RE-FORMING FAITH:
IDOLATRY AND THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

A Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

Recently, Timothy Carens declared "the trope of idolatry has yet to receive the full discussion it deserves" ("Idolatrous Reading" 239). This project takes up this challenge, reading the traditionally perceived sin of idolatry as evidence of a post-secular re-engagement with spirituality in the Victorian novel from the mid-Victorian period (1840s) through to the *fin-de-siècle* (1890s). Conventionally, Victorian culture is interpreted through a modern, secular, lens that has tended to overdetermine the material (as opposed to the spiritual) focus of nineteenth-century British culture and befits the master narrative of secularisation. Compelling as a progress narrative from a world of supposed superstition and faith to one of logic and science, the master narrative of secularisation is framed as a movement away from the constrains of the past—a subtraction story. In this subtraction story, the religious and the secular are accepted as binaries, with secularism displacing religion. This study proposes an "addition story": religion and spirituality's reinvigoration through Victorian revivalism, which is represented in the Victorian novel through idolatrous experience. The religious revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain returned a primitive simplicity and emotive focus characteristic of the early, pre-institutionalised church to Victorian spirituality. Spirituality is centred on the individual and becomes a journey of discovery reflected in and modelled by the *bildung* found in the Victorian novel, rather than as ordered by the Established Church. Outside the bounds of institutional authority, idolatrous experience in the Victorian novel offers unconventional and unorthodox pathways to the transcendent through personal agency—an understanding of the heart's own desires. In key Victorian novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë, *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and *Salomé* (1891) by Oscar Wilde, idolatry is a familiar trope; yet, more than simple metaphor, these novels centralise experience and suffering articulated through profound expressions of emotion and intensity in order to discover a pathway to the spiritual. Idolators in these novels experience *ekstatis*, an ecstasy obtained in suffering, which enables them to discover their paths to the transcendent—a path that leads not always to God but rather, the individual self. The experience of the idol, thus, thrives on a paradox of interwoven immanence (the here and now) and

transcendence (life beyond death): an immanent being offers transcendent experience in the act of idolatrous worship. This paradox reflects the post-secular condition—a rejection of binarism in favour of a more complex intermingling of the secular and the religious. Charles Taylor's framework adopted here offers a complex reading of Victorian spirituality, one that crafts a nuanced picture of faith in the Victorian novel and the Victorian period than has previously been offered. In this framework, idolatry shifts its meaning from sin and symbolic transgression to an important feature of personal agency and spiritual self-discovery.

Certification of Thesis

This Thesis is entirely the work of Marie Heneghan except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Dr Sharon Bickle

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Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

Statement of Contribution

Article 1: Sections of Chapter Three of this thesis appeared as "The Post-Romantic Way to God: Personal Agency and Self-Worship in *Wuthering Heights*", *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies,* 2018, vol.22, no.1, pp.53-65, https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/AJVS/article/view/11596.

The overall contribution of ***Marie Heneghan*** was 100%, and Dr Sharon Bickle's input was supervisory.

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The overall contribution of ***Sharon Bickle*** was 50 % and ***Marie Heneghan*** contributed 50%.

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The overall contribution of ***Marie Heneghan*** was 100%, and Dr Sharon Bickle's input was supervisory.

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Chapter One: Introduction
The Cultural Landscape of Victorian Britain and Idolatry

> The Priest as confessor, possesses the secret of a woman's soul; he knows every half-formed hope, every dim desire … [The priest] animates that woman with his own ideas, moves her with his own will, fashions her according his own fancy … She was wax in her spiritual director's hands; she has ceased to be a person, and is become a thing. (Michelet 106)

