"I'll Try to Break their Hearts by Breaking My Own": Catherine's Heterodoxic Love Triangle

Ibrahim Alhiyari[1]

[1]Assistant professor, English Dept, Faculty of Literatures, Yarmouk University

Email: ibrahim.alhiyari@yu.edu.jo

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ABSTRACT:

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) resists conventional interpretations of love, morality, religion, and social order, presenting an unorthodox, romantic triangle among Catherine Earnshaw, Heathcliff, and Edgar Linton that challenges Victorian ideals of marriage and domesticity. The novel reflects nineteenth-century declining confidence in ecclesiastical authority, constructing a narrative in which obsessive love transcends conventional distinctions between virtue and sin, life and death, and sacred and profane. From her early childhood, Catherine (along with Heathcliff) tosses the bible aside, identifying herself as willful, unreligious, and independent. While Heathcliff cannot accept sharing her with Edgar and takes every opportunity to discredit him as a "milk-sop," the latter describes him as a "moral poison" and a "most diabolical man" before he declares the termination of the love triangle, giving Catherine a final ultimatum to choose between him or Heathcliff. Aside from its failure, proposing an emotional triadic relationship to Victorian audiences reveals Bronte's attempt to join her non-conformism with female liberty to challenge the conventional understanding of domesticity.

Keywords: *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë, Victorian Religion, Emotional Authenticity, Love Triangle.

1. Introduction

Since its publication in 1847, *WH* has not ceased to interest readers through its unconventional treatment of love, revenge, death, religion, and morality inviting a plethora of critics to introduce various interpretations to decode its core, a difficulty best summarized by J. Hillis Miller who laments its lack of "logical order" that yields "ultimate bafflement" while another simultaneously decries its "missing center" (1980, 92; Jacobs 1979, 68). As scholars point to *WH's* inherent impossibility of interpretation and "incommunicability of feeling" (Husain 2021, 34), they overlook a major aspect that adds to *WH's* mystique which is the indecipherability of Catherine's split emotions among two men and her bold proposition to keep them connected to her in a love triangle they both are aware of. She feels incomplete with either in exclusion of the other and insists on owning both, but as the men reject her ground-breaking, too-progressive version of polyamory, she falls ill and dies soon after.

The novel attempts to construct a world where passion frequently supersedes religion and social expectations. Its progressive vision of religion

resonated well with Victorian audiences who placed emphasis on emotional freedom and "the religion of the heart" in which women felt empowered to resist hegemonic, patriarchal authority (Jay 2000). Biblical criticism, scientific discovery, industrialization, and Nonconformist traditions produced growing skepticism toward ecclesiastical authority. Emily's liberal yet mysterious and uninterpretable worldview can be detected in her novel via Heathcliff's posthumous affection for Catherine. His appeals to her ghost, desire for supernatural reunion, opening her grave, loosening one side of her coffin, gazing upon her remains, examining her face, and arranging for his own body to lie beside her violate Victorian religious norms; however, Brontë subtly narrates these scenes without moral condemnation. On the contrary, she implicitly condones Heathcliff's action as symbolic expressions of transcendent love. *WH,* therefore, develops an individualized moral philosophy departing from conventional Christianity, privileging emotional authenticity, metaphysical connection, and psychological truth over ecclesiastical inheritance.

"Judged as willful" and bent on having her "own way" (Ahmed 2014, 19), Catherine declares "I am Heathcliff," voicing her female empowerment and liberated soul. She admits her complete spiritual identification with Heathcliff, while her corporeal loyalty to her domestic union with Edgar reflects her matrimonial virtue (Brontë 1996, 49); however, Edgar's Anglican devotion portends the demise of the marriage because his monogamous compass is an integral part of his coded morality that Catherine sees as an ecclesiastic relic that is obsolete and antiquated. Edgar's resistance is enmeshed in his traditional patriarchal agency and inability to forsake his Anglican masculinity within their domestic structure. Lauren Berlant argues that Catherine's persistence in retaining both Edgar and Heathcliff prevents the group from finding fulfillment (2011, 92). Later, when the plot reaches a climax as the group unexpectedly gather in Thrushcross Grange's kitchen, the meeting ends disastrously with Edgar bursting at its outset that "It is disgraceful that she should own him for a friend" (Bronte 1996, 67). Instead of deescalating the situation, unrestrained Catherine proposes the setting up of a fight wherein she locks her husband in so that he won't be able to call on his men for help and throws the key in the burning coal. As a result, Heathcliff receives a blow on the throat, Edgar's dignity is dented, and Catherine, Nelly believes, acts in a "wicked" way towards Edgar.

