup>75</sup>

He even proceeds to dig up Catherine's grave in the middle of the night. And when he senses Catherine's presence near him:

“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 re-filled the grave, and led me home...”

But such feeling of consolation does not linger long, since it disappears once Heathcliff reaches the Heights:

“Having reached the Heights, I rushed eagerly to the door ...I felt her by me – I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not!* I ought to have sweat blood then, from the anguish of my yearning, from the fervour of my supplications to have but one glimpse!”<sup>76</sup>

Here we see a clear contrast between what happens to Hyperion and what happens to Heathcliff. When both seek for a glimpse of their lovers in Nature, Hyperion is consoled by the words Diotima sent out from Nature, and is at peace again, but Heathcliff searches for where Catherine is ever since the event of her death, and has to dig up her tomb in order to *feel* a spark of her presence, with no solid signs to confirm her actual existence. And even this sensing of Catherine being with him cannot be retained, as it is lost as soon as he enters *Wuthering Heights*. The kind of assurance that after a life passes away, it will then be assimilated into the soul of Nature, existing in another form, is therefore sharply reduced in *Wuthering Heights*, as the characters' connection with the soul of Nature is significantly weakened. As doubts arise as to whether the loved one has not simply disappeared but exists in Nature still, Heathcliff begins a relentless search that lasts for the rest of his life. He describes this experience as:

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<sup>75</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 147.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-257.

“It was a strange way of killing, not by inches, but by fractions of hair-breadths, to beguile me with the spectre of a hope, through eighteen years!”<sup>77</sup>

Existence without Catherine has become a living torture, ceaselessly generating frustration and pain. Thus when Hyperion is able to be connected to Diotima through the prevalent presence of Nature, Heathcliff lives in perpetual agony as he searches for any clues of Catherine’s existence on earth, and finds his situation increasingly unbearable. And his trial only comes to an end, when at last Death sets him free.

Like the falling out of childhood, the unpredictability of fate, and the passing of the ideal love, when death occurs, the characters in *Hyperion* at last arrive at a peaceful state of mind, as the two lovers find their way back to each other, despite Diotima’s death. The novel demonstrates that in the midst of conflict there is reconciliation, and parting is always followed by reunification.

However a very different tone is found in *Wuthering Heights*. It is even doubtful whether death itself can bring an everlasting peace to the characters. Catherine for example does not appear to find peace immediately after death. Her journey as a wandering ghost only comes to an end when Heathcliff joins her in death, as the two are in the end spotted by the country folks walking on the moor together.<sup>78</sup> Different from *Hyperion*, everlasting love and happiness now exist only in the next world. Thus when death no longer serves as the safe pathway to eternity, but could mean simple oblivion, Catherine and Heathcliff’s fate further demonstrates the sensing of this kind of existential threat which became prominent in Brontë’s time. In this respect, it could be said that Brontë introduced a ghost sphere to accommodate the spiritual need of the Romantic era, preventing death from lapsing into a mere naturalistic cessation of life. Nevertheless, the existence of such a ghost sphere is hardly beyond doubt. Heathcliff’s sighting of Catherine and their reunion after death as ghosts are merely one way of looking at what happens in the novel, and they could also be mere human illusions. Lockwood, for example, holds the belief that both Heathcliff and Catherine slept quietly on earth in the end.

To conclude, the world of *Wuthering Heights*, when compared to the world of *Hyperion*, demonstrates features characteristic of the post-Romantic period, when Nature’s miraculous power

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>78</sup> Nelly tells Lockwood towards the end of the novel, “The country folks, if you ask them, would swear on their Bible that he[Heathcliff] *walks*. There are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor and even within this house,” and relates a shepherd’s encounter with Heathcliff and Catherine on the moor. Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 299.

fades away, and the gap between this world and the next enlarges. In the early Victorian period, the purely naturalistic view of the world, as derived from pre-Darwinian scientific discourse, has mounted a serious challenge to the holistic view of the world, the self, and human beings' place in the natural world as expounded in the Romantic literary and philosophical tradition. Emily Brontë lives in such a historical period that witnesses the confrontation of these two distinctly different narratives. Her works as a result inevitably bear the mark of such an era. In her writings, there can often be seen an un-relinquished effort, a desperate attempt, to bridge the gap between the human and the divine, as the prospect of achieving a harmonious state in Nature recedes into a distant dream, and an unreal fantasy.

### **The Dialectical Pattern of Freedom and Unity in *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights***

When looking at the plots of *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*, it is clear that there is a dialectic movement which functions as a guiding principle that weaves the stories into a whole. In the following section I will briefly discuss how this principle can be seen in both novels, as well as the individual features it adopts.

As the story of *Hyperion* unfolds, it becomes clear that Hyperion's life demonstrates a cycle of loss and survival, which is not only based on the events that have happened in Hyperion's past, but is also thematized and reinforced through the protagonist's recollection of these events itself. Towards the end of the novel, when Hyperion looks back upon his own past, and examines what he has gone through, he sees life's sufferings and joys, its sorrows and happiness, gradually woven into a designated pattern, a definite shape:

I gaze out upon the sea and reflect on my life, its rising and sinking, its bliss and its mourning, and my past often resounds to me like a lyre on which the master plays through all tones and blends discord and harmony with hidden order.<sup>79</sup>

Bliss is mingled with mourning, joy with sorrow. In the midst of discord and strife there forms the grand melody of life. Freedom has a price. Reflection tears one away from the original union with Nature, and initiates both the fall and the path to redemption. It therefore remains both a curse and a blessing, bringing the protagonist freedom and sorrow simultaneously. Through his work, Hölderlin shows the reader that life is an endless struggle to secure some order and the acknowledgment that the ultimate foundation cannot be known, the desire to take control of one's life, and the realization

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<sup>79</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 2.

that total control is unattainable.<sup>80</sup> What Hyperion desires in life, whether it is human freedom, the ideal love, or to be at one with Nature, can only be approached in infinite approximation, but never grasped in fully realized form, and this makes his life an on-going quest for higher fulfillment.

Furthermore, what happens to Hyperion in the novel is not unique, but represents the experience of all living things. Thus together all lives form the great harmony of life, which is infinite throughout time and space:

The stars have chosen constancy, they shine unceasingly in silent fullness of life and do not know age. *We represent perfection in flux; we divide the great chords of life in ever-changing melodies...*<sup>81</sup>

Each human life on earth is limited and finite, yet together they harmonize in life's unending melody – and perhaps even shine through the universe with a different kind of beauty from the constancy of the lives of gods.

Thus on both an individual and a collective scale, *Hyperion's* plot illustrates a typical dialectic pattern in Romantic literature and philosophy,<sup>82</sup> as the dominant tone in the novel alternates between conflict and reconciliation, doubts and certainty, victory and defeat. And it shares with many early Romantic writings a deep conviction that all the sufferings and struggles that one experiences in different stages of life have their own value, as in the end they always lead back to Unity, and in progressively higher forms. The “hidden order” of life is yet to emerge, and the efforts of searching for the meaning of life would eventually yield fruitful results.

We could also find similar dialectic patterns in the novel *Wuthering Heights*, which may be more than a mere coincidence or superficial resemblance, as Brontë was once referred to as “the sole major English novelist with a full understanding of a dialectical philosophy.”<sup>83</sup>

In the last chapter of the novel, as Lockwood is coming across the moor on his way to find Nelly, a splendid natural scene emerges in front of his eyes:

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<sup>80</sup> “Their [reflection and unity] tension forms a pattern. Our lives move continually back and forth between the effort to achieve some order in our experience and the realization that the order achieved is imperfect.” Larmore, “Hölderlin and Novalis,” 151.

<sup>81</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2 (my italics).

<sup>82</sup> Other notable examples are Goethe's *Faust* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, both of which exhibit Hegelian philosophy.

<sup>83</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: Women's Press, 1994), 51.

I turned away and made my exit, rambling leisurely along with *the glow of a sinking sun behind, and the mild glory of a rising moon in front; one fading, and the other brightening*, as I quitted the park, and climbed the stony by-road branching off to Mr Heathcliff's dwelling.

Before I arrived in sight of it, all that remained of day was a beamless amber light along the west; but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon.<sup>84</sup>

The Moon is traditionally associated with Night, vision and the power of Imagination in Romantic literature, while the sun with Day, Reason and analytical thinking. The rising of the moon thus indicates an anticipatory reconciliation that is about to come later in the novel, when Lockwood in the end finds out the second Catherine and Hareton are now together, and peace again dawns onto Wuthering Heights. A difference can be drawn here though, that unlike *Hyperion*, in which the protagonist finds his peace and reconciliation in this life, the tragic story of the first generation is only re-compensated through the second generation finding *their* happiness in this life. For Catherine and Heathcliff themselves, their relationship also moves through a process of union (childhood), separation, and reunion, which, as J. Hillis Miller once shrewdly commented, "is like the dialectic of Hegel or like Novalis' vision of human life and history."<sup>85</sup> However, as aforementioned, the real reunion between Catherine and Heathcliff only comes after they are both dead. Thus in *Wuthering Heights* life's renewing cycle is realized through the next generation, rather than in the earthly life of Catherine and Heathcliff themselves.

As the novel leaves Catherine and Heathcliff behind, and ends with the second Catherine and Hareton, each of whom is the last member of their ancient family, moving to the Grange to start their new life, the author presents a different view on the future of these two, which in some way also represents the collective future of humankind:

"*They* are afraid of nothing," I [Lockwood] grumbled, watching their approach through the window. "Together they would brave Satan and all his legions."<sup>86</sup>

Contrary to in *Hyperion*, no definite conclusion about life is arrived at by the main characters in *Wuthering Heights*. Instead, by looking into the future of Hareton and Cathy, *Wuthering Heights* exceeds the Romantic dialectic that in the end always points to Unity, and acknowledges the unknowability of the directions of human life and human destiny. For Hareton and Cathy, the courage to continue is no longer yielded from the belief about the definite shape of the future, a

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<sup>84</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 272 (my italics).

<sup>85</sup> Miller, "Emily Brontë," 206.

<sup>86</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 300.

promised unity to be arrived through a contoured journey, as the story of *Hyperion* exemplifies, but is simply derived from humanity's ability to brave the unknown.

## **The Narrative Structure and Technique of *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights***

Apart from the affinities in major themes of the two novels, the two literary works' narrative techniques also show lineage along the same tradition. For both novels bear distinct marks of the Romantic experimentation with the "novel" as a literary form. In this section, I will aim to compare the similarities and differences of these two novels in their narrative technique in a larger literary and philosophical context.

### **Novel of Education and Novel of Letters**

In the early Romantic period, many European Romantic writers adopt a crisis-autobiographical plot in their novels, which is commonly referred to as *Bildungsroman*, novel of education or development. Associated with religious writings such as Augustine's *Confessions*, the ancient plot of fall – quest – redemption in this form of novels is modified and preserved, used to serve as a convenient paradigm for an author to re-interpret the meaning and purpose of human life in the new historical context, and to explore the trajectory of human destiny in a drastically changing social and cultural environment. In these novels the story is often about the protagonist setting out on a journey, which is most likely both a factual journey and a spiritual one, that in the end circles always back home, when the hero finally learns who he is, what he is born for, and the invisible hand that governs the course of his life all along.<sup>87</sup> Some of the most celebrated works of the early Romantic period follow this pattern, such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, Karl Wilhelm Friedrich's *Lucinde*, and Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

While some of these authors used such a narrative plot, they at the same time put an emphasis on the *form* of the novel by introducing the epistolary novel as a method of narration, which is called *Briefroman*, novel in letters. This form of writing was inherited from eighteenth-century fiction. By situating the protagonist in a larger narrative context, which often consists of multiple voices with changing perspectives, and incorporating individual texts written in a variety of genres, such as letters, poems, diary pages, dialogues, ballads, reflections, dreams, flash backs, etc., these novels seek to form a unity-in-diversity body of narrative, where the central message of the novel is

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<sup>87</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 193-94.

everywhere present but is in a dispersed form, never apparent but needing to be gradually unpacked by the reader. These narrative techniques challenge the very form of the novel as linear and sequential, and the meaning of the text as definite and conclusive.

To different extents, *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* are novels that have adopted both traditions, with the latter having a further development and variation along the line. A journey of quest can be seen in both stories, for example, during which the protagonists are constantly driven by the desire to find love, self-identity and a spiritual home. Both are also epistolary novels, with *Hyperion* taking on the typical form of serial letters, and *Wuthering Heights* that of a private diary. Both works furthermore demonstrate textual and narrative coherence. The central tenet of the novel is modulated into the very structure of the text, and supported by various “fragments” in the main body of the narrative.

However there are also clear differences between the two works. As a “novel of education”, *Hyperion* is a work that tells of a typical circular journey. It starts with Hyperion leaving Greece to search for higher knowledge, and ends with him returning home, loaded with experience of life. The journey is progressive and complete. Hyperion at last reaches a more self-conscious union with the world, Nature and the self. Meanwhile, the development of the protagonist is singled out throughout the novel by the fluctuation of fate. As Hyperion’s life moves back and forth, the circle of life appears and again. A new round of quest always leads up to a higher unity – which is nevertheless always contingent – and repeats the pattern of life that precedes it. This movement disrupts the apparent linearity of Hyperion’s journey, and holds the novel in a spiral shape. As a “novel of letters”, *Hyperion* uses for the most part letters, and at times interpolated poems, dialogues and monologues as the novel’s main narrative methods. The central tenet of the novel, which is that the world is “One differentiated in itself”, is thus contained and explicated through the novel’s compositional parts and narrative plots, and at last revealed at the end of the novel. By doing this, the *form Hyperion* takes on, corresponds and contributes to the essential *content* the novel seeks to unravel and illustrate.

By comparison, *Wuthering Heights* is also about a circular journey home. It starts with Catherine and Heathcliff growing up together in Wuthering Heights, and ends with Heathcliff dying in it and the second generation leaving the site for a new home. But the story lacks the clear signs of progression that can be found in *Hyperion*. And instead of reaching a higher synthesis in the understanding of the world and the meaning of life, *Wuthering Heights* gives no definite conclusion or answer in the end. Whether Catherine and Heathcliff have attained their happiness, and what the future holds for the

second Catherine and Hareton, are left to the reader to ponder. As to the narrative form, *Wuthering Heights* is scattered with letters, ballads, diary fragments, dialogues, dreams, reflections of past events, which disrupts the singularity and linearity of the storytelling. The novel also uses multiple narrators. With short stories being told one within another, fragmentary episodes offered by different narrators are pitched together. As a result, the narrative frame of *Wuthering Heights* is more sophisticated and complicated than that of *Hyperion*.

Also differently from *Hyperion*, *Wuthering Heights* is not dominated by a single idea to which the various parts of the novel correlate. Instead of a central voice running through the novel, there is a hotchpotch of juxtaposed voices in the novel, through different “fragments” and narrators, and each of them looks at the past from their own perspectives. The “unity” that appears in *Wuthering Heights* is therefore of a quite different kind, as its *content* is heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, consisting of a cluster of conflicting views. If *Hyperion* reveals a dynamic unity through the individual but interrelated letters, each of which contributes to the hidden order of human life, *Wuthering Heights* is committed to form a diversified “unity” by the inter-weaving of provisional and conflicting voices and episodes, which do not co-exist in harmony but are distinguished by the contrast and tension between them.

### The Self and Identity in *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*

Another notable difference between the two novels lies in whether the protagonists successfully achieve or recover their identity at the end of the stories. To look into this issue we need to first consider the respective ways the stories are told, and the narrators chosen. In *Hyperion*, the protagonist is the main narrator. The narration of the story only starts when the events themselves, drawn from Hyperion’s earlier life, have all been completed. A retrospective view on the events is thus adopted. While it is generally conceded that during the process of retelling his story, Hyperion “gains an increased understanding of himself and of life in general.”<sup>88</sup> The past gradually unfolds in front of him, with increasing clarity and comprehensibility, as it is molded and shaped into a recognizable, intelligible form.

*Wuthering Heights*, however, uses Lockwood, an outsider as the primary narrator. The narration of the story does not begin after all the events have been concluded, but instead starts in the middle, with Lockwood’s visit to Wuthering Heights, presenting to the readers a scene filled with riddles. It

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<sup>88</sup> Unger, *Friedrich Hölderlin*, 24.

then goes back to decades ago, in the form of Nelly's conversation with Lockwood. What happened in the past is therefore first told by Nelly, and then recorded into Lockwood's diary. Though the narrators in both novels are from a position detached in time and somewhat distanced from the events recounted,<sup>89</sup> Hyperion's narration is more direct and clear due to the fact that he is re-telling his own past, while Lockwood's view is necessarily constrained, because he has to rely on Nelly's memories. Thus Lockwood stands at a further removed point, and his narration consists of an effort of looking into someone else's past, through another person's eyes, and trying to make sense of it. His apparently inadequate ability, being himself neither smart nor discerning enough to perceive what is going on, adds more difficulty in revealing the real nature and full significance of the past events. As a result, while Hyperion is able to make sense of his own past by examining a series of emotional and ontological attachments, and reconstructing his past, it is hard to tell how much Lockwood learns in the end. His limited understanding of the story remains with him, so does his way of living his life continue. The incomprehensibility and enigma of some of the most important conversations that occur between the characters<sup>90</sup> are largely left to the reader to decipher.

In Romantic novels, the tracing of one's past, the attainment of one's own identity, coincide with a person finding the real meaning of life.<sup>91</sup> Hyperion in the end returns to Greece, the place he starts his journey, and through the recounting of his past to his friend Bellarmin, he gradually learns who he is, and what he is born for. The story ends with him becoming a priest of nature, finding his rightful place in the world. The ancient journey of fall-redemption-unity circles back home, with a higher unity with the world achieved.

Whereas the past reveals to Hyperion life's "hidden order", the re-telling of the story in *Wuthering Heights* is reduced to the mystification of one's origin itself, and the uncertainty of finding any inherent meaning in life. This could be seen in the ambiguity of Heathcliff's identity. His parentage, for example, is unknown from the very start, though Nelly sometimes muses on his true origin.<sup>92</sup> In the end his tombstone is only inscribed by the name "Heathcliff" and the date of his death, since no one knows either his surname or the year and date he was born. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff's identity remains a mystery, and is never revealed, neither is it said where Heathcliff truly belongs.

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<sup>89</sup> "Hyperion's letters are composed from a perspective detached in time and usually at some emotional distance from the events recounted." Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Such as Catherine's confessions to Nelly about her dream and her articulation of the relationship between her and Heathcliff, the conversation between Catherine and Heathcliff in their last meeting.

<sup>91</sup> For an extended discussion on this topic, see Anthony Phelan, "Prose Fiction of the German Romantics," in Nicholas Saul, *German Romanticism*, 42-49, doi:10.1017/CCOL9780521848916.003.

<sup>92</sup> For example, Nelly once pondered, "Is he a ghoul, or a vampire?" And "Where did he come from, the little dark thing, harbored by a good man to his bane?" Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 293.

The past was irreducibly opaque. Catherine, similarly, assumes an alternative identity upon entering the Grange. A short period of apparent married bliss is followed by the estrangement with Heathcliff and the disillusionment about finding any lasting happiness in her life. She in the end becomes unrecognizable to herself in the mirror. Both Catherine and Heathcliff do not find an identity of their own after childhood, or a place where they can belong. There is still the quest for the meaning of life, but the path which is supposed to in the end lead one home is truncated. The destination remains unknown, at least in this life.

## Novel as a “Fragment”: The Endings of the Novels

Both *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* are works that self-consciously resist closure, and this to some extent reflects the Romantic conception of novel as a form of “fragment” whose story never ends. The ending of *Hyperion* for example indicates the on-going nature of the protagonist’s quest, as the novel ends with the famous sentence:

So I thought. More soon.<sup>93</sup>

This signals that though Hyperion has returned home, his journey is not over, but will go on as long as he lives.

The ending of *Wuthering Heights* is also very subtle, as Lockwood narrates:

I lingered round them, under the benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.<sup>94</sup>

Lockwood believes that the dead are now at peace, which ostensibly gives the reader a sense of closure at the end of the novel. But there is also a sense of irony in the air, when one considers that Lockwood makes this statement, not long after Nelly tells him Catherine and Heathcliff were spotted by the country folks wondering on the moor and near the Heights.

However, it is also true that *Hyperion* has a stronger sense of closure than *Wuthering Heights*. *Hyperion* ends with Hyperion achieving a holistic vision of the world, and assigning himself the priesthood of Nature. His last words therefore gesture towards a new phase of his life, that henceforth, what he talks about would be the eulogy of Nature, a place that all lives come from and

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<sup>93</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 2, bk. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 300.

return to. Whatever happens to himself, to his fellow men, and to the world, could now be explained in the existing paradigm, as life's happiness and sorrow can only carry one nearer to the soul of Nature, and reveal the inner connection of all things. The cardinal Romantic principle of life has been found and presented to the reader. This is equally true for the author himself, as *Hyperion* was Hölderlin's first major prose work, and it was to be his last. Hereafter, his writings produced as a poet would predominantly be elegies, odes, and hymns.<sup>95</sup>

This is not the case for *Wuthering Heights*. Though they struggle to do so, the characters in the novel can no longer attain harmony with Nature. In the end, with Catherine and Heathcliff finding their happiness beyond the tomb, and Hareton and Cathy moving to the Grange, the journey home cannot be said to be conclusive. Differing from *Hyperion*, the novel has no conclusion, no total restoration, and no spiritual home to return to. As the tide of history pushes one forward, the past site is simply left behind.

## Conclusion

Through a series of thematic and narrative comparisons between *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights*, we have seen that Emily Brontë's handling of major Romantic concepts, such as Death, Love and Human Suffering, shows an obvious Romantic lineage, while the novel's narrative technique also manifests traditions distinctly recognizable in early Romantic literature (novel of education; novel in letters). At the same time, in Brontë's novel, there is also new development in these Romantic concepts, themes and narrative techniques. Death is not only a pathway to return to Nature, but is also clearly favoured compared to the gloomy condition of existence on earth; Love is not just one of the few effective ways to reconnect to the world, but will become irrevocably lost in later life; sufferings and miseries are no longer to be shouldered in the face of the unpredictability of fate, but are to be endured throughout life's journey. These new developments, along with the further fragmentation of the narrative, the loss of self-identity of the main characters, as well as the lack of closure in Brontë's novel, all show that Emily Brontë belongs to the late Romantic era, when the Romantic movement was heading towards its end.

The different ways Hölderlin and Emily Brontë looked at the world, the self and Nature are therefore inextricably linked with the different social, scientific and political environments they respectively lived in. For Hölderlin, as the French Revolution brought about drastic political and ideological

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<sup>95</sup> Unger, *Friedrich Hölderlin*, 38.

changes, many of his contemporaries believed that a new and better age was emerging. The future was filled with promises and new possibilities. *Hyperion* in this regard is a work that bears the hallmark of the Romantic era. In the early Victorian period, things have become a bit different. As Peter McInerney correctly points out, *Wuthering Heights* is not a typical Romantic novel, but is “an historical novel about Romanticism.”<sup>96</sup> It offers a view back towards a past era, “when the possibility of an unlimited human will seemed plausible,” a view from a time that has denied it.<sup>97</sup> The novel therefore shows both reverence and lamentation, remembrance of the past and the belief that what it once offered cannot be regained. Brontë’s novel is thus both within the Romantic tradition and outside of it, both a continuation and a refutation of the Romantic credo.

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<sup>96</sup> Peter McInerney, “Satanic Conceits in *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*,” *Milton and the Romantics: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4:1 (July 2008): 10, doi:10.1080/08905498008583178.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

# Novalis's *Hymns to the Night*

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*"Inward goes the mysterious path. In us or nowhere is eternity with its worlds, the past and future."* – Novalis, *Blüthenstaub (Pollen)*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This chapter compares German poet and philosopher Novalis's *Hymns to the Night*<sup>2</sup> with Emily Brontë's novel and lyrical works, and focuses on how the mystical elements, or visionary aspects of these two authors' writings constitute an intrinsic part of the way they perceive truth, the world and the self distinct in the Romantic tradition. The chapter will also discuss this topic in relation to a larger Romantic context.

*Hymns to the Night* (1800) is Novalis's most accomplished lyrical work, and one of the most important poems in early German Romanticism. The poem consists of two times three hymns, with a primary antithesis set forth between the image of "Light" and that of "Night", and is to be read as "an ensemble of interdependent parts."<sup>3</sup> Within each pair of the hymns, the first one leads the reader into the sphere of eternal Night, and the second one tells of the awakening that follows and the longing to return to the Night. As the narrative proceeds, between each pair of the hymns, the antithesis between "Light" and "Night" takes on a richer and deeper meaning. The first pair of the hymns, for example, talks about the scorching of the daylight and the nurturing nature of the night; the second pair then describes an event of personal revelation at night and the ensuing return of the day; the last pair deals with the coming of Christ and the eventual breaking of the boundary between Night and Light, which heralds the era of poetry and religion yet to come. With its thematic unity and structural symmetry, the *Hymns* aims at lifting the personal to the universal, and presenting to the reader an all-encompassing experience.

It is perhaps not surprising that, as a representative work of early Romanticism, some of the central themes in *Hymns*, such as Night and the yearning for Death, are also frequently subjects in Emily Brontë's poems. But the striking thematic parallels between the two authors' works go beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> William Arctander O'Brien, "Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg)," in *German Writers in the Age of Goethe, 1789-1832*, ed. James Hardin and Christoph E. Schweitzer (Detroit, MI : Gale Research, 1989), 244.

<sup>2</sup> Along with a few sporadic writings such as the *Fragments*.

<sup>3</sup> David Gascoyne, "Novalis and the Night," introduction to *Hymns to the Night*, trans. Jeremy Reed (Hampshire, UK: Enitharmon, 1989), 9.

mere adoption of traditional Romantic images. Most notably, associated with the exultation of Night, is the description of mystical visions, in which “consciousness attempts to transcend reality through nature, aiming for that close union with God, freedom, and immortality,” as Maggie Allen puts it.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the appearance of Night and mystical visions is frequently featured in the two authors’ writings, so much so that Allen has called the resemblance between the two authors’ works “uncanny”.<sup>5</sup>

This visionary aspect of their works is in fact related to the understanding of the role of Art, and of Imagination’s active ability to reveal the Truth distinct in the Romantic tradition. It has been systematically explicated in the writings of early Romantic philosophers such as Schiller.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will therefore start from a brief introduction of the concept of Art in early Romantic philosophy, then go on to explore its adoption in Novalis and Emily Brontë’s works, before delving into a more extended discussion of how seminal Romantic images and concepts, such as Night, dream, and death, are used to evoke the sense of the Infinite, and as effective ways to reveal the Truth, by Novalis and Emily Brontë respectively in their writings.

## Carlyle’s Article “Novalis”

Differing from the comparison made between *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* in Chapter One, which focuses on the textual parallels between two works whose authors may not have known each other at all, there is reason to believe that Emily Brontë may have received actual influences from Novalis’s writings.

Novalis’ main philosophical concepts and ideas were introduced into England by Thomas Carlyle, through his article “Novalis”. Carlyle first published his essay “Novalis” in July, 1829 in *The Foreign Review*. It is regarded as “the most important critique of German Romanticism to appear in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain.”<sup>7</sup> The article not only gives a detailed and comprehensive account of Novalis’s life, but also includes extracts from Novalis’s major published works such as *Pupils at Sais*

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<sup>4</sup> Maggie Allen, “Emily Brontë and the Influence of the German Romantic Poets,” *Brontë Studies* 30, no. 1 (Mar. 2005): 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letter* (1794).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Cumming ed., *The Carlyle Encyclopedia* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 351. Carlyle’s essay “surpasses in depth and detail the fragmentary, at times inadequately informed, discussions of German thought published by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas De Quincey.” Ibid.

(*Lehrlinge zu Sais*), *Christianity or Europe (Die Christenheit oder Europa)*, *Heinrich von Ofterdignen*, and a series of writings under the title *Fragments*.

Most pertinent to our concern in this chapter, Carlyle discusses *Hymns to the Night* at considerable length in this article. It not only gives a full translation of the third hymn, but also offers the reader a detailed account of the personal circumstances under which the poem was produced. The third hymn, which is essentially an account of the speaker's midnight mystical encounter with his beloved at her tomb, was based on the poet's diary entry of a real life event, which, according to Charles Passage, occurred on May 13, 1797, some two months after his lover Sophie's death.<sup>8</sup> The biographical account of Novalis's life, and the introduction of the poem in relation to the poet's spiritual journey, highlights the *Hymns*' association with the poet's personal grief and spiritual transformation. While the article does not give a full commentary on the *Hymns* as a whole, it is because to do so "would be an exposition of Novalis's whole theological and moral creed", which lies there only "symbolically in lyric", and "not in didactic language."<sup>9</sup>

Apart from *Hymns to the Night*, another important component of Carlyle's article is his introduction of Novalis's so-called Mysticism and German metaphysical philosophy. Carlyle first brings up the topic of Mysticism with the following words: "Novalis was a Mystic, or had an affinity with Mysticism, in the primary and true meaning of that word, exemplified in some shape among our own Puritan Divines." (p. 201) This both acknowledges the complexity of the word "Mysticism" and associates the current usage with religious lineage. This commentary is followed by a citation of Novalis's own thinking on Mysticism: "What is Mysticism?" asks he. "What is it that should come to be treated mystically? Religion, Love, Nature, Polity. – All selected things (*alles Auserwahlte*) have a reference to Mysticism. If all men were but one pair of lovers, the difference between Mysticism and Non-Mysticism were at an end." (p. 201)

After citing this statement – which does little to clarify things – the article goes into a brief but well-informed sketch of German Idealism featuring Kant and Fichte, and concludes that this school of thought upholds Reason as "the true sovereign of man's mind" (p. 205). Novalis, who in Carlyle's view no doubt belongs to this school, is the "most ideal of all Idealists" (p. 206). For the material Creation is but for him an Appearance, a place where the Deity manifests itself to humanity, while

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<sup>8</sup> Charles E. Passage, introduction to *Hymns to the Night and Other Selected Writings*, by Novalis, trans. Charles E. Passage (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), ix-x.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carlyle, "Novalis," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays: Collected and Republished* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), 2: 220. Subsequent text references are to page numbers of the same book.

the Invisible World which is “in us and about us” (p. 206), has the ultimate authentic claim on reality. The goal of Novalis’s whole philosophy, is therefore to “live in that Light of Reason”, and be encircled with “this Vision of Existence”, “our abode in that eternal city,” even while in this life. (p. 207)

The tracing of this invisible world would inevitably lead one into Nature, a Nature which is typical of early Romantic thinking, and diametrically different from the kind of Nature in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> pre-Darwinian scientific discourse. For Novalis, Nature is considered as “rather in the concrete, not analytically and as a divisible Aggregate, but as a self-subsistent universally connected Whole.” (p. 206) Therefore for him, “Nature is no longer dead, hostile Matter, but the veil and mysterious Garment of the Unseen” (p. 207), a place where Truth dwells.

Apart from the above, Carlyle’s article also records Novalis’s discussion of the “third stage” of philosophy where Art unites the merely poetic and the mere intellect, and the philosopher and the artist become one (p. 213-15); his statement that true Art belongs to Nature, and exudes inexhaustible meanings like the products of Nature (p. 218); an explication of the word “light” as “shadow[ing] forth our terrestrial life”, and “night”, “the primeval and celestial life” in Novalis’s writings (p. 220); praise of Novalis’s rare power of “abstract meditation”, of “pursuing the deepest and most evanescent ideas” “to the very limit of human Thought” (p. 226-27); as well as a remark on his belief in Love as “his Instructor, his Wisdom, his Religion” (p. 228).

After initial publication, “Novalis” was subsequently reprinted and included in Carlyle’s *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, first published in 1839, and was reprinted several times after that. Given the popularity of Carlyle and the Brontë household’s reading habits, Carlyle’s article was readily available to the Brontës, and there is a good chance that Emily Brontë read it, or at least knew about its contents. Though the discussions on Novalis and Emily Brontë in the present chapter will eventually go beyond the content of “Novalis”, this important piece of writing may have very well served as a gateway for Emily Brontë to explore Novalis’s writings further on her own.

Overall, the previously discussed aspects of Carlyle’s article on Novalis are all closely associated with the way of viewing the world, Nature, and the self distinctly recognizable in the Romantic tradition, and relevant to the central topic of the present chapter – the mystical or visionary aspects in Novalis and Emily Brontë’s writings. But in order to form a detailed and informed discussion on this topic, it is necessary to first have a look at where Novalis and Brontë stand on the role of Art, and the nature of Truth, as well as the role of productive Imagination, in a larger Romantic context.

## Art, Truth and Imagination in Romantic Tradition and Novalis's Position

While the mystical elements that constitute an intrinsic part of both Novalis and Brontë's works have an obvious affinity, it is because they are both associated with a changing perception on Truth that has formed a major trend in the Romantic philosophical and literary movement, where the two authors are not the first, and by no means the last.

### Art as a Way of Reaching the Truth

Contrary to Hegel's belief in philosophy's claim to truth by way of logical deduction, which seeks to use the greater power of abstraction in systematic philosophy to overcome the finitude of everything particular, Romantic writers such as Friedrich Schlegel deny that cognitive thinking can achieve a total account of all things that exist. This belief leads to their re-evaluation of the philosophical significance of Art.

Andrew Bowie in his "Romantic Philosophy and Religion" introduces Schlegel's view on this issue in detail.<sup>10</sup> Schlegel once said, "The impossibility of positively reaching the Highest by reflection leads to allegory,"<sup>11</sup> which means that the impossibility of making an ultimately positive claim to Truth leads to the idea that Truth can only be alluded to negatively. Allegory, which is closely associated with the notion of "irony" in Romantic philosophy, involves using the particular to suggest the Absolute through an indirect way, thus "generat[ing] a sense of absence that always points beyond what appears."<sup>12</sup> Through allegory, what is communicated is not something determinate, but rather indeterminate, which produces meanings that are inexhaustible.

In the field of Art, a creative piece of artwork always involves employing some particulars, such as a chosen material, a definite form of speech or expression, which are finite or transient, to signify the universal that goes beyond the manifold appearances of the empirical world, and transcend the contingent particulars contained in the individual artwork. In a similar way, through irony, a Romantic text aims at generating a sense of absence and incompleteness that constantly points beyond what it appears to mean. And this leads to the feeling which Schlegel calls "longing [for the

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Bowie, "Romantic Philosophy and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 175-190, doi:10.1017/CCOL9780521848916.011.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

infinite]”,<sup>13</sup> the sense that we can never come to fully rest with a certainty because of the finitude of human existence. In failing to exhaust the meaning of a work of art, we feel the “infinite” truth in a finite object, which itself cannot be reduced or classified into simple concepts.

In a similar vein with Schlegel, Novalis states that “the absolute which is given to us can only be recognized negatively by acting and finding that what we are seeking is not reached by any action.”<sup>14</sup> Since the “absolute idea”, which is the ultimate ground of philosophy, can never be reached positively, the existence of the Absolute can only be recognized negatively via other means. Novalis therefore resorts to poetry, by which he means Imaginative Art in general, for its capability to generate a sense of lack, and evoke the feeling of the Infinite, so as to “*show* the elusiveness of the Absolute”<sup>15</sup> from within.

It is during this historical period that the very concept of “Art” in one of its most widely used modern senses is formed, as Art establishes itself as an independent discipline, liberated from the service of theology and predominantly instrumental functions within society.<sup>16</sup> Art, with the new metaphysical significance bestowed on it, becomes an authentic way for German Romantic philosophers and poets to reach Truth. Early German Romantics thus pointed out a new direction for philosophy in its pursuit of and engagement with Truth, and opened up a new aesthetic area for it to exercise its influence.

## The Subjective Nature of Being

The assigning of Art to a central role in Romantic philosophy is inevitably associated with Art’s unique ability to evoke the feeling of the Absolute from within, which cognitive thinking can only state as an external fact. Feeling, for its “immediacy”, is therefore privileged over “mediated” knowledge in Romantic philosophy. But this idea has its root in Kant’s work. Bowie in his “German Idealism and the Arts”, gives an account of Kant’s idea as below.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 183

<sup>15</sup> Charles Larmore, “Hölderlin and Novalis,” in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 155, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521651786.008.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Bowie, “German Idealism and the Arts,” in Ameriks, *German Idealism*, 241, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521651786.013.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 242-244.

In his *Third Critique*, Kant claims that there is a feeling of pleasure in aesthetic perception that derives from a sense of coherence in nature, which cannot be known, as far as general conceptual knowledge, driven by reflective cognitive power, is concerned. The possibility of universal assent in relation to this “feeling”, suggests the philosophical significance of aesthetics, for it points to a “supersensuous substrate” of humankind, which would link Nature itself to the activity of our own thinking. Perhaps more significantly, Kant furthermore postulates a “common sense” as the “necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition,” which in turn requires the possibility of consensus in aesthetic and non-conceptual thinking. This leads to the suggestion that the most fundamental relationship of the self to the world occurs at the level of immediate “feeling”, rather than that of “mediated” knowledge of the world in its appearance.

Bowie goes on to state that the appraisal of the “immediacy” of feeling by Kant and its subsequent adoption by the early Romantics demonstrate new ways of mapping the relationship between subjectivity and the world of objects, which take into account the active role of the mind in the acquisition of knowledge. The faculty of “productive imagination”, as postulated by Kant, seems to have an unconditional place in philosophy’s attempt at rendering the world’s intelligibility. Later on, Kant’s view of the un-eliminable role of the subject in the cognition of the objective world was intensified in Fichte’s philosophy, in which the activity of the subject became the basis of the world’s being intelligible at all.<sup>18</sup>

According to Larmore, though acknowledging Fichte’s emphasis on subjectivity, Novalis argues that the “I” cannot provide the basis for the first principle of philosophy.<sup>19</sup> For to be able to say “I” naturally entails I’s self-reflection, which separates I from itself, and generates a distinction between the subject and the object. This leads to the conclusion that the fundamental basis for philosophy has to be sought somewhere antecedent to the I’s self-awareness. In other words, the I must have a more immediate relationship with itself than reflection. Novalis calls this the “primordial”, “pre-reflective” activity of the I, which can also be only a feeling, passively registering an I whose being is simply given. For Novalis this Being of the I is that which underlies the standpoint of reflection and the knowledge of all the conditioned things.

