

# Spaces of Death in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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## Summary

In this article I explore the idea expressed by philosophers and social geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Henk van Houtum that “space” is a social construct; that the space in which a society exists and of which it consists is shaped by that society itself, and that specific locations are assigned to each of the members of the community. I discuss how the dominant spaces in society are shaped by those in positions of authority according to their own ideologies so as to ensure social order and their continued empowerment within the social structure. Additionally, I suggest that it is possible for those who do not conform to social norms, and who are consequently cast into dominated spaces, to undermine the authority of those in positions of power by embracing their marginalised state, and thereby to generate new spaces they can inhabit. I explore these ideas in relation to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and its depiction and examination of central nineteenth-century ideas and anxieties about death and the different areas allocated to the dead.

## Opsomming

In hierdie artikel ondersoek ek die idee, verwoord deur filosowe en sosiale geografe soos Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja en Henk van Houtum, dat “ruimte” ’n sosiale skepping is; dat die ruimte waarin ’n gemeenskap geleë is en waaruit dit bestaan deur die samelewing self gevorm word en dat spesifieke ruimtes aan elk van die lede van die gemeenskap toegeken word. Ek bespreek hoe die dominante spasies in die samelewing deur dié in posisies van outoriteit in ooreenstemming met hul eie ideologieë geskep word om sosiale orde en die voortbestaan van hul eie mag binne die sosiale struktuur te verseker. Ek voer ook aan dat dit moontlik is vir dié wat nie by sosiale norme hou nie en wat gevolglik in ruimtes van onderdrukking gewerp word om die outoriteit van dié in magposisies te ondermyn en sodoende nuwe ruimtes vir hulself te skep. Ek ondersoek hierdie idees ten opsigte van Emily Brontë se *Wuthering Heights* en dié teks se uitbeelding en ondersoeking van kern negentiende-eeuse idees en vrese met betrekking tot die dood en die verskeie areas wat aan die dooies toegeken word.

Although many critical studies conducted more recently support arguments in favour of the merit of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, many critics

still fail to fully acknowledge the representation and examination of core nineteenth-century issues in the narrative. This failure is reflected, for instance, in Pauline Nestor's claim that "[u]nlike the contemporaneous, industrial novels of Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Benjamin Disraeli and Charles Kingsley, *Wuthering Heights* shows no engagement with wider social issues" (Nestor 2003: xix). This article argues that, contrary to assertions such as Nestor's, the novel does explore central nineteenth-century social debates and preoccupations,<sup>1</sup> including nineteenth-century ideas and anxieties about death. The significance of death in *Wuthering Heights* is proven by the fact that the text refers to no fewer than twelve deaths. Through its portrayal of so many deaths, the narrative does not only reflect the high mortality rates of the nineteenth century, but also investigates its characters' reactions to and comments about death, as I shall demonstrate in my discussion of the deaths of Mr Earnshaw, Frances, Catherine,<sup>2</sup> Hindley, Edgar, Linton, and Heathcliff.

Nelly states that, when Mr Earnshaw died, Catherine and Heathcliff "set up a heart-breaking cry. I joined my wail to theirs ... but Joseph asked what we could be thinking of to roar in that way over a saint in Heaven" (Brontë [1847]2003: 44)<sup>3</sup>. The reference to "Heaven" alludes to the idea of an after-world, a concept many religious institutions and individuals have inculcated and believed in for millennia. To sustain this notion, these institutions and individuals have had to ascribe to people attributes that will enable them to keep on living when their bodies have perished. To this end, they maintain that people have "immaterial and eternal" souls (Pârlog, Brînzeu & Pârlog 2007: 28). They have also had to generate places the departed can be said to occupy. The texts that constitute the Bible, which were written over many centuries, reflect various, often opposing, ideas about death, presumably due

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1. The narrative represents and comments on many fundamentally nineteenth-century debates and concerns, such as the slave trade and slavery; the distinction between the supposedly superior whites and allegedly inferior non-whites in the British Empire; the changes in the structure of nineteenth-century British society due to industrialisation, particularly with regard to the conflict between the different social classes and with regard to conceptions of gender and gender relations; and a discriminatory legal system.
  2. Nelly states that Edgar and Catherine's child "was named Catherine, but [the father] never called it the name in full, as he had never called the first Catherine short .... The little one was always Cathy, it formed to him a distinction from the mother, and yet, a connection with her" (Brontë [1847]2003: 184-185). Due to possible confusion between the Catherine's in the novel, I will adopt Edgar's method of distinction: where possible, I will refer to the mother as "Catherine", and to the daughter as "Cathy".
  3. Subsequent references to *Wuthering Heights* (Brontë [1847]2003) are indicated by *WH* and the page number(s).