Jules Michelet's 1845 anti-Catholic propaganda, titled "Du Prêtre, de la Femme, et de Famille", ("Of the Priest, of the Wife, and Family") in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* addresses a central concern in the discourse of idolatry in the Victorian period—the agency of the individual in faith. Although Michelet writes from the French nineteenth-century perspective, his writing shares a common characteristic with British anti-Catholic literature of the period: an anxiety concerning British, Protestant women allowing themselves to seduced by priests (Peschier, "Forgive Me Father" 25) The priest embodies the papacy that stands as mediator between the woman, as individual, and God, as well as a dangerous seducer able to fashion her according to his own fancy. The need for a "spiritual director" was a common point of difference in Victorian Protestantism—one that contributed to the splintering of the Church of England. [1] Increasingly, Victorian Protestantism favoured the autonomy of the individual in the interaction with God, and the need for a "spiritual director" seemed an unnecessary, even sinister, affectation. Michelet's focus on the figurative image of Catholicism as dangerous seducer reveals deep-rooted Victorian anxieties regarding individual autonomy in the relationship with God, which was a ripe topic of debate in Victorian Britain.

In the rest of the article, Michelet constructs the figure of Catholicism as infiltrating and displacing the role of husband in the family home and thus threatening the patriarchal foundation of the Victorian family (Peschier, "Introduction" 5).

[1] The Church of England refers less to the Church as a spiritual institution than to the sense of national identity associated with the Church of England, particularly in the early part of the nineteenth century; the sense of being "Anglican" as a British citizen remained prevalent throughout the century (Knight, "Lay Religion" 32).

Catholicism, in this case, is associated with anti-British discourse in its vow of celibacy (Peschier 6). The bedrock of family life was the patriarchal, Anglican culture of England, and the priest's celibacy is thus constructed as an anti-British binary; for this reason, Catholicism is often perceived as a feminine influence, and was often depicted as a seductress (Hanson, "Scarlet Woman" 121). It disrupted familial values with its celibate priests, and it was the figurative image of seductress, seducing the faithful (especially women) via idolatrous worship away from the familial responsibilities of hearth and home. Roman Catholics were seen as the epitome of un-Englishness, and, as the passage from Michelet's article suggests, embodied the imagined Other in Victorian culture.

In this thesis, I explore the trope of idolatry in the Victorian novel, and its role in reconceptualising notions of Victorian religion. At the heart of idolatry, a struggle occurs between the transcendent and the immanent, as protagonists negotiate their own spiritual journeys in turning to idols for fulfillment. Transcendence refers to life beyond the immediate frame, usually in context of the supernatural and life after death. Immanence refers to life contained in the immediate, with no reference beyond the here and now (Taylor 543). The novel, as a form centred on individual experience, becomes the site to renegotiate faith in the idolatrous journey. New forms of faith are articulated in this struggle, ones that draw on British forms of revivalism in their simplicity and suffering. In its emphasis on experience, British revivalism contains many parallels with early Christianity. Passion and suffering were the cornerstones of early Christianity, which was sealed with the blood of martyrs. Similarly, in the Victorian novel, idolatrous experience is an intense spiritual experience that parallels the passion and suffering of early Christian martyrs in the experience of the transcendent during suffering. As such, this thesis explores a distinctly British idolatry, one that turns to immanent beings for an experience of the transcendent.

1.1 Idolatry and the British Imaginary

In the Victorian imagination, idolatry is grounded in anti-Catholic sentiment, which has roots in Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century. The Catholic imagined Other was constructed in the Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century, depicting sadistic monks and Gothic dungeons. Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century foregrounds a key feature of idolatry and its discourse in the Victorian period; it was a specifically

gendered concern, and it aided in maintaining patriarchal power structures. According to Diane Hoeveler, the demonisation of Catholics in Gothic fiction provides a definingly Protestant identity and national unity for late-eighteenth-century Britons in the face of secularisation (3).[2] This translated in nineteenth-century British fiction as an irrational fear of committing Catholic idolatry. Thus, the trope of idolatry is grounded in English identity, part of a cultural imaginary that defines Britons as God-fearing, and Roman Catholics as idolatrous.