Novalis’s tracing of the nature of Being has important implications for his view on Art and Poetry, and exemplifies an influential strand in Romantic tradition. By locating the Being within the subjective self, Novalis reveals Being’s fundamentally subjective nature, and suggests that the

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<sup>18</sup> Bowie, “Romantic Philosophy and Religion,” 180.

<sup>19</sup> Larmore, “Hölderlin and Novalis,” 153-154.

ground of philosophy is to be sought within the self. Thus the task of the poet is to “take hold of his transcendental self, to be at the same time the I of his I,”<sup>20</sup> and bring his own thinking into proximity with its ultimate ground. And this is why he says, “Inward goes the mysterious path.”<sup>21</sup> But Novalis also takes one step further, by saying Man “proclaims himself and his evangel of nature. He is the Messiah of nature,” which, as Abrams points out, implies Man is both his own evangelist and his own redeemer.<sup>22</sup> It is a claim that was to be made explicit by Nietzsche decades later.<sup>23</sup>

## Imagination as a Transformative Power

The mind’s ability to capture and materialize the feeling of the Absolute has to do with another important concept in Romanticism – “productive Imagination”, a concept that has also been treated by Kant and other early European Romantics.<sup>24</sup>

According to Larmore, Novalis explicated this concept in detail in his writings.<sup>25</sup> For Novalis, since any intelligible form of speech would involve employing the particular, something definite and “conditioned” from this world to signal the Truth, productive imagination too cannot attain the ground of Being in a direct way, but can only approach it indefinitely in approximation. But Novalis believes that rather than describing philosophy’s ultimate ground from the outside like analytical philosophy does, poetry by deploying the special resource of poetic language, can intimate more than it precisely says, and gesture beyond the mere conditional, thus evoking a sense of the Infinite from within. A poet starts from some definite point, but by at the same time moving beyond it, he transcends his initial point of departure and goes to places that can only be indicated, but not pinned down by cognitive thoughts. This is for Novalis the essence of the process of romanticization:

The world must be romanticized. Then one will again find the original sense [...] In this operation the lower self is identified with a better self [...] When I give the commonplace a higher meaning, the customary a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the illusion of the infinite, I romanticize it. The operation is the converse for the higher, unknown, mystical and infinite.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>21</sup> O’Brien, “Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg),” 244.

<sup>22</sup> M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 248.

<sup>23</sup> “By a drastic exercise of the principle of parsimony, he [Nietzsche] cancelled the role of nature as well as God, leaving only one agent to play out the ancient spiritual plot [of fall and redemption].” Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 212.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the concept was later borrowed and introduced into England by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*.

<sup>25</sup> Larmore, “Hölderlin and Novalis,” 155-156.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, ed., *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85.

In Novalis's view, poetic imagination calls upon images, dreams and memories to endlessly expand our capacity for understanding, and transform the ordinary, the common, the banal into the sphere of the pure and the unconditioned. Imagination thus functions as a constitutive force in the subject's apprehension of the world. It receives and produces, takes and constructs, imagines and finds. The subject's activities, its productive imagination in particular, elevate the Seen into the sphere of the Unseen, and express "the whole of the subject's infinity, which encompasses both itself and the seemingly independent world."<sup>27</sup>

Seen in this light, the mystical elements in Novalis's writing are derived from the way of viewing Art, Truth and Imagination inherent in the Romantic philosophical tradition, and are inextricably connected to Novalis's belief in the power of the subjective mind at revealing the truth of the world. Through romanticization, the world is able to "regain its magic, mystery, and beauty."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Novalis's usage of images, dreams and memories as effective ways of transforming reality, as we will see in more detail later, also has a clear lineage in the Romantic tradition, and forms another parallel with Brontë's works.

## **Art, Truth and Imagination in Emily Brontë's Writings**

### The "God" within and the Inner World of Imagination

Novalis locates the basis of Being in a transcendental subjectivity that is forever beyond human comprehensibility, and at the same time acknowledges the subjective I's imaginative power to actively reach towards the truth within. On this subject, Emily Brontë holds a very similar position. Her poem "No Coward Soul is Mine", in which the speaker talks about a "God within", gives a clear statement:

*O God within my breast  
Almighty, ever-present Deity  
Life, that in me hast rest,  
As I Undying Life, have power in thee  
...  
With wide-embracing love  
Thy spirit animates eternal years*

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<sup>27</sup> Dieter Sturma, "Politics and the New Mythology: The Turn to Late Romanticism," in *Ameriks, German Idealism*, 227, doi:10.1017/CCOL0521651786.012.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 424.

Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears

Though Earth and moon were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be  
And thou were left alone  
Every Existence would exist in thee.<sup>29</sup>

The poem at first introduces an “Almighty, ever-present Deity” dwelling in the speaker’s breast. Though the individual life “has rest” in “me”, the “Undying Life”, which has power in “thee”, is still located in the “I” and sustains it. The lines feature an interchange between “I” and “thee”, with “I” being finite and specific, and “thee” being infinite and eternal. Brontë’s syntax here suggests a balance between “I” and “thee”, but it is a balance that in the end “topples in favor of the self.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, by saying that the all-pervading “God” is located in “my” breast, the poem shows that Brontë shares with Novalis the idea that the path to Being leads inward. Antecedent to the standing point of the “I” lies the ultimate ground of Existence, which every particular, finite object in the material world originates from and depends upon.

The subsequent description of the Being which dwells in the self, and its relationship with the outer physical universe in the poem, is typical in the Romantic tradition, in which the inner world of the self is likened to a microcosm, and the outer physical world to a macrocosm, each reflecting the other. The exploration of the self into the Infinite within would eventually lead to a deepening of the understanding of the universe without. Similar expressions can also be found in Novalis’s writings: “We shall understand the world when we understand ourselves, because we and it are integral *halves*. We are God’s children, divine seeds. One day we shall be what our Father is.”<sup>31</sup> Self-knowledge and the knowledge of the world in the end overlap and become one through our own endeavor.

If the deity dwelling within the self has the expanding power to permeate the universe and claim its supremacy in “No Coward Soul is Mine”, in the poem “To Imagination”, however, the inner world of imagination is pressed by a cold and harsh outside world, as the two form a distinct contrast:

*So hopeless is the world without;  
The world within I doubly prize;  
Thy world, where guile, and hate, and doubt,*

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<sup>29</sup> Emily Brontë, “No Coward Soul is Mine,” in *Emily Jane Brontë: The Complete Poems*, ed. Janet Gezari (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 182, lines. 4-8, 17-24 (my italics).

<sup>30</sup> Michael O’Neill, “ ‘Visions Rise, and Change’: Emily Brontë’s Poetry and Male Romantic Poetry,” *Brontë Studies* 36, no. 1 (Jan. 2011): 59, doi: 10.1179/147489310X12868722453500.

<sup>31</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” in *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 61.

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?<sup>32</sup>

This poem, dedicated to Imagination, describes the importance of the existence of the inner universe for the speaker. While the phrase “Where thou, and I and Liberty,/Have undisputed sovereignty” reveals the sovereignty of the self in the world of Imagination.<sup>33</sup> The poem also talks about Imagination’s integrative power in amending a world of affliction and pain, and contrasts the inner world as illuminated by imagination with the outer world’s solitude and darkness. Here, Imagination not only reveals a world of infinity and perfection, but also becomes a source of solace, for the speaker to confront a cold, fragmented, and self-conflicting outer world.

## Metaphor of Truth: The Veil of the Goddess

Emily Brontë’s emphasis on the discovery of the inner world, often in the form of a deity, upon which a person’s entire understanding of the physical world and human existence depends, is often associated with the usage of a famous metaphor commonly adopted among early Romantics: the metaphor of lifting the veil of the Goddess.

In his “Logological Fragments”, Novalis writes:

One person succeeded – he lifted the veil of the goddess at Saïs – But what did he see? He saw  
– wonder of wonders – himself.<sup>34</sup>

The face of the goddess would be the face of Truth, and the veil is the world in its appearance. A person who tries to lift the veil of the goddess is a person who attempts at revealing the truth of the world. But by finding him/herself behind the veil, the metaphor says that the person him/herself is the one who holds the truth all alone.

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<sup>32</sup> Emily Brontë, “To Imagination,” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 19, lines. 7-18 (my italics).

<sup>33</sup> This praise of the self also appears in another poem of Brontë’s, “Plead for Me”: “And am I wrong to worship,  
where/Faith cannot doubt, nor hope despair,/Since *my own soul can grant my prayer?*” Brontë, “Plead for Me”, in  
Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 23, lines. 35-37 (my italics).

<sup>34</sup> Novalis, “Logological Fragments II,” in Stoljar, *Philosophical Writings*, 76.

Interestingly, a similar expression is also found in Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, with slight variation:

It is as if I saw, but then I am seized with fright again, as if it were my own form that I saw; it is as if I felt it, the spirit of the world, like a friend's warm hand, but I awaken and realized that I was holding *my own finger*.<sup>35</sup>

Brontë on the other hand, also uses the metaphor of the veil of the Goddess in her writings, such as in the poem "A Day Dream":

'And could we lift the veil, and give  
One brief glimpse to thine eye,  
Thou wouldst rejoice for those that live,  
*Because they live to die.*'<sup>36</sup>

Here, though the speaker also talks about lifting the veil, the scenario is somewhat different. Although nobody has yet succeeded, the speaker says that if the veil is lifted, "Thou", which presumably refers to Truth, would rejoice for the mortals, as *death* is waiting behind the veil. This links truth not only to the inner world – as the poem as a whole demonstrates – but also to the domain of Death, or Afterlife, which is here recognized as the ultimate purpose of human existence.

Despite the fact that in both instances the hero(ine) tries to lift the veil, what lies beneath it remains hidden. The person who succeeds in lifting the veil of the goddess of Sais sees only himself, who is the vessel of truth, but not truth itself. The "thou" hidden beneath the veil may very well have to do with Death or Afterlife, but what is to be expected after death is not after all shown to the reader. In other words, in both cases the agencies that can lead to truth are given, but what the truth is, is not. One may ask why the ultimate answer is not attainable. And this leads to another dimension of Truth in Romantic philosophy.

As far as the process of human cognition is concerned, the moment anything becomes comprehensible, it presupposes a higher ground in which it is comprehended. Thus a thing is not the highest, precisely because it can be comprehended. This makes the knowledge of Being always beyond the human cognitive process. As the first principle of philosophy remains unknowable, the task of tracing the ground of Being is ultimately impossible to achieve. This constant striving to attain what is ultimately unattainable acknowledges that transcendental subjectivity in and above the self is forever beyond reach, and this is a notion that both Emily Brontë's and Novalis's writings seem to register.

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<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion; or, The Hermit in Greece*, trans. Ross Benjamin (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2008), Kindle edition, vol. 1, bk. 1 (my italics).

<sup>36</sup> Emily Brontë, "A Day Dream," in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 19, lines. 65-68.

It would be difficult to fathom to what extent Novalis and German metaphysical philosophy have influenced Emily Brontë's understanding of the nature of Truth, and the role of creative imagination. But from the looking into the self for the ultimate ground of truth, to the belief in the authenticity of Imagination and vision as opposed to the reality of the physical world, to the admission of the ultimately unknowable nature of Being, it is clear that the so-called mystical aspects in Brontë's writings can find considerable foreshadowing in Novalis's writings.

## **Night, Dream, Slumber, Death and Love in Novalis and Emily Brontë's Writings**

To reveal the Truth beneath the phenomenal world in its appearance, both Brontë and Novalis adopt a set of traditional images in Romantic literature in their writings, such as "Night", "Light", and "Star". These images are used to evoke a sense of the Infinite, and elicit the feeling of the world beyond. In this section, I will discuss in detail the adoption of these images in both Novalis and Emily Brontë's writings, and their significance when associated with other cardinal Romantic concepts such as "Death" and "Love". The primary texts I draw upon are Novalis's *Hymns to the Night*, and on occasions, quotations from his *Fragments*, as well as Emily Brontë's novel and several of her poems.

### The Image of "Night" in the *Hymns* and Emily Brontë's Lyrical Works

The image of "Night", along with its counterpart "Light", is a recurrent theme in early German Romanticism. As Lilian Furst states, there are multiple sources that contribute to its wide usage during this period. But arguably the most important reason is that "Night" serves as a natural symbol to signify the break from Romanticism's predecessor, the Enlightenment movement, which upholds its belief in the power of reason and rationality to shed "light" on the unintelligibility of the world.<sup>37</sup> As Novalis once said: "Because of its mathematical obedience and its freedom, light became the darling [of Enlightenment thinkers]. They rejoiced more that it allowed itself to be broken than that it played with colors, and so they named their greatest project after it, Enlightenment."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the early Romantics often use the counter image "Night", to declare their distinctly different position

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<sup>37</sup> Lilian R. Furst, "Lighting Up Night", in *A Companion to European Romanticism*, ed. Michael Ferber (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) doi: 10.1111/b.9781405110396.2005.00031.

<sup>38</sup> Jill Scott, "Night and Light in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and Novalis's *Hymnen an die Nacht*: Inversion and Transfiguration," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 775, doi:10.3138/utq.67.4.774.

from their Enlightenment precursors, and highlight the privilege they give to the power of Imagination over that of Reason.

Apart from its association with the Enlightenment, the image of “Light” is also related to individuation, as “light” is what allows for distinction and measurement. The day is the time when self-reflection and self-consciousness are constantly at work, gazing at the empirical world outside of the self, and looking to pursue their own desires. Thus “light” is characterized by individuation and separateness. On the other hand, “night” gives protection and relief from the bustling of a busy day. It provides a natural retreat from work, labor and daily living that humans all share. Night is the time when all the corporeal bodies take rest, as they are submerged into the realm of unconsciousness. Night directs our attention from without to within, and introspectively leads us to the self, and the inner world.<sup>39</sup> At night self-identity is temporarily dissolved, as it is transformed and incorporated into the infinity of the universe, where the self and the world merge and become one. Night therefore offers a natural image, “the only one possible – for all-encompassing noumenality, the sum of everything,”<sup>40</sup> as Li Sui Gwee puts it, when it can never be fully appreciated and articulated in the sensual sphere of light, with scientific precision.

Novalis writes: “Does not all that enraptures us wear the color of the Night?”<sup>41</sup> In *Hymns to the Night*, the “holy, ineffable, mysterious”<sup>42</sup> Night serves as a central image, and accompanied with it is the counter image “Light”. The predominant opposition between “Night” and “Light” is a theme running through the *Hymns*, which the whole scheme of the poem depends upon. *Hymn 1* starts with “Light”, which is associated with day, everyday life, and wakefulness. The opening scene is full of earthly joy and energies, and the liveliness of the day. But as the speaker turns his attention to “Night”, the poem descends into the sphere of night. The splendor of the light gives way to the peaceful domain of the night, as night opens the “infinite eyes” that are “within us”. This is where Novalis makes his crucial inversion of values, and proclaims Night as holding the inner essence of life, when Light can only illuminate the transient, finite, manifold phenomena of the world. The welcome of the daytime, as the Sun endows light on this world, is thus replaced by the welcome of the night, and of the Moon – the Sun of the Night:

Praise be unto the world’s queen, the high herald of sacred worlds, the fostering nurse of blessed love! She sends thee to me, tender Beloved, lovely sun of the Night. I wake now, for I

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<sup>39</sup> Charlie Louth, “The Romantic Lyric,” in Saul, *German Romanticism*, 70, doi:10.1017/CCOL9780521848916.004.

<sup>40</sup> Li Sui Gwee, “Night in Novalis, Schelling, and Hegel,” *Studies in Romanticism* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 109.

<sup>41</sup> Novalis, “Hymns to the Night,” in *Hymns to the Night and Other Selected Writings*, trans. Charles E. Passage (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

am thine and mine: thou hast proclaimed to me the Night as life and made me human.  
Consume my body with spirit-fire that I may ethereally commingle more intensely with thee  
and that the bridal night may last then forever.<sup>43</sup>

The opening line defines Night as the “world’s queen”. Its importance is further accentuated by being hailed as the herald of the invisible world. Another important concept in Romanticism – Love – is also mentioned and linked to the image of Night, when Night is exalted as the entity that fosters and nurtures Love.<sup>44</sup> As *Hymn 1* ends, the speaker proclaims himself and Night as one, and expresses his desires for an eternal commingling with the spirit of the Night.

The exaltation of Night, which is often associated with paying reverence to celestial entities such as the moon and the stars, is also expressed more than once in Brontë’s lyrical works. In her poem “Wind Sink to Rest in the Heather”, the speaker prefers the light of the Moon to that of the Sun:

Sun set from that evening heaven  
Thy glad smile wins not mine  
If light at all is given  
*O give me Cynthia’s shine*<sup>45</sup>

Cynthia is, of course, the name of the Greek goddess of the moon. The speaker’s fondness towards the image of the Night is unmistakably imparted to the reader. Between these lines we see a clear preference of the sphere of the Night over that of the Day, as similarly demonstrated in *Hymn 1*. Such fondness is also seen in another poem “How Clear She Shines”:

How clear she shines! How quietly  
I lie beneath her guardian light;  
While heaven and earth are whispering me,  
“Tomorrow, wake, but, dream tonight.”<sup>46</sup>

While the speaker in *Hymn 1* yearns to lose himself in the domain of the Night, here in Brontë’s poem the speaker also desires to take rest, or a temporary refuge, under the guardian light of the Moon. However, the most comprehensive account of the image of Night is perhaps to be found in the poem “Stars”, which is among the 21 poems originally published in the 1846 collection *Poems By Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. Towards the beginning of the poem, there is a similar praise of the night that reminds one of the previous quotation from the *Hymns*:

All through the night, your glorious eyes

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>44</sup> In *Hymn 4*, this relationship is further accentuated as a mother – daughter relationship: “But faithful unto the Night will my private heart remain, and unto creative Love, *her daughter*.” Ibid., 6 (my italics).

<sup>45</sup> Emily Brontë, “Wind Sink to Rest in the Heather,” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 47, lines. 5-8 (my italics).

<sup>46</sup> Emily Brontë, “How Clear She Shines,” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 20, lines. 1-4.

Were gazing down in mine,  
And with a full heart's thankful sighs,  
I blessed that watch divine.

I was at peace, and drank your beams  
As they were life to me;  
And revealed in my changeful dreams,  
Like petrel on the sea.

Thought followed thought, star follow star,  
Through boundless regions, on;  
While one sweet influence, near and far,  
Thrilled through, and proved us one!<sup>47</sup>

The stars are personified to watch the speaker attentively, while the speaker returns such care with thankfulness. Their shining beams nurture and impart strength into “me”, and their influence passes into “my changeful dreams”, as in boundless regions the speaker’s thoughts drift. And similarly to the paragraph from the *Hymns*, the section ends when the speaker and the realm of Night mingle together and become one.

As in the *Hymns*, in this quotation the speaker inverts the usual relation between the sphere of night and that of light, and gives supremacy to Night, as vision arises. In both the *Hymns* and “Stars”, the speaker’s inner self communicates with the maternal force of the Night through a designated agent: in the *Hymns* it is the Moon, and in “Stars” the Stars. As the speaker and the celestial entity are commingled and finally become one, the individual bodily existence is consumed in the all-pervading spirit of the universe. While throughout the boundless region of Night, Love binds the world together, and proclaims the wholeness of the universe, where the finite soul within is coextensive with the infinite world soul without.

But the bliss of the Night cannot be retained forever. In both the *Hymns* and “Stars”, the peaceful state of night is interrupted by the arrival of the day, which produces a feeling of desolation. After *Hymn 1* ends with the speaker immersing himself in the blissful union with the universe, *Hymn 2* opens with the following lines:

*Must morning ever return? Does the power of things earthly never end? Unholy activity consumes the heavenly descent of the Night. Will the secret sacrifice of love never burn eternally? Appointed to the Light was its time, but timeless and spaceless is the Night’s dominion.*<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Emily Brontë, “Stars,” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 5, lines. 5-16.

<sup>48</sup> Novalis, “Hymns to the Night,” 4 (my italics).

While Night signifies the arrival of eternal Love and foretells the sacred worlds, the blissful union with the world is broken as soon as the morning returns. But the day is limited by humankind's "unholy activity" and the shackles of time, which pales into insignificance when compared to the abundance and timelessness of Night. A similar turn in the narrative also appears in "Stars":

*Why did the morning dawn to break  
So great, so pure, a spell;  
And scorch with fire, the tranquil cheek,  
Where your cool radiance fell?*

...

*Oh, stars, and dreams, and gentle night;  
Oh, night and stars return!  
And hide me from the hostile light,  
That does not warm, but burn;*

*That drains the blood of suffering men;  
Drinks tears, instead of dew;  
Let me sleep through his blinding reign,  
And only wake with you!<sup>49</sup>*

For the speaker in "Stars", the dawning of the day is not only unwelcomed, but directly causes anguish and pain, as the radiant Sun shines on the speaker's cheek, which "does not warm, but burn". Compared to the *Hymns*, here the speaker's desire to return to the realm of Night becomes even stronger, as it is compelled by greater sufferings.

Thus after going through the mystical Night, both poems have returned to the sphere of the Light, where the speaker's attention is drawn back to everyday life. Later on in *Hymn 4*, the speaker of the *Hymns* would cheerfully meet the demand of the practical world, and the earthly work assigned to him, holding the belief that being captured in time, the real world of industrious labor will not last forever, but will one day cease to be. This makes it possible for him to reserve his heart to the Night and remain faithful to it, as he waits for its victory in the future. The *Hymns* eventually ends with the triumph of the Night, and the redemption of humankind into eternal life. However, "Stars" ends with the speaker's yearning to return to the realm of Night, when the Sun shines cruelly above his/her head. Thus Brontë's poem is less balanced and optimistic, and leaves little hope.

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<sup>49</sup> Emily Brontë, "Stars," p. 5-6, lines. 17-20, 41-48 (my italics).

## Dream and Vision in the *Hymns* and Emily Brontë's Writings

Night is when dreams occur. This leads to another popular theme in Romantic literature: dream and vision. In Biblical tradition dreams and visions have a prophetic function, which can disclose a higher truth in the human mind. Building upon this, Jürgen Barkhoff argues that for some Romantic thinkers, dreams, together with religious ecstasy, artistic inspiration, trance, and other abnormal psychological states, represent a privileged, heightened state of the human mind. Under such a state the mind is able to gain access to “the essential being of nature and even catch a glimpse of the after life.”<sup>50</sup>

Such a function of dreams can be seen in many of Novalis's writings. In his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, for example, the blue flower, which would later become an emblem for the whole of German Romanticism, is picked up by the young man in his dream. Apart from this, a famous vision of the beloved can also be seen in *Hymn 3*, as the speaker recalls from the time he visited his lover's tomb:

Once, as I shed bitter tears, as in sorrow dissolved my hopes melted away, and I stood lonely by the barren mound which in narrow and dark room hid away the form of my life ... then, out of blue distances, from the pinnacles of my old blessedness, there came a twilight shudder, and all at once the bond of birth broke the Light's fetters. Fled was earthly splendor, and with it my grief. Condensed, sadness flowed away into a new and unfathomable world. Thou Night-inspiration, slumber of heaven, didst come over me: the region gently rose aloft and over the region hovered my released and newborn spirit. The mound became a cloud of dust and through the cloud I beheld the transfigured features of my Beloved. In her eyes reposed eternity; I grasped her hands, and my tears became a glittering chain that could not be wrenched asunder. Millennia passed off into the distance, like storms. Upon her neck I wept ecstatic tears unto the new life.<sup>51</sup>

This mystical scene at the tomb is based on a real life event that happened to the poet when he visited his fiancée Sophia's tomb in 1797.<sup>52</sup> The scene gives a very detailed and vivid description of the visionary experience. As the beloved arises from the dead, the speaker falls into ecstasy and in the end locks her in an embrace. A bit later, the speaker proclaims this vision as his “first and only dream”. Since then, the “everlasting, immutable faith in the heaven of the Night and in its Light, the Beloved” has entered into his heart and stayed with him forever.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jürgen Barkhoff, “Romantic Science and Psychology,” in Saul, *German Romanticism*, 216, doi: 10.1017/CCOL9780521848916.013.

<sup>51</sup> Novalis, “Hymns to the Night,” 5.

<sup>52</sup> For full detail of the event, refer to page 3 of the present chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Novalis, “Hymns to the Night,” 5.

Turning to Emily Brontë's writings, we see that dreams and visions also occupy an important place there. For example, *Wuthering Heights* begins its story with two bizarre and terrifying dreams Lockwood has, during the night that he is forced to stay in Catherine's old bedroom.<sup>54</sup> Despite its apparent absurdity, the first dream Lockwood has depicts a fallen world in which "every man's hand" is "against his neighbor,"<sup>55</sup> once the treaty between God and Man is broken. As can be seen later, such a depiction accurately describes the situation the characters live in in the novel. The implicit critique of orthodox Christianity contained in the dream's narrative in fact runs through the whole novel. The second dream Lockwood has, on the other hand, reveals the central event that leads to the gloomy atmosphere at the Heights and the hostile relationships between its occupants, at the time of Lockwood's visit: Catherine's death, an event which also serves as the climax of the novel. Thus the landscape of the Heights distills its deepest secrets to Lockwood in his dreams, though the irony is that, despite having these dreams, Lockwood is unable to comprehend their true meaning and takes them as only queer delusions.

Apart from Lockwood's dreams, in *Wuthering Heights* there is also Catherine's dream of being thrown out of heaven.<sup>56</sup> In her dream, Catherine is kicked out of heaven by angels, before waking up on the top of Wuthering Heights, sobbing with joy. This dream leads Catherine to the somewhat heretic conclusion that she believes she should be miserable in heaven, for it does not seem to be her home. Judging from the fact that Catherine appeared in Lockwood's dream as a wailing child ghost, trying to get into the Heights, her childhood home, Heaven indeed does not seem to be her eternal resting place.

Besides dreams, visions also occur frequently in Brontë's writings. In *Wuthering Heights*, for example, when Heathcliff starts to see the vision of Catherine, it does not take long before the desire to be with her leads Heathcliff to his own death. In Emily Brontë's lyrical works, the poem "The Prisoner (A Fragment)" gives a vivid presentation of the dawning of the vision during the night, as the speaker, who is a prisoner, describes "A messenger of Hope" visiting her every night, and offering her "for short life, eternal liberty":

'He comes with western winds, with evening's wandering airs,  
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars.  
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,  
And visions rise, and change, that kill me with desire.

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of Lockwood's dreams, see Nicholas Marsh, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1999), 129-146.

<sup>55</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>56</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 71.

...

‘But, first, a hush of peace – a soundless calm descends;  
The struggle of distress, and fierce impatience ends.  
Mute music soothes my breast, unuttered harmony,  
That I could never dream, till Earth was lost to me.

‘Then dawn the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals;  
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:  
Its wings are almost free – its home, its harbour found,  
Measuring the gulf, it stoops, and dares the final bound.

‘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 think again,  
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.<sup>57</sup>

The stanzas present to the reader a detailed, vivid mystical experience as the vision arises. As the night dawns onto the earth, vision comes to visit, and soothes the distress in the speaker’s heavy heart. The vision brings peace and solace into the speaker’s world, like the scene in *Hymn 3*. But unlike in the *Hymns*, where the messenger of the Unseen World takes on the individual form of the lover whom the speaker can hold in his arms, here the vision is not personified but is referred to as “it”. There is, furthermore, a dissolution of the self upon the vision’s visit. As the invisible world dawns on the speaker and reveals to her the eternal truth, the speaker’s self gradually draws its attention from without to within, until it loses all its outward senses and its own identity all together. This further reveals the mystical nature of the experience, as the self and the universe become one.

Contrasting to the blissful mystical state, the speaker’s subsequent return to self-consciousness initiates a new round of anguish and pain, But what is perhaps interesting is that the speaker declares next, “Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less, .../If it but herald death, the vision is divine!”<sup>58</sup> Like what happens to Heathcliff towards the end of *Wuthering Heights*, though it causes much suffering and pain, the vision, as the harbinger of death, heralds the world to come, and the eternal rest waiting ahead. The vision thus links Night, Dreams and Visions with Death, and proclaims Death as the ultimate price to break through the bondage of the body, and bring about the eternal salvation of the soul.<sup>59</sup>

In both Novalis and Emily Brontë’s writings, dreams and visions make available a world more vivid than the real. Often the interior worlds opened up by dreams and visions are more sacred than the

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<sup>57</sup> Emily Brontë, “The Prisoner (A Fragment),” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 15, lines. 37-40, 45-56.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, line. 57, 60.

<sup>59</sup> The meaning and significance of Death in Emily Brontë’s writings is analyzed in more detail in the subsequent section on Death.

outer world of senses. As truth is revealed in the esoteric visions of the “inner eyes”, a new dimension is added to the speaker’s world, which transforms the existing world, and proclaims vision’s supreme authenticity.<sup>60</sup> In these instances, the visible world becomes in the end no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream. This inversion between dream and reality is related to the inversion of yet another pair of concepts: slumber and awakening.

### The State of Slumber in Novalis’s *Fragments* and Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*

Novalis’ *Fragments* is a compilation of his miscellaneous thoughts on various philosophical, critical and moral issues. In it there are a few discussions specifically on the topic of sleep and awakening, which can help shed light on the deeper philosophical meanings of this pair of concepts in the Romantic context:

“Sleep is for the inhabitants of Planets only. In another time, Man will sleep and wake continually at once. The greater part of our Body, of our Humanity itself, yet sleeps a deep sleep – ”

“We are near awakening when we dream that we dream – ”

“Our life is no Dream, but it may and perhaps will become one – ”<sup>61</sup>

At first sight, these individual quotations may appear to be enigmatic, but when taken as a whole, it becomes evident that the key concepts in them, such as “dream”, “slumber”, are highly consistent throughout.

In the first quotation, Novalis states that, “Sleep is for the inhabitants of Planets only. In another time, Man will sleep and wake continually at once.” This indicates that the current state humans are in will one day come to an end, as humankind becomes fully awake in “another time”. The next sentence continues, “The greater part of our Body, of our Humanity itself, yet sleeps a deep sleep”. It is clear that the “sleep” Novalis is talking about is not sleep in its usual sense, but the sleep of Humanity. It is currently in a dormant state, waiting for the time of awakening.

In the second quotation, Novalis goes on to say that, ““We are near awakening when we dream that we dream”. This means that the moment we become self-conscious of our current state – which is

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<sup>60</sup> This recalls Catherine’s words to Nelly: “I’ve dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they’ve gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.” Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 70.

<sup>61</sup> Carlyle, “Novalis,” 216.

that we are in deep slumber – is the moment Humanity’s awakening is near. In other words, only when we realize there is a higher status of awakening awaiting us in the world to come, will we make conscious efforts to get out of the current slumber and reach that higher state.

In the third quotation, Novalis states that our life is not merely a dream, but it will perhaps become one, when it is compared to the life we will have. It is here that after the reversal of Night and Light, and the reversal of dream and reality, a similar reversal of slumber and awakening is pronounced in Novalis’s writings. As the visionary world that is transiently available to us in the night becomes humankind’s eternal home, the life of the phenomenal world will fade into an illusion, and the life of the invisible world will become the real. In eternal slumber Humanity awakens, while in the state of awakening it is yet in a deep sleep.

Taken as a whole, these three quotations demonstrate Novalis’s distinct philosophical explication of the states of slumber and awakening. By stating that Humanity is now in a state of slumber, waiting for the true awakening, Novalis imparts to the reader the Romantic motif that Truth is to be sought beyond the sensual the world in its appearance, and into the vision of our inner world, while the realization of Humanity’s current state of Slumber is the first crucial step towards gaining access to that sacred unseen world.

The state of slumber is also featured in Emily Brontë’s writings. Whereas Novalis focuses on how the real world becomes an illusion when one enters the world of dreams, Brontë’s writing looks at how sleep, or in this case trance, provides access to an authentic experience of life. In *Wuthering Heights*, when Catherine falls into delirium, she unconsciously traces back to the event that marks the beginning of her unhappy adult life – the time when her father was just buried, and Heathcliff and she were separated for the first time. This event symbolizes the severance of the bond between her and Heathcliff, which neither of them is able to regain in their lives. Yet after waking up from the trance, Catherine cannot figure out why she would recall that time in her sleep:

“*[M]y heart ached with some great grief which, just waking, I could not recollect – I pondered, and worried myself to discover what it could be; and most strangely, the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all.*”<sup>62</sup>

In slumber Catherine’s life is re-molded into a different shape by her subconscious mind. The entire seven years after her separation from Heathcliff are wiped out from her present memories, which means the marriage to Linton, and all the time she spends at the Grange evaporate and become

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<sup>62</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 110 (my italics).

nothing. Catherine's life stops forever at that moment when she and Heathcliff were separated from each other. Thus in slumber Catherine is able to discern the truly meaningful part of her life, though her awakening self fails to grasp and understand it. Sobriety and sanity therefore become, strangely, an under-privileged state where the mind is prohibited from the access to Truth, and trapped in the plethora of the phenomenal world in its appearance. Whereas slumber and trance have the ability to elevate the mind to a higher platform, and grant it the power to reveal things that cannot be fathomed in sobriety.

A notable difference between Novalis and Brontë is that the visionary world in Brontë's writings often exhibits a lack of credibility. For example, when dreams and visions occur in *Wuthering Heights*, there is always a sense of uncertainty surrounding them: Catherine's dream of being kicked out of Heaven is dismissed as nonsense by Nelly; the phantom figure of Catherine can only be seen by Heathcliff, and none other; at the end of the story, when Lockwood hears that Heathcliff and Catherine are spotted walking on the moor together as ghosts, he refuses to believe that it can be true. These dreams and visions in the novel are largely personal experiences, and are therefore far from being accepted universally by the characters in the novel, let alone the novel's readers. Whether Catherine's dream is a total nonsense or reveals her eternal spiritual home, whether Heathcliff is driven crazy by his desire to see Catherine or has received a personal revelation, or whether Catherine and Heathcliff rest peacefully in their graves or are wandering happily on the moor after their death, are largely left for the reader to ponder. Thus in *Wuthering Heights* it is often the case that the authenticity of the Romantic vision is threatened by rationalism. This kind of ambiguity, again, takes on characteristics more commonly seen in the late Romantic period.<sup>63</sup>

The Romantic longing for the Infinite, to "break free from the burden of subjectivity and return to nature," is "a typical motif of Romanticism,"<sup>64</sup> according to Barkhoff. But in Brontë's works, this longing forms an irreconcilable tension with the demand of modern society, which leads the subject merely to madness and self-destruction, while the ultimate unity with the world awaits the characters, only in death.

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<sup>63</sup> A notable example is Hoffmann's "The Golden Pot".

<sup>64</sup> Barkhoff, "Romantic Science and Psychology," 221.

## Death in the *Hymns*, and Its Variation in Emily Brontë's Lyrical Works

If Night, dreams and slumber can assist one to enter a heightened state to catch a glimpse of the invisible world, then Death signifies the final triumph of the Night when the self can stay in its sphere eternally. The incessant yearning for Death in Romantic literature has often been mistaken as a kind of mental sickness, a morbid fascination that is unfortunately shared among many young Romantics. For example, Goethe once famously says that "I call the Classical the healthy, and the Romantic the sick,"<sup>65</sup> which set up a precedent for later critics to draw upon. Later on, Nietzsche would go on to fiercely dispute this lamentable tendency of his Romantic predecessors, and ground his belief and faith firmly in this life, and this life alone. But on this issue the Romantics have been misunderstood, so it may be helpful to first refer to a passage in *Hyperion* for clarification:

Death is a messenger of life, and that we now sleep in our hospitals testifies to imminent healthy awakening. Then, only then shall we, shall the element of our spirits, be found.<sup>66</sup>

There are clear echoes of Novalis in this quotation. But apart from a similar inversion of the state of slumber and awakening, what is more important is that the passage also points out that Death is when the "healthy awakening" happens. For the world we live in is in fact a hospital, and we are the patients, waiting to be set free from the inflictions and ailments of the world, and delivered to eternal life. And only Death is able to do this. A couple of verses from *Hymn 5* express similar ideas:

What plunged us into misery and tears  
Draws us with sweeter yearning now from hence.  
In death was life eternal first revealed:  
And *thou art Death, who makest us be healed.*<sup>67</sup>

Death can heal the sickness of the soul, and restore it to its healthy state. Death can reveal the eternal life and make it available to enter. Thus we find the paradoxical view in Novalis that "sickness itself, as part of the process of negation and synthesis which enacts becoming, is but another form of life, and conversely that life itself is merely one form of illness, from which death represents recovery and redemption."<sup>68</sup> The Romantics' preoccupation with Death, and their yearning to be re-united with the beloved in Death, is therefore not a simple denial of Life itself. On the contrary, such an

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<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Saul, "Love, Death and *Liebestod* in German Romanticism," in Saul, *German Romanticism*, 165, doi:10.1017/CCOL9780521848916.010.

<sup>66</sup> Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, vol. 1, bk. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Novalis, "Hymns to the Night," 10 (my italics).

<sup>68</sup> Saul, "Love, Death and *Liebestod*," 166. Saul in this specific instance was referencing to Schelling, as someone who is representative of German Romantic thinkers. But the same is true about Novalis.

assertion testifies to the Romantics' aspiration for the triumph of Love over Death, and valorises Night as the sphere where eternal Life springs from.

Thus following the reversal of the image of "Night" and "Light", the reversal of the concept of Dream and Reality, and the reversal of the state of slumber and awakening, we see another reversal between the concept of Death and Life in early Romanticism, which proclaims Death as the ultimate purpose of Life. Thus, as Nicholas Saul points out, Death, instead of being the terminal point of the individual life which the Romantics morbidly pursue, in fact provides the cure for "the sickness of the Age."<sup>69</sup> In this sense, the Romantics' yearning for Death does not deny the value of Life, but is on the contrary life-affirming.

This understanding of Death can be seen in both Novalis and Emily Brontë's writings. In *Hymns to the Night*, after the third hymn gives a vivid description of the vision of the beloved, *Hymns 4* opens with the following sentence:

Now I know when the final morning will be: when the Light no longer frightens away Night and Love, when slumber shall be eternal and only an inexhaustible dream.<sup>70</sup>

From the "final morning" to Light, Night, Love, slumber and the "inexhaustible dream", this sentence knits the key images and concepts discussed so far together, and lays out their relationships clearly to the reader. While Light symbolizes Reason, Night is associated with Love, slumber, dream and eternal life. The mystical encounter with the lover in the previous hymn has now given the speaker a new perspective on life, which identifies the eternal slumber, which is another name for Death, as the ultimate purpose of human life.