to changes in society's thoughts on the matter. One of the central ideas in these texts is the belief that there is life beyond death, and that "[t]hose who reject the Christian message will also be resurrected [in the afterworld, just as those who accept it], but then they will be sent to a fate separate from, and worse than, that of the blessed" (Bernstein 1993: 207). This notion led to the formation of a polarity between the idea of heaven, which is held to be assigned to those who accept the teachings of Christianity and who are consequently seen as moral, and that of hell, which is believed to be allocated to those who reject the Christian message and who are therefore considered immoral.

Between the fourth and eleventh centuries, the "custom of commending the dead and praying for them that they might pass through the perils of the world beyond the grave and be brought to the heavenly Jerusalem, became focused on [an] intermediate stage of purgation" (Rowell 1997: 20). This led to the establishment of a Catholic space of death between heaven and hell, namely purgatory, in which sinners would suffer until their souls had been cleansed and they could go to heaven. The Catholic belief that people could be immoral and still ultimately go to heaven through purgatory undercuts the opposition between heaven and hell. The sixteenth-century Reformation "attacked the notion of purgatory" (Rowell 1997: 22), perhaps because, if people started to believe that the wicked would also go to heaven, then the division between the moral and the immoral, and the distinct spaces of death allocated to them, would become irrelevant.

The extent to which society establishes and reshapes the spaces assigned to death, which I have indicated in my discussion of the creation of the spaces of heaven, hell, and purgatory, may be considered to reflect spatial theories such as those of Henri Lefebvre that suggest that "([s]ocial) space is a (social) construct" (Lefebvre [1974]1991: 26); and that society generates and maintains the space in which it exists and of which it consists. The development of different realms of death may also show that the site allocated to death, like that assigned to social life, consists not of one instance of space, but of different spaces that are separated by borders. Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen mention that, although many used to see borders as fixed, more recent geographical debates uphold that "[b]orders do not represent a fixed point in space or time ... [but rather] a social practice of spatial differentiation" (Van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002: 126). Such differentiation consists in the way society creates and sustains borders between its spaces to include those elements that it wants to incorporate as part of its identity, and to purge itself of and to exclude those that do not fit its dominant ideologies. Since such inclusion and exclusion are believed to be essential in a society's establishment of a unique social identity, that society's construction of space and borders will differ from that of others.

The idea that each society wishes to construct its own space so as to establish its own social identity ties in with Lefebvre's claim that the

conception of space as a social construct carries several implications, one of which is that “every society ... produces a space, its own space” (Lefebvre [1974]1991: 31). Accordingly, the society of nineteenth-century Britain would have had its own mode of spatial production, and would have had its own spatial constructs regarding death. In the early nineteenth century, “[t]he Christian sense of sin and belief in judgement ... were still terribly real” (Burrow 1978: 157-158). The members of nineteenth-century British society were, then, still preoccupied with the places souls occupied in the afterworld; with the idea that the pious would be sent to heaven, and that the wicked would suffer eternally in hell. The rise of medical science and changes in theological thought also influenced the way the members of this society saw death:

[t]he notion that science had “disproved” the Bible ... was readily assimilable .... German scholarship, and particularly that of the Tübingen school of biblical critics in the 1830s, was fundamental to the nineteenth-century historical reappraisal of the Scriptures.

(Burrow 1978: 163)

The rise of medical science and the questioning of biblical accounts of the universe resulted in increased doubt and anxiety about the destiny of souls, which highlighted the experience and fear of death, and notions of the afterlife, in this society.