1.1 Purpose

The central argument is twofold: first, the emotional triangle proves too progressive and an unstable amorous configuration whose collapse destroys all three participants; second, while acknowledging that Victorian Britain was going through a transition, the men in the relationship prove self-centered and uncompromising. Regardless of their divergent moral underpinnings, they insist on monogamy and simultaneously share an unwillingness to surrender their patriarchal privileges. Third, the collapse of the triangle is interpreted through Brontë's unconventional moral vision, which reconfigures death, love, and transgression according to an alternative ethical logic that suspends orthodox Victorian judgment.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis of *WH*, supplemented by scholarship in Victorian studies, Gothic criticism, religious history, and psychoanalytic literary criticism. The paper examines dialogue, symbolism, narrative structure, characterization, and Gothic imagery, with emphasis on Catherine's declaration of identity with Heathcliff, her marriage to Edgar, Heathcliff's accounts of Catherine's grave, etc. Historical analysis contemplates nineteenth-century conception of marriage, religious authority, Nonconformity, and shifting moral values. The essay also examines how Brontë regards morally transgressive acts as symbolic explorations of passion, sadness, and

metaphysical aspirations—conventions functioning as mechanisms questioning contemporary morality and existing values.

3. Discussion

Understanding the moral backdrop of *WH* requires situating Brontë within nineteenth-century socio-religious and intellectual milieu. Although the Victorian period is often characterized as religiously transitional and morally conservative, historians have demonstrated it was also characterized by theological diversity, denominational tension, scientific inquiry, and growing skepticism toward institutionalized religion. Brown describes a new trend beyond church decline: "What emerges is a story not merely of church decline, but of the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of self" (Brown, 2001, p.19). The result of such significant changes in Victorian Britain included industrialization, urbanization, increased social class mobility, and intellectual change, all of which significantly affected the extent to which ecclesiastical authorities were able to control society. Although the mainline Anglican Church continued to be influential, Methodism, Congregationalism, Baptists, Quakerism, and other Nonconformist denominations made up the religious dialogue, whereas biblical criticism, politics, and industrialization allowed Victorians to begin questioning their traditional views.

Emily Brontë does not directly dismiss the Victorian religious establishment; instead, she questions whether formal institutional Christianity has the moral authority to support the deep experiences of human beings.

In addition to this, she constructs an alternative to institutionalized religion by creating a spiritual framework based on emotional authenticity rather than ecclesiastical doctrine. Emily's writing reveals a deeply personalized spiritual realm that lacks religious connotations (Barker, 1994, p. 121).

Her life history also indicates that her religious views were at odds with those of her peers. Her father, Reverend Patrick Brontë, provided his daughters **with** "complete freedom" to express their thoughts. Similarly to her description of Catherine and Heathcliff's love affair that transcends mortality, Emily's poetry illustrates the eternal nature of the human soul, the enduring quality of emotional relationships, and a transcendental power that is separate from organized religion; all of these are present throughout her poetry. In her poem "No Coward Soul is Mine," she writes:

"There is not room for Death,/Nor atom that his might could render void:/Since thou art Being and Breath,/And what thou art may never be destroyed" (Brontë, 2007, p. 420).

Scholars have described her theology as being very personal and unique. They state that she prioritizes inner conviction, spiritual self-determination, and continuous emotional identity beyond physical death (Davies, 1998; Miller, 2002), and it is this view that influenced *Wuthering Heights*, where "emotional truth" can sometimes appear as having greater authority than social norms or laws governing religious behavior (Jay, 2000, p. 116).