The gendered nature of idolatry in eighteenth-century Gothic fiction persisted into the Victorian period not merely in representations of Roman Catholicism, but in perceptions about the dangers of reading novels. Suspicions regarding the influence of novel reading are embedded in Victorian power structures, couched in the notion that it would awaken idolatrous desires for things other than God in the working classes and among women.[3] Anxieties about novel-reading manifest comically in novels of the early nineteenth century. In *Northanger Abbey* (1803), the young heroine's imagination conflates fiction with reality after reading Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Catherine describes Beechen Cliff as reminding her of France, which prompts Henry to assume she had travelled to France. She replies, however, "Oh! No I only mean what I have read about" (118). Catherine is also disappointed when Northanger Abbey does not live up to her expectations, which are based on her reading of Gothic novels, "[t]o an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt, and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing" (177). The fear surrounding novel reading was prevalent in the early part of the nineteenth century and incited a prohibition of novel reading in some religious quarters, and extreme caution in others (Flint, "The Victorian Novel" 14).

Timothy Carens addresses the gendered nature of idolatrous discourses, in particular the fear that novels would ignite an idolatrous imagination—an imagination that loves the land of fiction more than God—particularly among women ("Idolatrous

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[2] *The Monk* (1796) is Matthew Lewis's anti-Catholic novel, which shows hysteria associated with religion in its depiction of a Franciscan Monk who rapes and murders an innocent woman (Hoeveler 1).

[3] In her dissertation, "The Dialectic of Idolatry", Kathleen Vejvoda's, identifies idolatry as being a gendered discourse, based on the assumption that women were more susceptible to committing idolatry, and need to be protected from the seduction of Roman Catholicism (4). Timothy Carens argues that reading was prohibited in the early part of the nineteenth century, due to the idolatrous desires it was widely believed to incite among women ("Idolatrous Reading" 242).

Reading" 241). William T. Stead, a journalist in the Victorian period and son of a Dissenter—best known for exposing child prostitution with his "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" articles— refers to the novel as a "kind of Devil's Bible, whose meretricious attractions waged an unholy competition against the reading of God's word" (qtd. in Cruse 67). Yet, as the century progressed, novel reading often took precedence over the Bible in the Victorian household and tended to be perceived as in competition with the Bible, pulling readers away from the Word of God (Carens, "Idolatrous Reading" 241).

In this theoretical framework, scholars have tended to approach the Victorian novel as the start of a true secularism that views God as absent, if not completely, inaccessible.[4] This interpretation provides the basis for what is known as the subtraction story, which perceives religion as in decline throughout the Victorian period, gradually replaced by secularism. The subtraction story is based on the standard narrative of modernity that remains a commonly accepted view of religion's history in the West, often in light of the perceived loss or "crisis of faith" and expressions of doubt in Victorian culture. Victorian literature expresses grief at the loss of central meaning in light of advances in biblical criticism, scientific theory, and the fragmentation of faith.

In this thesis, I do not interpret this loss and disconnection in the Victorian novel as conceding a world without God, but rather as attempts to reconnect with the spiritual. I am especially interested in expressions of loss and disconnection that are represented as a form of intense suffering that reclaims the passion of early Christianity and its martyrs in its intensity and simplicity. Characterised by intense emotion, the novels chosen as part of this study portray an attempt to reconnect with the spiritual through the idolatrous experience: *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), by Emily Brontë, *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and *Salomé* (1891) by Oscar Wilde. In these texts, this searching involves a journey of struggle and constant negotiation, which I identify as a post-secular struggle. These novels are not the only nineteenth-century texts addressing idolatry and intense experience, but they are prominent texts in the study of the Victoria novel. From the

[4] J. Hillis Miller's *Disappearance of God* provides a strong case for nineteenth-century texts as being among the first to depict this change (165). As such, modernity starts to be articulated in the nineteenth century with the world depicted in novels showing God as incredible and chaotic.