For the last set of the *Hymns*, *Hymn 5* expands its scope to a mystical account of the history of Western religion from ancient Greece to Christianity. In doing so the poem successfully translates the speaker's personal revelation of his lover into a revelation about the destiny of the entire human race, and identifies Christ as the prince of Night and the messenger of Love to humankind. *Hymns 6* goes on to exalt Christ as the martyr who breaks through the boundary of Death and leads humanity to the eternal sphere of Night, and whom humankind ardently follows:

Down now into the dark earth's womb,  
From Light's domain away!  
Wild rage of grief and pangs of gloom

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<sup>69</sup> Saul, "Love, Death and Liebestod," 169.

<sup>70</sup> Novalis, "Hymns to the Night," 5.

Mark glad departure's day.  
In narrow barque we swiftly ply  
To land along the shores of sky.

Praised be the everlasting Night,  
Praised be eternal slumber!  
Day's heat has withered us, and blight  
Of sorrows without number.  
For alien lands we no more yearn,  
To our Father's house we would return.<sup>71</sup>

From the line “Mark glad departure’s day”, we can see there is a direct contrast between the “grief and pangs of gloom” that fills Light’s domain, and the eternal happiness that awaits in the everlasting Night. The anticipation of the flight into the world of Death is clearly expressed. The last two stanzas furthermore reveal that in Death lies humanity’s true home, for this earth is just an “alien land”, and “to our Father’s house” we will eventually return. Death and eternal life with the Christ are thus linked together.

Being the last hymn, *Hymn 6* is the only hymn in the poem that has been given a title: “Yearning for Death”, which patently gives out its central theme. It is also the only hymn that is entirely written in verse. And the fact that it takes on the form of a church hymn indicates its religious and transcendental nature. As Saul states, “In Christ’s person the realms of life *and* death are (aesthetically) demonstrated to be united. In this way the encounter with death is paradoxically *also* an encounter with the hidden principle of life.”<sup>72</sup> Life and Death finally cease to appear contradictory. The poem ends with Death being installed as the principle of Life, the passage to eternal existence.

Although Brontë’s writings lack Novalis’ religious piety, similar ideas of Death are also frequently featured in her novel and verses. From Catherine’s yearning “I’m tired, tired of being enclosed here. I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there,”<sup>73</sup> to the various depictions of the bright worlds beyond in Brontë’s poems, we see a view of Death typical of the Romantic tradition. The scene in her poem “A Day Dream” in particular echoes the lines in *Hymn 6*:

‘O mortal! mortal! let them die;  
Let time and tears destroy,  
That we may overflow the sky  
With universal joy!

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>72</sup> Saul, “Love, Death and Liebestod,” 169.

<sup>73</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 141.

‘Let grief distract the sufferer’s breast,  
And night obscure his way;  
They hasten him to endless rest,  
And everlasting day.

‘To thee the world is like a tomb,  
A desert’s naked shore;  
To us, in unimagined bloom,  
It brightens more and more!’<sup>74</sup>

Similar to the example from the *Hymns*, the day in this poem is depicted as a domain of weariness and suffering, the Night on the other hand a land of everlasting joy. What is startling, however, is that the speaker then takes a step further to welcome the tears and grief in “the sufferer’s breast”, for they are means to hasten death. Thus unlike the simple anticipation of Death in *Hymns 6*, here the fervent yearning for Death further intensifies.

A notable distinction, however, is that the “yearning for death” in the *Hymns* is grounded in the speaker’s belief in Christ: therefore the return to the everlasting home by way of Death, which is led by Christ, naturally corresponds to the return to God the Father. This belief is however absent in Brontë’s poem. “A Daydream” clearly adopts a more pantheistic view. The deity in the poem does not have a name, but like the ones in the poem “No Coward Soul is Mine” and others, is referred to as “thee”. The world “brightens more and more” as Death approaches, but the world that one enters after Death may very well not be a Christian Heaven.<sup>75</sup> The poem in this regard opens other possibilities.

There are indeed markedly different ways of viewing Death in Emily Brontë’s writings. And sometimes these differences can be clearly seen. In some of Brontë’s poems, Death does bring one back to God. For example, in a Gondal poem titled “A. G. A. to A. S.”, which was dated 1838, the speaker tells her lover that, “Thy soul was pure when it entered here/And pure it will go again to God – ”<sup>76</sup> But in some other poems, one shares an eternal existence with a semi-pantheistic deity after death, and this can be seen in “A Daydream”. In yet some others, Death simply means annihilation. A typical example is the poem “Song”. In this poem the narrator tells a story about what happens to a fair lady after she dies: the deer continues to browse above her grave, and the birds go on to raise

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<sup>74</sup> Brontë, “A Day Dream,” p. 18, lines. 53-64.

<sup>75</sup> In some instances, the rejection of a Christian heaven is clearly given. In the poem “I See Around Me Tombstones Grey,” for example, the speaker declares, “We would not leave our native home/For any world beyond the Tomb.” Brontë, in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 132, lines. 41-42.

<sup>76</sup> Emily Brontë, “A. G. A. to A. S.,” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, p. 69, lines. 27-28.

their brood. All the grief and sorrow are now forgotten, while she in her tomb is changed and careless too.<sup>77</sup>

Emily Brontë's various explorations of what it means to die, of the possible destinations Death may lead to, distance her from early Romanticism's motif that Death brings eternal Life, whether it is of a pantheistic nature like in *Hyperion*, or has a stronger Christian lineage like in the *Hymns*. Brontë's questionings instead reflect the character of her own era – the early Victorian period, when faith is challenged by doubt, but no viable or satisfactory answer is available.

### Love as the Symbol of Continuity and the Essence of Life

If Night provides a natural image that heralds the visionary worlds, and Death marks the threshold of everlasting life, then Love opens the door to eternal dreams and holds the power to make it all possible. In a note written not long after his fiancée passed away, Novalis declares:

What I feel for Sophie is religion, not love. All absolute love, independent of the heart and founded on faith, is religion.<sup>78</sup>

This hyperbolic proclamation, which identifies Love for a woman with Love for God, is characteristic in Romantic literature. For Novalis, Sophie is no longer an individual, but acts as “an intermediary to God and infinity,”<sup>79</sup> a priestess figure that connects the poet to the Divine. Through Sophie, earthly love and love for God and Humanity are bound together and in the end become one.

In this regard, the *Hymns* is a faithful record of the poet's spiritual growth. Since what is originally a struggle to cope with the traumatic loss and grief in his personal life in the end expands to a new understanding of human life, as the poet at last achieves an aesthetic appreciation of Love and Death on a universal scale. Before Novalis had the vision of Sophie at the graveyard, an event which eventually found its way into *Hymn 3*, the poet went through a dreadful period of his life. In 1797, the year that Sophie died, Novalis wrote his bitter thoughts into his diary, “She (Sophie) is dead – consequently I shall die – the world is empty”. “With her, the entire world is dead for me. I belong to the earth no more.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, the mystical scene in *Hymn 3* does not only serve as a vision and a

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<sup>77</sup> Brontë, “Song,” in Gezari, *The Complete Poems*, 11-12.

<sup>78</sup> Gascoyne, introduction to the *Hymns*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Ricarda Schmidt, “From Early to Late Romanticism,” in Saul, *German Romanticism*, 26.

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<sup>80</sup> Gascoyne, introduction to the *Hymns*, 14.

personal revelation, but also testifies to the poet's renewed faith in Love and in the final triumph of Night.

However Novalis's spiritual journey does not stop there. In *Hymn 5*, Love reaches its universal status, as the poet's vision expands from the personal to the universal. By incorporating the ancient Greek mythology into his own mythicized Gospel story from Christianity, Novalis aims to form a synthesized western history from its origin to its climax – the coming of Christ,<sup>81</sup> and proclaim Christ as the saviour of humankind. For Christ, by a triumph over Death, breaks the hateful wall of Time and leads humankind to the sphere of Night, where “life steps at last/Into eternity”:<sup>82</sup>

Love is now set free  
And parting is no more.  
Full like an endless sea,  
Life surges without shore.  
One Night of rapture, one  
Eternal poem, whence  
Our universal sun  
Is God's own countenance.<sup>83</sup>

Enacted by Love, the coming of Christ sets humankind free from the bondage of earthly life, and grants them eternal life. Though in the *Hymns* both Sophie and Christ are the incarnation of Love, the personification of Infinity, they have different levels of significance. The personal salvation by Sophie is meant to be played out again by Christ on a universal scale one day, since the mystical vision beheld by the poet will in the end dawn onto the entire human race. Thus the poem forms a parallel between Sophie for the poet himself, and Christ for humankind. As the role of Christ in human history resembles and is equated to the role of Sophie in the poet's personal life, the poem transforms and elevates the author's personal revelation to a universal prophecy. The final victory of Love is that the face of Eternity is no longer beheld by the poet himself, but will be revealed to all humankind.

The high proclamation of Love as the essence of life can also be found in Emily Brontë's writings. In *Wuthering Heights*, after Catherine's death, Heathcliff's miserable state of mind mirrors that of

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<sup>81</sup> It is worth pointing out that Novalis, unlike Stephan George or Schiller, who place the ancient Greek culture above Christianity, upholds Christianity as the highest mode of culture in the western civilization. August Closs, “Novalis: ‘Hymns to the Night’,” in *Medusa's Mirror: Studies in German Literature* (London: Cresset, 1957), 138. Admittedly, the stories of the Bible have been reshaped to accord to Novalis's own mythology of western civilization in the *Hymns*.

<sup>82</sup> Novalis, “Hymns to the Night,” 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*,

Novalis.<sup>84</sup> Heathcliff claims, “I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!”<sup>85</sup> And also, “The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!”<sup>86</sup> But interestingly, in the novel, there is a similar mystical vision dawning to Heathcliff, which like the one described in *Hymn 3*, also occurs at night, upon his visit to Catherine’s tomb. After Catherine’s death, Heathcliff develops a habit of visiting her grave at night, just like Novalis visited Sophie’s grave in real life. One day, under the influence of an unspeakable urge, Heathcliff proceeds to dig up Catherine’s grave in order to see her again:

I [Heathcliff] got a spade from the toolhouse, and 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, I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down – ‘If I can only get this off,’ I muttered, ‘I wish they may shovel in the earth over us both!’ and I wrenched at it more desperately still. There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind, I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by – but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certain I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth.<sup>87</sup>

The sense of Catherine’s presence on earth makes Heathcliff unspeakably consoled, and accompanies him as he returns to the Heights. But the whole experience is less assuring than in *Hymn 3*, since a mystical vision of Sophie arising from the grave is now replaced by a mere *feeling* of Catherine’s presence at the tomb. More importantly, unlike the speaker in the *Hymns*, whose vision inaugurates his faith in Love, and leads to his belief in the universal triumph of Night, Brontë’s story does not end with the overflowing of Love in the universe. Love is still the essential, and perhaps the only agency to bind one together with the universe, but the faith in its final triumph which is evident towards the end of the *Hymns*, has at this time lapsed into doubt.

## **The Romantic Agenda of Poetry as Seen Through the Structure of the *Hymns*, and Its Mutation in Emily Brontë’s Lyrical Works**

Following the break from traditional philosophy’s claim to absolute Truth, the early Romantics initiated a revolution in the kind of language and the form of writings they used. Under the belief that poetry and philosophy should be combined, and ultimately become one, the early Romantics refer to poetry not in its narrow sense, but as “poetic” writings in general. Thus if poetry is opposed to

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<sup>84</sup> It is worth mentioning that Carlyle’s article also includes some of Novalis’s diary entries during this period of his life, which Emily Brontë may have read.

<sup>85</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 148.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

anything, it is not prose, but traditional analytical philosophy with its scientific precision of language.

According to Charlie Louth, when addressing the agenda of Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel claims that Romantic poetry should be a “progressive universal poetry”, which “seeks to touch upon all area of human experience and suggest a totality.”<sup>88</sup> It should be “at once poetry and poetry of poetry,”<sup>89</sup> concerned not with the dissection and categorization of individual objects, but with the working of realization, by connecting everything to create a dense and light network of interrelations. Schlegel believes that by doing so, Romantic poetry will be able to transcend the limit of traditional philosophy, and become its “goal and meaning.”<sup>90</sup>

In this regard, Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night*, which can be considered as one of the few authentic gestures to genuinely fulfill Schlegel’s transcendental poesy program, is a self-conscious effort to break the traditional oppositions between philosophy and poetry, verse and prose, and create a mode of writing that encompasses everything that exists. Having a central theme dealing with the meaning of Life and Death and humans’ place in the universe, *Hymns to the Night* demonstrates “a unique instance of epic matter reduced to small compass in the form of lyrical reveries,”<sup>91</sup> which offers the reader a unique fusion of epic and lyric.

The *Hymns* consists of two times three hymns, with the primary antithesis set between “Night” and “Light” in each pair. The poem as a whole is therefore strictly symmetrical. And since each time the transition from one pair of the hymns to the next is accompanied with a deepening of the meaning of “Light” and “Night”, the *Hymns* at the same time takes on a spiral structure. Key images which appear in the initial pair of the hymns are reinforced and endowed with richer meanings through repetition in newly developed contexts in the following pairs. As the narrative proceeds, the *Hymns* by steps engages with the themes of “Light” and “Night”, loss and Love, Time and Eternity, as well as the limited earthly life and the Eternal life in Death. In doing so, the poem successfully produces a sense of continuity and enacts a process of transformation at the same time.

Drawing upon the proximity of Night and Day, Death and Life, fulfillment and longing, the free and seemingly weightless transitions between different spheres in the *Hymns* create a rich constellation

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<sup>88</sup> Louth, “The Romantic Lyric,” 69-72.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Passage, introduction to *Hymns to the Night*, x.

of meanings, which are not fixed, but are constantly in flux and motion, transcending all the existing isolated concepts. By doing so, the poem “explores that openness, dissolving the structure of the visible world to reassemble them in the ideal, inward form of the [Hymns] themselves.”<sup>92</sup> The *Hymns* therefore is a symbolical piece of work, as it aims at expressing universal relationships between humans and the universe by translating limited aspects of human life into universal symbols. Shifting the literal to the figurative, the poem aspires to resemble the Infinite and the Eternal.

A small number of themes and images also have a high frequency of appearance in Emily Brontë’s writings. In her lyrical works in particular, Brontë has the tendency to go back to them again and again. Such themes include Night, Death, Imagination, Childhood, Love and Loss. At the same time, Brontë also favors a limited number of images, such as “prison”, “tear”, “wind” “flower”, to use in these chosen contexts. But such repetition and combination of certain images is of course not simply aimed at repeating what has been said before, but at achieving a more extensive and comprehensive totality.

However, instead of a particular word being added with more layers of meaning, which would contribute to the semantic connotation of a particular image, like what happens in the *Hymns*, in Brontë’s poems, the totality of the meaning of the word breaks down, diffuses and expands into different directions, and in the end forms an endless discussion within itself. The light, transitional mode of writing that was once used to connect different individual experiences into a seamless whole in early Romantic writings can still be seen in Brontë’s poems, but its function has been altered. Instead of representing the freedom to transit from one sphere to another, it now becomes the method to express the uncertainty and contradictoriness of the self’s place in the universe. Thus Brontë’s poems often do not provide an integral vision of the world, but manifest the inherent contradictoriness of the reality.<sup>93</sup> An all-encompassing view of the universe can no longer be achieved on a solid metaphysical basis, but is confined to the realm of subjective consciousness, which constantly faces the intrusions and doubts from the outside world.

Such features manifest another important aspect of Brontë’s writings, which is her close relationship with the literature of her own era: the early Victorian period, where the doubts and quandaries seen in her writings are also shared among prominent intellectuals of the day. Thus in the next two chapters, I will explore Brontë’s engagement with the intellectual and cultural challenges of her own

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<sup>92</sup> Louth, “The Romantic Lyric,” 70.

<sup>93</sup> An example would be the different presentations of Death in her poems.

time, which also had a profound impact on and in the end reshaped the way Brontë views the world and the self.

## Conclusion

Through tracing a series of related images and themes in Novalis and Emily Brontë's writings, this chapter delves into a comparative analysis of the philosophical significance of the imagery of "Night", and shows how such an image is inevitably linked to the concepts of Dream, Vision, Slumber, and ultimately, Death, in the two authors' works, both of which are part of a larger literary and philosophical tradition. As Lilian Furst puts it, "Night is a striking pervasive theme in European Romanticism."<sup>94</sup> Large numbers of Romantic lyrical works and prose take Night as their central theme. While the reasons for the Romantics' fascination with Night have been given, Emily Brontë's own preoccupation with, and strikingly similar representation of, this concept in her writings shows us to a more extended degree, the sway European Romantic tradition had over her. At the same time, the idea of "universal poesy", which was raised by Schiller and implemented faithfully by Novalis in the *Hymns*, seems to have found audible echoes in Brontë's poetic works, albeit in a localized form.

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<sup>94</sup> Furst, "Lighting up Night," 505.

# Tennyson's *In Memoriam*

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“Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?” – Tennyson, *In Memoriam*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This chapter looks at Tennyson's masterpiece *In Memoriam* in relation to Emily Brontë's writings, and focuses on the influence of pre-Darwinian natural science discourse on the Victorian literary, ideological and social spheres, in particular its impact on Tennyson and Brontë's thinking. The chapter also introduces Chambers' *Vestiges* (1844) and Lyell's *The Principles of Geology* (1830-1832) to provide the larger cultural context and facilitate the subsequent discussion. The chapter primarily compares the different reactions to these arising scientific discourses on the part of Tennyson and Brontë, plus the conclusions the two writers drew from them, which show the overall impact of natural science discourse on the two authors' thinking. The chapter uses *In Memoriam* as the primary text for Tennyson,<sup>2</sup> and also includes a few of Emily Brontë's Belgian essays amongst her other writings.

Tennyson's *In Memoriam. A. H. H.*, written after his friend Arthur Hallam's early and unexpected death, is widely regarded as not only the poet's masterpiece, but one of the greatest poems written during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Tennyson struggled to search for answers and renewed hope in his grief over the loss of his friend, the poem became a faithful record of the various events and ideas that influenced Tennyson during that period, and touched upon many of the most important intellectual concerns at the heart of the early Victorian era. As personal experience was interwoven with the doubts and quandaries of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, what was in the beginning an attempt to deal with a traumatic loss in the poet's personal life, went on to become a healing process representative of an entire generation, a collective therapeutic journey to find a way out, or else to come to terms with a bleak, harsh and grim reality. In doing so, the poem expands its scope from the personal sphere to the broader Victorian public, and in the end “renders the intellectual and religious spirit of the age with unparalleled fullness and accuracy.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Tennyson, “In Memoriam A. H. H.,” in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 397, canto 55, line 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> The chapter will also extend to a few other writings of Tennyson.

<sup>3</sup> Ian H. C. Kennedy, “‘In Memoriam’ and the Tradition of Pastoral Elegy,” *Victorian Poetry* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1977): 366, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40002885>.

Sporadically written over a long period of seventeen years (1833-1849), *In Memoriam* serves as a living record of many of the intellectual debates and crises happening in the early Victorian era. Most notable is its exploration of ways of viewing Death, Nature, and human lives, which reflects the ascendancy of pre-Darwinian sciences during this period. Needless to say, the conflict of scientific discourses with the Biblical narratives and the Christian worldview was one of the major ideological challenges Tennyson, as well as his contemporaries, had to deal with. Though exposed to similar literary and cultural environments, Tennyson and Emily Brontë eventually took two different positions on this issue. Therefore in this chapter, by comparing the different views the two authors express in their works, as well as the process they went through, I hope to present both a larger picture of this intellectual phenomenon in the early Victorian period, and where Emily Brontë stands in relation to her own era.

## **Pre-Darwinian Science in the Early Victorian Period**

Before Darwin published his *Origin of Species* (1859), speculations on the origin of the universe and that of the lives on earth were already fermenting in the intellectual sphere, as new scientific discoveries advanced in individual scientific disciplines such as astronomy, embryology, zoology and geology. More significantly, according to Rebecca Stott, “first in 1830-32, and secondly in 1844, two ground breaking but very different British books appeared that attempted to forge a grand narrative from the new and still emerging discoveries.”<sup>4</sup> These are Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830-1832) and Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of The Natural History of Creation* (1844). The former was written for a specialised science community. The latter, however, aimed at reaching a broader Victorian audience. As an effort to engage the general public with the contemporary scientific discourse, and form what could be termed as a kind of “popular science”, the publication of *Vestiges* gained prominent influence, and was especially successful. The book quickly became a bestseller, reaching a wide audience in British society, and stirring up a heated debate in both the intellectual circles and the public sphere.

During this time, because of these public debates and discourses, the ascendancy of natural science, as well as its wider social and cultural implications, was widely felt in the public domain, and ultimately mounted a serious challenge to the Biblical narrative and orthodox Christian faith. The

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Stott, “‘Tennyson’s Drift’: Evolution in *The Princess*,” in *Darwin, Tennyson and Their Readers: Explorations in Victorian Literature and Science*, ed. Valerie Purton (London: Anthem, 2013), 19.

impact was profound and lasting, which not only reshaped the way Tennyson's generation looked at the world, but still affects people's way of viewing the world, Nature and the self till this day.

In view of this chapter's focus on pre-Darwinian science, and in particular its expanding impacts on the literary, intellectual, social and philosophical debates in Victorian society, *Vestiges* is of seminal importance, both because it achieved an exceptionally wide audience among the Victorian public, and for the fact that it was published during the productive years of Tennyson and Emily Brontë. Thus many of the issues the work dealt with, or attempted to deal with, were issues of major concern to the Victorian public, and also to these two authors in particular, to which their writings amply testify. A close analysis of some parts of this book would therefore provide a general context for the intellectual environment the two authors lived in, while Chambers' own arguments on a few specific questions, which are of our particular concern in this chapter, would serve to facilitate the subsequent discussions on Tennyson and Emily Brontë's own views.

### *Vestiges*

The book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* was published anonymously in 1844, with eleven editions and 25,000 copies sold within the next 15 years.<sup>5</sup> As an effort to bring forth the different strands of scientific disciplines and achieve a total account of all things that exist, *Vestiges* endeavours to transcend the narrow scope and limited vision of the individual scientific disciplines, and is concerned not so much with the accumulation and compilation of specific and disparate scientific facts, as with the unifying and fundamental principles that guide the course of natural and human history. By integrating individual scientific discoveries and theories and infusing them with broader moral, philosophical and theological connotations, the book breaks the boundaries of traditional science, and ventures to bridge science with larger social, ethical and theological issues which concern the Victorian public. As a result it has a profound impact on contemporary science, literature, religion and politics.

From the beginning to the end, *Vestiges* consistently presents to the reader a Nature governed by a designated set of natural laws, functioning along its own course, with which human moral conditions "have not the least concern"<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> James A. Secord, introduction to *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and Other Evolutionary Writings*, by Robert Chambers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xxvi. From 1847 onwards, a cheap edition targeting a wide range of readers in the working family and middle class was made available, enabling the book to reach an even wider audience.

<sup>6</sup> Chambers, *Vestiges*, 375. Subsequent text references are to page numbers of the same book.

The whole is complete on one principle. The masses of space are formed by law; law makes them in due time theatres of existence for plants and animals; sensation, disposition, intellect, are all in like manner developed and sustained in action by law...The inorganic has one final comprehensive law, GRAVITATION. The organic, the other great department of mundane things, rests in like manner on own law, and that is, - DEVELOPMENT. (p. 359-360)

A natural world functioning under these seemingly unifying principles raises the question as to where the concepts of good and evil can be placed. And most significantly at the time, such depiction of Nature led to doubt about the benevolence of the Maker, if not ultimately His existence. Knowing that “the system unfolded does not imply the most perfect conceivable love or regard on the part of the Deity towards his creatures,” (p. 383) Chambers seeks to defend the faith in God by encouraging the reader to look at the evil and sufferings in the natural world in a larger scope:

It may be that, ...there is a system of Mercy and Grace behind the screen of nature, which is to make up for all casualties endured here, and the very largeness of which is what makes the casualties a matter of indifference to God...It is necessary to suppose that the present system is but *a part of a whole, a stage in a Great Progress.*(p. 384-385, my italics)

The confident tone reassures the reader that there is a guiding hand behind what seems like divine indifference. Such optimism is founded on the belief that when we look at the natural system as a *whole*, instead of its parts, it would appear to be benevolent. Good is dominant in the system, and evil only a minor occurrence. Thus evil and sufferings are in fact only accidental and lamentable deviations from the overall upward direction towards which the whole creation strives.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Chambers even likens the system to having the fairness of a lottery, in which “every one has the like chance of drawing the prize.” (p. 377) Individual suffering is thus subordinated to the general goodness of the totality, becoming an inferior moment to the Author of Nature in the gigantic history of the Earth, and an unfortunate event to the individual sufferer in the vastness of the universe.

Chambers’ attempt at combining Pre-Darwinian evolutionary theory with the traditional Christian worldview, at a time when the conflicting views between natural science and the Biblical narratives became impossible for the Victorian intellectuals and the public to ignore any longer, was both urgently necessary and tactical. He moderated the arguments on both sides in order to achieve such a synthesis to allow the two to co-exist.

The belief (or lack thereof) in a harmonious natural world sets the overall direction for Tennyson and Emily Brontë’s respective views on Nature and the future of the human race, and is therefore of cardinal importance to the concerns of this chapter. It is on this basis that they subsequently reach

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<sup>7</sup> “The evil is, therefore, only a casual exception from something in the main good.” Chambers, *Vestiges*, 365.

their respective, albeit different, positions on the issues of human beings' place in the natural world, the reality of human nature, and the prospect of human civilization.

Derived from the belief in the progress and development of the natural world, *Vestiges* regards the appearance of human beings as so far the highest point of achievement in Nature. Humans are “the genuine head, not only of this order, but of the whole animal world,” (p. 267) uniting in themselves a greater number of properties than those that are to be found individually in any other types, and possessing a remarkable concentration of qualities from all the other groups.<sup>8</sup> Man is seen as the highest form of being yet existent on earth, the most superior and intelligent.

Acknowledging that the human mind is infinitely more sophisticatedly developed and possesses a wider range of ability to think and act, the author nevertheless sees the appearance of humans as the result of natural development, the fruition of a process which was brought about under the operation of the same set of natural laws that brought forth the existence of all other types of lives on earth. The difference between our mental capacities and those of other kinds of animals is therefore only a matter of degree, not of quality.

As Chambers must be aware, this way of seeing humans' mental phenomena does not deal with the issue of religion, as it hardly touches upon the existence and nature of the human soul, the “immortal part of our being” (p. 325) which concerns humans' special relationship with God. A purely materialistic account of human mental activities thus bears the danger of lowering humans to the place of beasts, which would have been unacceptable to a religious mind, let alone the entire religious establishment at the time. In an effort to seek for reconciliation, a passage is dedicated to clarifying this issue, giving religion an adequate place in the whole narrative:

Bound up as we thus are by an identity in the character of our mental organization with lower animals, we are yet, it will be observed, strikingly distinguished from them by this great advance in development. *We have faculties in full force and activities which the animals either possess not at all, or in so low and obscure a form as to be equivalent to non-existence.* Now these parts of mind are those which connect us with the things that are not of this world. We have veneration, [...] We have reason, [...] We have consciousness and benevolence, [...] *Beyond this, mental science does not carry us in support of religion: the rest depends on evidence of a different kind.*(p. 347-348, my italics)

By assigning a certain part of the human mind to the task of making religious inquiries, an ability which animals lack, Chambers to some extent enlarges and emphasizes the difference between humans and animals, so as to make room for human beings' spiritual pursuit. At the same time, by

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<sup>8</sup> This is elaborated between pages 269 and 317. Ibid.

identifying and delineating a clear boundary within which mental science operates, Chambers removes the pressure from those who seek to either validate or refute the Christian worldview by drawing on the empirical evidences in mental and natural science. Part of the significance of *Vestiges* is its attempt at the healing of the schism between science and religion, and here once again, Chambers does the best he can to fulfil this task.

However, not everyone appreciated Chambers' reconciliatory efforts. For some, though Chambers had acknowledged humans' superior status, putting them in the animal kingdom was still seen as a great offence to human dignity and the Maker of the universe. Samuel Richard Bosanquet, for example, believed that "behind the attractive cotton and gold-stamped spine all the tendencies of the work were bad: no special providence, no miracles, the Bible a fable, and human beings no better than beasts."<sup>9</sup> While for others, the attempt to bypass religious inquiries in the scientific field was both inconvenient and complacent, for avoiding the question did not in the end address it. "Some atheist radicals", for instance, "remained suspicious of *Vestiges*, fearing co-option by liberal political economy and a bland theism,"<sup>10</sup> as Secord puts it.

Turning to the social and political aspect, as Stott states, the 1830s and 1840s was "a period of political speculation in Britain."<sup>11</sup> "The development theory," she says, was "often bound up with radical or reformist discussions about the progress and future of humankind, and as such, it was "used by radicals to underpin a reformist agenda and to undermine the power and authority of the church."<sup>12</sup> Thus "evolutionary ideas ... were not just controversial because they contravened Biblical accounts," but also because "they had the potential to be politically and socially subversive."<sup>13</sup>

In this climate, the book *Vestiges* was written to underpin Chambers' life-long campaign for social reform and progress. Throughout the book, the Principle of Development serves as the fundamental and unifying force in Nature: from the beginning of time to the present day, from the first appearance of life to the flourishing of humankind on earth. The hope was that if this principle could be seen as consistently acting upon all things in the entire natural world across the vast time and space articulable by modern science, then it can be argued that the same principle must be equally at work in human society and throughout human history. Thus Chambers' book, as he was very much aware,

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<sup>9</sup> James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: the University of Chicago, 2000), Kindle edition, chap. 1

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Stott, "Tennyson's Drift," 16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

would lend support to the political voice advocating for social change and social reform. This then in part explains why the central concern of the book had always been the delineation of “gestation, development and progress”<sup>14</sup> in different historical periods and natural spheres, for the goal was to reach a tenable creed by the synthesis of them all.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, the whole book, along with its central message of Progress, was but an effort to promote the author’s social and political agenda, as its reception since publication amply testified.

At the same time, what is also very important for Chambers, is to make it clear that a natural world functioning under the principle of Progress, as we recall from previous passages, includes evil and suffering as a necessary element, which dissolves as the system develops and perfects itself. Thus if the same principle is at work in human society, it could then legitimize and justify the vices and deficiencies currently existing in human nature and the society as a whole, and lend support to the belief that the cure of the human race lies in the future:

So is human society, in its earliest stages, sanguinary, aggressive, and deceitful, but in time becomes just, faithful, and benevolent. To such improvements there is a natural tendency which will operate in all fair circumstances.(p. 355)

Chambers argues that just as the mechanism of Nature on the whole strives for harmony, human civilization constantly tends to fairness and justice. As the society progresses, humans will one day achieve not only material abundance, but also moral perfection.

On the one hand, by establishing the credibility of the principle of Progress throughout natural history, Chambers justifies the necessity for change in the human social sphere, thus lending support to his propaganda of social reform. On the other hand, by seeing the injustice and conflicts currently existing in the society as irregular and temporary occurrences, which will be rectified as the society progresses, he also to some extent harnesses the urge to resort to more radical means – such as violence or revolution – to tackle social conflicts and oppression. Once again, Chambers tries to find a middle way, this time between the political conservatives and the radicals, the interest of the aristocracy and that of the emerging working class.

Chambers’ depiction of the natural world, along with his optimism on the future of the human race and human society, at a time when industrialization transformed the natural landscape and people’s lives in profound and unprecedented ways, had undoubted appeals to his contemporaries. Though

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<sup>14</sup> Secord, introduction to *Vestiges*, xxxvii.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

they eventually arrived at different positions, both Tennyson and Emily Brontë were exposed to such debates surrounding natural science and religion at the time, and were familiar with similar literary and scientific endeavors which took place in the public sphere. Tennyson's interest in natural science is long-standing, with evidence showing his active engagement with the popular scientific discourses and debates as early as when he was in college.<sup>16</sup> He read Lyell's *Principles*, and bought his own copy of *Vestiges* only a few days after the book came out.<sup>17</sup> While there is little empirical evidence that Brontë has read *Vestiges* (as usually is the case with her), judging from the sales of the book and the scope of audience it reached, as well as the reading materials the Brontë household had access to,<sup>18</sup> it is reasonable to believe that Brontë was aware of these books and the debates they generated. More direct evidence of her knowledge of natural science can be seen in some of her lesser known writings. The depiction of Nature in Brontë's French essay "The Butterfly (1842)", for example, is identified by the editor of *The Belgian Essays* Sue Lonoff as having possibly been influenced by the writings of authors such as Buffon, Lamartine, and Chateaubriand, all of whom were interested in natural science and theories of development.<sup>19</sup>

The enduring impact of natural science on religion in the early Victorian period has significantly influenced the ways these two authors look at Nature, human beings, and the future of human society, while Chambers' stance on these issues serves as a prominent but not exclusive example for them to draw upon. In the rest of this chapter, I will seek to address Tennyson and Brontë's thinking on these issues.

## The Nature of Nature

With the rise of natural science, the fundamental principle that is at work in Nature becomes an issue of frequent speculation for Victorian intellectuals. Chambers, as we recall, has formed an optimistic depiction which reconciles the phenomena of the natural world with Christian belief. But his is not the only account being offered at the time. In this section, I will through introducing another major work, Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which gives a quite different account of the driving force in Nature, throw light on Tennyson and Emily Brontë's thinking on this issue.

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<sup>16</sup> Stott, "Tennyson's Drift," 14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Valerie Purton, introduction to Purton, *Darwin*, viii.

<sup>18</sup> The Brontë household had access to popular journals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*, which published reviews on Chambers' *Vestiges*.

<sup>19</sup> Sue Lonoff ed. and trans., *The Belgian Essays*, by Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 18.

## The Impact of Lyell's *Geology*, and Tennyson's Resort to Transcendentalism

The first major impact of natural science discourse on Tennyson, as could be found in *In Memoriam*, was not from Chambers' *Vestiges*, but Lyell's *Principles of Geology*.<sup>20</sup> Published in three volumes from 1830 to 1833, *Geology* predated *Vestiges* by more than a decade, and was "the principal means by which pre-Darwinian scientific thought on the history of the earth and of living matter was diffused."<sup>21</sup> In the first volume, based on the studies made by his predecessors and his own observations over a number of years, Lyell seeks to demonstrate to the reader the formation of the earth since its beginning, and explain why the present landscape of the earth is the result of the slow and continuous work of natural forces (wind, rain, tides, seas and ice, etc) over long periods of time in the earth's history. In the second volume he then proceeds to demonstrate the extinction of species throughout earth's history, as they become unable to cope with the new conditions that the continual physical change of the earth brings about. In his work, Lyell "passionately refute(s) the idea of species change", and rejects Lamarck's evolutionary claims "over the course of 40 pages."<sup>22</sup> He instead stresses Nature's destruction, and the inherent unending conflict and struggle within the system of Nature which each species has to confront: "every species" he writes, "which has spread itself from a small point over a wide area, must, in like manner, have marked its progress by the diminution, or entire extirpation, of some other, and must maintain its ground by a successful struggle against the encroachments of other plants and animals."<sup>23</sup> Contrary to Chambers, Lyell paints a disinterested, ruthless picture of Nature.

For Tennyson, "the writings of Charles Lyell were foundational."<sup>24</sup> He read *Geology* in 1836,<sup>25</sup> and as his son tells us, was "deeply immersed"<sup>26</sup> in it by 1837. Tennyson had never been interested in the kind of optimism exhibited by thinkers like Paley, who is quite convinced of the overarching

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<sup>20</sup> As his son stated, the sections "about Evolution had been read by his friends some years before the publication of the *Vestiges of Creation* in 1844." Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (London: MacMillan, 1924), 223n1. However, given the fact that *In Memoriam* was written across the span of seventeen years, it is quite possible that not all the sections on Evolution precede Chambers. For example, the ones in the Epilogue were probably written after the publication of *Vestiges*, therefore it is not surprising that these would indeed show traces of Chambers' influence on Tennyson, a point which this chapter will elaborate on later.

<sup>21</sup> Graham Hough, "The Natural Theology of *In Memoriam*," *Review of English Studies* 23, no. 91 (July 1947), 246, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/509269>.

<sup>22</sup> Stott, "Tennyson's Drift," 18. More specifically, Lyell rejected Lamarck in his chapter "Changes of The Organic World Now in Progress" (p. 404-465) from the second volume of *Geology* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). *Geology* has twelve editions. The first edition to the seventh edition were published during Emily Brontë's lifetime.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1835), 119.

<sup>24</sup> Gillian Beer, "Systems of Extravagance: Darwin, Meredith, Tennyson," in Purton, *Darwin*, 140.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred Tennyson, "To Richard Monckton Milnes," November 1, 1836, in *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, vol. 1, 1821-1850 (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2002), 146, electronic edition.

<sup>26</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 162.

happiness of the universe: “It is a happy world after all. The air, the earth, the water teem with delighted existence.”<sup>27</sup> His own observation of nature was much cooler. When he looked through a microscope at the minute life it revealed he said: “Strange that these wonders should draw some men to God and repel others. No more reason in one than in the other.”<sup>28</sup> But in his Cambridge years, after his reading of Friedrich Tiedemann’s discovery about the developmental stage of the foetal human brain, which closely resembles that of other vertebrates, he was after all encouraged to believe that all species were moving forward progressively.<sup>29</sup> Lyell’s narrative, however, by offering a vision of Nature which no longer moves in a straight line towards an ever-improving future, but is chaotic and purposeless, as it goes through cyclical extinction and replacement, has thus “destroyed a dream only to substitute a nightmare.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, its emphasis on the inevitable extinction of all species,<sup>31</sup> not only shows Nature’s utter disregard for the welfare of a single life and even entire species, but also, more central to Tennyson’s concern, extinguishes humans’ hope for immortality, both personally as individuals and collectively as a race.