Conventional religious figures of *WH* manifest moral deficiency and spiteful acrimony. Joseph, the popular, self-proclaimed religious character who often employs religious vernacular is shown as judgmental, spiteful, and spiritually strict. His version of Christianity is emphasizes corporeal punishment rather than Christ-like forgiveness. Joseph functions less as representative of tolerant Christianity than a target for religious hypocrisy. His moral contradiction contrasts sharply with the serene peace afforded to the personally truthful Heathcliff and Catherine. Heathcliff's early exposure to religion dispensed by cruel Joseph nurtures deep disdain for traditional Christianity. For him and Catherine, bible study was met with contempt rather than spiritual zeal, leading to their punishment via Hindley. Consequently, Heathcliff's depravity and

unwavering revenge wish were engendered, as he later seeks comfort in retribution rather than forgiveness: "... God won't have the satisfaction that I shall… I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that I don't feel pain" (Brontë 1996, 36). As noted by Tytler, his rejection of faith is a reaction to the "pernicious," misanthropic brand of religion imposed upon him (2007, 42).

As for Nelly's version of religion, she shows no inclination to engage young Heathcliff and Catherine with uplifting Christian parables or extol the heavenly benefits of moral conduct, which would align with her character as a Christian, but she only identifies with Christianity by name, rather than genuinely embodying the virtuous teachings of scriptures. Moreover, there are several instances where Nelly is witnessed engaged in "deceit and deception" concerning Edgar (Tytler 2007, 43), whom she should have informed about Heathcliff's secret visits to Catherine in his own home; hence, she hardly serves as a credible model of Christian behavior for Heathcliff and Catherine. Although she treats Heathcliff more kindly than other characters, she takes no additional effort to present herself as a genuinely devout individual. On the contrary, she comes across as self-absorbed and censorious, subtly reinforcing the colonialist mindset that seeks to undermine the dignity of a black child.

This subtle, post-colonially based penchant is clearly manifested through fourteen-year-old Catherine's words who expresses white Europeans' inculcated speech as she returns from the Lintons' Thrushcross Grange after she spends two weeks in the wake of The Linton's dog biting her ankle. Her words are different from the guarded, nuanced discourse that white supremacists may likely use: "Why, how very black and cross you look! and how—how funny and grim! But that's because I'm used to Edgar and Isabella Linton" (Bronte 1996, 32). As a child who is not well versed in using tendentious puns and subtextual phrases, her discourse naively betrays her plain yet transitory, racist intentions, which have been freshly ingrained into her psyche after spending her period of recovery at The Lintons' place.

In her defence, although Catherine is domineering and willful, she is not malicious nor bigoted, but playfully depraved. Her statement about having grown accustomed to The Lintons is an admission of the short-lived, racist influence on her as a naïve adolescent, her behavior throughout does not stray from sincerity and multiculturalism. Although she is often manipulative, controlling, and even abusive as for instance when she pinches Nelly perniciously, she does not conceal any racist sentiment. As two souls grew up together and who did almost all their activities together and acted "united… against the tyranny of patriarchy" that Hindley once represented (Abraham 2004, 97), Catherine and Heathcliff were a unified, inseparable entity. Catherine grew up attached to him as though he were her sibling. It is only during the brief time she stays at the Lintons that she regurgitates racist terminology; however, her unwittingly hurtful words have a profound impact on the already traumatized Heathcliff, especially because they are uttered simultaneously in the wake of Hindley's and The Lintons' horrendous abuse at the defenseless boy. Yet aside from her unwitting, racially motivated words in this scene, no sooner that she notices Heathcliff turning sulky, she spontaneously offers an indirect apology by offering a quick remedy to his unkempt appearance: "If you wash your face and brush your hair, it will be alright." To show her willful nature at taking action, she also impetuously "seizes" his hand to signify the strength of their bond, even against the wish of Hindley who "condescendingly" instructs Heathcliff earlier to "shake hands… [only] once… that is permitted" (Brontë 1996, 32).

Catherine's words, nonetheless, already etch their damage onto Heathcliff's psyche. To a chronically abused foundling at a foster home who never experienced a parent's reassuring embrace and who lived mostly as a churned outcast, the insult by the only person who bonded with him as a soulmate deeply injures his

feelings and represents the final straw for a major change in the life of the fifteen-year-old adolescent. To exacerbate the blunder and stoke the fire further, on the same day Catherine confides to Nellie Dean as Heathcliff overhears in the background that "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff" (Bronte 1996, 48). Deeply offended, Heathcliff departs on the same evening for a three-year period to work on one of the shortcomings Catherine criticizes him for—his socio-economic station. He comes back as a completely changed man, a self-assured, wealthy gentleman with a confident ego, a firm sense of purpose, and an optimal masculine physique.