Brontës through to Wilde, the selection follows the novel throughout the Victorian period and includes texts that continue to be widely read. Up until now, tropes of idolatry have been read as metaphoric and peripheral (Vejvoda, "Dialectic of Idolatry" 4; Carens, "Idolatrous Reading" 242). This project argues that central to this idea of reconnection is the suffering accompanying the idolatrous experience. In the idolatrous journey, suffering also plays a vital role in conversion, though this conversion does not always entail discovering spirituality; instead, the novels studied in this thesis display attempts to reconnect with God through seeking fulfillment in an idol.

1.1.1 Idolatry and the Victorian Novel: A Post- Secular Struggle

Depictions of idolatry in the Victorian novel reflect the religious landscape of nineteenth-century Britain, which was increasingly anti-institutional. This religious landscape was splintered as a result of continued disillusionment with the Established Church.[5] For many Britons, the Church of England was central to national identity, but it was perceived as lacking in spirituality. From the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century through to the mid-century Tractarian revival, revivalism, with its emphasis on personal interaction with the Bible and God, accelerated the fracturing of unity in the Established Church (Cooper 140); this caused large groups to split away from the Church (Giley 98). Across the Victorian era, faith was becoming a personal matter, separate from religious institutions. Outside of the confines of a church, British Christianity became increasingly fluid and problematic to define, and idolatry is a trope in British fiction that not only names this anxiety but draws the secular and the spiritual into a dialogue that interrogates faith and spiritual experience in this uncertain world.

A blunt search finds that the term idolatry appears in Victorian literature 559 times;[6] yet, the presence of idolatry is not in itself evidence of a rejection of the spiritual but can be read as a way to mark the presence of the spiritual. Carens describes idolatry in Victorian Britain as breaking down "the barrier between ... religious and secular discourses," and he refers to literature as being one of the main

[5] See chapter two of this thesis (on pages 42-52) for a thorough discussion of dissatisfaction associated with the Church of England as expressed in British periodicals, which was also often the general cause of dissention and revivals.

[6] This number is based on a general search on the *Literature Online* database which demonstrates, in broad terms, a fascination with idolatry in nineteenth-century British literature.

forms in which these discourses become intermingled (“Idolatrous Reading” 238). Religious novels frequently used the language of idolatry to condemn worldly passions and, in secular literature, idolatry provided a means for questioning the morality of religious devotees (“Idolatrous Reading” 238). Carens’s interpretation identifies idolatry as a trope useful in both secular and religious literature, not solely as an articulation of spirituality.

My interpretation focuses on the Victorian novel to argue that the spirituality inherent in the idolatrous experience is not a rejection of the spiritual, but a complex negotiation between the spiritual and the secular. This argument returns a spiritual focus to the Victorian novel, while considering the uncertainty about faith articulated in the novel. The novel engages, therefore, not with a secular but rather a post-secular discourse: a term that refers to a religious and secular pluralism, which allows these apparent binaries to exist in a common frame (Rectenwald, “Introduction” 7). In a religious and secular coexistence, these usually binary terms influence one another: Michael Rectenwald cites Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1834) as an example of this, since the text portrays spirituality as having its own reward on earth (“Carlyle and Carlile” 23). The transcendent, in this case, becomes contained within the immanent frame as an instance of the post-secular in Victorian literature.

At its core, idolatry involves a struggle. Kathleen Vejvoda identifies this in her thesis, which she identifies as a “dialectic” between Catholicism and Protestantism (“Dialectic of Idolatry” 5). Instead of merely an exclusionary struggle, in my thesis, idolatry is a condition that interweaves secularism and religion. As such, idolatry offers a language of doubt that wrestles with personal belief in a world where faith was shifting away from institutional religion toward personal religion, and an articulation of faith that struggles to identify and discover its foundations without the convictions of religious dogma. Personal belief was increasingly at the centre of the way in which English Christians worshipped, encouraged by the spirit of revivalism. This revivalism opened up new expressions of faith, and the chosen texts of this thesis contain these distinct articulations of faith.