Joseph’s wondering what Catherine, Heathcliff, and Nelly “could be thinking of to roar in that way over a saint in Heaven” does not merely allude to the belief in an afterworld, but also suggests that the living should not mourn the passing of loved ones who get to go to heaven; that the grief the bereaved experience at the death of loved ones ought to be alleviated by the idea that the departed occupy a realm that is considered preferable to life on earth. The novel seems to represent the solace this conception is held to provide in Catherine and Heathcliff’s dealing with Mr Earnshaw’s death: Nelly, who goes to the children’s room to console them, discovers that “[t]he little souls were comforting each other with better thoughts than I could have hit on; no parson in the world ever pictured Heaven so beautifully as they did, in their innocent talk” (*WH* 44).

The novel continues to explore death through the effect of Frances’s passing on Hindley. Nelly states that, after his wife’s death, Hindley “execrated God and man, and gave himself up to reckless dissipation. The servants could not bear his tyrannical and evil conduct long: Joseph and I were the only two that would stay” (*WH* 66). She appears partly to ascribe Hindley’s inability to come to terms with the death of his wife, his degenerate, violent behaviour, and the unpleasant situation at the Heights, to his turning against and thus failing to trust in God. Her remarks reveal the connection she makes between death, grief and the ability to deal with death, the extent to which people are believed to adhere to Christian doctrine and

their being regarded as moral or immoral, and the preoccupation with being either rewarded or punished in the afterworld.

After Edgar has banished Heathcliff from the Grange, Catherine locks herself in her room, starves herself for three days, and falls ill. Heathcliff later enters the Grange, from which he is exiled, to see Catherine. She asks him:

“How many years do you mean to live after I am gone? ... 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!’”

(WH 160)

Her asking him if he will forget her and if he will be sorry to leave his children reinforces the notion that the dead are separated from the living, and live in a world where the living cannot reach them, at least not until they are reunited in death. Her questions also indicate her fear of being separated from and being forgotten by the living, and the suffering this division will inflict on her. The sorrow this separation may cause is also reflected in Heathcliff’s response to Catherine’s words: he asks her whether it is “not sufficient for your infernal selfishness, that while you are at peace I shall writhe in the torments of hell” (WH 161). They, who appeared to be comforted by the belief that Mr Earnshaw had gone to heaven, are now haunted by the thought of being separated by death. It may be argued that they, like Hindley, lack the faith in God that characters such as Nelly believe to be required to deal with death, and that they are, perhaps, as immoral as Nelly presents Hindley to be, which suggests the possibility that they may be barred from heaven, and will therefore have to suffer, not only on earth, but also in the afterworld.

When Catherine has died, Nelly comments on the appearance of her corpse: “No angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared; and I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay” (WH 166). She seems to see the serene appearance of the corpse as an indication that the late woman’s soul is in a place that is equally peaceful. She thereby draws a parallel between the appearance of the corpse and the location the younger woman’s soul is believed to occupy in the afterworld. She queries this parallel, though, by saying that “one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence [Catherine] had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection, but not then, in the presence of her corpse” (WH 167). If one may doubt “in seasons of cold reflection”, then it is possible that a peaceful afterlife for one as wayward as Nelly claims Catherine to have been seems uncertain.

Nelly takes it upon herself to inform Heathcliff of Catherine's death. When he asks if she died "like a saint", the housekeeper says that "[h]er life closed in a gentle dream – may she wake as kindly in the other world!" (*WH* 168-169). Her words again suggest a possible connection between the quiet way Catherine died and her soul's occupying a tranquil space in the afterworld. Whether the peaceful way in which Catherine is said to have died reflects her soul's going to heaven is questionable, however: before her death, Catherine tells Nelly about a dream she had in which she had gone to heaven; she says that "heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy" (*WH* 81). She appears not to want to go to heaven because she does not believe that she will be happier there than she is at the Heights. If she does not *want* to go to heaven, then the dichotomy between heaven and hell is rendered irrelevant. Edward Soja suggests that "choosing marginality reconceptualizes the problematic of subjection by deconstructing and disordering both margin and center. In those restructured and recentered margins, new spaces ... are created" (Soja 1996: 98). If the marginalised are able to embrace their ostracised positions, then they might be able to destabilise the dominant spaces and thus to gain enough power to generate new spaces of their own. It might be that, by sobbing with joy at being back at the Heights, and thus embracing her exclusion from heaven, albeit in a dream, Catherine succeeds in generating a new space of death in which she can spend her afterlife.