Rather than constructing morality according to conventional distinctions between virtue and sin, Brontë evaluates actions according to emotional authenticity. Characters are judged less by conformity to religious law than by sincerity, intensity, and permanence of emotional commitments. This orientation is apparent in Catherine's declaration: "I am Heathcliff." From a Victorian Ecclesiastic perspective, the admission borders on blasphemous self-annihilation and "common schizophrenia" (Fleenor 1978, 451), as Catherine dissolves her individual identity into another human being, redefining personhood through emotional union rather than a divine relationship identifiable through God. Brontë does not condemn this declaration; instead, the novel presents it as an honorable expression of a profound existential truth. Catherine's identity is understood not through religious doctrine, legal marriage, or social status but through emotional affinity—her being inseparable from Heathcliff's existence.

Catherine's declaration "I am Heathcliff" is not a mere declaration of an uncommonly strong love affair nor a union of identical souls but a suggestive metaphysics that contradicts settled Victorian notions about the conception of marriage and the meaning of life. Bronte treats the statement as a fundamental assertion of our ontological binarism and later extends her interests to Edgar in a bold inclusion in the love triangle. Bronte upends the common understanding of the self and the other and suggests instead the complementarity of a person's identity in another (or others such as Catherine's love triangle notion) and the erasure of unilateral selfhood. As J. Hillis Miller notes, *WH* repeatedly destabilizes fixed meanings due to its interpretive richness. Catherine's statement is one clear demonstration of such instability by virtue of replacing Anglican exegesis of life with the mundane interpretation of "the relation between two persons" (1980, 96). Catherine's oversimplified description masks its deep, philosophical significance. The usual sense of "I" as a separate subject and "Heathcliff" as another person is dissolved by equating them with the verb "am." The construct defies the Victorian notion of honoring individualism and instead introduces identity as an abstraction recognized through relational connections.

Catherine's statement embodies a deep, rich, and spiritually meaningful way of thinking about God. Both Stevie Davies (1998) and Marianne Thormahlen (1999) described how Brontë often portrayed the inner spiritual experience of her characters instead of the outward behavior or dogma associated with those experiences. Although Catherine is married to Edgar when she makes this statement, she still identifies herself with Heathcliff. She enjoys the "social aspirations" of marrying Edgar; however, she wishes to maintain an existential union with Heathcliff. Catherine attempts to integrate two kinds of love into her life: Heathcliff's all-consuming passion, emotionality, instinctuality, and metaphysical bond with her on one side, and the rational, civilized, and socially acceptable aspect of being married to Edgar on the other. As a result of her realization that her true identity has existed since birth as tied to Heathcliff, Catherine faces an existential crisis. In essence, Catherine cannot simultaneously reconcile the two opposing aspects of her identity. Therefore, the internal struggle creates psychological disintegration for Catherine, leading to a subsequent decline in her mental health. It can be deduced from Catherine's statements

("Heathcliff treated me 'infernally--infernally,' while Edgar reacted to my anger only through sulking") (Brontë 1996, p. 58) that Catherine mentally views Heathcliff as an extension of her own consciousness. Catherine and Heathcliff have several characteristics in common, including having grown up together as children, experiencing feelings of social isolation during their youth, and sharing numerous adventures together on the Yorkshire moors. Together, these experiences create a connection between Catherine and Heathcliff that transcends the boundaries typically seen in friendships or romantic relationships. Separation from Heathcliff results in the loss of Catherine's perception of self, thus producing an immediate breakdown in her emotional stability due to his absence for approximately three years while he travels.

Edgar occupies a markedly different position to Catherine. Unlike Heathcliff, he emblematizes Victorian ideals of domestic serenity, life-long marriage, emotional stability, and social order. His conception of love corresponds to nineteenth-century bourgeois expectations: marriage establishes a narcissistically exclusive emotional partnership where the husband is head of the household and sole financial provider while the wife is the nurturing mother whose duties are confined to the domestic domain and who carries out her obligations happily without aspiring for extra-marital affairs. Theirs is not a traditional home, however, for there are hardly scenes in which Catherine's image is depicted as a patient, doting mother whose center of the world is her domestic, confined boundaries.