The experience of idolatry in the novels explored in this thesis contain displays of profound emotion and affection in the encounter of the idol. Idolatry shares many characteristics with British revivalism, since it is also an individual spiritual experience outside of the Established Church. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane is Rochester’s “comforter” and “rescuer” when he begs her not depart from Thornfield Hall (281).

Heathcliff's worship of Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, continues after her death, and he confesses, "[t]he entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" (324). In *David Copperfield*, David refers to himself as Dora's Splendow's "captive and a slave" and to be loved by her was "the summit human ambition" (323, 326). Pip's devotion to Estella in *Great Expectations* exceeds all reason and is the core of his existence: "it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life" (217). *The Picture of Dorian Gray*'s protagonist Dorian is the main object of worship, and Basil Hallward tells Henry Wotton: "[a]s long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me" (25). Narraboth's devotion to Salomé drives him to kill himself in Wilde's retelling of the biblical narrative of John the Baptist's beheading—*Salomé*. In all of these instances, idolatry becomes a profoundly individual spiritual experience, particularly associated with a characteristic intensity of emotion.

1.1.2 Defining Protestant Idolatry: Desires of the Heart

In Victorian society, idolatry was frequently equated with the physical vestments, such as the devotional statues, found in Catholic churches. If Roman Catholics were perceived as the ultimate idolators, idolatry remained a sin not committed by British Protestants. However, the King James Bible identifies a much more nuanced notion of idolatry as a sin rooted in the desires of the human heart. The trope of idolatry portrayed in the Victorian novel is consistent with these biblical underpinnings, defined as a turning to something—or someone—other than God for fulfillment.

Idolatry is a violation of the Ten Commandments, which are central to the beliefs of the Judeo-Christian cultures and an essential part of the Christian religion. The Ten Commandments, written on stone tablets, was the "writing of God" (Ex.32.16). The apostle Paul devotes a considerable section of Romans One to explaining idolatry in detail:

> [W]hen they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man … and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. (Rom. 1.21-25)

Giving one's love, as the Israelites do in Exodus 32, to a golden calf or anything other than God, is the bedrock of idolatry (Ex.32.4-5). However, Alison Searle expands on this basic definition, arguing that idolatry is specifically linked with desire and love: it occurs when we do not allow "a supreme love and desire for God" to direct all of our other loves (39).

Support for this notion is also provided by the New Testament, which also makes this link, reading evil desire as associated with covetousness: "[m]ortify therefore your members which are upon the earth … evil concupiscence and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3.5). Idolatry is birthed in the heart as a director of desire, and Christ addresses the root of sin in the Gospel of Matthew. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the heart as the essence of all human sin:

> Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. (Matt 5. 21-22)

In associating anger with the act of murder, Jesus illustrates the dangers of sin and the origin of sin as an emotion, anger, which resides in the human heart. Theologian G. K. Beale also defines idolatry as whatever one's heart clings to "for complete security in the place of God" (17). Similarly, C. S. Lewis identifies idolatry as a misdirected love (Lepojarvi 3). That is, the intensity, or passion, does not constitute idolatry; rather, the sin lies in the focus of the love, which is not directed at God.

Since the King James Bible identifies idolatry as a sin that grieves God and arouses great anger, sexual imagery is used to illuminate the severity of this sin. As God's chosen people, the Israelites are referred to as a harlot turning away from her beloved—a nation who climbs into bed with idols. Jeremiah's vision from God crafts the image of Israel as a harlot:

> Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath *played the harlot*. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not … And I saw, when, for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel *committed adultery* … for I am married unto you. (Jer.3. 6-9, 14; my emphasis)

Later, sexual desire is invoked again to illustrate Israel's turning to other gods: "[h]ow shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery" (Jer.5.7). This is mentioned again in Ezekiel, when Jerusalem plays "the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers … all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses" (Ez. 23. 5-7). Idolatry is constantly described in terms of an adulterous relationship, with God as husband, and Israel as the adulterous wife who turns to the idol as a desirable seducer.