Nelly, who has informed Heathcliff of Catherine's death, finds it difficult to sympathise with him, possibly because she objects to the way in which he deals with Catherine's death: she says that "[h]e dashed his head against the knotted trunk [of an oak]; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears .... It hardly moved my compassion – it appalled me" (*WH* 169). Her comparing his behaviour to that of a "savage beast" suggests that she believes that he does not mourn Catherine's death as a civilised gentleman ought to, and perhaps associates him with beliefs and practices that are at odds with the customs of the primarily Protestant British society. This idea is reinforced by Isabella's comments about her husband's behaviour after Catherine's death: in her letter to Nelly, Mrs Heathcliff writes that Heathcliff has "come home at dawn, and gone upstairs to his chamber; locking himself in .... There he has continued, praying like a methodist; only the deity he implored is senseless dust and ashes; and God, when addressed, was curiously confounded with his own black father" (*WH* 175). His praying to "senseless dust and ashes" and his "black father" may refer to ancestor worship or the veneration of the dead. Early readers of the novel may have regarded Heathcliff as an uncivilised, immoral threat to social order based on these practices alone, considering that most of the community members were

Protestants who would probably have objected to such practices, given that “[p]rayer for the dead was seen as inextricably bound up with [Catholic] belief in purgatory” (Rowell 1997: 22), and that the “Roman [C]hurch was [still] regarded ... with a fearful hostility nourished through generations by Protestant horror stories of idolatry and superstition, of priestly tyranny, persecution and vice, and sinister Jesuit plots” (Burrow 1978: 154).

Catherine’s corpse is interred. Through the burial of her body, the novel depicts and questions burial practices. If a society such as nineteenth-century Britain chooses to bury, and not to cremate, its dead, then those in positions of authority must identify spaces where corpses can be stored. Due to an association between graves and the afterworld, burial grounds were owned and controlled by the Church. As a result of continued industrialisation in the early nineteenth century, which caused a rise in population numbers, there were even more corpses that had to be accommodated. Consequently, the 1840s saw

great change in British funerals. A campaign to close urban churchyards, revealed as wholly inadequate for the number of burials even before the cholera crisis of 1847-8, succeeded in opening a new era of cemeteries, owned, funded and operated by local government .... The vast majority of funerals were still conducted by Anglican clergy according to Anglican rites, but Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters were now receiving more equal attention in the new private cemeteries.

(Jupp 1997: 3)

Many of the earliest readers of the novel would have been acutely aware of any references to places of interment, since the second half of the nineteenth century saw even more changes in British society’s allocation of space to the dead:

[t]he Burial Laws of 1850 and 1852 closed 5 000 urban churchyards within eight years and transferred the responsibility for providing land for the disposal of the dead to local (and secular) authorities, ending a period of 1 000 years’ virtual monopoly by the Church .... By the Burial Laws Amendment Act [of] 1880, Nonconformists were finally permitted to conduct funerals according to their own rites in rural churchyards.

(Jupp 1997: 3-4)

The need for space in which to bury the dead thus forced the Church to relinquish its control over burial grounds, which led to its partial loss of control over alternative burial practices and beliefs regarding the afterlife. Consequently, people were increasingly free to decide for themselves how and where they wanted to be buried. This fundamentally nineteenth-century preoccupation seems to be reflected in *Wuthering Heights*: before her death, Catherine tells Edgar that she does not want to be buried “under the chapel-roof; but in the open air with a head-stone” (*WH* 127). Nelly later says that



“[t]he place of Catherine’s interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel, under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope, in a corner of the kirkyard” (*WH* 170). The location of the grave comes as a “surprise” to the villagers, which proves that her request to be buried “in the open air” challenges the social norm, and shows that she could decide where she wanted to be buried.

Nelly comments not only on the effect of Catherine’s death on Heathcliff, but also on Edgar’s reaction to his wife’s death. She compares their reactions; she says that Edgar’s aversion to Heathcliff and his grief at his wife’s death

transformed him into a complete hermit .... But he was too good to be thoroughly unhappy long. *He* didn’t pray for Catherine’s soul to haunt him: Time brought resignation, and a melancholy sweeter than common joy. He recalled her memory with ardent, tender love, and hopeful aspiring to the better world, where, he doubted not, she was gone.