Probing Catherine's feelings towards her husband, her answers indicate that it is decidedly conventional and in no way passionate, validating Eagelton's claim that she marries Edgar in "bad faith" (Eagelton 2005, 101). After Nelly badgers her for a precise description of her emotions towards Edgar, she eventually gives out: "As everybody loves" (Bronte 1996, 47). Sensing that this statement does satisfy Nelly, Catherine backs it up with jargon-laden, meaningless expressions that are cliched stock responses to extricate herself from Nelly's persistent cross-examination. Still not appeased after long haranguing her about the issue, Nelly, assumes the role of Catherine's mouthpiece and summarizes what lurks deep in her heart: "You love Mr. Edgar because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves you. The last, however, goes for nothing: you would love him without that, probably; and with it you wouldn't, unless he possessed the four former attractions" (Bronte 1996, 47). Nelly's list summarizes Catherine's popular reasons—perhaps universally for many women—to seek marriage but they are not unique or special. Interestingly, Nelly probes Catherine's feelings towards Edgar at this point in chapter 10, right before Heathcliff reappears in the next chapter after his three-year-long travels. Bronte brilliantly sets up the sequence of chapters to underscore Heathcliff's central status in the love triangle and Edgar's peripheral status. It is not a coincidence that this episode is marked by Heathcliff's return to reignite Catherine's long-buried feelings towards her "soulmate" (Bronte 1996, 45).

Although Edgar is a desired, landed aristocrat with white complexion and handsome looks, he misjudges Catherine's love towards him. Believing she is committed to being a stereotypical wife who has made a decision to sever her childish relationship with a playmate, he realizes that she is not able to live that role, which shows clearly upon Heathcliff's return from his long journey abroad. When Catherine learns that he is waiting at the door for permission, she does not even consider her husband's discomfort or possible jealousy and acts ecstatically as she hangs to his neck, raising his immediate consternation and rivalry instinct: "don't strangle me for that! He never struck me as such a marvellous treasure. There is no need to be frantic!" (Bronte 1996, 56). Ignoring his comment, she proceeds to receive Heathcliff and takes him by the hand, twice. As he is received, Edgar's presence seems to be redundant as they lose themselves in each other's gazes: "They were too much absorbed in their

mutual joy to suffer embarrassment. Not so Mr. Edgar: he grew pale with pure annoyance: a feeling that reached its climax when his lady rose, and stepping across the rug, seized Heathcliff's hands again, and laughed like one beside herself" (57).

As Catherine's treatment of Edgar progressively worsens and their relationship embarks on a destructive, irreversible detour that dents the triangle's precarious structure, compelling the patriarchally minded Edgar to give her an ultimatum to choose between him and Heathcliff, but despite the warning and her marriage to him, Catherine uncompromisingly pursues her unsustainable polyamorous plan regardless of the consequences, even if she pays for it with her own life.

The second, explosive meeting of the trio in Edgar's Kitchen seals the fate of Catherine's anachronistic love triangle as she unintuitively ushers in the destruction of her own invention. The mistake of sneaking Heathcliff into her husband's house without the consent of the latter is not the least transgression Catherine makes. Instead of calming the incendiary encounter between the two men, she further stokes it. Instead of siding with Edgar on whose property Heathcliff stands, she accuses him of being a coward and derides of his smaller body and inferior strength. She reacts to the gaze of her flabbergasted husband who is bewildered by her stance regarding him on equal, if not lower, footing with Heathcliff. Analysis of her speech to both, she certainly does not favor Edgar: "If you have not courage to attack him, make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten. It will correct you of feigning more valour than you possess. No, I'll swallow the key before you shall get it! I'm delightfully rewarded for my kindness to each!" (Bronte 1996, 67). Unable to wrest the key from Catherine who throws it in the furnace, he resigns himself to the chair covering his face with his hands, feeling the bitterness of emotional abandonment. Adding insult to injury, Catherine does not relent. Siding with Heathcliff, Catherine unabatedly resumes with depraved sarcasm while referring to herself and Heathcliff with the first-person plural pronoun: "We are vanquished! We are vanquished! Heathcliff would as soon lift a finger at you as the king would march his army against a colony of mice. Cheer up! you sha'n't be hurt! Your type is not a lamb, it's a sucking leveret".