The ideal relationship with God is relational and intimate, as the apostle Paul illustrates in his epistle to the Ephesians. When Paul describes marriage, he likens it the profound mystery of Christ and the Church. Christ becomes one with his Church, as he washes her clean of all sin in intimate relationship:

> [T]he husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in every thing. Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it cleansed with the washing of water by the word. (Eph 5. 23-26)

In a relationship that fulfils ultimate desire, Christ is presented as the husband, and true faith becomes a marriage with God. In contrast, idolatry becomes an adulterous relationship, a dark mirroring of Christ and the Church. This complex relationship with desire is doubly encoded in the trope of idolatry in the Victorian novel and involves images of sexual and spiritual fulfilment that occur through relationships other than with God, even in his guise of the ideal husband. The biblical term for idolatry asserts it as a relationship that turns away from God in search for satisfaction, but in the novel idolatry is often reconstructed as a positive expression of affection and satisfaction.

In the Victorian novel, idolatrous experience is antithetical; that is, it provides an intense spiritual experience via a "false" god. This is possible due to the presence of emotion, which signals the spiritual in the Victorian period.[7] The biblical definition perceives idolatry in negative terms (as a sin), but in the Victorian novel,

[7] Timothy Larsen argues that the presence of intense emotion in the nineteenth century was to signal the spiritual, since it was strongly associated with the conversion narrative of early Methodist leaders ("Vanity and Vexation" 46).

idolatry is central to the Victorian novels' pilgrimage in search of personal understanding and spiritual fulfillment and, thus, is not framed as a sin. In fervent expressions of emotion, idolatry becomes a textual strategy that reconceptualises idolatrous experience as valuable. If genuine spiritual experience becomes possible in the secular form of the novel, it is idolatry that opens up possibilities to engage with the spiritual outside of the Established Church. An idolatrous experience originates in the heart and reflects a purity of purpose—a surrender of one's existence. In *Vanity Fair* (1848), Amelia Sedley's devotion to George Osbourne transfers to their son after his death, and the "child was her being. Her existence was a maternal caress. She enveloped the feeble and unconscious creature with love and worship" (282). Rooted in emotion and affection, religion itself is shaped in the novel as a phenomenon that arises from individual desire and is authorised by self-knowledge rather than a set of dogmas. Completely separated from anti-Catholic rhetoric, this idea of idolatrous worship does not produce the same sense of horror, but rather situates itself in a type of "blind spot" for Victorians. Here, idolatrous worship functions as a stepping-stone to intense feeling, and forms part of a reclaiming a spirituality that asserts itself against more secular interpretations of the novel.

In a contradiction, idolatry produces ecstatic experience, which fulfils the desires of the heart—enabling self-knowledge; and enabling ecstasy which itself becomes an intense spirituality that may lead from immanence to transcendence, an experience of God. The contrast exists because the idolatrous experience is not a direct knowledge of God, and merely serves as the agent of transformation: the idolatrous process arises from an authentic, and authorising, knowing of one's own heart. Thus, *Jane Eyre* contains a protagonist who discovers God at the end of her idolatrous journey by knowing her own heart. Jane's pilgrimage of suffering in her worship of Rochester teaches her to rightly order her loves, and to discover a faith that legitimises her own happiness in this life as compatible with pleasing God by being true to herself. Jane shamelessly catalogues the profoundness of their love and her personal happiness: "[n]o woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh" (399). Here, Jane also sanctions their relationship in reference to Genesis 2.23, "Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"; as such, she presents their union as earthy bliss and fulfilling God's will for humanity.