Seen in this light, the following stanzas from *In Memoriam* record Tennyson’s reaction to Lyell’s narrative as well as its moral and theological implications, and reflect his struggles in absorbing this new discourse. In section LV, Tennyson writes:

Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere  
Her secret meaning in her deeds,  
And finding that of fifty seeds  
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call

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<sup>27</sup> William Paley, *The Works of William Paley* (Edinburgh: Peter Brown and Thomas Nelson, 1833), 534.

<sup>28</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> Stott, “Tennyson’s Drift,” 15, 18.

<sup>30</sup> John Killham, *Tennyson and “The Princess”: Reflections of an Age* (London: Athlone, 1958), 250.

<sup>31</sup> Lyell stated on the title page of the second volume of the first edition of *Geology* that “The inhabitants of the globe, like all the other parts of it, are subject to change. It is not only the individual that perishes, but whole species.” Quoted in Eleanor Bustin Mattes, *In Memoriam: The Way of a Soul; A Study of Some Influences that Shaped Tennyson’s Poem* (New York: Exposition, 1951), 58-59.

To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.<sup>32</sup>

According to Ricks, the use of “type” and “life” here suggests the influence from *Geology*.<sup>33</sup> While the phrase “of fifty seeds/She often brings but one to bear” further points to the sweeping force in Nature and its utter disregard of individual lives. Elsewhere Tennyson also says:

An Omnipotent Creator who could make such a painful world is to me *sometimes* as hard to believe in as to believe in blind matter behind everything. The lavish profusion too in the natural world appals me, from the growths of the tropical forest to the capacity of man to multiply, the torrent of babies.<sup>34</sup>

As Hough states, “This is Malthusianism applied to the natural world.”<sup>35</sup> Such depiction of Nature forces the poet to ask whether the world is created and governed by a God of love after all, and if all the lavish profusion and destruction in the natural world, will not in the end be wasted, but contribute towards the ascent on “the great world's altar-stairs” that lead the whole creation up to God. But such questioning is apparently too much to bear for the poet, who cherishes a faith that he could not afford to relinquish. The section ends with him stretching out his “hands of faith”, gathering whatever miserable evidence he could find, to “faintly *trust* the larger hope. (my italics)”<sup>36</sup>

If in this section, despite all the destructions happening in the natural world, the faith in a God of love is still retained through the belief in Nature’s careful preservation of the “type”, and the ultimate onward and upward direction of the species and of the natural course as a whole, the section that follows shatters such a belief into pieces, as it depicts an even gloomier picture:

‘So careful of the type?’ but no.  
From scarped cliff and quarried stone  
She cries, ‘A thousand types are gone:  
I care for nothing, all shall go.

‘Thou makest thine appeal to me:  
I bring to life, I bring to death:  
The spirit does but mean the breath:  
I know no more.’<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 397-398, canto 55, line 5-20.

<sup>33</sup> Ricks, *Tennyson*, 397n.

<sup>34</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 314.

<sup>35</sup> Hough, “The Natural Theology of *In Memoriam*,” 250.

<sup>36</sup> Tennyson’s resort to hope here, in dealing with the seemingly dispensable individual lives in Nature, is not so much based on rational ground as out of the need to satisfy the heart’s desire. This point can also be seen in his letter to Emily Sellwood in 1839: “So mayst thou and I and all of us ascend stepwise to Perfection... the *hope* that conquers all things ... but there is no answer to the question except in a great hope of universal good. (my italics)” Alfred Tennyson, “To Emily Sellwood,” October 24, 1839, in Lang, *Letters*, vol. 1, 175-176.

<sup>37</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 398-399, canto 56, line 1-8.

As Mattes argues, if section LV may have possibly been indebted to Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, which Tennyson had read at university if not before, it was almost certain that the reading of *Geology* led Tennyson to write this subsequent section.<sup>38</sup> For here not only has Nature ceased to care for individual lives, but it has ceased to care for the entire species as well. In fact, it cares "for nothing" at all, as "all shall go." This stanza also finds resonance in Lyell's claim that "Species cannot be immortal, but must perish one after the other, like the individuals which compose them."<sup>39</sup> From this point on the situation seems to be spinning out of control. Nature has ceased to be meaningful, but only represents a process of mindless changes, as it goes through an endless cycle of life and death, in which the new type irrevocably replaces the old. Good weighs no more than evil, and the future offers no more hope than the past. It is a Nature that has descended into perpetual chaos. And such a depiction makes one ask, in a world seemingly functioning under some mere blind forces indifferent to all the values and principles that humans hold dear, whether life has any inherent meanings at all.

More recently, Michelle Geric in her book *Tennyson and Geology: Poetry and Poetics* (2017), suggests that the influence of Lyell's *Geology* on *In Memoriam* is not limited to the adoption of certain scientific ideas and arguments, but extends to the very structure of the poem. Her chapter "In Memoriam's Uniformitarian Poetics" reads *In Memoriam* as "structured on ... the same basic 'principles' that underpin Lyell's *Geology*."<sup>40</sup> These include: the "strategy of division"; the principle of "displacement" and repetition; the non-progressive change; uniformitarianism. Geric claims,

For *In Memoriam*, ... these principles form the logic and ordering structures that shape the poem's movement. They provide fitting patterns for the expression of unending grief, for the discursive examination of faith and doubts and for exploring the relationship of individual death to the wider scheme of nature.<sup>41</sup>

Geric's study convincingly shows that apart from affinities in ideas and themes, there are also deep structural parallels between *Geology* and *In Memoriam*, and thus Tennyson's reception and assimilation of Lyell's work is more extended than previously thought. However, it seems to downplay (if not deny entirely) the role of Chambers, who in my view has at least ostensibly offered a tone of assurance, solace and a conventional teleological ending to *In Memoriam*.

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<sup>38</sup> Mattes, *Way of a Soul*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, vol. 3, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Michelle Geric, *Tennyson and Geology: Poetry and Poetics* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 116.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

When the blind profusion and extravagance of Nature seems to have failed Tennyson, he tries to retain his faith in a God of love from a different route. Tennyson seeks to circumvent the difficulties raised by natural science, by putting his faith within the subjective domain of “feeling”, which does not rely on empirical evidence or logical reasoning for its legitimate existence:

I found Him not in world or sun,  
Or eagle’s wing, or insect’s eye;  
Nor thro’ the questions men may try,  
The petty cobwebs we have spun:

If e’er when faith had fall’n sleep,  
I heard a voice ‘believe no more’  
And heard an ever-breaking shore  
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt  
The freezing reason’s colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answer’d ‘I have felt.’<sup>42</sup>

The Pascalian argument, “the heart has its reasons, which reason does not know”,<sup>43</sup> finds a resonance here. We see that at this point, Tennyson attempts to store his faith in a safe place by keeping it within the subjective domain of human consciousness, which natural science does not deal with. Decades later, Tennyson paraphrased the same argument in prose:

Yet God *is* love, transcendent, all pervading! We do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells us that God is disease, murder and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest within us, which recognises that there is not one fruitless pang, just as there is not one lost good.<sup>44</sup>

This is faith turned inward, so that it no longer needs to seek proof or disproof from the outside world, but can rely on one’s inner experience alone.

However, this kind of subjectivism has attracted some of “the severest criticism”<sup>45</sup> since the poem’s publication. For some it merely shows a sign of weakness, revealing how desperate and anxious Tennyson is when he fails to find in the geographical and biological history of the natural world enough proof to support his religious faith. Even those who are sympathetic towards the poet’s position cannot help pointing out the inadequacy of his attempt at only bypassing the claim of

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<sup>42</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 470, canto 124, line 5-16.

<sup>43</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Dover: Mincola, New York), Kindle edition, Chap. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 314.

<sup>45</sup> Hough, “Natural Theology,” 253.

science. Buckley, for example, mentions that such belief is “individual and private and precarious”,<sup>46</sup> and “by intuition alone, the cry of his believing heart”, “through passionate feeling”,<sup>47</sup> was Tennyson able to maintain his faith in God and the dignity of human life. While other times these stanzas are praised on exactly the same subjective ground. Henry Sidgwick, for example, in his letter to Hallam Tennyson, stated that, “These lines I can never read without tears. I feel in them the indestructible and inalienable minimum of faith which humanity cannot give up because it is necessary for life.”<sup>48</sup> The intense and honest feelings these lines contain, which renders the conclusions of empirical evidence practically irrelevant, is precisely what makes them extremely moving and earns them reverence and respect from the contemporary readers.

But no matter how one looks at these lines, it seems that the above comments all rest on the assumption that Tennyson reaches his position, not so much through rational reasoning as prompted by an innate feeling of love. In other words, such a statement is based on human emotion, and therefore lacks any intrinsic rational basis. But on a closer look, it is not hard to find that there is more to this section than one at first recognizes.

For example, A. C. Bradley distinguishes two kinds of “inward evidence” that can be derived from the phrase “I have felt”. The first, as aforementioned, points to a kind of emotion or the claim of the “heart”, but the second is “an immediate assurance of God or of immortality”, which is “direct and immediate, not dependent on [logical] reasoning or proof.”<sup>49</sup> This kind of immediate certainty, which requires no process of logical inference, links Tennyson’s thinking with the thesis of German idealists, which Carlyle interpreted and expounded in his *Miscellanies*. For example, in his article “State of German Literature”, Carlyle says,

The Germans... deny... that Sense is the only inlet of Knowledge, that Experience is the primary ground of Belief. Their Primitive Truth, however, they seek, not, historically and by experimentation, in the universal persuasion of men, but by intuition, in the deepest and purest nature of Man.<sup>50</sup>

As Mattes clarifies, in his writings Carlyle, in general, maintains that practical knowledge must remain subordinate to the truths or insights which intuition reveals.<sup>51</sup> Carlyle’s ideas, as pointed out

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<sup>46</sup> Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 18.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 303.

<sup>49</sup> A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson’s “In Memoriam”* (London: MacMillan, 1901), 59-66.

<sup>50</sup> Carlyle, “State of German Literature,” *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 88.

by Mattes, are nothing essentially new in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. But his line of argument, especially the usage of the term “knowledge” and “wisdom”, find distinct echoes in *In Memoriam*:

What is she (knowledge), cut from love and faith,  
But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons? Fiery-hot to burst  
All barriers in her onward race  
For power. Let her know her place;  
She is the second, not the first.

A higher hand must make her mild,  
If all be not in vain, and guide  
Her footsteps, moving side by side  
With wisdom, like the younger child:

For she is earthly of the mind,  
But wisdom heavenly of the soul.<sup>52</sup>

The stanzas say that knowledge has little merit or value, when it is cut off from love and faith. For it will merely serve human desires for power. It is therefore necessary for wisdom, which is “a higher hand” to guide and lead her. The indebtedness to Carlyle, and to German idealists’ thinking, is clearly demonstrated, through connecting “knowledge” to the endless pursuit of power, and the subordination of knowledge to wisdom and love.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, to say that the “feeling” Tennyson talks about represents nothing more than mere human emotion or desire, which is promoted solely out of the cries of a grieving heart, clearly underestimates the depth of Tennyson’s thinking and his acquaintance with the tradition of German Idealism.

This kind of internalization and privatization of faith, the resorting to the subjective domain of the human mind for the preservation of a fading faith, is characteristic of a Victorian era, which, when facing the challenges of the natural science discourse, finds all dogmatic positions increasingly vulnerable. Elsewhere in her poetry, as explored in Chapter Two, Emily Brontë attempts to proceed in the same direction as Tennyson does, the result of which, however, ultimately proves to be unsatisfactory for her. Neither is Tennyson content with relying on transcendentalist answers alone to attend to his now shaken Christian belief. The full concession of the objective world to a disinterested, amoral Nature does not in the end square with the queries of a religious mind, and provides no actual answers to the questions raised in section LIV of *In Memoriam* and its sequel.

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<sup>52</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 462, canto 114, line 11-22.

<sup>53</sup> Due to Tennyson’s limited knowledge of German language, his acquaintance with German idealism is likely to have come via Carlyle.

Because the religious difficulties Tennyson faces are caused by the rise of the new natural science discourse, Tennyson wishes to provide an answer in scientific terms. As we will see later, the task of reconciling God and geology, of synthesizing a meaningful, benevolent Divine Purpose with the inevitable and inexorable rise and extinction of species which geological evidence reveals, is subsequently laid on Chambers' *Vestiges*, which Tennyson, after some struggle and reluctance, in the end chooses to accept.<sup>54</sup> While Brontë's writing, on the other hand, is characterized by an unflinching acceptance of the natural world as it is, and a resolute rejection of Chambers' idealistic depiction of the natural world and his optimistic predictions on its future course.

### Emily Brontë's "Butterfly" and A Nature of Destruction

The concept of Nature in Emily Brontë's writings is inherently divided. In her poetry most distinctly, Nature retains the features that are frequently found in early Romantic writings.<sup>55</sup> While in her other writings, for example the Belgian essays, the depiction of Nature bears the obvious influence of early and contemporary natural science discourse, and thus often appears to be much more bleak and unflattering.

Unlike other genres, where Emily Brontë speaks through the mouths of different narrators, speakers and characters, such that the opinions and thoughts expressed are not necessarily her own, and sometimes could even contradict Brontë's actual positions, the essays, by their articulate and expressive nature, give us a rare opportunity to look at Brontë's thinking on a few issues pertinent to our concern here, in a direct and unfiltered manner. At the same time, while poetry remains a medium in which Emily Brontë could at times (not always) construct a free and imaginary world unfettered by the cold harsh reality, and thus in a way bears witness to the apparent influence she receives from the early Romantic period, the essays demonstrate her sharp and acute observation based on empirical evidence, her cogent, intelligent line of reasoning, and her trenchant conclusions thereof derived. Thus the essays most clearly illustrate her connection with the scientific thoughts of her own era.

Emily Brontë's scientific view of Nature is perhaps most explicitly and expressively articulated in her essay "The Butterfly", composed on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1842.<sup>56</sup> In a quiet summer evening, the speaker in the essay sits alone at the edge of a forest, silently musing on the way by which Nature operates:

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<sup>54</sup> See section "Tennyson's Renewed Faith: From Lyell to Chambers" for detailed discussion on this topic.

<sup>55</sup> This will be discussed in Chapter Four, section heading "Nature as a Medium to Reach the Divine".

<sup>56</sup> Emily Brontë, "The Butterfly," in Lonoff, *Belgian Essays*, 176-179.

All creation is equally mad. Behold those flies playing above the brook; the swallows and fish diminish their number every minute. These will become, in their turn, the prey of some tyrant of the air or water; and man for his amusement or his needs will kill their murderers. *Nature is an inexplicable problem; it exists on a principle of destruction.* Every being must be the tireless instrument of death to others, or itself must cease to live, yet nonetheless we celebrate the day of our birth, and we praise God for having entered such a world.<sup>57</sup>

J. Hillis Miller commented on this passage in detail in his chapter on Emily Brontë. As he states, Brontë's is a Nature that is at war with itself. Brontë's depiction of Nature is not only full of conflict, with its members pitted against each other for survival, but also reveals that the very mechanism of Nature itself is built upon the "principle of destruction". Nature feeds upon pain and evil. Suffering and destruction are the very fuel which keeps the whole system going. Just as J. Hillis Miller argued, Brontë's Nature "is engaged in a constant act of suicide, tearing itself to pieces in the very effort to prolong its own life. Murder is the sole law of life, that is to say, life paradoxically depends upon death, and is impossible without it."<sup>58</sup>

What is astounding is the prevalence of pain and suffering depicted in this narrative. In a world built upon the principle of Destruction, there is no harmony, but endless conflicts and strife. Since each life survives on the destruction of others, any one who does not comply would only cease to exist. Thus the system demands a kind of universal selfishness from all its members, which is no longer a choice that they could voluntarily opt out from, but a prerequisite for their very own survival. As a consequence, there is little room left for the existence of genuine goodness in such a world. As evil and suffering occur no longer on an individual scale, but the fundamental principle of Nature is designed for evil to flourish and good to become extinct, Brontë's depiction truncates any hope for the future, and ultimately challenges the idea as to whether a benevolent, loving God could bring such a world into existence.

The possible influence of Lyell on Emily Brontë is also apparent in this passage. Like Lyell, Brontë presents to the reader a Nature which is relentless, brutal and filled with destructive forces; a Nature which is careless and indifferent to human morality and human values. Like Lyell, Brontë also features in her narrative an endless cycle of life and death in Nature, in which the sole aim of each single life is, through the fierce individual struggle, to maintain its continuing existence. And like Lyell, Brontë depicts a Nature which is running along its own course in a seemingly disoriented universe, with no higher purpose to be realized in its future.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 176 (my italics).

<sup>58</sup>J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, 164.

On the other hand, it can also be seen that Brontë's account of the indifference and destructions of Nature forms a sharp contrast with Chambers' insistence on progress and improvement as Nature's way. Like Chambers', Brontë's Nature operates under a set of natural laws, which cannot be defied by individual lives. However, Brontë's is a Nature that diverges distinctly from the one presented in *Vestiges*, for the direction towards which the laws operate is now altered. Though both recognise that Nature functions under a set of designated principles, *Vestiges* upholds the belief in the benevolence of the universe – and thus the benevolence of the Creator – by arguing that natural laws exist for a better and higher purpose that transcends individual sufferings and losses. But as Brontë replaces the principle of Progress and Development with the principle of Destruction, by directing attention to the inherently prevalent and unending conflicts among the members within the system, the fundamental direction of Nature is changed. Instead of operating towards goodness and harmony, Nature now feeds upon evil and suffering, with no higher goals to be realized or pursued, and meanwhile has the potential to descend into perpetual destruction and chaos.

Chambers' picture is attractive and bright, precisely because of the faith he seeks to erect in Progress. By burying individual casualties in the vastness of the universe and the centuries-old natural and human histories, the sufferings they entail instantly pale into insignificance. Meanwhile he is also able to look into the future for compensation, which counteracts the temporary evil that has occurred in the present and the past. But as soon as this investment in progress and the future is taken out, the whole prospect becomes much more gloomy and bleak, and Nature soon turns into something chaotic and purposeless.<sup>59</sup> It should be noted though, that unlike Lyell's *Geology*, in this specific instance, Brontë would not have received any influence from Chambers' work at the time, for Brontë wrote "The Butterfly" before Chambers published his book. However, Chambers' views are representative of the period.

Thus when Tennyson in his *In Memoriam* struggles to come to terms with the realities of the natural world by resorting first to the individual's inner experience, then to Chambers' belief in progress and development, Brontë, by touching upon the inherent unending conflicts within the natural system, points to the utter irreconcilability of natural science and orthodox Christian belief. Brontë refutes the belief that the world was created by a benevolent Deity, with a good purpose to a good end. Brontë's articulation of Nature and the fundamental principles at work in Nature thus exhibits a more radical turn from the axiom of orthodox Christianity, and instead veers towards the purely

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<sup>59</sup> This view on the mechanism of Nature also affects Brontë's subsequent view on the collective future of the human race, which then links to her criticism of civilization as a whole. These topics will be discussed in later sections.

naturalistic account of Nature that can be found in Lyell's as well as the early French naturalists' writings.

The depiction of Nature and its relentless mechanism as shown in "The Butterfly" is hardly isolated in Emily Brontë's writings, which often reveal that the same principle is equally at work in the human world. The Gondal queen Augusta, in some of the poems, ruthlessly kills and abandons her lovers one after another, so that they will not have the chance to do the same to her. One only needs to think of Heathcliff and his decades-long revenge, along with the means by which he succeeds (by bullying, lying, cheating and manipulating others), to get an idea of how the unsparing rules of Nature are played out in the human social sphere. In one of the illuminating moments in the novel, we hear these words uttered by Heathcliff, "the tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them."<sup>60</sup> Heathcliff's utterance succinctly summarizes the basic principle at work in Nature, which in fact runs through the entire story. It is perhaps little exaggeration to say that, the most distinct, unforgettable, haunting and perhaps successful characters created by Emily Brontë, are those who are willing to execute Nature's principle to the uttermost degree.

The ambivalence of the essay "The Butterfly" is due to the fact that it has a conventional ending, and perhaps too conventional for an author like Emily Brontë. For towards the end of the essay, the speaker says:

Let not the creature judge his Creator; here is a symbol of the world to come. As the ugly caterpillar is the origin of the splendid butterfly, so this globe is the embryo of a new heaven and a new earth whose poorest beauty will infinitely exceed your mortal imagination.<sup>61</sup>

As John Hewish points out, the abrupt turn in the narrative as well as the optimistic assumption which forms the ending of "The Butterfly" are uncharacteristic for Brontë, since its tone is overly positive and involves an over-reliance on Christian belief.<sup>62</sup> However, one possible explanation to the ending of the story is that, as the essays' editor Sue Lonoff discovers, both sisters wrote their essays within the topic outlines prescribed by their teacher Héger, which means the ending of the essay had probably already been determined before Emily Brontë embarked on her writing task.

Janet Gezari also commented on the ending of the essay:

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<sup>60</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100.

<sup>61</sup> Emily Brontë, "The Butterfly," 178.

<sup>62</sup> Hewish also suspects the "pious coda" was written to please her teacher Heger. John Hewish, *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 67.

The point here is violent disjunction without organic continuity. Emily Brontë's caterpillar doesn't metamorphose into a butterfly but dies violently so that the butterfly can appear. The tone of 'The Butterfly' is uncertain. Its angry, defiant narrator receives a lesson in humility. The angry speaker of 'Death' remains defiant.<sup>63</sup>

I agree with Gezari that what should have been a natural, gradual process of transformation of life is illustrated here by violent, sudden act,<sup>64</sup> which, in the very least, brings out a certain kind of dramatic effect. The appearance of the butterfly can in fact be seen as either a sign from God, which bears transcendental significance, or a mere natural phenomenon, beheld by the speaker by coincidence. So the interpretation here can go either way. Even the last words of humility uttered by the speaker can be read both literally and ironically, which reminds one of the ending of *Wuthering Heights*.

Simon Marsden, in his *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination*, gives a different interpretation of the whole story. By shifting the focus of the essay to its conventional ending, and claiming that the speaker's vision of the world at the beginning of the essay is "subjective"<sup>65</sup> and pessimistic, Marsden comes to the conclusion that the goal of the essay is to show that "the natural world"<sup>66</sup> is "available for multiple interpretations,"<sup>67</sup> and Emily Brontë "responds to Christian literature and theology as living traditions, always available for new interpretations and new acts of literary creation."<sup>68</sup> For reasons I laid out in the introduction, I do not wholly agree with Marsden's reading of the story.

To conclude, following the rejection of Lyell's dark, ruthless Nature, Tennyson reaches out for "firmer, newer foundations of a faith that he could not bear to abandon,"<sup>69</sup> and as we shall see later, the poem would reveal his transition of position from Lyell to Chambers, and the ultimate, if sometimes only ostensible adherence to the belief in progress and human perfectibility. Emily Brontë, on the other hand, stays with Lyell's Nature, and her consequent views on human nature and the prospect of human society are accordingly much more unflattering.

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<sup>63</sup> Gezari, *Last Things*, 124.

<sup>64</sup> Simon Marsden, on this issue, offers another interesting perspective, though I don't agree with him. Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination*, 26. "Organic continuity" by definition refers to a natural process of growth, which in this context does not show.

<sup>65</sup> Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination*, 22.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Marsden, *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination*, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Mattes, Preface to *Way of a Soul*, xiv.

## Human Beings' Relationship with the Natural World

After looking at Tennyson and Brontë's respective views on the underlying forces at work in Nature, this section looks at another related issue, which concerns human beings' place in the natural world. Tennyson, who upholds the belief in the nobility of human nature and the dignity of the human soul, in the end finds consolation in Chambers' narrative. Brontë, on the other hand, gives a completely different view on human nature, and furthermore, shows through her novel that the same natural principles and mechanism that regulate lives in the natural world, are also at work in the development of human species within human society.

### Tennyson's Renewed Faith: From Lyell to Chambers

As aforementioned, Lyell's depiction of a monstrous, merciless Nature, especially his account of the inevitable extinction of species, not only questions the notion of a God of love, but also puts an end to humans' hope for immortality as promised by orthodox Christianity. Thus as section LVI of *In Memoriam* continues, we find these verses:

shall he,  
Man, her last work, who seemed so fair,  
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,  
Who rolled the psalm to wintry skies,  
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,  
  
Who trusted God was love indeed  
And love Creation's final law –  
Though Nature, red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shrieked against his creed –  
  
Who loved, who suffered countless ills,  
Who battled for the True, the Just,  
Be blown about the desert dust,  
Or sealed within the iron hills?<sup>70</sup>

Turner notes that Lyell has a whole section entitled, "Imbedding of Organic Bodies and Human remains in Blown Sand."<sup>71</sup> The echoes of this section are evident. Humans, who under the Christian belief system are the end and purpose of creation, are now but another ordinary species, who in the sweeping force of Nature, are doomed to perish and dissipate as the evolutionary process proceeds.

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<sup>70</sup> Tennyson, "In Memoriam," p. 399, canto 56, line 8-20.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Turner, *Tennyson* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 124-125.

The stanzas mock the vainly upheld belief in a God of love and eternal life, which Nature ruthlessly denies, and the uselessly cherished human values (“the True”, “the Just”), for which Nature shows a total disregard.

The conception that humans are a mere transient phenomenon on earth, a member of an infinite series, bearing no other significance than other animals in the ongoing process of Nature, is something Tennyson particularly struggles with. He finds this dismal future for the human race hard to accept. Once he was even caught by his son saying that he “would rather know that he was to be lost eternally than not know that the whole human race was to live eternally.”<sup>72</sup> But even when talking on an individual level, a simple repose in Nature after death is clearly not enough for Tennyson to live on. He yearns for eternity, and dreads the possibility of oblivion after death:

My own dim life should teach me this,  
That life shall live for evermore,  
Else earth is darkness at the core,  
And dust and ashes all that is;

This round of green, this orb of flame,  
Fantastic beauty; such as lurks  
In some wild Poet, when he works  
Without a conscience or an aim.

What then were God to such as I?  
'Twere hardly worth my while to choose  
Of things all mortal, or to use  
A little patience ere I die;<sup>73</sup>

The conflict between a disinterested Nature running along its own course and the aspirations of a human soul that looks for eternity is again shown through these stanzas, but this time specifically on personal terms. For the speaker in the end asserts that for him a life without the prospect of eternity is not worth living. The fear for human mortality, and the concern for the ultimate purpose of human life on a personal level, are clearly presented here. As T. S. Eliot brilliantly points out, “his (Tennyson’s) desire for immortality never is quite the desire for Eternal Life; his concern is for the loss of man rather than for the gain of God.”<sup>74</sup> It is clear that Tennyson cannot accept such a dismal prospect as prophesized in Lyell’s narrative either for himself, or for Humanity as a whole.

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<sup>72</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 321.

<sup>73</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 377, canto 34, line 1-12.

<sup>74</sup> T. S. Eliot, “In Memoriam,” in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 334.

Apart from the issue of human immortality, another related issue that Tennyson struggles to deal with is the fact that in both Lyell's and Chambers' works, humans bear such a close kinship with some members of the animal kingdom, that we are seen as essentially no different from other types of animals. And from the stanzas below, we can see that Tennyson is not particularly enthusiastic about being compared to apes and monkeys:

I trust I have not wasted breath:  
I think we are not wholly brain,  
Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,  
Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death;

Not only cunning casts in clay:  
Let Science prove we are, and then  
What matters Science unto men,  
At least to me? I would not say.

Let him, the wiser man who springs  
Hereafter, up from childhood shape  
His action like the greater ape,  
But I was *born* to other things.<sup>75</sup>

This section points to the limitation of natural science, which does not accommodate the needs of certain aspects of human consciousness. Many years later, Tennyson explains that this was “spoken ironically against mere materialism, not against evolution.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Tennyson eventually comes to terms with Chambers' evolutionary narrative, which allows room for humans' religious aspirations. But the explicit comparison between human and apes in natural scientific terms here certainly does not look particularly encouraging for Tennyson, who seeks support everywhere for the special destination of the human soul. The line, “Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death,” in particular, reveals the poet's anxiety that a simple equation of a human life to that of other types of animals may mean simple oblivion after death.

For Tennyson, humans are spiritual beings, having a special relationship with God. To give up this privilege is to acknowledge eternal death after earthly existence. And the lowering of human beings to the level of other types of animals imposes just such a danger. Thus it is no surprise that in the lines, “His action like the greater ape,/But I was *born* to other things”, one can discern a tinge of contempt, and even indignation in the speaker's tone. For Tennyson humans are nobler than and morally superior to other animals: as a consequence he self-consciously distances humans from

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<sup>75</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 466, canto 120, line 1-12.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 466n.

animals, and would find even Chambers' claim for humans as the natural product of the evolutionary process somehow poignant and degrading. This is categorically different from how Emily Brontë perceives human beings' place in the natural world.

From the profusions and derelictions of the natural world, to the oblivion of the human soul, to the kinship between humans and other types of animals, though these difficulties Tennyson has encountered from the reading of Lyell and other natural science discourses, are partially mitigated by German idealists' appeal to the innate "feeling" of the individual, Tennyson is not prepared to override the scientific evidence that challenges his faith solely on subjective grounds, nor can he ignore the actual hold natural science has on his contemporaries. He eventually finds satisfactory answers for these queries in Chambers' *Vestiges*, which seeks religious meanings *in*, rather than *in spite of*, the natural evolutionary process. The later sections of *In Memoriam* as a result show a move away from Lyell's version of Nature, towards a more benign depiction of Nature offered by Chambers:

Contemplate all this work of Time,

...

But trust that those we call the dead  
Are breathers of an ampler day  
For ever nobler ends. They say,  
The solid earth whereon we tread

In tracts of fluent heat began,  
And grew to seeming-random forms,  
The seeming prey of cyclic storms,  
Till at the last arose the man;

Who throve and branched from clime to clime,  
The herald of a higher race,  
And of himself in higher place,  
If so he type this work of time

Within himself, from more to more,  
... Arise and fly  
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;  
Move upward, working out the beast,  
And *let the ape and tiger die*.<sup>77</sup>

This section, which "draw(s) from the evidence of organic development conclusions that were essentially [...] Chambers'", is "regarded as a key statement of the philosophy or 'message' of *In*

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464-465, canto 118, line 1, 5-17, 25-28 (my italics).

*Memoriam*.<sup>78</sup> As Jesse Oak Taylor states, “For Tennyson, ‘higher race’ and ‘higher place’ operate within a typological framework as references to a religious afterlife.”<sup>79</sup> At the same time, “that ‘higher race’ is not so much ‘man’ (who is after all only its ‘herald’) but rather the *Anthropos* of the Anthropocene: a post-human, technologically-enhanced, cyborgian species that has become a ‘geophysical force’ by having ‘typed’ the work of time within itself.”<sup>80</sup> Taylor’s reading of *In Memoriam* as “the poem of the Anthropocene”<sup>81</sup> highlights that it centers on human and the future of the human race, an issue that deeply troubled Tennyson at the time.

The section is Tennyson’s most explicit attempt in the poem at giving a reassuring account of the relation between natural evolution and humans’ religious beliefs and aspirations, in a distinctly Victorian context.<sup>82</sup> Apparently seen with the eyes of Chambers rather than those of Lyell this time, the idea of ongoing progress, rather than cyclical extinction, is featured in Nature. When cosmic evolution is combined with organic form development, everywhere in the world we see meaningful, upward striving towards a higher purpose, an ultimate goal despite the seemingly transient individual life on earth. This depiction of Nature is therefore highly consistent with Chambers’ narrative, which incorporates Divine Purpose into the frame of natural evolutionary process, and is evidently much more optimistic and hopeful.

While under such a depiction, even the succeeding of humans as we are at the current stage, by some more advanced form of humanity, for Tennyson will mean the fulfilment, rather than the defeat, of humans’ highest hopes and aspirations. Thus the lines, “at the last arose the man; [...] The herald of a higher race,/And of himself in higher place.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore at last, after some struggle at accepting the inevitable extinction of the entire species in Nature’s history, Tennyson seems to be content with seeing humans as a step in the direction of some higher forms of life yet to appear in the future.

But such a hopeful prospect for Humanity in the future does not, as Tennyson must be aware, meet the religious demand of personal immortality. To this problem the lines, “But trust that those we call

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<sup>78</sup> Mattes, *Way of a Soul*, 81.

<sup>79</sup> Jesse Oak Taylor, “Tennyson’s Elegy for the Anthropocene: Genre, Form, and Species Being,” *Victorian Studies* 58, no. 2: 230.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Mattes, *Way of a Soul*, 81

<sup>83</sup> These stanzas in particular echo Chambers’ words, “Is our race but the initial of the grand crowning type? Are there yet to be species superior to us in organization, purer in feeling, more powerful in device and act [...] There may then be occasion for a nobler type of humanity, which shall complete the zoological circle on this planet, and realize some of the dreams of the purest spirits of the present race.” Chambers, *Vestiges*, 276.

the dead/Are breathers of an ampler day/For ever nobler ends” gives a tangible answer. There is little doubt that Tennyson is here referring to his deceased friend Hallam and is in fact speculating on his spiritual journey after death. In the Epilogue of *In Memoriam*, we also find these verses: “Whereof the man, that with me trod/This planet, was a noble type, /Appearing ere the times were ripe/That friend of mine who lives in God.”<sup>84</sup> If we look at these verses together, it could be seen that for Tennyson, the earthly existence is only a stage in the human soul’s infinitely upward development, which a physical death can neither hinder nor terminate. There is, of course, little scientific evidence to support this claim of Tennyson’s, but as the love for his friend is merged with the love for humankind, or rather the idealized version of humanity yet to appear on this planet, which would realize God’s highest promises to his creatures, it seems strange for Tennyson to think otherwise about the destiny of the individual human soul.

And how about the problem of connecting humans to animals? The last stanza of the section: “Arise and fly [...] Move upward, working out the beast,/And let the ape and tiger die,” explicitly responds to the earlier verses: “His action like the greater ape,/But I was *born* to other things.” It can be seen that at this stage, Tennyson is much more complacent in relating humans to animals, and this is because Chambers’ narrative has pointed to God’s providential scheme to *separate* humans from animals. By Chambers’ account, the beast in humankind would eventually die out, as humankind advances into purer and more spiritually elevated creatures. Thus with the prospect of ever enlarging differences between humans and animals lying in the future, the kinship to lower forms of lives on earth, being only a temporary association, is much easier to accept and tolerate.

To conclude, in his search for answers for his religious doubts, Tennyson has at last found further assurance on the benign goal of the Maker and the immortality of the human soul, through his reading of Chambers, and in the end in his *In Memoriam* offers – or rather accepts – a version of evolution that is much more compatible with his religious faith, a faith he could not bear to abandon. In doing so, Tennyson becomes a representative voice in spelling out both the religious sentiments and the social conventionalities of the Victorian era. However, the solutions he presents in his work, which are largely in alignment with Chambers’, look much more conservative when compared with Emily Brontë’s treatment of the same issue.

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<sup>84</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 484, Epilogue, line 137-140.

## Brontë's View on Human Nature, and Evolutionary Theories in *Wuthering Heights*

Building upon Lyell's narrative on the ruthless struggle for survival among the species in Nature's history, and not in the least feeling offended by linking humans to animals as Tennyson does, Brontë takes a more radical approach. It is not hard to find that in her writings Brontë regards humans as an intrinsic part of the natural world. But more importantly, though Brontë also considers humans as the zenith of the creation, who are superior in intelligence and abilities to other animals, she does not share the same view with Tennyson on the nobility of human nature, and appears to have little trouble accepting the notion that men are akin to brutes, both physically and morally. In fact, on a moral level, Brontë believes that humans are not only not superior to other members of the animal kingdom, but often occupy a lower place.

Consistent with her depiction of Nature functioning under the relentless principle of destruction, the pivotal place humans occupy in the natural world is not regarded as the result of their inherent goodness, but the result of their superior capability to inflict pain and sufferings upon other lives on earth. Therefore, though Brontë similarly recognizes humans as the crowning type in Nature's creation, her denial of the fundamental benevolence of Nature means that now the ethical attributes of human beings go in an opposite direction. For Brontë, the abilities humankind possesses are not deployed for a higher good, but are used to create a greater evil.

This view on human nature is reflected through another Belgian essay, "The Cat". When comparing humans with another type of animal – the cat, Brontë's account is both trenchant and subversive:

A cat is an animal who has more human feelings than almost any other being. We cannot sustain a comparison with the dog, it is infinitely too good; but the cat, although it differs in some physical points, is extremely like us in disposition.

There may be people, in truth, who would say that this resemblance extends only to the most wicked men; that it is limited to their excessive hypocrisy, cruelty, and ingratitude; detestable vices in our race and equally odious in that of cats.

Without disputing the limits that those individuals set on our affinity, I answer that if hypocrisy, cruelty, and ingratitude are exclusively the domain of the wicked, that class comprises everyone.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Emily Brontë, "The Cat," in Lonoff, *Belgian Essays*, 56.

Brontë's misanthropy is well-known, which to some extent explains her life-long affection for and bond with animals.<sup>86</sup> During her six months' teaching at Law Hill, Brontë told a classroom of unruly girls that "the only individual she liked in the whole establishment was the house-dog."<sup>87</sup> In Brontë's eyes, human beings are no better than other types of animals. In fact the latter are more lovable, for they often possess the qualities that humans lack. Compared with them, humans are infinitely too wicked. While the cat is more akin to humans, as is argued in this passage, it is only because the two both possess the same qualities of hypocrisy, cruelty and ingratitude. In other words, it is because both humans and cats are particularly wicked.

Later on in this essay Brontë goes on to offer specific examples to illustrate humans' detestable and inexorable nature. Just as cats like to torture their prey before the actual killing, the little boy who later appears in the essay crushes butterflies for his own entertainment. Humans thus excel other animals in cruelty and ruthlessness, for while the others kill out of necessity, humans kill for their own amusement.<sup>88</sup> Thus when the entire natural world exists upon the principle of destruction, humans, as the type sitting on the top of the natural system, excel in their greater abilities to produce evil and inflict pain. To be granted power and intelligence which other types do not possess only means to be able to execute Nature's destructive principle to a higher level.