Emboldened by her admonishment, Heathcliff, her soulmate and, as is apparent in this scene, her true partner, finishes the sadistic abuse she started. He capitalizes on her sarcastic trend and begins: "I wish you joy of the milk-blooded coward, Cathy!…. I compliment you on your taste. And that is the slavering, shivering thing you preferred to me! I would not strike him with my fist, but I'd kick him with my foot, and experience considerable satisfaction. Is he weeping, or is he going to faint for fear?" (Bronte 1996, 68). To Heathcliff's and Catherine's surprise, Edgar musters his courage and punches Heathcliff a blow on the throat that is severe enough to make the latter choke while affording Edgar time to escape through a side exit.

The unfolding action that ensues is predictable. Catherine defends her friendship with Heathcliff to Nelly while manifesting his uncompromising character: "Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend—if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own" (Bronte 1996, 68), dismissing Edgar's abandonment and the substantial harm she inflicted on his ego. With irreparable damage done, Edgar attempts to salvage the remaining part of his dignity and demands from Catherine to either end her relationship with Heathcliff or end theirs, a choice that ushers in the demise of the love triangle and indeed the destruction of the lives of the group, literally or figuratively. "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" (Bronte 1996, 69).

The impact the scene has on the married couple's relationship is quite devastating, so much so that what used to be doting Edgar becomes aloof and

withdrawn. As he ceases to sleep in the same bedroom as Catherine, the latter rejects food and attempts to starve herself. The split proves to be too excessive, and her nerves begin to falter, becoming delirious after a few nights. To exacerbate the disaster, Nelly does not inform Edgar about Catherine's dire situation. When she does notify him, it is already too late to remedy catherine's neurological illness.

The novel's notable departure from Victorian moral convention and gravitation to the gothic realm occurs after Catherine's death. Edgar spends the remaining years of his life nurturing his daughter, living a sad, celibate life. Heathcliff refuses to resign to his fate and pursues in vain to exact retribution on the next generation to avenge his unfulfilled union with Catherine. Moreover, he seeks continued intimacy with her through supernatural, gothic means. One challenging passage occurs when Heathcliff confesses that he had Catherine's grave opened, examined her face, and experienced profound consolation rather than horror, and instructed the sexton to place his coffin next to hers so that their remains might mingle after death. Although Heathcliff's acts constitute typical gothic intrigue, Bronte's purpose behind the incorporation of Heathcliff's grave intrusion scene as an "open mystery… for readers" (Thormählen 1997, 194), and to promote her belief regarding another spiritual reality beyond death which she discusses in her poem above.

The triangle fails not due to one relationship being untrue but rather because all are in pursuit of incompatible forms of commitment. In her depiction of what constitutes "love," Brontë provides an implied critique of Victorian marriage. It is impossible for marriage alone to reconcile the multiple conflicting emotional realities of individuals. Although Catherine was legally wed to Edgar, she remained spiritually bound to Heathcliff. Similarly, Heathcliff's obsessive nature represents a form of emotionality that cannot be subdued by legal means. The novel highlights the limitations of Victorian views that marriage can provide harmony among desires, morals, and social order. Instead of providing equilibrium, Catherine's marriage created greater emotional turmoil as it attempted to bring societal cohesion to her fragmented psyche.

Brontë also rejected the concept of the redemptive aspects of sentimental romantic love. As both characters are expressive and candid regarding their perspectives, they each have no qualms about expressing themselves in an outward manner. Catherine is tormented by her divided loyalties toward both men. Her loyalty toward Heathcliff is devastating to Edgar's family. Catherine is ultimately separated from her strongest emotional bond when she marries Edgar. Brontë creates a tragic view of life where two or more different forms of love become mutually destructive. The triangle serves as a vehicle through which all three members' psychological decay, moral ambiguities, and eventual deaths occur. The failure of the triangle becomes one of the key structural elements governing the novel's development (initiating the cycle of vengeance, creating the atmospheric conditions for the novel's Gothic style, and setting the stage for Heathcliff's transgressive attempts to circumvent death).