Pip, from *Great Expectations*, by contrast, does not experience a redemptive simplicity at the end of his idolatrous journey. The final passage in front of Satis House shows two characters marred by the world, unable to regain the innocence and simplicity of childhood, which only the Christ-like Joe can retain. Estella tells Pip, "suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be" (442). Redemption, however, remains possible, but it is uncertain: as Pip takes Estella's hand, "the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her" (443). Pip finds solace in no parting from Estella, but he lacks Jane's confidence in asserting happiness in this life as justified, because his heart has been marred and corrupted by his journey.

Both Jane and Pip experience ecstasy and suffering as part of their journeys, but Pip's journey ends in greater uncertainty. Like the novel itself, ecstasy is finely balanced between transcendence and its loss—an experience of God and a turning away from Him through seeking fulfilment in an idol. This means the trope of idolatry performs a gesture towards transcendence at the same time as there is a turning away from it. The combination of secular and religious discourses that Carens refers to do not merely exist alongside one another, but are often intermingled in the Victorian novel through a complex union of the material and the spiritual, reflecting what has come to be called the post-secular condition.

1.1.3 The Post-Secular Condition

The post-secular framework acknowledges the relevance of religion, and restores value to religious features in texts, as Rectenwald demonstrates in his study of nineteenth-century British secularism (7). Charles Taylor defines post-secularism as a counter to the traditional explanation of secularism in the West. Taylor recognises a drastic shift in the conditions of belief, in which religion has become one option among many (594). In this case, post-secularism becomes a cultural condition that allows religion and secularism to exist in a pluralistic frame. The type of pluralism that Rectenwald and Taylor identify occurs in the experience of the idol in the Victorian novel, which involves the antithetical concept of ecstatic suffering. This type of suffering produces a unique type of joy "for better things to come"—a type of supernatural joy at the prospect of what is to come in the afterlife—a joy at being

united with God (Padilla 44). In this case, ecstatic suffering is directly related to the intense sufferings of the early Christian martyrs, who encountered suffering in the flesh (the secular) and experienced an ecstasy at the joy of joining God in the afterlife.

The suffering of Christian martyrdom is mirrored in the experience of the idol, in which the worshippers experience suffering through their idolatrous worship. Ecstatic experience provides a connection with the spiritual, even though its basis involves turning to immanent objects (idols), thereby supplanting the ecstatic suffering of Christianity with the ecstatic encounter with the idol. The intense experience of the idol serves as a mechanism that provides an experience of being outside oneself. For Philip R. Wood, a core characteristic of modernity involves "the inflection of religious experience into secular humanist forms" (93) and involves "experience beyond a constructed subjectivity" (98); being outside of this constructed subjectivity involves standing outside oneself, which, he argues, is divine. The experience of being outside of this subjectivity individualises spirituality, and for mystics there is "no impulse towards organisation" as they desire to break free from religious institutions (Bender 49). In the intense experience of the idol, a mystical experience occurs. That is, a spiritual experience outside the confines of a church or the Church. Mysticism, in this case, refers to an anti-institutional spirituality. Courtney Bender interprets this as hostile to the true nature of Christianity, since it is not attached to religious life (49). Idolatry, however, as it frequently appears in the Victorian novel, counters such a view and presents an authentic faith outside of institutions as legitimate, grounding this legitimacy in the truth of one's heart and knowing one's own heart.

As Victorian culture is interpreted through a modern, secular, lens that has tended to overdetermine the material (as opposed to the spiritual) focus of nineteenth-century British culture, tropes of idolatry in the Victorian novel have been most often interpreted as purely metaphoric, rather than articulating a spiritual significance. [8] In my reading, the trope of idolatry functions not merely in a figurative sense (a turn away from the spiritual), but is a spiritual encounter that occurs in the intensity of feeling and passion (221). For example, Catherine and Heathcliff's idolatry is an expression of intensity and passion that does not pursue God, but is centered on one