Brontë's depiction of the incorrigibility of human nature does not stop here. In another essay – "Filial Love" – she offers her ideas again:

'Honour thy father and thy mother if thou wouldst live.' It is by such a commandment that God gives us knowledge of the baseness of our race, of how it appears in His sight. To fulfill the gentlest, the holiest of all duties man must be threatened; it is through fear that the maniac must be forced to sanctify himself.<sup>89</sup>

The first sentence in this paragraph is a reference to Fifth Commandment, Exod. 20:12: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy day may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." While the original Biblical verses provide an incitement for Man to honour his parents, Brontë's parody turns the encouragement into a threat, which is probably a deliberate alteration considering her familiarity with the Bible. Obviously the revised version suits Brontë's view of human nature a lot better. The succeeding sentence explains the Biblical verse in Brontë's own fashion: God does not

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<sup>86</sup> At one point, the Brontë household had one dog, one cat, one hawk and a few wild geese. Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (London: Hachette Digital, 2010), Kindle edition, chap. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Winifred Gerin, *Emily Brontë: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), .81.

<sup>88</sup> This point recalls what is said in the previous essay "The Butterfly": "[M]an for his amusement or his needs will kill their murderers." Brontë, "The Butterfly," 176.

<sup>89</sup> Emily Brontë, "Filial Love," in Lonoff, *Belgian Essays*, 156.

have any affectionate or noble feelings towards his creatures, for he chooses to use threat and menace to force humans to meet his standards, which is the only effective way in his eyes. We see from this instance that not only is Brontë unconvinced of the nobility of the human soul and humans' special relationship with God, she also laughs at such pretentiousness.

These two extracts from her essays give us a glimpse of Emily Brontë's views on human nature, which is consistent with her depiction of the underlying principles at work in Nature. In relation to this, Brontë's view on humans as an intrinsic part of the natural world, being essentially no different from other types of animals on earth, means that human beings as a race are subject to the same laws and principles that affect and regulate the development of all the other organic forms of life on this planet. This then leads us to another aspect of Emily Brontë's knowledge and understanding of the pre-Darwinian discourse, which I believe she has actively applied in her own writing, namely: the relationship between the inherited qualities and the outward circumstances, along with the phenomenon of hybridization, in the configuration and development of her novel's characters and plot. Together these factors constitute the natural framework of *Wuthering Heights*, a novel that is composed three to five years after the essays are produced.

In the following section, I will explain how these natural factors are at work, and when combined together, help drive the novel's overall plot forward. And by doing so, I hope to show Emily Brontë's familiarity with, and intimate understanding of the debates surrounding evolutionary theories in the early Victorian era, and in particular those that can be found in Lyell's book.

### *Inherited Qualities: The Deciding Factor*

It is well-known that the characters in *Wuthering Heights* are frequently described as certain types of animals, which corresponds to their distinctly different personal traits. Thus Heathcliff is a "wolfish man",<sup>90</sup> Linton a "sucking leveret",<sup>91</sup> Isabella an "impertinent little monkey",<sup>92</sup> and Cathy a "dog in manger".<sup>93</sup> As the different temperaments of these characters are likened to the dispositions of different types of animals, the reader is left with the impression that these individuals are born to possess certain inherent qualities, just as the members of the animal kingdom, conditioned by birth, are destined to grow into the types they were designated to become. This point is further indicated

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<sup>90</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 103.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

through the fact that most of the characters in the novel belong to two different families, and members from the same family share distinctly recognizable family traits in their personality, temperament and natural disposition. Thus the Lintons are civilized, docile and delicate, while the Earnshaws are wild, tough, and hardy.

Such configuration of characters, which designates each individual into a certain “type”, with limited flexibility for change and adaptation in their later lives, could perhaps best be illustrated through an exchange between Linton Heathcliff and Catherine Linton. In the aftermath of a heated altercation between the two, Linton says to Catherine:

“Sit down and take your hat off, Catherine,” he answered. “You are so much happier than I am, you ought to be better... I *am* worthless and bad in temper, and bad in spirit, almost always – and if you choose, you *may* say goodbye – you’ll get rid of an annoyance – Only, Catherine, do me this justice; believe that if I might be as sweet, and as kind, and as good as you are, I would be, as willingly and more so, than as happy and as healthy. And believe that your kindness has made me love you deeper than if I deserve your love, and though I couldn’t, and cannot help showing my nature to you, I regret it, and repent it, and shall regret, and repent it, till I die!”<sup>94</sup>

These words carry Linton’s bitter realization and acute acknowledgement of the defects in his own character, and the deplorable conduct he has towards Catherine. But regretful as he is, he can do nothing to change them. His utter *inability* to change or hide his true nature, and act and behave differently, even if he wishes so, shows a certain kind of rigidity in his character, which strictly limits his potential to develop and improve in later life. From this example we see that despite the will of a given character, the inner qualities an individual possesses, which are endowed at birth, are difficult to modify later.

If such is the case, external circumstances can exert only limited influence on a character’s moral and intellectual development, for their main role is to assist, or thwart the inherited traits from developing further, but not to alter them. This point can be seen from the comments Heathcliff once makes on Linton Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw’s respective qualities:

One is gold put to the use of paving stones, and the other is tin polished to ape a service of silver – *Mine* has nothing valuable about it; yet I shall have the merit of making it go as far as such poor stuff can go. *His* had first-rate qualities; and they are lost – rendered worse than unavailing.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 223-224.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 193.

The different qualities Linton Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw inherit from birth determine the potentials they can reach in later lives. Thus though by depriving Hareton of the opportunity to improve himself, Heathcliff has temporarily rendered his “first-rate qualities” “worse than unavailing”, Heathcliff is also aware that it is in vain to attempt to bring out the qualities in his son that were not there in the first place, no matter how much time and effort he puts into it.

Such emphasis laid upon the inherited attributes of an individual is in fact consistent with Lyell’s position, who disputes Lamarck’s stance on the transmutation of species, and the greater ability for individual lives to adapt and develop in a changed and changing natural environment, and instead insists upon the stability of a species, and its tendency to stick to its original state despite the varied outward conditions. A specific example could be found towards the end of the second volume of *Geology*. After listing a series of cases showing the limited capacity for an individual life to modify itself in order to fit into the changed external environment, Lyell says,

In these, and innumerable other instances, we must suppose that the individual was produced with *a certain number of qualities*; and, in the case of animals, with a variety of instincts, some of which may or may not be developed, according to circumstances.<sup>96</sup>

The instances from *Wuthering Heights* demonstrate just such a pre-determinate tendency in an individual’s developmental potential, which is strictly limited by “a certain number of qualities” given to it through birth. They also indicate the subservient role of external circumstances, which serve to stimulate or repress inherited qualities, but not to create them.

But such awareness of pre-Darwinian scientific concepts in Emily Brontë’s writing may not have come from Lyell alone, as a similar, though much tamer statement can also be found in Chambers’ work: “It is a common mistake to suppose that the individuals of our own species are all of them formed with similar faculties – similar in power and tendency – and that education and the influence of circumstances produce all the differences which we observe.”<sup>97</sup> At any rate, resonances with these works show that Emily Brontë may have a greater understanding of the scientific concepts and ideas in her time than is often recognized.

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<sup>96</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, vol. 2, 450 (my italics).

<sup>97</sup> Chambers, *Vestiges*, 349.

### *External Circumstances: Power of Stimulus or Suppression*

On the other hand, the novel also displays the significance of external circumstances in either facilitating the development, or causing the decline, of a character. Catherine Earnshaw, for example, who is originally a member of the Earnshaw family, becomes gradually blighted and consumed after moving to the Grange through marriage. Linton Heathcliff, who has inherited the delicacy and feebleness of his mother, is at first able to survive under his mother's meticulous care during his early childhood. But after he is forced to settle at Wuthering Heights, the lack of care and love in his new home aggravates the already-existing weaknesses in his character, and, despite his father's wishes, makes him into a person of "apathy" and "self-absorbed moroseness."<sup>98</sup> The harsh physical environment of the Heights also affects his delicate health, so that in the end he dies prematurely. These characters flourish or die according to the places where they live. Like plants, they can only grow and prosper in the soil that suits them. And when they are transplanted to an unfavourable situation for too long, their lives inevitably wither.

These examples show the limited capacity for an individual to adapt and modify itself according to the changed outward environment, which in extreme circumstances, would ultimately cause their death. And again similar opinions can be found Lyell's narrative:

The alteration in habits, form, or organization, is often rapid during a short period; but when the circumstances are made to vary further, though in ever so slight a degree, all modification ceases, and the individual perishes.<sup>99</sup>

Here Lyell admits that an individual has elasticity in its ability to adapt to the rapidly changed environment, but he differs from Lamarck's position in declaring that such modification is not indefinite, and a species cannot transform itself to an unlimited degree in order to survive. And again the echo to the instances in Brontë's novel is obvious.

Apart from acknowledging that external circumstances can affect an individual's chance of survival, Brontë also recognizes the impact external circumstances can have on a person's intellectual growth. This can be seen from Nelly's comments on Hareton after his degradation:

Good things lost amid a wilderness of weeds, to be sure, whose rankness far over-topped their neglected growth; yet, notwithstanding, evidence of a wealthy soil, that might yield luxuriant crops under other and favourable circumstances ... He (Heathcliff) appeared to have bent his

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<sup>98</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 231.

<sup>99</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, vol. 2, 453.

malevolence on making him a brute: he was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper.<sup>100</sup>

Having been degraded into the servant of the house of Wuthering Heights, Hareton works in the fields all year round and receives little formal education, nor does he ever get reprimanded for his bad behaviors or habits by his master. The roughness of his circumstances contributes to his degradation in both his intellect and his manner towards others. But this is only a temporary situation. For the qualities Hareton possesses, as Nelly believes, are still there, waiting to flourish under a more favorable condition. Nelly is right. For later on, with the help of Catherine Linton, Hareton gradually makes progress in his education, and is on track to get rid of his ignorance and uncivilized behavior. The “wealthy soil”, as prophesized by Nelly, in the end “yield(s) luxuriant crops.” Therefore, though under the right conditions, the good qualities will always have the chance to flourish, it is also important for an individual to be provided with such conditions in order to reach its potential.

The endeavor Hareton has to make, in order to make up for the earlier neglect of his study, is shown through Nelly’s words again towards the end of the novel: “The intimacy [...] encountered temporary interruption. Earnshaw was not to be civilized with a single wish; and my young lady was no philosopher, and no paragon of patience.”<sup>101</sup> The two young people make progress through labor and toil, which highlights the importance of education and individual exertion in an individual’s intellectual development. This is an aspect Lyell hardly ever acknowledges in his narrative.<sup>102</sup> Therefore in this aspect, Emily Brontë seems to have deviated from his position.

But the relationship between nature and nurture is an issue of frequent discussion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, apart from Lyell’s views, Chambers’ explication on the same issue could perhaps serve as a supplementary source that has possibly influenced Emily Brontë’s own opinion, as we find these words in *Vestiges*:

There is, nevertheless, a general adaptation of the mental constitution of man to the circumstances in which he lives, as there is between all the parts of nature to each other. The goods of the physical world are only to be realized by ingenuity and industrious exertion; behold, accordingly, an intellect full of device, and a fabric of the faculties which would go to pieces or destroy itself if it were not kept in constant occupation.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 173-174.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>102</sup> Lyell holds the view that even in domestic animals, the domestic qualities should be referred to as “modifications of instincts which are implanted in them in a state of nature”, rather than “the influence of education alone.” Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, vol. 2, 456.

<sup>103</sup> Chambers, *Vestiges*, 352.

The approximation of Chambers' opinion here with the ideas in *Wuthering Heights* is apparent.

*Hybridization: The Mutation and Development of Human Species*

In a constantly changing outer environment where new biological and social conditions arise from time to time, the individual's lack of ability to adapt to the changed external circumstance means that the species as a whole, in order to avoid extinction, has to have other ways to produce new "types". And this leads to the phenomenon of hybridization in *Wuthering Heights*, through which humans as a species are able to evolve and adapt to a constantly changing outer environment.

The novel first of all is set in a transitional historical period, with the decline of the landed gentry class on the one hand and the rise of capitalism and new wealth on the other. In this regard, the first generation of the novel belongs to a past era, which sees relatively stable attributes in each of the Earnshaw and Linton family members. But in the second generation, through cross breeding, the family traits of the first generation are mingled together, and bring into existence offspring possessing new sets of attributes and qualities. These new qualities either cause internal conflicts and degeneration in an individual, or are successfully preserved and enhance the abilities of the individual, making them fitter for the new social and ecological environment. Linton Heathcliff, for example, serves as a notable example of failure. The sexual union of a Linton and Heathcliff has produced offspring who is the throwback of them both, inheriting both the peevishness and over-delicacy of the mother and the selfishness of the father. Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw are, on the other hand, two successful examples, being both improved versions of their parents: the former adaptable and sharp, the latter hardy and generous. They furthermore fall in love with each other, with the novel ending with the prospect of marriage between the two.

We know that Lyell vehemently denies the transmutation of species, and insists on the inevitable extinction of species as a necessary part of the evolutionary process. But quite apart from Lyell's own beliefs and conclusions, *Geology* is also important as a compendium of the biological theories which were gaining influence in the Victorian public and quite possibly affecting Emily Brontë as well. Among them is Lamarck's theory of mutability of species, which, in order to dismantle in minute detail, Lyell comprehensively introduces and quotes extensively in his book. Thus often in Emily Brontë's narrative, apart from a close resemblance to Lyell's own positions, we can also see a curious blending in of some of Lamarck's remarks, such as those concerning the effects and results

of hybridization. For example, the following presentation of Lamarck's views on hybridization in Lyell's work:

Hybrids have some times proved prolific, where the disparity between the species was not too great; and by this means alone says Lamarck, varieties may gradually be created by near alliances, which would become races, and in the course of time would constitute what we term species.<sup>104</sup>

A bit later, the book also says: "after repeated failures, the union of two recognized species may at last, under very favorable circumstances, give birth to a fertile progeny."<sup>105</sup> Seen in this light, Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw are successful results of such near alliances, while the union of the two (who are presumably both fertile) will further ensure that their offspring have the opportunity to develop into new types.

The necessity of producing new "types" is also indicated through the failure and dying out of the old "types" of the first generation in the novel. The love between Catherine and Heathcliff fails to survive and succeed in this world, while the love between Catherine Linton and Hareton, having neither the intensity of Catherine and Heathcliff, nor the pettiness and shallowness of the Lintons, takes on a somehow refined and mitigated character, and thus is able to grow into fruition towards the end of the story. From a social perspective, in the course of human civilization, when change happens and the society moves forward, those who are of the old world wither and die, while new ones take their place and chart out a new course. In this regard, the first generation represents the pastoral life and the declining landed gentry, while the second generation – through the wealth Heathcliff leaves to them – is associated with the rising capitalism and the life of the city, which represents the future direction of human society. The novel in the end closes with the old "type" being left behind at the Heights, as the new generation, who are more equipped to adapt to the changed social conditions, replaces the old and ventures into the future hand in hand. The ending of the novel thus signals the end of an era that belongs to the past, and the anticipation of a new one on the horizon.

But one may ask whether such taking over of the old "type" by the new one in Brontë's writings necessarily represents progress or advancement in human society. My own view is that the novel is intentionally ambiguous on this point. Indeed, there is a lack of upward direction in Emily Brontë's depiction of both the natural world and the human society, that reflects another distinctive feature of Lyell's narrative. Quite apart from Lamarck's and Chambers' belief in the progressive development

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<sup>104</sup> Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, vol. 2, 416.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 428-429.

and the ascending nature of evolution, Lyell denies that species go in straight lines upwards, but instead insists that the existing types are merely surviving types which happen to fit the best in the current external environment. In his book, not infrequently we see words like “degenerate”, “relapse”, or “revert”. It is clear that Lyell does not believe in the progressive advancement of Nature or species as a whole, but instead asserts the irregularity and unpredictable factors in Nature’s course. And such depiction of the arbitrariness of the surviving type could also be seen in *Wuthering Heights*.

Cathy and Hareton, as successful survivors of the second generation, do not necessarily possess more capable or nobler qualities than members of the first generation. It is hard to form a consensus among the novel’s readers, for example, that their tamed version of love is better or more advanced than the love of Catherine and Heathcliff, which though violent, has a sweeping force and energy that for some makes the former look pale and insipid. The survival of the second generation is rooted in the fact that their breed – one through the mixture of a Linton and an Earnshaw, another through the mixture of an Earnshaw and a girl from the outside world, as well as the structure of their wealth, happens to be healthy, and in accordance with the demand of the changed external circumstances.

Consistent with Lyell’s view that there is no upward or onward direction in nature’s evolution but aimless chaos, in Brontë’s novel social or biological changes do not necessarily bring about improvements of the species or a positive outlook for its collective future, but simply mean the replacement of the old type by the new. While the new, because it is better fitted to the changed outward conditions, survives and continues to move forward. There is no guarantee of the definite improvement in any essential part of the race through Catherine Linton and Hareton in the novel. And even in the successful survival and modifications of these two, there is a certain kind of precariousness in the preservation of their types, since both Catherine and Hareton are *the last* members of their ancient families, thus the imminent danger of extinction for their races is still present at the very end of the novel. Their future, as indicated at the end of *Wuthering Heights*, is fairly uncertain and ambiguous. Whether it would be a downward turn or upward journey is not communicated to the readers, as they are merely left with the words, “They are afraid of nothing. Together, they would brave Satan and all his legions.”<sup>106</sup>

To conclude, from the deciding role of inherited qualities, to the active influence of external circumstances, to the rise of new types through hybridization, and to the lack of upward direction in

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<sup>106</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 300.

Nature's course, it is clear that Brontë is not only familiar with the evolutionary theories of her own time, but also applies them in the construction of her novel. And though the ideas in her writing sometimes adhere to Lyell's views on these issues discussed, traces of influences from other earlier and contemporary evolutionists such as Chambers and Lamarck are also detectable.

On the whole, it is not hard to see that Brontë's view on human nature and human beings' place in the natural world departs significantly from those upheld by Tennyson and her contemporaries. When the latter are worried about the dignity of the human race and its sacred bond with God in the face of the challenge from natural science, and struggle to keep the pivotal place of humans intact by distancing them from the rest of the animal kingdom, Brontë's narrative offers a completely different picture. In her novel not only has she created a world where God is off the scene, but she also draws humans closer to other types of animals, to the extent that the lines between human and animals are blurred. Humans are subjected to the same natural laws and principles that govern other lives in nature, and evolve and change just like all the other animals do. While the supreme status of human beings is only shown through their incorrigible nature and their exceptional abilities to inflict pain and sufferings, which other animals are rarely equipped with to such a comprehensive and extended degree.

## **Human Society and the Prospect of Human Civilization**

Having looked at the two authors' respective views on Nature and human nature, in this last section we will look at their opinions on the principles of human society and the future prospect of the human race. Tennyson, after finding enough support and consolation from Chambers' narrative, leaves the reader with a bright and optimistic picture of humanity's collective future in his poem, which is consistent with his belief in social reform and progress, despite the interruption of war and violence. Emily Brontë, on the other hand, based on her unrelenting revelation of the mechanism of Nature, and her trenchant critique of human nature, arrives at a quite different conclusion on the nature of human civilization and its future prospect.

### **Tennyson's Belief in Human Perfectibility and the Progress in Human Society**

The ending of *In Memoriam* is resolutely optimistic and forward-looking. When Tennyson looks into the collective future of the human race, he writes down these words:

A soul shall draw from out the vast

And strike his being into bounds

And, moved thro' life of lower phase,  
Result in man, be born and think,  
And act and love, a closer link  
Betwixt us and the crowning race

...

No longer half-akin to brute,  
For all we thought and loved and did,  
And hoped, and suffer'd, is but seed  
Of what in them is flower and fruit;

Whereof the man, that with me trod  
This planet, was a noble type  
Appearing ere the times were ripe,  
That friend of mine who lives in God.

That God, which ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves.<sup>107</sup>

If progress is evident everywhere in the natural world, then so it should be in human society. The beginning of this section specifically refers to the marriage of Tennyson's sister Cecilia, to his friend Edmond Lushington, when it imagines the birth of a child in the future. While the lines, "And, moved thro' life of lower phase,/Result in man, be born and think," refers to the theory of foetal development, which, as mentioned earlier, Tennyson became familiar with in his university years. On this issue Chambers adopts the same position, as he writes that a human's "organization gradually passes through conditions generally resembling a fish, a reptile, a bird and the lower mammalia, before it attains its specific maturity."<sup>108</sup> So its reference here is also consistent with Chambers. In addition, the phrase "the crowning race" again finds resonance in Chambers' words, "Is our race but the initial of *the grand crowning type*?"<sup>109</sup> Other concepts mentioned in this section, such as the gradual separation of the human race from the animal world, the progressive advancement and perfection of humanity, the nobility and special destination of the human soul, are also consistent with the earlier sections of *In Memoriam* on human nature and human beings' relationship with the natural world, as previously discussed.

William Rutland shrewdly summarises:

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<sup>107</sup> Tennyson, "In Memoriam," p. 482-484, Epilogue, line 123-128, 133-144.

<sup>108</sup> Chambers, *Vestiges*, "Hypothesis of the development of the vegetable and animal kingdom," 199.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

It seemed to him (Tennyson) in his maturity that the Process visible in external Nature, which had produced Man, was also taking place in the *moral nature* of Man himself. For the race it might in some far future result in a perfected humanity. For the individual it could assuredly result in a conquest of the lower nature.<sup>110</sup>

As the theory of foetal development is associated with an optimistic evolutionary hypothesis, the thought of the procreation of a new human being goes hand in hand with a positive recalibration of the entire evolutionary process, and in the end results in Tennyson's belief that humanity is ever moving forward towards a divine event set forth by God's grand scheme.

Like Chambers, Tennyson hardly seeks to separate the new scientific discoveries from their social and political implications, but extends the evolutionary theories to the social and political sphere, and strives to work out their ramifications. By doing so, he opens up new justifications for social reform, gives hope to the future of humankind, and offers reassurance to an anxious and seeking Victorian public. In this regard, Tennyson and Chambers share a profound similarity.

But under his optimistic presentation, there appears to be considerable confusion between material progression on the one hand, and humanity's moral improvement on the other. As Fanny Kemble sharply observed, "the hypothesis [...] that other and higher destinies, developments, may, and probably do, await humanity, than anything it has yet attained here [...] though most agreeable to the love of life and desire of perfection of most human creatures, in no sort hinges logically on to his (Chambers') *absolute chain of material progression* and development."<sup>111</sup> The same equally applies to Tennyson. T. S. Eliot furthermore points out that the section "show[s] an interesting compromise between the religious attitude and, what is quite a different thing, the belief in human perfectibility."<sup>112</sup> As the hope for the salvation of the human soul is confused with, and infused into, the gradual and steady improvement of human society perceivable through the rapid progress of industrialization in the Victorian society, it seems easy for Tennyson to overlook the fact that the advancement of one does not necessarily bring about the improvement of the other, and that there is no natural connection between the two kinds of progression. Sometimes quite on the contrary, the advancement of the latter is built upon the sacrifice of the former. While in *In Memoriam* Tennyson may seem to have found a new discourse to substitute for his religious belief, which is satisfactory enough for the moment, and far more comprehensible and acceptable to his Victorian audience,

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<sup>110</sup> William R. Rutland, "Tennyson and the Theory of Evolution," *Essays and Studies* 1 (1910), 26 (my italics).

<sup>111</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, Letter of Leeds, Friday, November 19, 1847, in *Records of Later Life* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1882), 547, electronic edition.

<sup>112</sup> Eliot, "In Memoriam," 336.

elsewhere in his writings, for example *Locksley Hall*, he is in no way complacent about all the changes and problems brought about by the industrial revolution.

But at least in *In Memoriam*, once the belief in the overall progress and advancement of human society is successfully erected, the current existence of conflicts and injustice in human society and throughout human history is seen as a temporary and irregular phenomenon, which does not dim the bright future of the human race as a whole. In this we see another similarity between Tennyson and Chambers' *Vestiges*, since we could find, especially in later sections of *In Memoriam*, the same optimism about social progress and human perfectibility, despite the presence of war and sufferings in human history and contemporary society:

The love that rose on stronger wings,  
Unpalsied when he met with Death,  
Is comrade of the lesser faith  
That sees the course of human things.

No doubt vast eddies in the flood  
Of onward time shall yet be made,  
And thronèd races may degrade;  
Ye O ye mysteries of good,

Wild hours that fly with Hope and Fear,  
If all your office had to do  
With old results that look like new;  
If this were all your mission here,

To draw, to sheathe a useless sword,  
To fool the crowd with glorious lies,  
To cleave a creed in sects and cries,  
To change the bearing of a word,

To shift an arbitrary power,  
To cramp the student at his desk,  
To make old bareness picturesque  
And tuft with grass a feudal tower;

Why then my scorn might well descend  
On you and yours. I see in part  
That all, as in some piece of art,  
Is toil cöoperant to an end.<sup>113</sup>

“The lesser faith” can only see “the course of human things,” which shows the suffering, the pain and the truncation of human lives. But that Love, which “rose on stronger wings,/Unpalsied when he

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<sup>113</sup> Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” p. 474-475, canto 128, line 1-24.

met with Death” is able to see beyond these temporary evils in human history, and recognizes that good shall be the final goal of ill. As Potter notes, Tennyson has “an intense desire for human progress toward perfection.”<sup>114</sup> He would like to see human civilization as going upward, thus even in the midst of political turmoil, when the forms of faith and social order are threatened and subject to desertion, he believes that as one age ends and another begins, every dose of evil will eventually lead to a better and fairer society. Thus similarly to Chambers’ work, in *In Memoriam* war, violence and evil currently existing in the society are seen as convulsions of human progress, and not its dominant force. This contrasts distinctly with Emily Brontë’s understanding on the same issue in “Why Ask to Know What Date What Clime,” a poem which will be discussed later.

Another aspect of this section is the speaker’s fundamental distaste towards violent revolutions. The phrases “Wild hours that fly with Hope and Fear,/If all your office had to do/With old results that look like new,” and the series of examples that follows, clearly condemn the kind of violent political events which do not so much bring about meaningful change in the society as forge the illusions of change to fool the public and give out false hope. J. Harrison points out how Tennyson’s view on the teleological process in Nature affects his view on societal change, when he says: “Even in Politics he had a horror of revolutionary ‘cycles of disastrous change’, much preferring a state of affairs ‘where Freedom slowly broadens down/From precedent to precedent.’”<sup>115</sup> For Tennyson, the way to avoid violence, bloodshed, and unnecessary sufferings in human society, is via incremental change, and peaceful transition, where positive changes could be brought about gradually and methodically.

Tennyson’s “deep distrust of political violence,”<sup>116</sup> and of sudden, drastic social alterations, can be traced back to the Cambridge Apostles’ failed attempt at aiding the Spanish rebels, in which the then young Tennyson played his part.<sup>117</sup> And as part of the application of natural scientific theories in the social sphere, it forms yet another similarity with Chambers’ position.

## Brontë on the Nature of Civilization and the Nature of War

Not acknowledging the principle of Development as Nature’s first principle in the first place, Brontë seems dubious about the prospect of human civilization (to say the very least). This could be seen through another of her Belgian essays, “The Palace of Death”. The essay is a story about Death

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<sup>114</sup> George Reuben Potter, “Tennyson and the Biological Theory of Mutability in Species,” *Philological Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Oct. 1937), 342.

<sup>115</sup> J. Harrison, “Tennyson and Evolution,” *The Durham University Journal* 64 (1971-1972), 31

<sup>116</sup> Buckley, *Growth of a Poet*, 41.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

selecting her new prime minister, upon feeling discontent about the frugal way of living supported by her current prime minister Old Age. Though many come to Death's palace, a stranger who arrives late gets the position. The reason for this stranger's appointment, however, is that she has a powerful ally, Civilization:

'In a few years, she (civilization) will come to dwell on this earth with us, and each century will amplify her power. In the end, she will divert Ambition from your service; she will put the brake of law on Wrath; she will wrest the weapons from Fanaticism's hands; she will chase Famine off among the savages. I alone will grow and flourish under her reign; the power of all the others will expire with their partisans; mine will exist even when I am dead.'<sup>118</sup>

The stranger's name is, as it is revealed at the end of the story, Intemperance. As argued by the essays' editor Sue Lonoff, though both Charlotte and Emily Brontë follow a topic outlined by their teacher Héger, and make Intemperance the nominal winner of the debate and Death's new prime minister, Emily Brontë chooses to let Intemperance speak as the confederate of Civilization, and thus inserts a considerable twist in the prescribed narrative.<sup>119</sup> This outcome demonstrates that as early as in 1842, when Brontë was a student in Belgium, she had formed her view on the nature of human civilization and the role it could play in the future of the human race. In the story, on the one hand the triumph of Civilization is recognized, with Ambition, Wrath, and others all falling onto their knees, on the other hand Civilization's sole predator, Intemperance, is able to flourish as it advances. This development indicates that from the very beginning of its existence, Civilization has the dangerous tendency of going into excess, a tendency which is beyond its own power to harness, and has the potential to foster greed and even lead to humans' extinction.

Therefore, in contrast with Tennyson's optimistic view of the perfectibility of the human race and the upward direction of human society, here we see a much darker and dismal prediction of the collective future of the human race and human civilization. Beneath the surface of the story we find the author recognizes that civilization only concerns material enrichment, which is based upon the active exploitation of Nature and other lives on earth, in the process of which moral improvement has not the least relevance. Just like in Brontë's natural world where everywhere is monstrous striving, humans, as the crowning type, maintain their pivotal place through their exceptional abilities to inflict pain and sufferings upon other lives, so will humans adopt the same method in human society. And as their capacity and power are further developed and amplified in the progression of the society, indulgence and intemperance will flourish along the way, leading to humans' own demise.

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<sup>118</sup> Emily Brontë, "The Palace of Death," in Lonoff, *Belgian Essays*, 228.

<sup>119</sup> Lonoff, *Belgian Essays*, 234.

Here diametrically different from Tennyson's narrative, we see a clear demarcation between social progress and human moral advancement. For Brontë, human civilization has little to do with the betterment of human nature, which she sees as corrupted and incorrigible anyway. While civilization does not improve human nature a single bit, its materialistic orientation can also bring about the perpetual destruction of humankind, through fostering greed and extravagance. Thus just like in Brontë's natural world, in her human society, there is no inherent purpose governing the course of humans' collective future, instead it is dependent upon disoriented, amoral forces that lack the ability to regulate themselves. Brontë's view of the future of the human race and human society is as a consequence much bleaker and devoid of hope.

Evolutionary theories, like the ones advocated by Lamarck and Chambers and adopted by Tennyson, through their optimistic description of the principles in the natural world, lend hope for social change and advancement in the social sphere. But since the notion of Development, and the belief in the upward direction of the natural creation, in which the best is yet to come, is shattered by Brontë in her depiction of the relentless mechanism of Nature, when the same principles extend to the human social sphere, it naturally leads to the belief that war, violence and the sufferings in human society are nothing but the manifestation of the same ruthless principles at work in Nature. And since there is no intrinsic fairness or justice existing in the system of Nature, it is little surprise to see there is none existing in human society and throughout human history. This point is shown in one of the last poems written by Brontë, "Why Ask What Time What Clime":

Why ask to know what date what clime  
There dwelt our own humanity  
Power-worshippers from earliest time  
Foot-kissers of triumphant crime  
Crushers of helpless misery  
Crushing down justice honouring Wrong  
If that be feeble this be strong  
  
Shedders of blood shedders of tears  
Self-cursers avid of distress  
Yet mocking heaven with senseless prayers  
For mercy on the merciless<sup>120</sup>

In distinct contrast with the section from *In Memoriam* previously discussed, which exhibits sustained hope despite the violence and bloodshed in the political turmoil, in this poem written by Brontë we see the disillusionment about the innate nature of humanity as a whole, and a refusal to

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<sup>120</sup> Emily Brontë, "Why Ask to Know What Date What Clime," in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 190, line 1-11.

believe that there is hope for social improvement in the future. The overall dismal tone is set from the beginning, which sweeps through the entire poem. Later on the poem reveals that it is the autumn of the year, the season of harvest, yet nothing is left in the field. War and anarchy have left people in a state of famine. While the last lines of this poem, “I doubly cursed on foreign sod/Fought neither for my home nor God,”<sup>121</sup> spell out the speaker’s identity: a mercenary soldier who fights on a foreign land. The poem trenchantly reveals that the dominant force at work in human society has been human greed and human desires, which make the so-called civilization expand and move forward, while Good or Justice have not the smallest place to claim in the process. It also points out that war and violence, far from minor occurrences in a society striving towards overall justice and fairness, are in fact the ultimate manifestations of the driving force behind human civilization.

The poem, likely taken out of a Gondal context, is the last dated poem written by Emily Brontë that we know of. Thus the views on human nature, war, and violence expressed in this poem, disclose the author’s state of mind towards the last stage of her life. It consists of an unrelenting judgment on human nature, and a gloomy view towards the collective future of humankind. Thus when compared to *In Memoriam*, the last words Emily Brontë leaves us strike a much bleaker tone.

By now, the faith in the upward direction of the natural world, the noble status of human beings, and the continuing progression of human society, as largely upheld by Tennyson in his *In Memoriam*, has been systematically dismantled in Emily Brontë’s essays and her other writings. In the world of Brontë, Nature no longer tends towards harmony, but feeds upon conflict and destruction; humans do not excel in compassion and benevolence, but do so in cruelty and tyranny; social progress does not bring about the moral perfection of the human race, but fosters greed and indulgence. These writings have thus demonstrated Emily Brontë’s own view on Nature, humanity and the future of the human race from a naturalistic perspective, which, as we have seen, deviates significantly from that of Tennyson and mainstream Victorian discourse.

## Conclusion

Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* records a poet’s spiritual journey from grief to solace, from desolation to hope, from death to life, in his most interesting creative years. The poet’s personal struggle to cope with the challenges of contemporary natural science, and find a way to retain his belief in God, bespeaks many Victorians’ own fears and desires. And in the end, by incorporating the new scientific

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., line 24-25.

discoveries into the centuries-old Christian worldview, the poem ends with, at least ostensibly, a sense of triumph. In this regard, Tennyson, as the spokesman of his age, provides us with an exemplary case of faith winning over doubt. But beneath the surface of the poem, things appear to be a bit different. Long after the poem is published, Tennyson confesses, on more than one occasion, “It was meant to be a kind of *Divina Commedia*, ending with Happiness,”<sup>122</sup> and “It’s too hopeful, this poem, more than I am myself.”<sup>123</sup> As Mattes points out, by artificially arranging the sections and constructing them into a three-year chronological order, the poet “*supposedly*, advanced from sorrow and doubt to serenity and faith,”<sup>124</sup> which does not so much represent the full depth and variance of Tennyson’s thoughts, as it is designed to appeal to a Victorian public who desperately need reassurance and confidence in an age that threatens to undermine the very foundation of their religion and culture.

By comparison, after seeing what she believes to be the inevitable rupture of natural science and religion, Emily Brontë’s treatment of the same issues exhibits a more radical break from conventional Victorian discourse. In an age when most natural science theorists at least ostensibly maintain their reverence for God in their writings, Emily Brontë’s writings are notable for their boldness, subversiveness, and often unapologetical frankness. But such desertion of an ideological axiom also proves to be costly, and even devastating for Brontë personally, who is brought up in a religious household, and craves for the kind of spiritual relief and support provided by orthodox religion. Her exposure to the natural science discourse thus leaves an ideological vacuum in her world, which she is desperate to fill subsequently in her writings.<sup>125</sup>

The writings of both authors, in their different ways, exhibit the Victorian dilemma between what one feels and what one knows, the struggle to square the claim of the heart with the claim of the mind. The crucial difference perhaps lies not so much in the nature of their plights and quandaries, as the overall tendency and solutions the two authors adopt. As we have seen, wherever possible, Tennyson struggles to refine and adjust his position in order to reconcile the conflict between science and religion, and shows more willingness to conform and adhere. Emily Brontë, on the other hand, is more rebellious, since just like a speaker in one of her poems, she “persevered to shun/The common paths that others run,/And on a strange road journeyed on”.<sup>126</sup> After seeing the irreconcilability of the claims of science and that of religion, Emily Brontë chooses to leave her old faith behind, but her

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<sup>122</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, 304.

<sup>123</sup> James Knowles, “Aspects of Tennyson: A Personal Reminiscence,” *Nineteenth Century* 33 (1893), 182.

<sup>124</sup> Mattes, Preface to *Way of a Soul*, xii (my italics).

<sup>125</sup> Brontë’s subsequent spiritual struggle after losing faith in an orthodox Christian God is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>126</sup> Emily Brontë, “Plead for Me,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 22, line 11-13.

struggle to search for a new ideological ground, which can satisfy both the reasoning of her mind and the desire of her heart, is not over.

# Arnold's Early Poems

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*“Wandering between two worlds, one dead  
The other powerless to be born,  
With nowhere yet to rest my head  
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.”*

– Matthew Arnold, “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse”<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This chapter looks at Arnold's early poems in relation to Emily Brontë's lyrical works and novel, and focuses on the ideological trajectories of these two authors as exhibited through their poems and other work. Faced with the Victorian dilemma of reconciling what one knows with what one feels, the spiritual plight of Arnold and Brontë represents the spiritual situation of that entire generation. This chapter will first introduce the social and cultural context the two authors lived in, then go on to discuss the spiritual quest they went through. The primary texts used in this chapter are Arnold's early poems, which include “Dover Beach”, the Switzerland poems, “Empedocles on Etna”, “Haworth Churchyard” and several other of his early poems, as well as Emily Brontë's poems and novel.

Matthew Arnold's status as the leading “man of letters” in Victorian England, his influence on our understanding of “culture” in general, and the role of literary and cultural critic in particular, have earned him a lasting place in Victorian intellectual and cultural history. But apart from his achievement in prose, another legacy is of course his poetry.

Along with Tennyson and Robert Browning, Arnold is regarded as one of the prominent poets of the Victorian era, but it is also claimed by some that his poems lack the qualities that are usually seen in the first-rate poetry of the literary canon. Chief among these qualities are originality, creative energy, and poetic imagination. Arnold is after all, as pointed out by Stefan Collini, “an intellectual poet.”<sup>2</sup> For instead of creativity and artistic imagination, the chief character of his poetry is reflection. Yet this has also proven to be the very quality that has continually attracted critical attention since the

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold, “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,” in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Miriam Allott, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1979), p. 305-306, line 85-88.