(*WH* 184; italics in original)

Nelly states that Edgar, unlike Heathcliff, is “too good” to remain unhappy, which shows yet again that she associates individuals’ ability to accept death with their faith in God. According to the housekeeper, Edgar derives comfort from his belief that Catherine’s soul is in a “better world”, which connects his reaction to death to that of Joseph, Catherine, and Heathcliff to Mr Earnshaw’s death. She also implies that Heathcliff cannot accept Catherine’s death because he does not have faith in God, and that he continues to suffer because of it, which ties Heathcliff to Hindley and Catherine, who, as I have mentioned, may be seen to be unable to deal with death because they do not trust in God, and who are, consequently, depicted as wicked and potentially damned to eternal suffering.

The housekeeper sustains this link between the ability to deal with the deaths of loved ones and faith in God by comparing Hindley’s and Edgar’s ways of dealing with their wives’ deaths; she says Hindley

has shown himself sadly the worse and the weaker man. When his ship struck, the captain abandoned his post; and the crew, instead of trying to save her, rushed into riot, and confusion, leaving no hope for their luckless vessel. Linton, on the contrary, displayed the true courage of a loyal and faithful soul: he trusted God; and God comforted him.

(*WH* 185)

Hindley dies about six months after his sister. The space he envisages inhabiting in death may be deduced by analysing his remarks about the afterworld in conversations he has had with Nelly and Isabella, respectively. After he nearly lets Hareton fall to his death, Nelly asks him to “[h]ave



mercy on your own soul”, to which he replies that he will take “great pleasure in sending it to perdition, to punish its maker” (WH 76). He later tells Mrs Heathcliff that “if God would but give me strength to strangle [Heathcliff] in my last agony, I’d go to hell with joy” (WH 182). Those who fear eternal damnation presumably want to adhere to the norms presented by the Christian teachings so they can go to heaven. If Hindley *wants* to go to hell, though, then it is possible that he does not see hell as a place of punishment, does not fear the suffering associated with it, or does not see heaven as a place of joy, and does not particularly want to go there. Consequently, he, like his sister, forms a new space of death for himself that lies outside the opposition between heaven and hell.

The novel continues to investigate conceptions about the afterworld through its description of Cathy’s and Linton’s ideas about heaven. Cathy tells Nelly about a dispute she and Linton had about “heaven’s happiness”:

“[Linton] said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bloom, and the larks singing high up over head [sic], and the blue sky, and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly .... [M]ine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright, white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance, broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake and wild with joy. He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle, and dance in a glorious jubilee.”

(WH 248)

Their conflicting notions indicate that individuals have different, often contrasting, desires and fantasies, and that their ideas about heaven and the happiness they associate with it are bound to differ. Therefore, people’s divergent ideas are revealed not only in their conceptions and fears of hell and eternal suffering, but also in their notions of heaven and in their expectations of eternal bliss.

The narrative’s exploration of death is seen not only in Cathy’s argument with Linton about “heaven’s happiness”, but also in her comments about the deaths of her father and Linton. She asks Nelly: “[W]hat shall I do when papa and you leave me, and I am by myself?” (WH 231). Nelly tells her that “[n]one can tell, whether you won’t die before us .... It’s wrong to anticipate evil – we’ll hope there are years and years to come before any of us go” (WH 231). She dismisses the young woman’s fear of losing her loved ones by stating that it is “wrong to anticipate evil”. The parallel she draws between death and evil may demonstrate society’s desire to separate itself from death through banishing it to another realm, which ties in with Alan

Bernstein's assertion that the "segregation of the dead from the living ... seems to allow the living to proceed with their lives, undisturbed by the dead" (Bernstein 1993: 9). The notion that it is wicked for someone to fear the death of a parent may draw on the housekeeper's earlier suggestion that it is those who lack faith in God who despair in the face of death. However, Nelly does exactly what she tells the young woman not to do by stating that "[n]one can tell whether you won't die before us", which shows not only that she, too, anticipates death, but also that her claim that grief as a result of losing loved ones to death is diminished by faith in God is doubtful, and that death cannot be excluded from social life.

Cathy's anticipation of death is echoed in Edgar's comments about his own impending death. He tells Nelly:

"I've prayed often ... for the approach of what is coming; and now I begin to shrink, and fear it .... I've been very happy with my little Cathy .... [B]ut I've been as happy musing by myself among those stones, under that old church ... on the green mound of her mother's grave, and wishing, yearning for the time when I might lie beneath it. What can I do for Cathy? How must I quit her? ... I'd rather resign her to God, and lay her in the earth before me."