Critics have been debating the specific nature of Brontë's beliefs about religion for many years. Because Brontë's surviving writings do not contain an organized theology, interpretation of the subject has been ongoing. However, critics point out that a consistent theme exists in her poetry and fiction—one that emphasizes the eternal existence of the soul, the interconnectedness of all things in nature, and the continuation of personality after death (Davies, 1998)—which is similar to what can be called "Romantic" spirituality, as both emphasize the role of emotions and imagination rather than institutional authority in achieving transcendence. In addition, Brontë places the divine in the individual's experience of emotion and imagination rather than solely in the institutions of the Church. Therefore, supernatural events in *WH* should not be simply

dismissed as a sensational aspect of Gothic fiction. Most often, characters in the novel are never evaluated based upon traditional Christian views of sin, repentance, or salvation. Rather, Brontë values authenticity, emotional richness, and consistency of spirit—whether or not such spirit is empty and selfish. Finally, the institutions of society—specifically represented by Joseph's strict Calvinist beliefs—prove incapable of explaining complex emotions. Although Joseph often quotes the Bible, he is also characterized by a complete lack of compassion and by judgment. Conversely, despite his extreme violence and moral ambiguities, Heathcliff is given rich psychological insight. Heathcliff's authentic emotions provide the greatest ethical standard.

Heathcliff's behavior at Catherine's grave represents a direct result of the unsuccessful resolution of the emotional triangle that defined the relationships between Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff. If Catherine had been able to combine her passion for Heathcliff with her marriage to Edgar, Heathcliff's fixation on death would not have emerged. However, because she is unable to integrate her two loves, there exists but one viable means for Heathcliff to reunite with Catherine: the transcendence of his own mortality. The grave thus provides a symbolic culmination of the novel's tragic center. Because Heathcliff cannot find Catherine through the societal constructs such as marriage and inheritance, governed by Victorian morality, he searches for her in the Gothic space where death, memory, and longing converge. The exhumation episode is not an isolated Gothic spectacle but the logical culmination of Brontë's exploration of divided love, individualized morality, and spiritual longing—exemplifying her willingness to suspend conventional religious judgment to investigate the extraordinary consequences of a relationship that could never be reconciled within nineteenth-century social and theological structures.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Through her desire to live according to feeling rather than conforming to the inherited morality of society, Catherine also finds an alternative way of existing as a woman in love with two men. By this means, *WH* investigates how the emotional and philosophical division within one's feelings can lead to several types of consequences. It has been demonstrated that the relationships among Catherine, Heathcliff, and Edgar are complicated because they all need to be viewed separately; however, the focus has been Catherine's experience of loving two men at the same time. Catherine attempts to maintain spiritual wholeness with Heathcliff while socially and legally continuing her union with Edgar. However, both Heathcliff and Edgar want either total existential union (Heathcliff) or exclusive marital commitment (Edgar), and reject Catherine's attempt to continue an archaic, extreme, and revolutionary form of life. The collapse of the triangle results in severe psychological and moral effects: Catherine's fragmented identity grows progressively until there is nothing left of her mentally or physically. Edgar's domestic ideals and peace are quietly destroyed. Heathcliff turns his crushing sadness into obsessive vengeance and eventually seeks Catherine again after he dies. In addition to illustrating how Brontë represents a distinctly Christian religion of imagination that cannot be reduced to the orthodoxy of Victorian Christianity, it has also been demonstrated that her treatment reflects a unique religious imagination.

In addition, *Wuthering Heights* displays widespread cultural changes in religion during the nineteenth century. These include an increase in theological diversity, challenges to institutional religious authority, and new debates about science and religion as they pertain to faith and morals. In this way, Brontë created a fictional world in which spiritual significance is based on emotions rather than formal church practices. The tragic outcome of Catherine, Heathcliff's, and Edgar's love triangle is the central focus of the novel. The collision of three disparate types of love within one relationship results not in harmony but in complete devastation. Time after time, marriage,

inheritance, social status, and institutional religious authority cannot resolve deep-seated emotional issues. Ultimately, the tragic fate of the love triangle was not just a product of individual relationships; however, it exposed the inadequacies of institutions confronting unresolvable human emotion.

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7. Author Declaration

I declare that this manuscript is my original work, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration elsewhere. I further declare that I have no conflicts of interest related to this manuscript.