<sup>2</sup> Stefan Collini, *Matthew Arnold: A Critical Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 2.

poems' publication, much as Arnold predicted himself. In a letter he wrote to his mother in 1869, Arnold made the following shrewd comment on his own poetic works:

My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it.<sup>3</sup>

The sheer intellectual grasp of Arnold's poetry, as well as its inherent reflective character, has made it particularly representative of the movement in the Victorian intellectual sphere. Arnold's poems record the spiritual journey and ideological struggles shared among many Victorian intellectuals and thinkers, and touch upon important cultural phenomena of the day. These include the nostalgia and lamentation for the past Romantic era, the profound sense of dislocation and homelessness, and the striving to retain "Faith" in the face of "Doubt".

Poetry is the chosen instrument of Arnold's turbulent youth. It is in poetry that he wandered, struggled, and searched for answers for his inquisitive and unsettled mind. And not surprisingly, given the nature of his verses, most of the best of Arnold's poems were written in his early adulthood, during his mid and late twenties, and were published in three slim volumes between 1849 and 1853.<sup>4</sup> Arnold carves out a trajectory, which not only shows how a young intellectual coped with the spiritual crisis of his era, but also how he becomes a general voice speaking of the trouble and doubts that faced that entire generation. And for my purpose here, this characteristic of Arnold's poetry is particularly pertinent, for the period that saw Arnold's best poems is almost contemporaneous with the productive years of Emily Brontë, who died in 1848. Thus by tracing Arnold's spiritual journey and struggles, I can examine a similar intellectual journey that Emily Brontë traversed under the same historical and cultural conditions.

In poetry both authors have searched for some kind of truth or answer in an increasingly uncertain and drifting intellectual environment. This chapter thus through looking at the lyrical works of these two authors, explores the spiritual journeys they went through, and the ideological destinations they arrive at – one with the vanishing of his youth, the other towards the end of her life. At the same time, by relating Emily Brontë to Arnold the poet, I seek to identify a more accurate place for Emily

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Arnold, "To his mother," Harrow, June 5, 1869, in *Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888*, ed. George W. E. Russell, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1895), 9.

<sup>4</sup> "It was in this work, and not in his academic efforts to achieve classical serenity, that his poems truly represent, as in 1869 he said they did, 'the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century.'" Leon Albert Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics* (London: Routledge, 1963), 209.

Brontë in Victorian intellectual and literary history. For the reasons mentioned above, this chapter will primarily focus on Arnold's early poetry.<sup>5</sup>

## The Challenge Faced by Christianity

With the advance of natural science, and the diminution of the power of Christianity, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalism had managed to present to the world a different picture of the universe from the one based on the Bible.<sup>6</sup> By the time of Arnold and Emily Brontë, this picture was sufficiently complete that few could ignore the fact that Christianity was faced with an unprecedentedly serious challenge from contemporary natural science, in offering to the Victorians a convincing and credible explanation of the world. And perhaps most of all, building upon the enlarging disparity between the course of Nature and human values, Christianity found itself once again struggling to answer the old yet ever-present question: how to explain the presence of evil in a world created by an omnipotent and benevolent God?

Though everyone faced the difficult question, the subsequent courses the Victorian intellectuals took diverge, and in this regard, as Gottfried relates, the Victorian era is certainly not short of "compromisers."<sup>7</sup> "Arnold's two great contemporary poets," Gottfried continues, "Tennyson and Browning, fall to some extent within this category."<sup>8</sup> In order to retain the inner peace and continue to uphold an already perilous faith in God, both of these poets tried to find a way to incorporate the arising science discourse with Christian faith. Though this requires a certain kind of half-blindness, a voluntary turning away from things as they are, Tennyson, as we have seen in the third chapter, did just that.

Then what about Arnold and Brontë? Enigmatic as Emily Brontë's thoughts on religion often appear to be, enough information is present in her writings to tell us her views on this issue, especially when her works are looked at as a totality. In her essay "The Butterfly", which has been analyzed in the previous chapter, the speaker exclaims at the seemingly endless suffering in Nature, and meaninglessness of human life, in a cosmos which functions under a stern natural law;<sup>9</sup> in her novel

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<sup>5</sup> "Dover Beach" and "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" were published in 1867, but they were composed as early as in 1851, and 1852. Collini, *Critical Portrait*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> This point has been discussed in the Tennyson chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> "Why was it (the world) created, and why was man created? He torments, he kills, he devours; he suffers, dies, is devoured – there you have his whole story. It is true that there is a heaven for the saint, but the saint leaves enough

*Wuthering Heights*, the church silently falls into decay at the end of the story;<sup>10</sup> in her poem “No Coward Soul is Mine”, we pick up lines like: “Vain are the thousand creeds [...] Worthless as withered weeds/Or idlest froth amid the boundless main.”<sup>11</sup> It is fair to say that the naturalistic account of the world and human life has a considerable impact on Emily Brontë, while orthodox Christian teachings in her day hold little power to give her comfort, but are on many occasions deemed to be futile and hypocritical in nature.

Arnold, too, expresses similar doubts in his early poems. For example, in the poem “Mycerinus”, he talks about how Mycerinus, a good man, is condemned to an early and undeserved death. Just as Mycerinus in the end questions whether “Man’s justice from the all-just Gods was given”, Arnold similarly concludes in the poem that God is either powerless to act, or deaf and indifferent to human miseries, which echoes His absence and retreat from the world of *Wuthering Heights*. Even in his later years, when Arnold is seeking for more balance and reconciliation, as he struggles to preserve the part he believes to be valuable and useful in religion, he cannot bring himself to support the truth acclaimed by Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Arnold’s view on religion has been well captured by Lionel Trilling:

That Christianity is true: that is, after all, the one thing that Arnold cannot really say. That Christianity contains the highest moral law, that Christianity is natural, that Christianity is lovely, that Christianity provides a poetry serving the highest good, that Christianity *contains* the truth - anything but that *Christianity is true*.<sup>13</sup>

As David Riede points out, Arnold does not believe in “a transcendental and all-creating God,”<sup>14</sup> and partly because of this, Arnold’s liberal position stirred up enough controversies and criticism at the time to make his mother feel compelled to state that “Matt is a good Christian at bottom.”<sup>15</sup>

As Arnold turns his attention to preserving the moral and social values in Christianity in his later years, what he is primarily concerned about, is in fact the utility of Religion, the potential good it could do for society, for culture, in real and everyday life. This emphasis separates Arnold from Tennyson and his other contemporaries, in that Arnold has, to a large extent, given up the attempt to

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misery here below to sadden him even before the throne of God.” Emily Brontë, “The Butterfly,” in *The Belgian Essays*, ed. and trans. Sue Lonoff (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 178.

<sup>10</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 300.

<sup>11</sup> Emily Brontë, “No Coward Soul is Mine,” in *Emily Jane Brontë: The Complete Poems*, ed. Janet Gezari (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 182, line 9, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> For a sustained discussion on this topic, see Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 297-368.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>14</sup> David G. Riede, *Matthew Arnold and the Betrayal of Language* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Basil Willey, “Arnold and Religion,” in *Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1975), 236.

snatch the truth claim back from contemporary natural science, and instead “holds firm to naturalism”,<sup>16</sup> as Lionel Trilling puts it, which seems to have been able to grant him enough peace.

This point partly explains the often dismissive tone Arnold adopts when talking about Tennyson: Arnold’s feeling towards Tennyson never appears to be more than lukewarm. He did, for example, say to Clough in a letter in 1861 that: “I care for his (Tennyson’s) productions less and less and am convinced Alfred de Musset and Henri Heine are far more profitable studies, if we are to study contemporaries at all.”<sup>17</sup> And on an earlier occasion in 1847, he describes himself as being fatigued by Tennyson’s “dawdling with” the “painted shell” of the universe.<sup>18</sup> What Arnold is impatient about in Tennyson is what he sees as the refinement of craft, the soft tone, the religious sentimentality under whose spell the poet refuses to open his eyes to a forever changed world, and face the bleakness of reality, despite the deep desire to believe which all human beings share.

On the other hand, in contrast to Arnold’s view on Tennyson, is his genuine appreciation of Emily Brontë’s uncompromising spirit in her work. In the poem “Haworth Churchyard”, for example, Arnold directly comments on the “daring” and “bold” quality of Emily Brontë’s writings, and compares her “passion, vehemence and grief” with those of Byron.<sup>19</sup> This shows his evident admiration of her poetic spirit and strength. Thus it is not difficult to see that on the issue of the conflict between natural science and religion, Arnold and Emily Brontë share a closer position than other contemporaries. But as they both turn away from the fragile yet comforting City of God, the question arises as to what kind of reality they are left with, and what challenges they will have to face next.

## **Wandering Between Two Worlds**

In the summer of 1851, on his honeymoon, Arnold wrote down these lines, which were to be reworked and organised into a poem we now know as “Dover Beach”, published by Arnold nearly two decades later.<sup>20</sup> These verses are widely deemed to embody the mid-Victorian Zeitgeist, and have successfully captured the spiritual situation that generation was trapped in:

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<sup>16</sup> Trilling, *Matthew Arnold*, 297.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Arnold, “To Arthur Hugh Clough,” 2, Chester Square, March 9, 1861, in *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. Howard Foster Lowry (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 154.

<sup>18</sup> “Yet to solve the Universe as you try to do is as irritating as Tennyson’s dawdling with its painted shell is fatiguing to me to witness.” Matthew Arnold, “To Arthur Hugh Clough,” shortly after December 6, 1847, *ibid.*, 63.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Haworth Churchyard,” in Allott, *Poems*, 428.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach,” in Allott, *Poems*, 253-254.

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.<sup>21</sup>

The tender and melancholy tone shows the poet's lamentation for an older and lovelier world, and as it retreats from the horizon, what the poet is left with, is a desolate, naked shore, upon which he is supposed to continue his life. But will he be able to?

Arnold and his generation saw the decline of Christianity and the future it holds, but the slow withdrawal of the Sea of Faith not only takes away the frustrations in holding to the promise of Christianity in a changed world, but also the warmth and certainty it provides. Though Arnold knows the old world belongs to the past, he cannot quite reconcile himself to what is new, for he is aware that there will be a price exacted from him, as he expresses in his poem "Progress":

'Say ye: "The spirit of man has found new roads,  
And we must leave the old faiths, and walk therein?"  
Leave then the Cross as ye have left carved gods,  
But guard the fire within!  
'Bright else and fast the stream of life may roll,  
And no man may the other's hurt behold;  
Yet each will have one anguish – his own soul  
Which perishes of *cold*.'<sup>22</sup>

As Arnold complains in a letter to Clough in 1849, "the service of reason is freezing to feeling, chilling to religious mood. And feeling and the religious mood are eternally the deepest being of man, the ground of all joy and greatness for him."<sup>23</sup> The coldness of a world devoid of a spiritual basis is frightful and repugnant to Arnold. And this feeling of an eternal wintry clime waiting for him in the world to come, is what at times makes Arnold reluctant to part with his faith in God, for the sake of the warmth it still holds.<sup>24</sup> Though Arnold too discerns the increasing difficulty of retaining an undoubted faith, few of his contemporaries are as acutely self-conscious of the true cost of losing

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256, line 21-28.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Progress," in Allott, *Poems*, 277 (my italics).

<sup>23</sup> S. O. A. Ulmann ed., *The Yale Manuscript: Matthew Arnold* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 160.

<sup>24</sup> "I sincerely feel that this *warmth* is the great blessing, and this frigidity the great curse." Matthew Arnold, "To Arthur Hugh Clough," Fox How, September 6, 1853, in Lowry, *Letters to Clough*, 143.

a solid ideological ground, and the fearful consequence as Arnold, when he utters, “I am past thirty, and three parts iced over.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus “Dover Beach” presented a picture of humanity’s homelessness, drifting in an alien, indifferent world, after God disappears from the scene. Furthermore, as David Riede points out, the “the physical decomposition of landscape” in the poem represents on a larger scale, “an analogous decomposition of meaning in the Victorian worldview: – the changed sense of time, the general sense of impermanence, the idea of living in a world in a constant state of flux and decay not only undermined Christian faith but left nothing at all solid to lean on.”<sup>26</sup> These developments are mingled with the doomed feeling of belonging to an era of blankness, barrenness and spiritual emptiness: everything speaks of the tragic human condition Arnold’s generation was confronted with.

The idea of the age as a spiritual No Man’s Land was a commonplace in the intellectual circles at the time,<sup>27</sup> as the Victorians found themselves left in a world of depletion. They were faced with an intellectual dilemma, where they were stuck with a present they could not accept, a past they could not go back to, and a future bleak, remote and filled with uncertainties.

But to Arnold, this unfavourable situation can be temporarily forgotten. For if he submerges himself in the endless repetition of everyday life, he can at least get used to the chill, and become numb to the coldness of the world. At such moments, the true self turns dormant, as the desire to search for the genuine self, and the true meaning of human existence, becomes a stream of a hidden life, running under the multitudinousness and frivolousness of everyday life. Yet at times, this hidden stream still awakens in us –

an unspeakable desire  
After the knowledge of our buried life;  
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force  
In tracking out our true original course;

A longing to inquire  
Into the mystery of this heart which beats  
So wide, so deep in us – to know  
Whence our lives come and where they go<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Arnold, “To Arthur Hugh Clough,” Edgbaston, February 12, 1853, *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>26</sup> Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 196.

<sup>27</sup> “Our lot is cast in an evil time; we cannot accept the present, and we shall not live to see the future. It is an age of transition; in which [...] to the few [...] is left nothing but sadness and isolation.” Thomas Arnold, “To Arthur Hugh Clough,” Colonial Office, April 16, 1847, in *The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. Frederick L. Mulhauser, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 180.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Arnold, “The Buried Life,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 289, line 47-54.

This yearning to live an authentic life is precisely what compels Arnold to search for various means that may still be available to him, to reach the divine, and restore him to his lost spiritual home.

Just like this intermittent awakening moment in Arnold's writings, the same longing for a spiritual home can also be seen in Emily Brontë's works. It is also further intensified as the anguish of living in a homeless universe seems to become unbearable – as is evident in these lines from

“Anticipation”:

When those who were thy own compeers,  
Equals in fortune and in years,  
Have seen their morning melt in tears,  
    To clouded, smileless day;

...

    with firm foot and tranquil face,  
Held backward from that tempting race,  
Gazed o'er the sands the waves efface,  
To the enduring seas –  
There cast my anchor of desire  
Deep in unknown eternity;  
Nor ever let my spirit tire,  
With looking for *what is to be!*<sup>29</sup>

In this poem, the speaker has been on a ceaseless search that can only be terminated by death. The existence of a divine presence, or a transcendental being, is crucial to the meaning of this speaker's existence, without which life will become void and empty, and compared to which death becomes an eternal bliss.

To conclude, on the one hand, the systems of religion are crumbling in the face of the facts of science, becoming increasingly distant and discredited; on the other hand, the truths science provides are inadequate to satisfy the emotional and spiritual needs of Arnold and Brontë's generation. For both writers, the disappearance of God has left a semi-permanent void in them, which generates much discomfort for one, and spiritual anguish for the other, so that it compels them both to search for a substitute to fill the empty space.

To deal with this spiritual plight, Arnold and Brontë both first turn to the literary and philosophical works of Romanticism, for consolation, refuge, and a possible solution. As they reflect upon the intellectual heritage left to them, they in the end find their own positions through reflections of the past.

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<sup>29</sup> Emily Brontë, “Anticipation,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 12-13, line 11-14, 29-36.

## The Romantic Legacy

The obvious influence Arnold's immediate poetic predecessors have on him has been much discussed by the critics.<sup>30</sup> From Coleridge and Wordsworth to Keats and Shelley, the works of English Romantics have obviously left a deep impression on Arnold. Together they represent an epoch of harmony, when things have not yet fallen apart, when time has not been severed into a series of broken sequences, and man can still stand in a loving relationship with God, Nature and his fellow men.

But for Arnold such a time is always located somewhere in the past. In the world he knows, humans are left on a trackless desert, alone and isolated, deprived of the means of genuine poetic communication. Therefore for Arnold, the age of harmony is something that he can only get to know second-hand. Growing up into the early Victorian era, he never had chance to see the light of Romantic spirit directly with his own eyes. This feeling of his is recorded in a poem titled "Despondency":

The thoughts that rain their steady glow  
Like stars on life's cold sea,  
Which others know, or say they know –  
They never shone for me.<sup>31</sup>

When Arnold starts to write poetry, he begins where the Romantics have left off. There is a sense of belatedness in this poem, and the tone is melancholy. It is clear that the speaker laments that when he comes into this world, he has already come too late. In another poem "Memorial Verses", Arnold expresses the same feeling further:

Goethe in Weimar sleeps, and Greece,  
Long since, saw Byron's struggle cease.  
But one such death remained to come;  
The last poetic voice is dumb –  
We stand to-day by Wordsworth's tomb.  
...  
    where will Europe's latter hour  
Again find Wordsworth's healing power?  
Others will teach us how to dare,  
And against fear our breast to steel;  
Others will strengthen us to bear –

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Leon Gottfried's discussion in his *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics*, 200-205.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Despondency," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 294, line 1-4.

But who, ah! who, will make us feel?<sup>32</sup>

Wordsworth, who resorts to the Romantic pastoral to respond to the challenges of the Enlightenment, and has successfully crafted a vision of Nature as an alternative, is mute now. Though his poetic voice once promised such extraordinary power that it could restore the freshness of that early world, and make the readers feel the joy of Nature, his voice is now irrevocably lost, after which there is no new song arising, to continue bringing people the enchanted visions he once expressed. What he leaves behind is a permanent empty space, which the present age Arnold lives in is unable to refill.

This tribute to Wordsworth reveals Arnold's relationship with the Romantics, as he himself sees it. Arnold formally announces this relationship in the Greek motto which he prefixes to both the first and the third volumes of his poems:

Ah, blessed he who was a servant of the Muses, one skilled in song, during that time when the meadow was yet unmown! But now, when all the spoils have been divided and the arts have reached the goals of perfection, we are left behind, *the last of all in the race*.<sup>33</sup>

But such sentiment is, however, not merely Arnoldian, but Victorian in general. As the heirs of the Romantic intellectual and poetical tradition, the early Victorians face paramount challenges to digest and absorb the literary and cultural heritage that is left to them, and find for themselves a viable position under the new historical and social situations. Meanwhile this feeling of "belatedness", of coming at the end of a great epoch, is shared by many poets of that period, such as Tennyson, Browning, and Clough, while Emily Brontë also belongs to this group.

We now know that the Brontë household read Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron,<sup>34</sup> and the influence these authors have on Emily Brontë has not gone unnoticed by the critics. But Brontë too appeared on the literary stage some time after the Romantic movement had waned. As a poet and novelist, she was self-conscious that she was living in an age of transition, that the idyllic age was passing by her generation and left them behind as the new age of industrialization advanced.

This predicament can be seen in *Wuthering Heights*, which essentially depicts a post-Romantic era, where humans' bond with Nature forms an irreconcilable conflict with the demands of the modern

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Memorial Verses," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 239, line 1-5; p. 242-243, line 62-67.

<sup>33</sup> A. Dwight Culler, *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 25 (my italics).

<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Brontë once recommended to Ellen Nussey in a letter: "If you like poetry let it be first-rate, Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith Pope (if you will though I don't admire him) Scott, Byron, Camp[b]ell, Wordsworth, and Southey." Charlotte Brontë, "To Ellen Nussey," July 4, 1834, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. 1, 1829-1847 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 131, electronic edition.

society. But besides the novel, the intermittent and transient vision in Emily Brontë's poems betrays another characteristic that can often be seen in post-Romantic works, such as in this poem:

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 could 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 –<sup>35</sup>

As years pass by, the vision the speaker once beheld, which was “bright and fair”, is now lost. She sees its decay over the years, with “weary pain”, and in the end acknowledges that it cannot shine again. A noticeable difference here, when compared with Arnold's verses, is that at least the speaker in Emily Brontë's poem was once able to see the light of vision by herself, not through the eyes of the poets of the preceding generation. Besides this, the depiction of Nature in the poem: “The sun-beam and the storm,/The summer-eve divine,/The silent night of solemn calm,/The full moon's cloudless shine,” can still remind the readers, to some extent, of the charms of that past age.

Both Arnold and Emily Brontë live in the aftermath of the high Romantic movement, yet coming after this movement does not mean there is no chance of beholding that vision of harmony, which has become increasingly precious. As Gottfried points out, the Romantics to some extent represent for Arnold's generation a last-ditch effort to reassert the fusion of thought and feeling, reason and emotion, in the face of what seems like the inevitable triumph of scientific standards of truth.<sup>36</sup> So understandably, both authors long for that past age and its lost dreams, and make strenuous efforts in their writings to let those dreams return.

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<sup>35</sup> Emily Brontë, “O Dream, Where art Thou Now?” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 85, line 1-16.

<sup>36</sup> Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold*, 212.

For Arnold, such efforts only bring about limited success. In general Arnold lacks the robust energy, the clear vision, and the expansive poetic power which are signatures of his Romantic predecessors. And most of all, he does not share with them the same faith in the power of Imagination to create a solid, integral and harmonious reality, under whose spell the Romantics were once able to unleash so much creative energy in their works. Instead Arnold is uncertain about Imagination's validity, and even questions its very existence. In the poem "Self-Deception", the very title of which betrays the poet's ambiguous attitude towards Imagination, Arnold writes:

And on earth we wander, groping, reeling;  
Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.  
Ah! and he, who placed our master-feeling,  
Failed to place that master-feeling clear.

We but dream we have our wished-for powers,  
Ends we seek we never shall attain.  
Ah! some power exists there, which is ours?  
Some end is there, we indeed may gain?<sup>37</sup>

The poet is unsure about the future lying ahead, as well as his own ability to ever get there, when he is only given what languid energy his time has left him. We often see in Arnold's writings that Imagination has lost its full-fledged and all-encompassing power, instead its legitimate status is challenged, disputed, and as a consequence it is often relegated to secondary roles, becoming synonymous with self-will, superstition, and wishful thinking. As a result, the world such Imagination creates appears to be unstable, transient, and incomplete. Arnold's attempt at reviving the sense of harmony in Nature and human relations, as we will see in more detail later, only creates scenes that are lifeless and sculpture-like, and feelings that are cold and feeble.

In a Post-Romantic age, as David Riede puts it, "mankind had become too knowledgeable to believe in the comforting illusions of poetry."<sup>38</sup> Back then, in the Romantic period, they "did not know enough".<sup>39</sup> Perhaps from the very beginning, the world that the Romantics create, which tilts under the balance between a creative mind and a world outside, has something fragile and precarious in it. In an age when science constructs reality based on a myriad of seemingly irrefutable empirical facts that are retrieved directly from the physical world, what is true is scientific. Imagination, on the other hand, becomes increasingly a coping mechanism humans have invented for themselves, in order to escape a cold and stern reality. Arnold eventually comes to the conclusion that the belief the

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Self-Deception," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 293, line 21-28.

<sup>38</sup> Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, vol. 3, *Lectures and Essays in Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 262.

Romantics uphold is false. At the best, it is naïve, and its inadequacy must be recognised as the world goes on to pursue the “real nature of things”.<sup>40</sup> Therefore though the world the Romantics create is lovely, for Arnold it somehow has the character of a dream, delusive and untrustworthy.

To know, to see the truth, that is the great impulse of the Victorians. Though this is reflected in many other poets of the period, it is also Arnold’s first concern. As a poet, he must tell the truth about the world he lives in, no matter how chilling and unsympathetic that truth may be.

Emily Brontë, too, is acutely aware of the transitory and illusionary nature of Imagination, when she makes similar attempts to revive the Romantic vision in her poems. While Arnold claims that “any ‘voice’ heard in nature is only supplied by ‘Fancy’s power’,”<sup>41</sup> the words “Fancy” and “Imagination” are also freely interchangeable in Emily Brontë’s poems, similarly pointing to Imagination’s false tendency and decreasing power. In a poem titled “To Imagination”, Brontë writes:

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!<sup>42</sup>

The “Nature’s sad reality” complained of by Reason would be the stern truth offered by natural science, when Imagination can only create “dreams” that are “cherished” by the “suffering heart”. Though harsh, what Reason tells is nevertheless recognised to be true in the poem, and at the same time, the fruit of Imagination is referred to as the “flower of Fancy” in the sixth stanza, which

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<sup>40</sup> Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold*, 217.

<sup>41</sup> Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> Emily Brontë, “To Imagination,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 19-20, line 19-36 (my italics).

indicates its illegitimacy. This point is further developed when the speaker says that she “trust[s] not to thy [imagination’s] phantom bliss”, but welcomes its arrival in the evening hours, for the sheer solace and hope it brings to her. Just like in Arnold’s poem, rather than creating an authentic world that assumes its own supremacy, Imagination’s primary function here is limited to offering solace to the heart’s sufferings when one is confronted with the grim reality of the world. However the two authors’ attitudes towards a dwindled version of Imagination are quite different. When Arnold rejects it on the ground that it is false and illusionary, and opts to bear a stern and barren truth, the speaker in Emily Brontë’s poem welcomes Imagination’s soothing power, despite what is viewed in this poem as its illegitimate status.

It is also true that, unlike in Arnold, the source of the river of imagination is not yet quite drained in Emily Brontë’s works. In general, Emily Brontë is able to retain the creative power of Imagination to re-create the Romantic vision with greater success than her contemporaries, and sometimes she can even present to the readers an energetic, integral, and enchanted picture of Nature, such as in this poem:

High waving heather, 'neath stormy blasts bending  
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars  
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending  
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending  
Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon sending  
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars

All down the mountain sides wild forest lending  
One mighty voice to the life-giving wind  
Rivers their banks in the jubilee rending  
Fast through the valleys a reckless course wending  
Wider and deeper their waters extending  
Leaving a desolate desert behind<sup>43</sup>

There is a sense of urgency in this poem, as if with the whirling speed of the wind and the storm humankind could break through the suffocating silence and stillness imposed by an unpoetic age, and reach the wonderland inhabited by their Romantic forbears. Filtered through the eyes of the speaker, the earth “rises” to heaven, and heaven “descends” to earth. Wild forest “lends” its voice to the wind, and rivers “rend” through a reckless course. The natural objects seem to have been endowed with a life of their own, while in the fast-forward pace of the poem their great impulse and energy are mingled with, and re-enforced by the expanding power of the speaker’s own imagination, creating a natural scene tinted with magical colours. Yet before the impending rainstorm, everything is

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<sup>43</sup> Emily Brontë, “High Waving Heather 'neath Stormy Blasts Bending,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 34, line 1-12.

changing and rushing forward with the wind. If the poet attains vision, and sees through the lives of things, it is albeit fleeting and transitory, rather than recurrent or enduring. Perhaps it is by borrowing the stimulating energy of the storm in Nature, that the speaker is able to temporarily burst the “fetters” and break the “bars”, and leave the “desolate desert” of her age behind. But after all, though it appears to be unsustainable, Emily Brontë succeeds in bringing the Romantic vision back to life, in glimpses, or incomplete pieces, which is no longer an easy task during her time. Such instances are not isolated in her poems.

Such are Arnold and Emily Brontë’s respective attitudes towards the great literary and philosophical tradition preceding them. The condition the Post-Romantic poets face is one of vagabondage or exile. It is therefore their natural desire to find a hand lending them strength and guiding them through the confusions, a voice promising them certainty and keeping the goal in view, in order to cope with a world that was seemingly falling apart. In Arnold and Brontë’s ways of seeking to re-establish the connection with the divine, they both resort to a few means that are still available to them. Such mediators have the metaphysical significance of the Romantic ideal, but are also grounded in this world, which makes it possible for them to be retained in an increasingly secularised and demystified Victorian era. The two authors hope that through these entities, they can re-connect with the General Life, and regain access to the lost world of harmony.

In the following sections I will discuss two particular ways through which Arnold and Brontë attempt to assume a durable ideological stance: Nature and Love. While the role of these entities in Arnold and Brontë’s works could be seen as a continuation of Romanticism, they also bear distinct Victorian features. After struggling to realize their full-fledged idealized form which can be seen in early Romantic works, they both in the end, in different degrees, become more domestic, more practical, and more rooted in this world.

### **Nature as A Medium to Reach the Divine**

It is perhaps of little surprise that Nature, as one of the most important concepts in Romantic literature and philosophy, is among the places Arnold and Emily Brontë first look into. The Romantic movement, as part of the secularization process of Western thought, is characterized by a series of re-interpretations and reformulations of traditional images, values and ideas of Christianity into secularized forms. Abrams believes that: “characteristic concepts and patterns of Romantic philosophy and literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of

devotional experience.”<sup>44</sup> In a post-Enlightenment age, the Romantics “revived these ancient matters with a difference: they undertook to save the overview of human history and destiny the experiential paradigms, and the cardinal values of their religious heritage, by reconstituting them in a way that would make them intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being.”<sup>45</sup>

One of the most important renovations the Romantics make during this time, is to relegate the role previously assigned to God to Nature. In many Romantic writings, when God seems to have retreated from the front stage of the world theater, Nature, as the masterpiece of God, who has inherited God’s power and beauty, takes over His office on earth. In these works, Nature is not only nurturing, but also organic and all-encompassing: it thus becomes a substitute for God.

However, the concept of Nature in Arnold and Emily Brontë’s writings is complex, conflicted, and inherently divided. With one way of viewing Nature derived from the Romantic tradition, and the other derived from the arising natural science in their time, there appears to be a sharp collision between two contrasting depictions of Nature which curiously co-exist in Arnold and Brontë’s works.<sup>46</sup> Thus these two authors’ writings in a way witness the changing dynamics between two different paradigms of thought in western intellectual history, testifying to the ascendancy of one, and the decline of the other.

### Arnold’s Fragmented and Stoic Nature

Arnold’s attempt at bringing a Romantic Nature back to life is largely thwarted, since, as J. Hillis Miller rightly puts it, Arnold lacks the “sense of a harmonizing power in Nature.”<sup>47</sup> Often the best Arnold can do is to express the feeling that Nature, just like mundane everyday life, could still be harboring a secret inner life of its own, which is nevertheless forever behind the scene. In his poem “The Voice”, where images from Nature are used as analogies to express the frustrations the speaker encounters when he searches for the authentic Voice in the universe, the speaker says:

Like bright waves that fall  
With a lifelike motion  
On the lifeless margin of the sparkling Ocean;

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<sup>44</sup> M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 65.

<sup>45</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 66

<sup>46</sup> As Arnold once exclaimed, “Ah, what pitfalls are in that word of *Nature!*” Matthew Arnold, “The True Greatness of the Old Testament,” in Super, *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 6, *Dissent and Dogma* (1968), 389.

<sup>47</sup> Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, 235

A wild rose climbing up a mouldering wall –  
A gush of sunbeams through a ruin'd hall –  
Strains of glad music at a funeral ...<sup>48</sup>

A series of images from Nature is used to convey the speaker's feeling of desolation here. The "waves" foretell the existence of a wide glimmering, lifelike sea, of which they form a part, the "rose" prophesizes the forthcoming of an exuberant Spring in the near future, and the "sunbeams" indicate there is a bright sun shining outside of the old hall. The sources of these images are all hidden behind the scene, so that the speaker can only infer their existence, but not ascertain them. Try as the speaker may to strain his eyes to see, he can behold nothing. But that world exists, to be sure. And there is a tantalizing hope of discovery which lasts till the very end. What is interesting about the poem is that one can feel a sense of decadence between the lines, which gets stronger as the images pile up, emitting an atmosphere that resembles the one in a medieval castle from a Gothic novel. The last line, "Strains of glad music at a funeral...", is particularly unsettling, as if the Messenger of Hope can only reach the speaker's eyes when the life at stake has in fact passed away. This is then followed by the horrifying idea that whatever indicators the speaker beholds now in fact belong to the past. The place from which they come, in fact does not exist any more.

When Arnold tries to follow Wordsworth by presenting to the reader a Wordsworthian natural scenery, his "inability to see nature in the romantic way is constantly betrayed by the landscapes in his poetry."<sup>49</sup> This is perhaps best illustrated through his poem "Resignation", which is addressed to a sister, about revisiting a place of the past and the reflections it arouses.<sup>50</sup> The poem itself is obviously a self-conscious imitation of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", but the description of the landscape has proven to be otherwise:

The solemn wastes of heathy hill  
Sleep in the July sunshine still;  
The self-same shadows now, as then,  
Play through this grassy upland glen;  
The loose dark stones on the green way  
Lie strewn, it seems, where then they lay;  
On this mild bank above the stream,  
(You crush them!) the blue gentians gleam.  
Still this wide brook, the rushes cool,  
The sailing foam, the shining pool!  
These are not changed; and we, you say,

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<sup>48</sup> Matthew Arnold, "The Voice," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 37, line 17-22.

<sup>49</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "Matthew Arnold," in *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-century Writers* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 234.

<sup>50</sup> Allott, *Poems*, 88.

Are scarce more changed, in truth, than they.<sup>51</sup>

The natural objects in these stanzas – “hill”, “shadows”, “stones”, “gentians”, and “brook” – are all separated from each other. Each is assigned its own place, and has nothing to do with the rest. This is in contrast with the “Coleridgean sense”<sup>52</sup> that “each object, though unique, is at the same time a symbol of the totality,”<sup>53</sup> When Wordsworth in his poem is able to associate and connect the various items in Nature to form a complex but organic harmony, Arnold is merely mechanically listing a group of disparate, isolated, lifeless things. His rendering of the natural landscape is accurate, but is also purely descriptive and superficial, devoid of any inner spirit. Furthermore, the assertion that neither the place nor the visitors have changed, is in direct contrast with the seeming transfiguration of the revisited scene in “Tintern Abbey”, which is facilitated by the changing perception of the viewer.

As Riede puts it, in Arnold’s poems, “such fragmentation of the landscape” often “represents the alienation of the viewer” from Nature.<sup>54</sup> Nature no longer possesses an inner spirit of its own, but has become a collection of inert objects. With an increasingly narrowing definition of Truth, which testifies to the impact of the rise of natural science discourse at the time, Arnold’s world has been split apart, to the extent that he can no longer adopt a Wordsworthian perspective when looking at Nature.

According to Riede, “Arnold’s lack of faith in a benevolent Nature was...a major cause of his reaction against the romantics, and especially against Wordsworth.”<sup>55</sup> Like Tennyson and Brontë, Arnold is very much aware of the controversy and debates stirred up by natural science. His poem “In Utrumque Paratus”, for example, has been seen as a response to Chambers’ book.<sup>56</sup> Arnold’s active engagement with the natural science discourse and debates of the period can further be seen through his poems such as “In harmony with Nature”, and “Quiet Work.” For example, Arnold has made his point clear, when he explicitly opts for the Nature depicted by natural science, in his poem titled “In Harmony with Nature”:

“In Harmony with Nature?” Restless fool,  
Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,

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<sup>51</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Resignation,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 92, line 95-107.

<sup>52</sup> Miller, “Matthew Arnold,” 235.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>56</sup> “That poem (“In Utrumque Paratus”)” is probably Arnold’s reaction to Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844).” Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 112.

When true, the last impossibility –  
To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool!

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,  
And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.  
Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;  
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore  
...  
Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;  
Nature and man can never be fast friends.  
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!<sup>57</sup>

In this poem, the high Romantic ideal of being “in Harmony with Nature” is rejected at the very beginning. Instead the poet acknowledges that there is a sharp division between humankind and Nature, with each reigning over their own spheres. As Riede states, “Arnold was among the first to refute the idea that mind could be in harmony with nature,” and “to insist that mind, human consciousness, is ... alienated from Nature...”<sup>58</sup> For Arnold, Nature is unequivocally other than human, and the two are furthermore antagonistic towards each other. Nature has its own laws, and “to its own impulse every creature stirs,”<sup>59</sup> while humans have the interpretative and cognizant power to know Nature, as well as their own moral laws to abide by. It is therefore necessary for humankind to rise above Nature, to go beyond where Nature stops. Such depiction of Nature is very much in consonance with Tennyson’s Nature “red in tooth and claw”.<sup>60</sup>

If there is anything humans are to learn from Nature, it is its stoic silence, its ability to move along its own course in an aimless universe. This is the “one lesson” Arnold would like to learn of Nature. In his poem “Quiet Work”, he says:

while on earth a thousand discords ring,  
Man’s fitful uproar mingling with his toil,  
Still do thy sleepless ministers move on,  
  
Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting;  
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,  
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone.<sup>61</sup>

Now that Nature is reduced to an empty husk, its motions are only directed by blind necessity. Unbound by moral laws, and any larger purposes beyond itself, Nature is indifferent to human care

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew Arnold, “In Harmony With Nature,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 44, line 1-8, 12-14.

<sup>58</sup> Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Religious Isolation,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 110, line 13.

<sup>60</sup> Alfred Tennyson, “In Memoriam,” in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 399, canto 56, line 15.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Quiet Work,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 113, line 9-14.

and human sufferings. But because of this, it is able to perform its own tasks as assigned without a fuss. The poem indicates that in a grim and cheerless universe, perhaps humans should also follow Nature's example, accept the separation from God and the general Life, silently assume the role assigned to them without any complaint, and perform their own earthly tasks to the best they can. There is an air of despair in the poem, as if the speaker at last concedes that it is in vain to struggle, to try to break the chains his age has imposed upon him. Because after all such struggles are futile. What is meaningful, or perhaps *useful*, is to silently accept. And just as in the end Arnold learns that Nature's secret is not joy, but peace,<sup>62</sup> acceptance in the end brings some peace for the mind.

### Emily Brontë and the Transient Vision in Nature

Emily Brontë's view on Nature is characteristic of the Victorian period, since there is a conspicuous split between the Nature she explicates in her essays and the one she describes in her poems. And it is hard to tell which one she leans towards. The Victorian dilemma where the mind opts for one thing, while the heart yearns for another, has been manifestly brought out in this instance.

Nature in Emily Brontë's essay "The Butterfly", as discussed in the last chapter, is very much the same as the Nature in Arnold's "In Harmony with Nature". Both have in fact been heavily influenced by the natural science discourse in their time. However, Nature in many of Emily Brontë's poems assumes a distinct Romantic character, almost as if the author performs in a Romantic mode when she writes poetry. In verses Brontë has managed to revive the creative energy that can be inspired by Nature, and at times the power of Romantic imagination is still very much alive. As a result, the natural scenery and landscape in her poems are not curtailed or two-dimensional, like the ones we see in Arnold's poems.