(WH 257)

He thus reveals that, although he is "happy" with Cathy, he is content to die, since death will reunite him with his wife. Consequently, it may be argued that the bereaved are consoled not only by the belief that the departed are in a space that is more desirable than life on earth, but also by the conception that the living will be reunited with the dead once they die, and that the perceived division between life and death is not eternal. It is, perhaps, easier for the bereaved to continue with their lives if they believe that the dead are merely temporarily separated from them than it is for them to accept the possibility that there is no life beyond death, and that the dead are lost to them forever. However, despite his yearning to be with Catherine, Edgar fears death, as it will prevent him from taking care of his daughter. His death will leave his daughter friendless, which may be why he states that he would rather "resign her to God and lay her in the earth before me". Nelly responds to her master's concern about his daughter by telling him to "[r]esign her to God, as it is ... and if we should lose you ... I'll stand her friend and counsellor to the last. Miss Catherine is a good girl ... and people who do their duty are always finally rewarded" (WH 257). She tries to set his mind at ease by assuring him that she will remain Cathy's "friend and counsellor", which means that the young woman will not be alone in the world, but will have someone to comfort and support her. She also suggests that he leave his daughter, who is a "good girl", in God's care. The reference to "good" brings to mind the housekeeper's remarks about the way Edgar, whom she presents as "too good to be thoroughly unhappy long", has dealt with

Catherine's death. The parallel implies that she believes that Cathy will come to terms with her father's death and will ultimately be consoled because she trusts in God.

Although Cathy is confined to the Heights after her marriage, her husband, Linton, sets her free, and thus enables her to go to her father's deathbed. Nelly says that, when Cathy reached her father's side, Edgar kissed her cheek and "murmured, 'I am going to her, and you darling child shall come to us;'" and never stirred or spoke again, but continued that rapt, radiant gaze, till his pulse imperceptibly stopped and his soul departed" (*WH* 283-284). He thinks that his death will reunite him with his wife, and believes that he and his late wife will be waiting for their daughter to join them in the afterworld. The possibility that husband and wife are reunited in death is suggested by the similarity between their respective deathbed scenes: according to Nelly, both die peacefully, and, considering the link between the appearance of corpses and the spaces the deceased are thought to inhabit in the afterworld, may be held to occupy the same space in death. This notion seems to comfort him, but whether Cathy is consoled by it – at that moment, at least – is doubtful: Nelly mentions that

[w]hether Catherine had spent her tears, or whether the grief were too weighty to let them flow, she sat there dry-eyed till the sun rose – she sat till noon, and would still have remained, brooding over that death-bed, but I insisted on her coming away, and taking some repose.

(*WH* 284)

These comments suggest that Cathy's suffering at losing her father may be so severe that she draws little comfort from the belief that she will be reunited with him and her mother in death. This is reinforced by her comments after the death of Linton: when Heathcliff asks her how she feels now that her husband is dead, she replies that "[h]e's safe, and I'm free ... I should feel well – but .... You have left me so long to struggle against death, alone, that I feel and see only death" (*WH* 294). She reveals that she "should" feel well, that is, that she is expected to feel well, since her husband has died and presumably gone to heaven, where he will be happier than he was on earth, but she does not. Instead, she feels only anguish, and fails to rejoice in the thought that a soul has gone to heaven, and thus appears not to have the faith that characters such as Edgar ostensibly have. If she is not to be consoled by faith, then it may be that she is one of the supposedly immoral characters in the novel who do not turn to God in their time of need.

The last death the novel investigates is Heathcliff's. His death is explored specifically through Nelly's, Joseph's, and Hareton's responses and comments. The kind of space he occupies in death is hinted at through Nelly's description of the appearance of his corpse. She says: "I tried to close his eyes – to extinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of

exultation, before any one else beheld it. They would not shut – they seemed to sneer at my attempts, and his parted lips, and sharp, white teeth sneered too!” (*WH* 335). The appearance of the corpse apparently scares Nelly. Its “sneer” at her attempts to close its eyes, and its “parted lips, and sharp, white teeth” seem to suggest that the ostensibly uncivilised man was defiant and immoral even while dying. Its appearance suggests that the space his soul occupies in the afterworld is equally terrifying. The difference between the way in which Heathcliff dies and the way in which Catherine and Edgar die presents the possibility that Catherine’s and Edgar’s souls reside in the same space, while Heathcliff’s inhabits another.