Sometimes the depiction of a natural scene constitutes the main body of a poem, sometimes it only serves to introduce the settings and the context for a long narrative poem. In either case, the natural objects the poet depicts assume an inner life of their own, while the lively and fresh energy in them can often be felt presently by the reader. For example, in a Gondal poem, before the speaker recalls the sad stories of her past and mourns the death of her lover, the poem opens with these lines:

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 –

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<sup>62</sup> "Whose (Nature) secret is not joy, but peace." Arnold, "Resignation," p. 96, line 192.

And lonelier still beneath her ray  
That drear moor stretches far away  
Till it seems strange that aught can lie  
Beyond its zone of silver sky –<sup>63</sup>

At midnight, the “moon”, who is the Queen of Night, shines its light upon the earth. She looks down on the “lonely moor”, which stretches far away, till it reaches beyond the horizon of the “sky”, which appears to be “silvery”, since it has been lit by the beams of the moon. On this landscape, the moon, the moor, and the sky all blend into each other till they are fused together, so that in the end they form a harmonious picture imbued with an unworldly tranquillity.

At times the power of Imagination dawns on the speaker of a poem in the form of a vision in Nature. Such is the case in “A Day Dream”. The poem begins with the speaker lying on the hillside one summer afternoon, when Nature is full of joy:

On a sunny brae, alone I lay  
One summer afternoon;  
It was the marriage-time of May  
With her young lover, June.<sup>64</sup>

But the speaker alone is sullen, for she knows when the harsh winter comes, leaves will fall onto the ground, and birds will desert the trees. The fleeting joy they experience now will then be taken away. As she mourns for the passing of seasons and the perishing of life, a vision descends upon her:

A thousand thousand glimmering fires  
Seemed kindling in the air;  
A thousand thousand silvery lyres  
Resounded far and near:

Methought, the very breath I breathed  
Was full of sparks divine,  
And all my heather-couch was wreathed  
By that celestial shine!<sup>65</sup>

Then the little glittering spirits in the air sing to the speaker of a bright world which all shall enter after death, where the “universal joy” overflows the sky. The creative energy the poet possesses can be seen clearly from these verses. The scene of thousands of “glimmering fires” descending onto the earth, and filling the air with little sparks, though incredible, has the infectious ability to bring the

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<sup>63</sup> Emily Brontë, “There Shines the Moon, at Noon of Night,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 36-37, line 1-7.

<sup>64</sup> Emily Brontë, “A Day Dream,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 17, line 1-4. Part of this poem was discussed in Chapter Two, on the subject of the speaker’s anticipation of death and afterlife, as compared to *Hymn 6* from *Hymns to the Night*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18, line 41-48.

reader along into that enchanted world created in the speaker's head. Breaking from what is natural and ordinary, the poet lifts up the readers to go on an imaginative flight.

But the vision is transient and unsustainable, as if deep down, the speaker acknowledges its illusionary nature, for the poem ends with these words:

The music ceased; the noonday dream,  
Like dream of night, withdrew;  
But Fancy, still, will sometimes deem  
Her fond creation true.<sup>66</sup>

The vision disappears as the music ceases. What's more, the poem makes the smallest possible claim for the credibility of the dream. For it is referred to as the creation of "Fancy", and even Fancy does not always deem it to be true.<sup>67</sup> This echoes what was said before the vision started, when the speaker forewarns, "Now, whether it were really so,/I never could be sure."<sup>68</sup> In addition, the very title of the poem also betrays the fallible nature of the vision itself. As John Hewish points out, there is a "failure of objectivity"<sup>69</sup> in Emily Brontë's pursuit of an authentic visionary experience that the speakers in her poems often cannot be certain whether the world created by Imagination truly exists, or is merely a product of human fantasy.

This predicament is characteristically Victorian. It happens at a time when the territory of Imagination recedes into the subjective mind, in order to confront the challenges of natural science discourse. In Brontë's writings, the power of Imagination is not lost or refuted, as in Arnold's case, but is nevertheless reduced to a certain degree. As a result, the subjectivity of the Romantic vision has become too turned inward, so that it lacks objective validity. Increasingly, in Emily Brontë's poems and novel, Imagination operates within the domain of dreams, nights, delirium, reverie, and hallucinations – those irrational spheres where the power of Reason cannot reach. It seems that when too much weight is placed onto the mind for it to create its own universe, the mind-created subjective world becomes subject to doubt and question from the outside world. This kind of diseased subjectivity, with a mind trapped in its own self-reflection, running along a circuit which each time only leads back to itself, shows not only Brontë's inheritance of the legacy of Romanticism, but also her intimate engagement with and reflection of the Victorian era.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 19, line 69-72.

<sup>67</sup> Gezari, *Last Thing*, 38-39.

<sup>68</sup> Emily Brontë, "A Day Dream," p. 18, line 37-38.

<sup>69</sup> John Hewish, *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: MacMillan, 1969), 149.

<sup>70</sup> For a detailed discussion on the topic of subjectivity in Emily Brontë's poetry, see Kathryn Burlinson, "'What Language can Utter the Feeling': Identity in the Poetry of Emily Brontë," in *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present Day*, ed. Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell (London: Pinter, 1991), 41-48.

Brontë is very aware of the era she lives in, and its spiritual plight. In her poems she repetitively returns to the themes of loss, grief, regret, the transience of happiness, and the irretrievability of a lost love. Even when she manages to revive the Romantic Nature of harmony and joy, sadness and mourning are blended in. The joyful summer time is almost always overshadowed by the approaching steps of a grim winter, when all will be dead and silent. Perhaps the poet is self-conscious that she is singing the last songs of Nature, before the bitter winter arrives:

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 linnet was trilling  
Its song on the old granite stone –  
Where the lark – the wild sky-lark was filling  
Every breast with delight like its own.<sup>71</sup>

### **Love as A Medium to Reach the Divine**

Love, as the all-encompassing entity in Romantic literature and philosophy that could link human, Nature, and everything existent in the universe into a harmonious whole, is another medium through which Arnold and Emily Brontë seek to be re-united with the General Life. In the Christian tradition, Jesus, who is loved by humans, can serve as a mediator between an individual and God. For if humans “love Jesus, then the current of emotion and sympathy binding them to Him will allow them to reach God through Jesus.”<sup>72</sup> The Romantics appropriated this belief for their own use, so that love is exalted as an effective means to link the self with the universe.<sup>73</sup> The love poems the Romantics write are therefore not only about love for a fellow human being, but at the same time take on a transcendental significance. In Romantic literature, “The beloved is a divinity, love is eternal, and union is paradise.”<sup>74</sup>

Thus in a Post-Romantic era, when God has retreated from the front stage of the universe, the love for another human being becomes another substitute for God. Many Victorian writers see Love as a benevolent power that can inject warmth and meaning into a barren and restless life. However, under

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<sup>71</sup> Emily Brontë, “Loud without the Wind was Roaring,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 87, line 43-50.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, “Matthew Arnold,” 253.

<sup>73</sup> Shelley, for example, in his essay “On Love”, describes love “in part as a desire that [...] one be able to escape isolation in the self by perfect communion with another human being”. Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 163-64.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

the pressure of modern life, and the increasingly mundane and chaotic human existence, in the Victorian age, love is deprived of the supreme privilege it once enjoyed in the Romantic era.

It is therefore not surprising that, in both Arnold and Emily Brontë's writings, Love can hardly live up to its high Romantic ideal. Instead it is reduced to a lower level, taking on distinct secular characteristics. In a materialized modern world, not only is Love quickly turned into passion and desire, it is also no longer eternal, but transient, and inevitably fades away with the passing of time. Perhaps most of all, Love ceases to serve as a perfect, or even effective means of communication between lovers, let alone to connect an individual to the rest of the universe.

For both authors, the loss, separation and unavailability associated with Love are essentially tied up to the changing conception of Love in a Post-Romantic age. In their writings, even in the fleeting moment when the speaker seems to have attained love, it inevitably falls short of expectations. Love, as "a sort of mournful cosmic last resort", like Nature and other possible means of refuge, is doomed to be unsatisfactory for a Victorian mind.<sup>75</sup>

### Arnold and Love in Its Secularized Forms

Arnold's poems on the theme of Love mainly consist of the "Switzerland" poems and those grouped under the title "Faded Leaves". The former is associated with his love affair with a French girl named Marguerite, and the latter is composed during his courtship of his wife Lucy. This section will begin with an analysis of the "Switzerland" poems.

In "Isolation. To Marguerite", Arnold depicts the desperate feeling of isolation in humans' earthly existence, which Love cannot save them from. For Arnold, love seems to have failed him from the very beginning:

We were apart; yet, day by day,  
I bade my heart more constant be.  
I bade it keep the world away,  
And grow a home for only thee;  
Nor fear'd but thy love likewise grew,  
Like mine, each day, more tried, more true.

The fault was grave! I might have known,  
What far too soon, alas! I learn'd—  
The heart can bind itself alone,

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<sup>75</sup> Collini, *Critical Portrait*, 32.

And faith may oft be unreturn'd.  
Self-sway'd our feelings ebb and swell—  
Thou lov'st no more; Farewell! Farewell!<sup>76</sup>

Though the speaker is able to steer his own heart towards his lover, and remain constant during the days that they are apart, his faithfulness is not reciprocated by his lover. The speaker can only bid his own heart to strive towards the ideal Love, but he cannot ask another fellow human being to do the same. As communication with the lover fails, the speaker bids the lover farewell and slips back into his isolation. This inability for lovers to communicate with each other arises from humanity's incompetence to love in an age characterised by spiritual aridity. In the poem "The Buried Life", the speaker asks again:

Alas! Is even love too weak  
To unlock the heart, and let it speak?  
Are even lovers powerless to reveal  
To one another what indeed they feel?<sup>77</sup>

As the words "weak" and "powerless" indicate, there is a languid energy in the poem. The power of Love is also diminished. And as love loses its once prominent status, it can no longer make one heart tell the other what it truly feels. As a result, humans may long for romantic love, but they are now impotent to attain it. In yet another poem, "Parting", Arnold proceeds even further, as the speaker in the poem exclaims:

What heart knows another?  
Ah! who knows his own?<sup>78</sup>

Here, not only are humans unable to communicate with another fellow being, but also they are no longer sure if they can communicate with their own heart. The fragmentation of the world is not merely initiated outside of the self, but is also happening within the self. In a disoriented and aimless world, the chain of understanding breaks down. Humans are no longer self-sufficient beings, but become disparate incomplete pieces drifting around. Under such conditions, it is impossible to genuinely connect with the self, and connect with one another. Thus the era that Arnold lives in has determined that Love cannot help reach the divine.

In the end, the speaker in "Isolation" comes to the bitter conclusion that humans are utterly and absolutely alone:

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<sup>76</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Isolation. To Marguerite," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 127, line 1-12.

<sup>77</sup> Arnold, "The Buried Life," p. 287, line 12-15.

<sup>78</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Parting," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 126, line 73-74.

long had place to prove  
This truth – to prove, and make thine own:  
'Thou hast been, shalt be, art, alone!'<sup>79</sup>

Love only belongs to those “happier men” – the Romantic poets.<sup>80</sup> But even their love is in fact an illusion:

for they, at least  
Have *dreamed* two human hearts might blend  
In one, and were through faith released  
From isolation without end  
Prolonged; nor knew, although not less  
Alone than thou, their loneliness.<sup>81</sup>

Though the Romantics seem to have been “released from isolation” through their faith, their faith is false; though they have dreamt of two human hearts “blend[ing] in one”, their dream is not founded on reality. The speaker believes that they are in fact no less alone than he is, and their bliss is only in that, unlike him, they are *unaware* of their loneliness. Therefore though they are happier, their happiness comes from ignorance, as a result of living in self-created fantasies. Thus after romantic love is refuted in Arnold’s poem, the innocence and purity of love is replaced by mere disillusionment. The ideal Romantic Love, like Nature, is only an illusion, synonymous with self-deception.

In Arnold’s poems, not only is the ideal Love dismissed as an illusion, it has also lost its celestial character, and instead becomes soiled and corrupted. In the poems about Marguerite in particular, love is associated with human passion and desires. This can be seen from “Destiny”:<sup>82</sup>

Why each is striving, from of old,  
To love more deeply than he can?  
Still would be true, yet still grows cold?  
—Ask of the Powers that sport with man!

They yoked in him, for endless strife,  
A heart of ice, a soul of fire;  
And hurled him on the Field of Life,  
An aimless unallayed Desire.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Arnold, “Isolation. To Marguerite,” p. 128, line 28-30.

<sup>80</sup> Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 28.

<sup>81</sup> Arnold, “Isolation. To Marguerite,” p. 128, line 37-42.

<sup>82</sup> This is “probably a ‘Marguerite’ poem cancelled by A. as duplicating the fuller self-analysis of ‘A Farewell’ 16-36.” Allott, *Poems*, 150.

<sup>83</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Destiny,” *ibid.*, p. 151, line 1-8.

What the man in the poem is driven by, to “love more deeply than he can,” is in fact not Love, but all-consuming passion. Engulfed by passion, he is enslaved by incessant, aimless desires. They throw him “on the Field of Life”, for restless strife without end. Therefore the man’s love can only lead him astray, making him lose himself.

The instances where Arnold equates love with unbridled, blind passion can also be frequently found in the “Switzerland” poems. In the poem “Isolation. To Marguerite”, for example, the speaker berates the heart that seeks for love at “the place where passions reign”, and bids it to go “back to thy solitude again”;<sup>84</sup> in “Absence”, the speaker’s love for Marguerite is rendered as “once-longed-for storms of love”.<sup>85</sup> But ultimately, the nature of the love for Marguerite is revealed in “Parting”, through these stanzas:

To the lips, ah! of others  
Those lips have been pressed,  
And others, ere I was,  
Were strained to that breast;<sup>86</sup>

“Under the surface of romantic love,” the speaker “has discovered” the dangerous “fact of sex.”<sup>87</sup> Marguerite has been soiled by the dust of this world, and is now seen as unfaithful. By finding out Marguerite possesses these degrading qualities, the poem indicates that the love between the speaker and his lover has been degraded into mere physical desires: it is directed by momentary impulses, therefore is changeful and faithless.

Thus, though Arnold searches for love, in his life he finds passion only. Love has been twisted into lust, becoming treacherous and wilful. In a Post-Romantic age, humans no longer have the luxury of living the high Romantic dreams. Even when they do, dreams only turn into nightmares, as “the pleasures of love lead only to a cold awakening, an ‘Unlovely Dawning’ of bitter regret.”<sup>88</sup>

Tired of being the subject of “the Powers that sport with man”, as well as seeking for release, the poet yearns for peace:

How sweet to feel, on the boon air,  
All our unquiet pulses cease!  
To feel that nothing can impair

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<sup>84</sup> Arnold, “Isolation. To Marguerite,” p. 128, line 17, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Absence,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Arnold, “Parting,” p. 126, line 67-70.

<sup>87</sup> Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 125.

<sup>88</sup> Riede, *Matthew Arnold*, 49.

The gentleness, the thirst for peace<sup>89</sup>

Arnold eventually leaves Marguerite, whose love he abandons, as he moves on towards “light” and self-mastery:

I struggle towards the light; and ye,  
Once-longed-for storms of love!  
If with the light ye cannot be,  
I bear that ye remove.

I struggle towards the light – but oh,  
While yet the night is chill,  
Upon time’s barren, stormy flow,  
Stay with me, Marguerite, still!<sup>90</sup>

Though the speaker in the poem recovers, he does so not without lamentation. He asks the past love to depart as he struggles towards the light, but the word “bear” betrays his reluctance to part with his lover, which brings out the plea later of asking her stay with him until he reaches the light.

The poem shows Arnold’s ambivalent attitude towards Marguerite. As Trilling points out, in the realm of poetry, Marguerite is a symbol of Arnold’s “youthful self.”<sup>91</sup> To have passion for her, even if it is false, means that there is still life left in him, and that his struggle continues. But in the end, in life and in his work Arnold chooses to settle for the calm and solitude his era has consigned to him.

Thus together, the “Switzerland” poems tell the story of a man who briefly tastes a rapturous love that plunges him into a swamp of passion, before attaining the state of calm and inner peace.<sup>92</sup>

Though the raw materials of these poems are based on an actual love affair that happened in Arnold’s life, the poems’ composition process has elevated them to resemble a spiritual journey that at the time was not shared by Arnold alone.

It is also worth noting that in Arnold’s poems, Love has ceased to be eternal, but has instead become subject to the erosion of time. Time tears the lovers apart. In “Absence”, for example, the speaker claims, “we forget because we must, /And not because we will.”<sup>93</sup> The memory of the past love inevitably fades away as time goes on, and is beyond the lover’s own power to retain, as if it is part of a natural process, which individuals are powerless to act against. As a product of this world, which

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<sup>89</sup> Matthew Arnold, “A Farewell,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 134, line 81-84.

<sup>90</sup> Arnold, “Absence,” p. 145, line 13-20.

<sup>91</sup> Trilling, *Matthew Arnold*, 137.

<sup>92</sup> Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 122.

<sup>93</sup> Arnold, “Absence,” p. 145, line 11-12

itself is fragmented and changeful, the love the lovers possess is no longer everlasting, but can now be forgotten. This could be seen as another Post-Romantic feature that Love assumes in the Victorian era.

At the same time, in Arnold's poems, the transience of Love is not limited to the "Switzerland" poems, but can be found in other love poems as well. Love cannot remain intact in the face of time, no matter if it is driven by passion alone, or is acquired in quiescence. In "Separation", which is a poem inspired by a crisis during Arnold's courtship of his future wife Lucy, he writes:

if the steadfast commandment of Nature  
Wills that remembrance should always decay –  
If the loved form and the deep-cherished feature  
Must, when unseen, from the soul fade away –

Me let no half-effaced memories cumber!  
Fled, fled at once, be all vestige of thee!  
Deep be the darkness and still be the slumber –  
Dead be the past and its phantoms to me!<sup>94</sup>

If under Nature's command, humans must forget, and the memories of the loved ones must fade, then the speaker would rather forget the past once for all, so that he could be released from the torture of the half-forgotten memories, and the lingering shadows of the past.

This state of an individual only being able to "remember that there is something which he cannot remember,"<sup>95</sup> or of knowing he has left something in the past without the ability to recall what exactly that thing is, in a way echoes the hopes and despairs in the poem "The Voice". In both cases, what one has is only the indication of the existence of "light", after being deprived of the privilege to ever find the place it dwells. And just as in this poem the speaker wishes to exchange half-effaced memories for total forgetfulness, so that he could return to peace, as we will see later, Arnold in the end also chooses resignation over the constant struggle in order to find a peaceful state of mind.

A year after Arnold leaves Marguerite, he meets his wife Lucy and is engaged to her. The five poems "The River", "Too Late", "Separation", "On the Rhine", and "Longing", which are later grouped as "Faded Leaves", are written during this period. In general, there is sorrow and sadness in these poems, as is suggested by some of the titles. The tone in these poems becomes quiet, subdued and melancholy, which distinguishes them from the forceful exclamations of the "Switzerland" poems.

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<sup>94</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Separation," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 246, line 5-12.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, "Matthew Arnold," p. 230.

And as love becomes “a state of *diminished* rather than of heightened emotion”,<sup>96</sup> the distinctly different characterizations of love found in these two different groups of poems exhibit a transition of the poet’s own spiritual state.

When on his honeymoon, Arnold writes down some of the lines in the famous “Dover Beach”, and the word love is again mentioned. But this time what it represents has quite changed:

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! For the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;<sup>97</sup>

These lines are in fact not about love or what love is. Rather, they are calling for love in a spiritually depleted universe. In the emptiness of a mundane Victorian life, nothing is certain, and no love is guaranteed. The poet’s proposal under such a situation, “Ah, love, let us be true to one another”, is in reality a desperate effort to create love out of nothing, in order to make life a little bit bearable. The Romantic love that once resembled divinity now only has an empty shell left in this world, filled by despair. Love has now become a kind of heart’s solace.

Arnold in the end settles for peace, as he abandons a passionate love and chooses a more domestic, modest one. Love is no longer something to be chased after, but is to be acquired in quiescence, and taken upon as quiet company in a chilling spiritual climate, like some kind of last straw. At best, Love has become a remnant of the passion the poet once possessed fleetingly. In a mundane, earthly existence, it has ceased to be transcendent, or even remarkable. As it falls out of the divine place it once occupied, there is now no cure lying in its hands.

## Emily Brontë and the Loss of Romantic Love

Different from Arnold’s disillusionment with love, Love is still upheld in Emily Brontë’s writings. For Love as seen in some of Brontë’s poems, seems to play exactly the role it is supposed to in Romantic literature:

By dismal rites they win their bliss  
By penance, fasts, and fears –

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<sup>96</sup> Collini, *Critical Portrait*, 33.

<sup>97</sup> Arnold, “Dover Beach,” p. 256, line 29-34.

I have one rite – a gentle kiss –  
One penance – tender tears –

O could it thus for ever be  
That I might so adore  
I'd ask for all eternity  
To make a paradise for me,  
My love – and nothing more!<sup>98</sup>

In this poem the speaker contrasts the formality of religious rituals, which is designed to obtain bliss through “penance, fasts and fears”, with an intimate romantic gesture – “a gentle kiss”. After this the speaker declares that the only paradise she would ask for is a paradise where her love is. Needless to say, this high proclamation of love is typical in Romantic writings, and it furthermore reminds one of Catherine’s famous speech in *Wuthering Heights*:

“My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff – he’s always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, anymore than I am always a pleasure to myself – but, as my own being.”<sup>99</sup>

Just like in the poem, Love in Catherine’s speech is unapologetically exalted. The lovers act as the “eternal rocks beneath”, each keeping the other from drifting in an alien universe. Not only can two hearts beat as one, but also they form one identity. The lovers’ attitudes towards orthodox religion in the novel are also consistent with what is said in the poem, for on another occasion, Heathcliff declares he does not need a heaven beyond where Catherine is:

“No minister need come; nor need anything be said over me – I tell you, I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me.”<sup>100</sup>

Love is not dismissed as an illusion, but is instead recognized fully in Emily Brontë’s writings. However, despite the high exaltation made by lovers, the love between the lovers struggles to maintain its ideal status. This can not only be seen from the separation of Catherine and Heathcliff after they grow up, but also at the two’s last meeting, before Catherine dies. After a heated interchange, Catherine looks at Heathcliff, who refuses to come near her, and says to Nelly: “That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me – he’s in my soul.”<sup>101</sup>

The hope that two hearts could throb as one, after all, asks for too much in a Post-Romantic era. When lovers are unable to genuinely communicate with each other, their hearts are inevitably

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<sup>98</sup> Emily Brontë, “A. G. A. to A. S.,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 151, line 38-46.

<sup>99</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 73.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

severed from one another. It is only in Catherine's own heart, that she is able treasure the idea of a perfect Heathcliff for herself.

Though Love often falls short of expectations, the characteristics Love assumes in Emily Brontë's writings are nevertheless different from those in Arnold's, since they retain more Romantic features. For example, although Love in Brontë's writings is also characterized by passion, it is not reduced to lust or physical desire, like the instances in Arnold's "Switzerland" poems. The love between Catherine and Heathcliff may be passionate and even intoxicating, but it is not lowered to sexual desire or sensual love. In fact it transcends them, as the platonic nature of the love between Catherine and Heathcliff has been much discussed by the critics.<sup>102</sup>

Another characteristic of Love in Brontë's writings is its changeless nature. Unlike Marguerite, who is fickle and changeful, on many occasions, the lovers in Emily Brontë's writings remain faithful, no matter how they are separated by time, space, or death. For example, once Catherine asks Heathcliff whether he would forget her after she passes away, and fall in love with other women:

"Will you forget me – will you be happy when I am in the earth? Will you say twenty years hence, 'That's the grave of Catherine Earnshaw. I loved her long ago, and was wretched to lose her; but it is past. I've loved many others since – my children are dearer to me than she was, and, at death, I shall not rejoice that I am going to her, I shall be sorry that I must leave them!' Will you say so, Heathcliff?"

"Don't torture me till I'm as mad as yourself," cried he [Heathcliff], wrenching his head free, and grinding his teeth.<sup>103</sup>

After Catherine dies, not only is Heathcliff unable to forget her, the pain of losing her has also impelled him to plunge into a life-long frantic search for her existence on earth, in any form. Twenty years after Catherine passes away, on an occasion when Heathcliff is convinced that she has wandered back to Wuthering Heights as a ghost, the gush of anguish in Heathcliff's words shows that his love has scarcely decreased during the decades-long period:

He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears.

"Come in! Come in!" he sobbed. "Cathy, do come. Oh do – *once* more! Oh! My heart's daring, hear me *this* time – Catherine, at last!"<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> For example, Barbara Munson Goff in her article mentions that "The attraction between them [Catherine and Heathcliff] is asexual, though intensely physical." Goff, "Between Natural Theology and Natural Selection: Breeding the Human Animal in *Wuthering Heights*," *Victorian Studies* 27, no. 4 (Summer, 1984), 501.

<sup>103</sup> Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 140.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

This endurance of love, which lasts throughout time and space, is also often seen in Emily Brontë's poems. For example, in "Yes Holy be Thy Resting Place", upon visiting the lover's tomb, the speaker says:

Farewell farewell 'tis hard to part  
Yet loved one it must be  
I would not rend another heart  
Not even by blessing thee<sup>105</sup>

While in another poem, when the speaker is on a journey far away from his home and his lover, he professes that his love will remain changeless and faithful till he dies:

that pure light changeless and strong  
Cherished and watched and nursed so long  
That love that first its glory gave  
Shall be my pole star to the grave<sup>106</sup>

This kind of faithfulness towards love and the lover adds to the divine and celestial quality of love in Emily Brontë's writings, thus to some extent it retains its Romantic character.

When Love can endure the test of time, memories of the lover do not fade, but are preserved, and seem to be able to last for eternity. Therefore in Emily Brontë's writings it is rare to find cases of half-effaced memories. Instead memories stay fresh and vivid regardless of the passing of time. In fact, they sometimes have such a strong grip on one's mind that they begin to haunt the present, making one wish that he/she had the ability forget:

Yet could I with past pleasures,  
Past woe's oblivion buy –  
That by the death of my dearest treasures  
My deadliest pains might die.

O then another daybreak  
Might haply dawn above –  
Another summer gild my cheek,  
My soul, another love –<sup>107</sup>

Because memory always occupies a place in the speaker's mind, it makes the speaker unable to go into the next phase of life. The painful memories the speaker bears make it certain that another love will never come into his/her life again. In this instance, the retaining of memories from the past

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<sup>105</sup> Emily Brontë, "Yes Holy be Thy Resting Place," in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 150, line 13-16.

<sup>106</sup> Emily Brontë, "Now Trust a Heart that Trusts in You," *ibid.*, p. 55, line 21-24.

<sup>107</sup> Emily Brontë, "The Wind I Hear It Sighing," *ibid.*, p. 117, line 17-24.

becomes a form of torture, leaving the speaker forever in darkness, in the season of winter. Whereas in Arnold's writings memory inevitably slips away, leaving only traces behind, which makes the speaker unable to recall its full content, in Brontë's poem the problem is that memory refuses to go away.

In another poem "Remembrance", which is more widely known, the speaker goes to visit her lover's grave fifteen years after he died, and tells him:

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.

Then did I check the tears of useless passion –  
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;  
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten  
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

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?<sup>108</sup>

The death of her lover is so devastating that the speaker only manages to live on after "the days of golden dreams had perished." For after giving up hope, despair can no longer touch her. In this instance, the past love is so crucial to the speaker's existence that after it is snatched away from her, time stagnates, life's renewal stops. It is almost as if her heart was dead fifteen years ago with the death of her lover. Existence like this is bleak, for it is devoid of joy and hope. Meanwhile memories constantly prick the speaker, and remind her of what she has lost, that she has to curb the desire to indulge in them, for the fear that they would make her existence unbearable. At the end of the poem, the speaker does not turn from death to life after fifteen years' grieving: instead "she asks whether," after what has happened to her, "such a turning is possible" at all.<sup>109</sup>

What happens to the speaker in this poem also resembles Heathcliff's fate after Catherine's death. In these characters constructed by Brontë there is in general an inability to continue, and to put the past

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<sup>108</sup> Emily Brontë, "Remembrance," p. 9, line 17-32.

<sup>109</sup> Gezari, *Last Things*, 53.

behind them. However, though in *Wuthering Heights*, the love between Catherine and Heathcliff fails to live up to its ideal, the love of the second generation – that of Cathy and Hareton, is able to flourish at the end of the novel. But their love is different from the love of Catherine and Heathcliff. The passionate love between Catherine and Heathcliff runs through the novel like a torrent, and is in the end replaced by a quieter, calmer version of love. The love of the second generation has lost almost all the force and grandeur of its predecessor, and is instead primarily characterized by sympathy and mutual companionship. But perhaps because of this, it has managed to survive in the world.

Thus in a sense analogous to Arnold's journey, Emily Brontë's novel ends with a quieter, more domestic, and realistic marriage, which very much belongs to this world. An interesting difference lies in the fact that, while Arnold uses two consecutive love affairs to arrive at a peaceful state of mind, it takes Emily Brontë two generations to tell the same story.

But more importantly, unlike Arnold's spiritual journey, the ending of *Wuthering Heights* is not clear-cut but ambiguous, as if the past haunts the present, and will not go away quietly. Heathcliff's frantic search for Catherine persists till almost the end of the novel. Though in the end both are dead, Heathcliff and Catherine seem to have not left this world, but wander on the earth as ghosts. As if their desire to obtain what has been lost in this life is so strong that it persists into the afterlife. The same sentiment can also be seen from Brontë's poem "Loud Without the Wind was Roaring":

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 –<sup>110</sup>

Though in Emily Brontë's writings Love retains more Romantic features, it is also frequently accompanied by loss and grief. There is without exception, no lasting happiness achieved in Brontë's poems and novel. As a haunting presence that refuses to disappear completely, Love in the end is awkwardly given a place in the ghost zone to continue its existence, which is yet a reluctant acknowledgment of its failure in the real world. Thus as Arnold and Emily Brontë probed everywhere for possible sources of the divine, no resolutions they have tried have succeeded.

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<sup>110</sup> Emily Brontë, "Loud without the Wind was Roaring," in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 88, line 67-70.

## The Spiritual Destination of Arnold and Emily Brontë

Impelled by the same reasons, Arnold and Brontë go through similar quests that much overlap each other, but in the end they go separate ways. Arnold finds equilibrium of mind by turning from a fruitless search to the active service of the world, and becomes a prolific prose writer. Brontë, on the other hand, refuses to give up the effort to seek for answers in the universe, though becoming increasingly aware that there may not be answers waiting to be found. In their different ways, the two authors are both resigned to the fate they choose to bear, which restores some peace in their minds. In this section, I will delineate how they come to their respective spiritual destinations.

### “Empedocles on Etna”: The Death of Arnold’s Young Self

“Empedocles on Etna,” the long dramatic poem written by Arnold between 1849 and 1852,<sup>111</sup> is generally regarded as one of the most important English poems in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. The poem is a sustained effort to articulate and analyse the conflict of Arnold’s inner world, and was withdrawn by the author shortly after its first publication, which was then followed by a bitter repudiation in his own preface to the *Poems* of 1853. It is of little doubt that Arnold writes the poem in a state of ideological vacillation. While the incompatible and conflicting voices in the poem itself, which have the tendency to negate each other, further dramatize the state of mind the author was going through.<sup>112</sup>

Three main characters are featured in the poem, which represent three different ways of living one’s life. Callicles, who is a harp-player singing in the wood, is a symbol of youthful joy, and represents harmony and serenity. Pausanias, who is a physician from the nearby city, represents the kind of people who dedicate their lives to actively serving the world, and are willing to live within the limits of everyday life. Empedocles, who is a philosopher troubled by the restlessness of his own mind, represents, according to Arnold himself, a “refusal of limitation by religious sentiment,”<sup>113</sup> for he has “see[n] things as they are – the world as it is – God as he is: in their stern simplicity.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Allott, *Poems*, 154.

<sup>112</sup> Culler points out, “‘In Memoriam’, published two years before ‘Empedocles on Etna’, is the poem in which Tennyson struggles with the same intellectual and spiritual problems as Arnold did, one suspects a covert allusion. Of course, Tennyson’s poem differs from Arnold’s in that he won through to a kind of faith.” Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 161-162.

<sup>113</sup> C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry, *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 11.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

The plot of the poem is relatively simple. At the beginning, Pausanias, who has followed Empedocles to the mountains, encounters Callicles. After a short exchange between the two, Pausanias continues to go up to the top of the mountain to find Empedocles. When these two finally meet, Empedocles gives Pausanias some advice on how to live his life, then bids him to leave him alone. Throughout the poem, Callicles's song accompanies Empedocles when he is on the mountain. At the end of the poem, Empedocles throws himself into the volcano, for he is unable to resolve the spiritual dilemma he is facing.

The spiritual plague that tortures Empedocles belongs to the modern man. It derives from the crushing intellectual burden placed upon him by his age once he refuses to take comfort in illusions and religious sentiments, which is a situation that very much belongs to the author himself. This is in fact what impels Arnold to write the poem in the first place. As Arnold afterwards wrote to Clough to explain his motivation, "Woe was upon me if I analysed not my situation."<sup>115</sup> After a fruitless search in Nature and Love for a substitute for his religious faith, Arnold has come to the conclusion that they are merely dreams and illusions, and there is nowhere he can escape from the barren and desolate reality. In this case, the words cried out by Empedocles in the poem accurately describe the poet's own situation:

He hears nothing but the cry of the torrents,  
And the beating of his own heart.  
The air is thin, the veins swell,  
The temples tighten and throb there –  
Air! Air!<sup>116</sup>

In 1853, in a letter to Clough, Arnold declares: "Yes, – *congestion of the brain* is what we suffer from – I always feel it and say it – and cry for air like my own Empedocles."<sup>117</sup> To live in a world of only intellectual vigour, where human feeling is absent, is suffocating. And such a situation, for Arnold, must not continue. In the poem, unable to either live up to the demand to only live by truth, or accept a wholly barren and desolate human existence, Empedocles chooses to end his life, so that he could –

Not to die wholly, not to be all enslaved.  
I feel it in this hour. The numbing cloud  
Mounts off my soul; I feel it, I breathe free.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Matthew Arnold, "To Arthur Hugh Clough," Battersea, December 14, 1852, in Lowry, *Letters to Clough*, 126.

<sup>116</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna," in Allott, *Poems*, p. 195, line 213-217.

<sup>117</sup> Matthew Arnold, "To Arthur Hugh Clough," Edgbaston, February 12, 1853, p. 130.

<sup>118</sup> Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna," p. 203, line 406-408.

By jumping into the volcano, Empedocles has rescued himself from either of the terrible fates he was facing at the time. Firstly, Empedocles' death signifies a final refusal to accept reality as it is. For to consign himself to the empty, cheerless reality is to succumb to a spiritual death, and to become a living corpse, which means, as said in the poem, to "die wholly". But by jumping into the volcano Empedocles saves himself from this fate. In this regard, Empedocles' death is the last defiant gesture Arnold has made in his literary life,<sup>119</sup> the last attempt to break free from his own spiritual prison, and the final protest towards a barren and joyless existence laid in front of him. Secondly, Empedocles' death frees him from the intellectual burden he was carrying. For to continue to search for answers in a universe where there is no answer waiting to be found, is to "be all enslaved" by a "naked, eternally restless mind." The incessant torture from the "devouring flame of thought" also means that there is no prospect of attaining peace in his life. But by jumping into the volcano, Empedocles has spared himself this terrible fate, which he could apparently bear no longer.

Isobel Armstrong, in her *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, offers a different reading of "Empedocles on Etna". Focusing on unearthing the internal tensions generated within the poem itself, Armstrong points out Empedocles' own limitations and failures at "interpret[ing] the mythological experience of the naïve poet of joy, Callicles, in a *literal* way, undoing mythic thought and distancing himself from it so completely that he is incapable of understanding it."<sup>120</sup> Thus with the different perspectives adopted by Empedocles and Callicles, "Empedocles on Etna" becomes a double poem, which opens "quite different possibilities"<sup>121</sup> of interpretation along the same lyrical lines, each with their own advantages and limitations.

I do not adopt the same approach in interpreting "Empedocles on Etna", because of the specific goal I have in introducing this poem into the current discussion. My primary goal is to reveal Arnold's state of mind during the period the poem was composed – hence my quotations from his correspondence with Clough, as well as from the *Preface* – and then to compare his mental state with Brontë's.

Armstrong, on the other hand, explores the space the poem opens up within itself. As she relates in the introductory section of her book, a text could be seen as a contending site, where it "is endless struggle and contention, struggle with a changing project, struggle with the play of ambiguity and

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<sup>119</sup> Culler calls it "the supreme Prometheus defiance". Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 156.

<sup>120</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (NY: Routledge, 1993), 213.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

contradiction.”<sup>122</sup> She furthermore sees this as one way of circumventing “the problem of deciding what is ‘really’ a poet’s interests politically or what is ‘really’ intentional as against unconscious.”<sup>123</sup> Armstrong’s interpretation of the poem, which focuses on not so much the meaning the poet tries to deliver but on the different possibilities of interpretation the poem itself generates under specific social and cultural circumstances, enriches our understanding of the circumstances under which it was produced. This is consistent with the larger project of Armstrong’s book.

As an influential piece of scholarly work, Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry* has commented on the works of major Victorian poets, such as Tennyson, Browning, Arnold and Clough, in comprehensive detail. The fact that the work does not mention Emily Brontë at all, let alone listing her as a Victorian poet, reveals that there is still a gap in the current scholarship. However, more recently, critics such as Elisha Cohn have suggested that Brontë’s work can be read as “double text”, a phrase initially brought up in Armstrong’s work. My thesis continues to explore Emily Brontë’s work in this direction, and presents her within a larger literary, philosophical and cultural tradition.

Though in the poem, Empedocles throws himself into the crater, in real life, Arnold goes on to live his life. The poem is dismissed by the author on the ground that it does not provide joy to the reader, since in it “a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged,” in which “there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done.”<sup>124</sup> The author calls for an exchange of this “morbid” state of mind with “human actions”, since he believes the present age demands that Victorian intellectuals do so. But to be able to act upon reality, one must first accept it. Therefore this calling for action also signifies Arnold’s resignation to the fate his era has assigned to him, and his coming to the end of his intellectual struggle, and also in a sense, his acknowledgement of defeat.

Ironically, Arnold apparently follows the life advice Empedocles gives to Pausanias in the poem, which Empedocles has trouble accepting himself. Empedocles first tells Pausanias the unpleasant truth of the universe: the natural world functions in strict adherence to its own laws, which are unbound by human moral principles, and therefore it is perfectly amoral. Empedocles goes on to say that if Pausanias cannot accept this simple fact, it is because he still deludes himself with unfounded hopes and fears. But despair not, Empedocles continues, for –

Life still

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Preface to First Edition of *Poems*,” in Super, *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 1, *On the Classical Tradition* (1960), 2-3.

Leaves human effort scope.  
But, since life teems with ill,  
Nurse no extravagant hope;  
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair!<sup>125</sup>

Even if existence is barren and cheerless, there is still space left for human endeavour, For one can choose to live a modest life, assume the role assigned by society, and diligently and meticulously compete the tasks of everyday life. Empedocles also gives a piece of practical advice to Pausanias here, which is “to nurse no extravagant hope”, for the more one hopes, the more disappointed one may feel later. To live such a life as Empedocles describes is to assume the calm and tranquillity of a corpse, which is exempted from all the earthly troubles and earthly fears. But it is better, after all, to be untroubled and undisturbed than to suffer, as one must if refusing to accept reality as it is.

In a later poem, “Youth and Calm”, the speaker says:

Youth dreams a bliss on this side death.  
It dreams a rest, if not more deep,  
More grateful than this marble sleep;  
It hears a voice within it tell:  
*Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well.*  
'Tis all perhaps which man acquires,  
But 'tis not what our youth desires.<sup>126</sup>

After all the struggles, youth now dreams of a rest, and considers it bliss. To be calm, to acquire tranquillity is not youth's pursuit, but, the speaker says, it is perhaps what everyone ends up with. Though it is not a perfect place to be, it is the second best, therefore still good enough. More importantly, unlike the dreams of youth, it is achievable in real life.

In a way the poem echoes the ending of “Empedocles on Etna”:

The day in his hotness,  
The strife with the palm;  
The night in her silence,  
The stars in their calm.<sup>127</sup>

These last words are sung by Callicles the harp boy. It seems “calm” is also where Arnold finally arrives at at this stage of his life.

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<sup>125</sup> Arnold, “Empedocles on Etna,” p. 182, line 422-426.

<sup>126</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Youth and Calm,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 238, line 19-25.

<sup>127</sup> Arnold, “Empedocles on Etna,” p. 206, line 465-468.

To conclude, it may be said that “Empedocles on Etna” serves as a sort of catharsis for its author. In the poem, Arnold is able to throw part of himself – his own “personal Empedocles”<sup>128</sup> – into the volcano, so that he can come down from the mountain, and become a practical man, starting to live a modest life required by society, just like Pausanias. While the poet’s subsequent repudiation of the long poem is analogous to a rejection of his youthful self. “Empedocles on Etna” therefore signifies the beginning of a turning point in Arnold’s spiritual journey, while the preface has facilitated its completion. After these works, a new phase of Arnold’s literary life begins, as he turns his attention from poetry to criticism, and devotes most of his energy to writing prose during the rest of his literary life.

For Arnold, poetry is about the self, prose is about the world. The turn from poetry to prose signifies Arnold’s turn from the self to the world. In an era where truth cannot be uttered, but is buried or lost, prose draws Arnold away from the self, towards the world outside. It provides him with a place to direct his attention, a site to exert his frustrated energy, and gives him the equilibrium of mind he searches for so long. Years later, the changed tone in his prose works testifies to the resigned acquiescence Arnold ultimately reaches. In poetry Arnold struggles, but in prose he finally finds some peace of mind.

### Brontë’s Peace in Her Resolution of Forbearance

It is hard to say if Emily Brontë in the end arrives at a more comfortable position than Arnold does. Like Empedocles, the lonely metaphysical thinker in Arnold’s poem who has seen the world in its “stern simplicity”, Brontë seems to have the curious ability to pierce through the kaleidoscopic surface of life, and reach the bare truth beneath. But truth has turned out to be a heavy burden. Repeatedly featured in her poems, is the idea that the world is corrupted and false, and true joy and happiness are unattainable in this life. In one poem, the world is described as a place where:

Pleasure still will lead to wrong,  
And helpless Reason warn in vain;  
And Truth is weak, and Treachery strong;  
And Joy the surest path to Pain;  
And Peace, the lethargy of Grief;  
And Hope, a phantom of the soul;  
And life, a labour, void and brief;  
And Death, the despot of the whole!<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Culler, *Imaginative Reason*, 154.

<sup>129</sup> Emily Brontë, “How Clear She Shines,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 21, line 33-40.

The poem offers a bleak view of human existence. “Truth”, “Joy”, “Peace”, and “Hope” are the treasures of life, but they are all paired with their counterparts, which are far stronger and more prevailing than they are, and disputed one by one by the speaker. The poem goes on to say that life is meaningless and all the efforts are futile, while “Death” is the agent that can put an end to it all. It is not difficult to see that the speaker is pretty much disillusioned. But there was a time when truth was ardently pursued:

There was a time when my cheek burned  
To give such scornful fiends the lie  
Ungoverned nature madly spurned  
The law that bade it not defy  
O in the days of ardent youth  
I would have given my life for truth

For truth, for right, for liberty  
I would have gladly, freely died  
And now I calmly hear and see  
The vain man smile the fool deride,  
Though not because my heart is tame  
Though not for fear, though not for shame

My soul still chafes at every tone  
Of selfish and self-blinded error  
My breast still braves the world alone  
Steeled as it ever was to terror  
*Only I know however I frown  
The same world will go rolling on*<sup>130</sup>

In the “days of ardent youth”, the speaker is hopeful and would gladly give up her life for “truth”, “right”, and “liberty”. But now hope is crushed by the stern reality. As in the case of Arnold, when the dreams of youth pass away, there is only a barren, empty world left behind. The struggle seems futile, and the fight endless. And when life becomes a forced journey through a false world, death turns out to be an “everlasting haven” much desired by the sufferers. But will the speaker in Brontë’s poems gladly exchange her fate with senseless sleep, with eternal rest, and embrace death like Arnold’s Empedocles?

It seems that on many occasions, the characters in Emily Brontë’s poems do not opt for quiet acceptance or silent resignation, as Arnold eventually does, neither do they seek to spare themselves the endless struggle by jumping into the realm of death, as Empedocles does. This point can in fact be seen in the poem above. Though the speaker can calmly look at a corrupted, hostile world, it is not

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<sup>130</sup> Emily Brontë, “There was a Time When My Cheek Burned,” *ibid.*, p. 116, line 1-18 (my italics).

because her heart is “tamed”, for her “soul still chafes at every tone”, and her “breast still braves the world alone”. In other words, the speaker has not given up, but is instead still resisting her fate.

In the poem “Self-Interrogation”, after the speaker has fought for many a year, the same question is raised again:

‘Then art thou glad to seek repose?  
Art glad to leave the sea,  
And anchor all thy weary woes  
In calm Eternity?’<sup>131</sup>

To which the speaker replies, “rest is sweet,” but a brave heart [...] Would rather fight than rest.” She furthermore declares, “as the long war closing in defeat,” the defeat would be “serenely borne”. This answer shows a different state of mind from that of Arnold. Rest is good, but a person with a brave heart would rather fight till the last breath, and calmly accept the defeat when the time comes.

From the speakers of these poems we see a position that may very well have been adopted by their author. Thus they indicate that the place Emily Brontë eventually arrives at, is to soldier on, and to continue to fight a war that she is self-conscious of having little prospect of winning – it is to fight for the sake of fighting. For to give up, to accept reality as it is, is to yield and acknowledge defeat. On the other hand, only the weak and the uncourageous would give in to death and seek rest. There is, one might sense, something tragic in this position. But it is also true that once formed, this resolution of quiet forbearance brings a state of calm and peacefulness of its own. Thus in the end Emily Brontë obtains a resignation of a different kind, which is not to accept the world as it is and go on living with what is left in it, like Arnold, but to accept the fate to combat with reality for as long as need be, with calmness and unremitting courage.

It is hard to tell how much the fever that comes with this fierce and uncompromising position is soothed, through the walks on the moors, the time spent with Nature, and the reminiscence of Romantic dreams Emily Brontë clearly indulges herself in from time to time in her life. In the poem “Shall Earth No More Inspire Thee”, a voice, which is presumably a voice of Nature, lures the speaker to come back and dwell in the place it comes from:

Shall earth no more inspire thee,  
Thou lonely dreamer now?  
Since passion may not fire thee  
Shall nature cease to bow?

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<sup>131</sup> Emily Brontë, “Self-Interrogation,” *ibid.*, p. 24, line 17-20.

Thy mind is ever moving  
In regions dark to thee;  
Recall its useless roving –  
Come back and dwell with me –

I know my mountain breezes  
Enchant and soothe thee still –  
I know my sunshine pleases  
Despite thy wayward will –

...  
I've watched thee every hour –  
I know my mighty sway –  
I know my magic power  
To drive thy griefs away – <sup>132</sup>

Nature has the ability to divert the speaker's mind from its ceaseless roving, as she searches futilely. Nature has the soothing power to take the speaker's grief away, even for a moment. But though the world of vision has the balmy effect of alleviating the pain, the speaker knows that what it creates is false, and cannot be relied on. This point is shown in another poem "How Long Will You Remain?". When one of the speakers is asked to go to rest at night, she replies:

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 thought that never comes with day  
A vision dear though *false* for well my mind  
Knows what a bitter waking waits behind<sup>133</sup>

In another poem, in one of the darker moments, the visions that arise at night are likened to lingering shadows of youth. Like vultures they prey on the speaker's mind:

This dark night has won me  
To wander far away –  
Old feelings gather fast upon me  
Like vultures round their prey – <sup>134</sup>

The speaker soon prays that they will leave her alone, for she has now outgrown the fancies they create:

'Tis like old age pretending  
The softness of a child,  
My altered, hardened spirit bending

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<sup>132</sup> Emily Brontë, "Shall Earth No More Inspire Thee," *ibid.*, p. 130, line 1-12, 17-20.

<sup>133</sup> Emily Brontë, "How Long Will You Remain?" *ibid.*, p. 110, line 7-12 (my italics).

<sup>134</sup> Emily Brontë, "The Wind I Hear It Sighing," *ibid.*, p. 117, line 5-8.

To meet their fancies wild<sup>135</sup>

In the end, the speaker in the poem yearns for an eternal rest to end her agony, for the grief in her “aching chest” has now become too heavy to bear.

Collectively, these three poems demonstrate Emily Brontë’s inability to leave the Romantic world, even after it is declared false by Reason. There is perhaps a certain kind of precariousness in these lines, as if things are at times at peril and would soon fall apart. A number of her poems also talk about the vanishing of hope with the passing of youth. It is not difficult to imagine that as hope diminishes as years go on, and courage is constantly called upon, the world of Imagination is one of the few places where Brontë can ease her heart. Thus though knowing it is false, she still takes refuge in it, and it remains a secret place for her to retreat from the chaotic world outside throughout her life.<sup>136</sup>

Unlike Tennyson, who chooses to dwell in the city of God because he cannot afford to proclaim it false, Emily Brontë no longer defends the credibility of the world of Imagination. But though acknowledging its illusory nature, she nevertheless cannot live without it, as Arnold does. Thus when Tennyson clings to the old world of God with a tinge of despair, and Arnold steps into the new world of reason with disheartened resignation, Emily Brontë is stuck somewhere in between. Faced with a reality that she cannot accept but is powerless to refute, Brontë is unable to either go backward, or proceed forward, but is resigned to the fate to struggle, to continue to seek, in a world where there is no answer waiting to be found. John Hewish says that Emily Brontë possesses a “religious cast of mind”, which accurately points out the reason of her sufferings. Though Brontë has the deep desire to believe like her literary predecessors, the early Victorian period sees the increasing secularization of literature, philosophy, and culture. Therefore Brontë’s spiritual needs cannot keep up with the developments of her own era. In this regard, Emily Brontë’s spiritual plight represents that of a generation who are unable to free themselves from the ideological crisis imposed by their time, and move on to a different world.

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117, line 13-16.

<sup>136</sup> Perhaps this is part of the reason that the imaginary Gondal world is so important to Emily Brontë, even in her adult life.

Still, Emily Brontë seems to have found some peace and contentment in her own resolution. In a poem entitled “All day I’ve toiled but not with pain”, which is an undated poem with autobiographical features,<sup>137</sup> the speaker says:

O may I never lose the peace  
That lulls me gently now  
Through time may change my youthful face  
And years may shade my brow<sup>138</sup>

Like the bluebell on the hill, which would gladly bloom and calmly fade, the speaker merely desires to face the fate that waits ahead with peace, be it desolate, bleak or devoid of hope. A similar mood of calmness and contentment also appears on the last surviving diary page of Brontë’s, which is dated 30 July 1845, three years before the author’s death:

I am quite contented for myself – not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty, and having learnt to make the most of the present and hope for the future with less fidget[i]ness that I cannot do all I wish – seldom or ever troubled with nothing to do.<sup>139</sup>

In her life Emily Brontë does not, like Arnold, turn her gaze from the inner world to the world outside, and actively engage with her society. She is most likely far less interested in worldly concerns than in the events that happen in her imaginary world, and is evidently cynical about the many social endeavours that Arnold later busies himself with. Far away from society, in her secluded and solitary life, Brontë finds her own peace.

In the winter of 1848, Emily Brontë’s health fails rapidly. In her terminal illness Brontë refuses all medicine and medical advice, and insists that “no poisoning doctor” should come near her. Meanwhile she continues to perform her daily duty around the house: baking the food, doing the needle work, feeding the dogs. No adjustment is made to accommodate her illness till the very last day of her life. Her physical and mental state at the time is captured by her sister Charlotte in a letter:

She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. Yet, while physically she perished, mentally, she grew stronger than we had yet known her. Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love... the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the faded eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Gezari in her notes to the poem says, “The poem is a prayer, and [...] can easily be ascribed to Brontë.” *Complete Poems*, 281.

<sup>138</sup> Emily Brontë, “All Day I’ve Toiled But Not with Pain,” *ibid.*, p. 191, line 13-16.

<sup>139</sup> Emily J. Brontë, Diary Paper, July 31, 1845, in Smith, *Letters*, vol. 1, 409, electronic edition.

<sup>140</sup> Charlotte Brontë, “Biographical Notice to Ellis and Acton Bell,” in Jack, *Wuthering Heights*, 305.

There is no doubt a great deal of Stoic forbearance exhibited here. In her nearly unreasonable stubbornness there can be perceived a contending gesture, to not yield to the power that works in the universe, and not succumb to a cruel and bitter reality. The way Brontë confronts death tells something about the nature of her adamant perseverance, which does not fade with youth or time.

As we have seen, though faced with the same spiritual dilemma, Arnold and Brontë eventually come to different conclusions. The reason for this difference is that, essentially, the two authors have different goals, and are therefore looking for not quite the same thing. Arnold wishes to achieve balance and equilibrium of mind, to see his way through a hazardous and chaotic world. As he once wrote to Clough, his “one natural craving is not for profound thoughts, mighty spiritual workings etc. etc. but a distinct *seeking of my way as far as my own nature is concerned.*”<sup>141</sup> It is a rather modest claim, for it only concerns the individual. And it tells us that Arnold is not so much an active reformer as a quiet observer. For he is not so much concerned with changing the world as with understanding it, in order to pass through it safely, and rightly. However, this is not the case with Brontë. What she seeks for is to lift the veil of Truth, and to behold that glorious face. As expressed in her poem “The Philosopher”, “Had I but seen his glorious eye [...] I ne’er had called oblivion blest,”<sup>142</sup> Brontë would rather bear a life of pain and strife, in order to catch a glimpse of truth on earth. So she perseveres till the end of her life.

Their different social circumstances, learning, personalities, temperaments, and in the end, their different ways of viewing the ultimate meaning of human life, lead the two authors onto different paths. Arnold wants to accommodate himself to a grating world, while Brontë seeks to change reality so as to make it liveable. Arnold wants to quell the frenzy, to escape the restlessness his age has bestowed upon him, Emily Brontë wants to behold the light, to see the hidden star burning in the distant sky. Arnold curses the strife, Emily Brontë curses the darkness. For Arnold the search for a lost spiritual home is a journey of reconciliation and acceptance. For Emily Brontë, it is a journey of quest and adventure. Between these two authors, Arnold is more Victorian, and Emily Brontë more Romantic.

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<sup>141</sup> Matthew Arnold, “To Arthur Hugh Clough,” Thun, Sunday, September 23, 1849, in Lowry, *Letters to Clough*, 110 (my italics).

<sup>142</sup> Emily Brontë, “The Philosopher,” in Gezari, *Complete Poems*, p. 8, line 45, 49.



Baffled, unknown, self-consumed;  
Whose too bold dying song  
Stirred, like a clarion-blast, my soul.<sup>146</sup>

The “too bold dying song” probably refers to Emily Brontë’s “No Coward Soul is Mine”, which at the time was regarded as the last poem she wrote.<sup>147</sup> Brontë’s poem bluntly refutes orthodox religious creeds, and acknowledges that the power of knowing truth resides in the self, which is presumably “too bold” for Arnold. There is a genuine appreciation of Brontë’s poetic power and ability in these lines. The comparison to Byron, for the “passion, vehemence, grief” and “daring” gesture they both share, shows a certain degree of admiration for Brontë. However, these stanzas are all the more significant, and reveal more details of Arnold’s opinion on Emily Brontë, when they are linked to another poem written by Arnold: “Courage”.

The poem “Courage” was written around the same time Arnold composed “Empedocles on Etna”, and its narrative likewise testifies to the spiritual conflict Arnold went through during this time. The poem begins by acknowledging that we must tame our rebellious will, and submit to Nature’s law. But then it goes on to say that those “sterner spirits” who raise their arms dauntlessly, in an age when even the boldest are swept along by fate and circumstances, are worthy of our praise. Thus the words Arnold writes about Byron in this poem, could also serve as an apt reference that conveys his true feeling towards Emily Brontë:

Those stern spirits let me prize,  
Who, though the tendance of the whole  
They less than us might recognize,  
Kept, more than us, their strength of soul.

...

Let us dare admire,  
If not thy fierce and turbid song,  
Yet that, in anguish, doubt, desire,  
Thy fiery courage still was strong.

The sun that on thy tossing pain  
Did with such cold derision shine,  
He crushed thee not with his disdain –  
He had his glow, and thou hadst thine.<sup>148</sup>

Arnold acknowledges that souls like Byron and Emily Brontë had their “glow” in the world, just like the dazzling sun has his upon the earth. The author may very well admire their courage to shine, but it is not difficult to see that Arnold has also underestimated these writers’ intellectual acumen and

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<sup>146</sup> Arnold, “Haworth Churchyard,” p. 428, line 92-100.

<sup>147</sup> See Gezari’s notes on the poem in *Complete Poems*, 278.

<sup>148</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Courage,” in Allott, *Poems*, p. 148, line 9-12, 17-24.

ability to see the real world properly. For he believes that such fierce spirits might recognize less than us “the tendance of the whole”, which may count towards the “strength of soul” they preserve. Therefore, his admiration is not derived from their “fierce and turbid song” itself, but is from the fact that they have the courage to sing in a turbulent world.

Returning to the stanzas in “Haworth Churchyard”, we see that Emily Brontë’s ability to move Arnold is limited to her song’s influence on his heart, but not on his reason. Like a clarion-blast, it stirs him on an emotional and instinctual ground, rather than an intellectual one. Also, the words “baffled” and “self-consumed” are used to describe Emily Brontë, which implicitly says that her courage to sing her song is at least partially derived from her blindness and lack of understanding of the whole spiritual situation of the era she lived in. However, the analysis of Emily Brontë’s poems in the previous sections, shows that this is not the case. Brontë has in fact been able to see the world as it is just as Arnold has, while the difference lies only in the choice she eventually makes, which testifies to her courage.

Thus as a contemporary critic, Arnold demonstrates both an uncommon appreciation of Emily Brontë’s poetic power, and at the same time an underestimation of her intellectual ability to grapple with the facts of her era. Through Arnold’s comments on Brontë in “Haworth Churchyard”, we get a glimpse of some of the authentic opinions Emily Brontë’s literary companions have on her and her works.

# Conclusion

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In the conclusion, I will first recapitulate the content and major findings in each chapter, then go on to talk about the final conclusions I have reached when linking the chapters together. Finally, I will consider the larger picture of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century intellectual movement the thesis has managed to present, and the trends thereof perceived, when the five authors are put together.

Chapter One discusses the post-Romantic features of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, through a comparison with Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, a novel produced at the height of the German Romantic movement. At the beginning of the chapter, it is shown that from language, subject matter to central concerns, both novels bear distinct Romantic features.

Turning to the central themes of the novels, the chapter finds that from the conceptions of Childhood, Human fate and suffering, to those of Love and Death, the two novels have obvious affinities to the Romantic tradition, with *Wuthering Heights* having clear variations. Whereas in *Hyperion*, life's balance and renewal are present in the plot, despite the fluctuation of fate and the occurrence of death, in *Wuthering Heights*, the characters struggle to restore the peace of childhood, the union with Nature, and find true love and happiness in their lives. In *Wuthering Heights*, the holistic vision of the world, the self, and human lives which is a hallmark of the Romantic movement gives away to the shattered and disillusioned depiction of life seen in Catherine and Heathcliff's adulthood, after a short period of childhood bliss. Love, peace, and unity with Nature can no longer be retained in this life, but need to be sought for in death and the afterlife. Therefore, the collapse of the balance between the self and the world, the diminishing of hope towards the future, along with the characters' fervent yearning for death, all illustrate that *Wuthering Heights* is a novel that belongs to the post-Romantic era, where the ideals upheld by the Romantic writers of the previous generation gradually fade away, and vanish into the past.

The overall patterns of the narratives of *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* also show the two authors' grasp of dialectical philosophy in Romantic literature, which is a distinct feature in the German Romantic tradition. Through the circular journey that *Hyperion* goes through, *Hyperion* reveals that the world is "One differentiated in itself", as all lives originate from the One and return to the One. Similarly, at the end of *Wuthering Heights* peace again dawns onto earth, as the second generation leaves the Heights to start their new life.

Lastly, through comparing the narrative structure and technique of the two novels, the chapter finds that both novels show a clear kinship with “novel of education” and “novel of letters”, both of which are forms that are widely adopted by European Romantic authors. *Hyperion* offers an exemplary case in which these two forms are successfully combined, while *Wuthering Heights* shows further developments. The latter’s evolution from early Romantic writings can further be seen from the characters’ thwarted pursuit of self-identity and the novel’s ambiguous and subtle ending, which opens space for multiple interpretations.

Through the comparisons of *Hyperion* and *Wuthering Heights* in several aspects, which encompass their language, major themes, narrative structures and techniques, Chapter One explores Brontë’s affinity with German Romantic tradition in key concepts adopted in the narrative as well the form of the novel, while at the same time pointing out the distinct post-Romantic characters of Brontë’s writing.

Continuing the discussion on Brontë’s relationship with German Romanticism, Chapter Two directs its attention to the mystical, or visionary aspect of Brontë’s writings, through a comparison to Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night*. The chapter first introduces Carlyle’s seminal article “Novalis”, and discusses its potential impact on Brontë’s thinking through its introduction of Novalis’s writings and German metaphysical ideas.

After this, the chapter offers a brief sketch of the changing perception of Truth and the role of Art and Imagination in the German Romantic movement, then points out that the visionary aspect in both authors’ writings has a clear lineage derived from this particular strand of thinking. Next, through the discussions on the two authors’ dealing with a series of traditional Romantic concepts in their writings, which include Day and Night, Dream and Reality, Slumber and Awakening, Death and Life, as well as Romantic Love, the chapter shows that Novalis and Brontë often share close, and sometimes stark similarities in their handling of these concepts, which further reveals the possible influence of German Romanticism on Brontë’s thinking.

At the same time, the chapter shows that post-Romantic features continue to be present in Brontë’s writings. The waning power of imagination, the intensified yearning for the return of the Night, the ambiguity of the authenticity of Dreams and visions, along with the appearance of the naturalistic depictions of Death in Brontë’s poems, are all clear signs of an author who writes in a post-Romantic age.

The transmutation of the Romantic ideas in Brontë's writings is again revealed through a comparison of the composition principles in the *Hymns* and Brontë's writings. While the *Hymns* forms a constellation of meanings which all contribute to a harmonizing, coherent totality, thus offering an exemplary case in fulfilling the Romantic poetic program, in Brontë's works the meanings of a given concept break down and diffuse into different directions, and reveal the underlying contradictions of reality. This feature further shows Brontë's engagement with her own time – the early Victorian era.

Chapter Two, through exploring the visionary aspect of Novalis and Brontë's writings, has revealed the potential direct influence of Novalis's works on Brontë. At the same time, by introducing several of Brontë's poems into the discussion, the chapter finds that, consistent with her novel *Wuthering Heights*, the post-Romantic features of Brontë's writings are equally present in her lyrical works.

Having explored the influence of German Romanticism on Emily Brontë, Chapter Three turns attention to Brontë's engagement with the rising science discourse in the early Victorian era, by comparing the manifestation of natural science discourse in her writings with Tennyson's as seen in his *In Memoriam*. A few of Brontë's Belgian essays are introduced and used in the discussion in this chapter.

The chapter first gives a brief introduction of the rise of the pre-Darwinian discourse in the early Victorian era, then goes on to introduce Chambers' *Vestiges*, an influential theoretical work on natural science at the time. By introducing this important work, and furthermore detailing Chambers' treatment of several issues relating to the debates of natural science and religion, the section sketches out the general intellectual and cultural environment of the Victorian era, within which both Tennyson and Brontë's works are produced.

After this, the chapter deals with the respective views held by Tennyson and Brontë, on the topic of the nature of Nature. Tennyson, who was distressed by the ruthless and chaotic Nature depicted by Lyell at the time, took temporary refuge in the belief of the supremacy of "feeling" over "knowledge", before finding more reconciliatory and satisfactory answers in Chambers' work later. Brontë, on the other hand, through depicting a Nature of destruction in her writing, tellingly reveals the fundamental conflicts and strife existing in the system of Nature, which shows a view that is more akin to Lyell's. Tennyson and Brontë's respective views on the fundamental principles at work in Nature provide the overall basis from which they reach their conclusions on human nature, human beings' place in the natural world, and the prospect of human civilization.

Having found renewed faith in the benevolence of Nature and the progressive development of the natural world through Chambers' work, Tennyson maintains his belief in the pivotal place human beings occupy in the natural creation, as well as in the immortality of the human soul. He furthermore upholds the belief in the perfectibility of humanity. In a stark contrast, Brontë offers a trenchant and unflattering account of human nature, which is consistent with her depiction of a Nature of destruction. For Brontë, human beings are an intrinsic part of the natural world, who not only possess no nobler qualities than other animals on earth, but also are subject to the same laws that regulate the development of all other organic forms in Nature.

The chapter then argues that Brontë's familiarity and engagement with the ideas and concepts in pre-Darwinian science could be seen in the natural framework of *Wuthering Heights*. Through the analysis of several passages in the novel, as well as the overall principle the novel adopts in the construction of its plot, it is found that Brontë not only has a thorough understanding of the roles inherited qualities and external factors play in the development of the characters, but is familiar with Lamarckian evolutionary theory and the principles of cross-breeding and hybridization. Brontë's knowledge of natural science discourse is more extensive than people usually recognize.

Finally, the chapter looks at Tennyson and Brontë's respective views on the future of human society and human civilization. Tennyson, who has successfully retained his faith in the upward direction of the natural world and perfectibility of the human soul, at the end of *In Memoriam* offers an optimistic view on the collective future of the human race. Consistent with this conclusion, he also sees the occurrence of wars and violence as lamentable deviations from the overall progression of human civilization. This is not the case with Brontë. In her essay "The Palace of Death", Brontë pointedly reveals the driving force behind human civilization – Intemperance – and forewarns of its potential to lead humans to their own demise. While in one of the last poems she wrote, "Why Ask What Time What Clime", she again depicts a gloomy picture of the future of humankind, by pointing to the real nature of war, which is nothing but the ultimate manifestation of Nature's principle actively at work in human society.

Chapter Three, through comparing the contrasting views held by Tennyson and Brontë on a series of issues pertaining to the debate of natural science and religion at the time, finds that Brontë occupies an unusual place among her contemporaries. Unlike Tennyson and others who tried to reconcile between science and religion, Brontë largely leaves an orthodox Christian belief behind, and instead

opts for a purely naturalistic view on Nature, human nature, and the future of the human race, as seen in Lyell.

While Tennyson does his best to synthesize Christian belief and modern science, thereby retaining his faith in God, Brontë, seeing Nature in a more brutal and unrelenting light, chooses to break off from orthodox religious belief and recognise the reality as delineated by natural science. By doing so, she steps into the Godless world of the Victorian era with its profound feeling of dislocation and homelessness, and this is where Brontë engages with Arnold's struggles.

Thus Chapter Four looks at the ideological trajectories Arnold and Brontë went through, by introducing Arnold's early poems. The chapter first shows that after Arnold and Brontë similarly abandon the truth acclaimed by orthodox Christian belief, they are left in a Godless world, and confronted with a cold, hard reality unable to give them spiritual comfort.

Such a situation propels Arnold and Brontë to resort to the Romantic legacy of the previous generation for refuge, solace, and possible answers. Arnold's attempt at bringing back a holistic vision of the world is largely thwarted, compared to which Brontë achieves success to a larger extent. The chapter then proceeds to explore two particular agents Arnold and Brontë used to retrieve the Romantic vision of harmony: Nature and Love. Where Arnold tries to follow the steps of early Romantics, he only manages to present a disparate, lifeless Nature in his poems. In the end, Arnold believes the sentiment of being "in harmony with Nature" is but an illusion, while the only useful lesson one can learn from Nature is its stoic ability to move along its course in an indifferent and amoral universe. On the other hand, Nature in Brontë's poems retains some of the most distinct Romantic features, where Imagination's healing power is able to transform the existing fragmented world into a new one. However, though the Romantic vision can sometimes be transiently achieved in her poems, it is not lasting or durable.

Turning to the depictions of Romantic Love in the two authors' works, the chapter finds that Love in Arnold's poem takes on several secularized features. Genuine communication between lovers becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible. Love has descended into lust, and become soiled and corrupted, thus no longer possessing the celestial quality seen in early Romantic writings. Furthermore, Love has ceased to be eternal, but subject to the erosion of time. By contrast, Love in Brontë's poems and novel preserves more characteristics of the Romantic era, though it has also, more often than not, failed to live up to its full Romantic ideal. This could be seen from the fact that the love in Brontë's writings is rarely degraded to lust or sexual desires, but has maintained its pure

and celestial features seen in traditional Romantic writings. Brontë's lovers also in many instances remain faithful to each other, despite the separation by time or space, while the memories of the loved one accompany the lover, through the remaining years of his/her life. But despite these features, just like the harmonious vision in *Nature*, Love has also proved to be transient in Brontë's works, and is almost always accompanied by loss, grief and bitter regret.

Through these discussions, the chapter has come to the conclusion that both Arnold and Brontë fail to find ultimately satisfactory solutions through the legacy of Romanticism. When compared to Arnold, however, Brontë has managed to retain more Romantic features of *Nature* and *Love* in her works.

After this, the chapter looks at the ideological destinations Arnold and Brontë finally arrive at, through an analysis of Arnold's "Empedocles on Etna", as well as a few of Brontë's poems. "Empedocles on Etna" signals the turning point of Arnold's literary career, after which he turned his attention from poetry to prose, from the pursuit of metaphysical answers to the active service of the world. In doing so, Arnold also proclaims the death of his youth and the end of his spiritual quest. Brontë, on the other hand, does not yield to the demand of the practical world, but goes on searching for answers in a changed world with stoic forbearance. The chapter lastly shows despite the rare appreciation of Brontë's poetic talent, how inadequately Arnold understands Brontë's grasp of the facts of the era on an intellectual level, through an analysis of his poem "Haworth Churchyard."

Through a comparison of Arnold's early poems with Brontë's poetic works and novel, Chapter Four finds that Brontë's writings have distinct features of the early Victorian era, while the delineation of her ideological trajectory in this chapter, further reveals the unique place she holds in 19<sup>th</sup>-century intellectual and cultural movements.

Through a series of comparisons made between the works of Brontë and those of Hölderlin, Novalis, Tennyson and Arnold, from their central concerns, to the common themes they engage with, to the narrative techniques they adopt, I have presented a relatively comprehensive picture of where Emily Brontë stands in relation to the larger trends of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary and intellectual movements.

It could be said that essentially, there are two ultimately incongruent paradigms of thought in Brontë's works, one derived from the Romantic tradition of the previous generation, the other from the science discourse of the early Victorian period. Many of the conflicts and tensions we have seen in Brontë's writings are generated from this. Though the central concern of Emily Brontë's works

has always been a semi-religious preoccupation with the meaning of human existence, such a spiritual quest is derived from Brontë's belief that orthodox Christian faith has failed to offer a credible account of the world with all its sufferings, when faced with the challenges of natural science. However, although science's articulation of the mechanism of the universe is logically convincing, and has the support of empirical evidence, it has proved to be inadequate to satisfy the spiritual need of a religious mind, which longs for the existence of a solid ideological ground to grant human life meaning. Such discontent towards a cold, harsh reality founded on scientific deduction thus propels Brontë to search for answers in the works of her Romantic forbears. And though the quest is ultimately unsatisfying, to Emily Brontë, Romantic dreams have always remained a source of solace, and a place for refuge.

Thus Brontë's spiritual journey offers an unusual example of how an author is perpetually caught up in the spiritual dilemma of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For her, what is logically valid is not spiritually satisfying, what is emotionally fulfilling cannot stand on the rational ground of science. Much of her writings exhibits a vacillation between these positions, and an *inability* to decide where to stop. Brontë's doomed quest in a Godless universe not only gives us a new understanding of the nature of her works, but also bespeaks the profound challenges many of her contemporaries needed to face.

Decades later, Nietzsche, "a later heir of Romantic thought", would "by a drastic exercise of the principle of parsimony", cancel "the role of nature as well as God, leaving only one agent to play out the ancient spiritual plot [of fall and redemption]" – the human mind.<sup>1</sup> By declaring the death of God, Nietzsche has made Man his own Master, set free from the search for an ideological center outside of the self. Thus following the Romantics' effort of balancing between a subjective human mind and an objective universe, in Nietzsche's work, the Creator and the creature have finally merged and become one. The last lamentation for the passing away of the old Master has thus been relinquished.

At the same time, as critics such as John Maynard and Elisha Cohn have recently proposed, in Brontë's works there is a major mode of Victorian dramatic monologue. Maynard specifically comments that "strong Romantic themes ... are stated strongly in her [Brontë's] poetry but always placed in perspective and turned over to us for resolution and judgment."<sup>2</sup> Cohn goes on to state that Brontë's works can be read as a kind of "double text", a phrase initially brought up by Isobel

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<sup>1</sup> Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 121.

<sup>2</sup> Maynard, "Poetry of Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë", in *A Companion to the Brontës*, 243.

Armstrong to refer to literary texts' ability to contextualize. Both critics point to the distinct tendency of Brontë's writings to historicize its own conditions and to incessantly self-reflect. But the doubleness, or sometimes the multitudinousness, of Brontë's writings is not limited to such a situation alone.

Sometimes this feature manifests itself in the form of warring voices in the speaker's heart, an example of which is the poem "The Philosopher". Sometimes we find it in the intentional ambiguity of a given line or phrase, which creates a sense of irony, such as Lockwood's thoughts at the end of *Wuthering Heights*. At other times it is "double texts" in Armstrong's sense, and we can see this in the poem "A Day Dream." This "double feature" not only adds a critical and dialectical edge to Brontë's works, but is also, for Brontë personally, an important method in her process of working out a viable solution during her spiritual and mental quandaries, which shows a considerable amount of artistic control. In this regard, the "double text" in Brontë's works bears her own brand.

Apart from the effort to achieve a deeper understanding of Emily Brontë's metaphysical thinking and spiritual pursuit, the thesis has also delineated a larger trend in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century European literary and intellectual history. Together, the five authors we have examined so far, Hölderlin, Novalis, Tennyson, Brontë and Arnold, have formed a bigger picture which shows one direction the European intellectual movement takes, from the height of early Romanticism to the secularization of the early Victorian era, to the beginning of Modernism (as heralded by Nietzsche). The thesis has therefore, to a certain extent, presented a "history of ideas" of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In recent scholarship, Colin Jager argues in his *The Book of God* (2007), that "the humanist technique of linking secularization to modernization, evident in the approaches of Abrams and Hartman, wrongly supposes that modernity is a singular and historically inevitable event rather than a multiple and contingent one."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to propose that secularization should not be equated with the "religious decline", but should be viewed as a process of differentiation, which is "the emancipation of a variety of forms of cultural authority from religious control."<sup>4</sup> It would be evident that the present thesis takes an approach akin to Abrams'. Jager's idea, however, offers a useful alternative perspective, and serves as a powerful reminder that the shape of history is conditioned by the place the narrator occupies in the time of history itself, and is therefore always contingent.

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<sup>3</sup> Jager, *The Book of God*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

The thesis also shows the common strands of thinking between German Romanticism and British Romanticism, and that British writers such as Tennyson, Arnold, and Brontë are more receptive to German Romanticism than is usually recognized. All of them have, for example, received substantial influences from German writers mediated by a third party – Carlyle – while for Arnold and Brontë the knowledge of German Romantic writings goes well beyond this.<sup>5</sup> The thesis has therefore highlighted the nature of the European Romantic movement as an integral movement, to which both the German and the British contribute a part.

Lastly, the study of Emily Brontë with four male writers has put Brontë into an intellectual tradition that is dominated by male authors. By unearthing the intellectual merits of Brontë's works, the thesis has drawn attention to Brontë's status as not only a novelist and a poet, but also a Victorian intellectual with sound knowledge and abilities for logical reasoning and philosophical thinking, living in an age when female authors are often regarded as intellectually limited.

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<sup>5</sup> It has been noted that "Arnold was familiar with [...] works of German poets". Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics*, 155.

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