Nelly, who is terrified by Heathcliff’s corpse, calls for Joseph. She says that the old servant “resolutely refused to meddle with him. ‘Th’ devil’s harried off his soul,’ he cried, ‘and he muh hev his carcass intuh t’ bargain, for ow’t Aw care! Ech! what a wicked un he looks girning at death!’” (*WH* 335). Joseph exclaims that the devil has carried off Heathcliff’s soul, and that the corpse looks “wicked”, which ties in with Nelly’s comparison of the appearance of the corpse and the space Heathcliff’s soul is believed to occupy in the afterworld, and shows that he and Nelly may share the belief that Heathcliff’s soul has gone to hell.

The housekeeper continues her account of Heathcliff’s death by referring to Hareton’s reaction to the master’s death; she claims that Hareton

sat by the corpse all night, weeping in bitter earnest. He pressed its hand, and kissed the sarcastic, savage face that every one else shrank from contemplating; and bemoaned him with that strong grief which springs naturally from a generous heart, though it be tough as tempered steel.

(*WH* 335)

Hareton mourns the death of his oppressor, and sits by the corpse all night, which connects his response to death to Heathcliff’s apparent inability to accept Catherine’s death, and Cathy’s reluctance to leave her father’s deathbed. Their apparent inability to let go of the dead links them, and, given the association Nelly establishes between consolation and faith in God, suggests that they may be immoral. It also implies, however, that they have a capacity for tender feeling and loyalty that characters such as Joseph lack.

The depiction of Heathcliff’s death also involves an exploration of burial grounds and the locations assigned to the afterworld. If a grave reflects its occupant’s place in the afterworld, then it appears that Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff inhabit the same space, since they are buried in the same place. Lockwood writes in his diary that he “sought, and soon discovered, the three head-stones on the slope next [to] the moor .... I lingered round them, under that benign sky ... and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth” (*WH* 337). His words imply that the graves give the impression that those who are buried together in a

serene environment may share not only the same space in the afterworld, but also an afterlife that is undisturbed. However, before his death, Heathcliff tells Nelly that he “struck one side of [Catherine’s] coffin loose – and covered it up – not Linton’s side, damn him! I wish he’d been soldered in lead – and I bribed the sexton to pull it away, when I’m laid there, and slide mine out too” (WH 288). If the sexton were to pull away the side of Catherine’s coffin that Heathcliff had struck loose, and remove the side of Heathcliff’s coffin once he was buried beside his beloved, then Catherine and Heathcliff would be buried together, while Edgar would be in a separate grave. Nelly later reveals that they buried Heathcliff, “to the scandal of the whole neighbourhood, as he had wished” (WH 336). If it is then accepted that graves reflect the spaces their tenants occupy in the afterworld, then it seems that Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s souls are reunited in death, while Edgar’s is separated from theirs. This brings to mind Catherine’s comment about her and Heathcliff’s and Edgar’s souls: she claims that their souls “are the same, and [that] Linton’s is as different [from theirs] as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire” (WH 81). Given the assumed connection between the nature of souls and the locations they are thought to inhabit in the afterworld, Catherine’s remark may imply that her and Heathcliff’s souls will inhabit the same space of death, and Edgar’s another.

As I have mentioned, the spaces that are assigned to death, which change whenever society’s ideas about death do, depend on the ideologies of those in positions of authority, such as those of the dominant religious institutions within the social order. It may be that those in power exploit theology to ensure their continued empowerment, and that the criteria that are believed to determine whether a soul will be sent to heaven or hell are closely linked to the standards of acceptable behaviour in the society of the living. Heathcliff’s, Catherine’s, and Hindley’s apparent rejection of the conventional spaces of death, for example, may, then, not be meant to indicate their degenerate characters as such, but to suggest that it is those who challenge social norms who are considered wicked, that the marginalised can generate new spaces for themselves to occupy in the afterlife, or even that the conception of spaces of death such as heaven, hell, and purgatory is artificial. It may therefore also demonstrate their rejection of conventional ideas about or theological accounts of the nature of existence.

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