[8] Vejvoda argues that idolatry is symbolic of Catholicism that ensnares the heroine in the Victorian novel ("Dialectic of Idolatry" 304); in this case, idolatry allows for an exploration of the heroine's character (305). Carens identifies a distinctly Protestant idolatry in the symbol of marriage ("Breaking the Idol" 338).

another. Heathcliff tells her: "nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will did it. I have not broken your heart—you have broken it—and in breaking it, you have broken mine" (163). The presence of such intense expressions of emotion and suffering in worship is spiritual and forms a part of an individual's spiritual journey, which if it does not offer closure, at least culminates in the "unquiet slumbers" Lockwood rejects at the end of *Wuthering Heights*; it nevertheless promises an afterlife that reflects their true selves. In a religious landscape in which personal interactions are privileged over a dogmatic institutional Christianity, idolatry can thus become a spiritual pathway to self-knowledge, and one with a certain legitimacy as a passion akin to early Christian martyrs. Martyrdom becomes figurative of the individual faith expressed in suffering, and even the ultimate expression of anti-institutional faith. Protestant idolatry, therefore, is not about the idol, but about the exploration of desires rooted in the human heart as a means to find personal fulfillment.

1.2 Background: The "Addition" Story and the Victorian Novel

The Victorian novel reflects the shifts in Victorian religion, as well as modernity's focus on interiority. Victorian religion was considered a religion of the heart, increasingly based on individual convictions (Jay 51). Under its canonical umbrella, the Church contained a myriad of opinions, and it was unofficially fragmented into three subareas—the Low, Broad, and High Church (Wolff 17; Sachs 36). On one end of the spectrum, the Low Church stressed individual authority in interpretation of scripture, and the High Church believed in understanding scripture within the context of Church authority, with the Broad Church accepting a greater variety of religious views (Parsons 33). Dissent consisted of old puritan divisions as well as new ones that formed in the nineteenth century, which often occurred as a result of revivalism.

Revivalism involved periods of significant shifts in the Church, with large-scale disagreement, accompanied by spiritual rejuvenation. The Low Church (also known as evangelical) revival originated in the eighteenth century, with Methodism as the leader in this renewal (Hempton 33). The Methodists remained a part of the Church until Charles Wesley's death, and then split away as a Dissenting group. The High Church revival (Tractarianism) returned a focus on old Church knowledge and tradition, eventually reconstructing as Ritualism after John Henry Newman's

conversion in 1845 and Tractarianism's subsequent demise (Peschier, "Introduction" 3, 4). What is significant to this thesis is the increasing fragmentation of the Victorian cultural landscape as was reflected in the novel; in this reflection, the novel explored the new possibilities of faith in the context of Christianity as becoming a truth based increasingly on personal conviction.

Idolatry's role in exploring new forms of faith in the Victorian novel emulates the religious landscape of Victorian as well as encompassing a key feature of the novel in the Victorian period: interiority. This peculiar function of idolatry in the Victorian novel is better explained when considered in line with changes in the reception of the novel, which was taking full shape in nineteenth-century Britain. In the same way that the fragmentation of the Anglican Church provided greater agency in the personal interpretation of the Bible, novel reading provided agency to those with less power in patriarchal society, specifically the working classes and women. The novel, in other words, gave agency to the everyday person—a spirituality for the here and now, rather than the afterlife. According to Ian Watt, the novel brought about the modern assumption of truth as a solely individual matter (13). As such, it is a form of literature that articulates a reorientation from the collective to the individual in society and, for this reason, it is often perceived as synonymous with the rise of secularism. However, it was also the case that modernity in Victorian Britain encouraged a framework that despises organised, embodied, religion. As Emma Mason and Mark Knight describe:

> [T]he so-called secularisation of religion in the latter part of the nineteenth century is best understood as a diminution of the power and reach of the Established Church rather than the decline of Christian ideas and culture. (7)

Religion, in other words, increasingly became defined as individual, which opened up possibilities of redefinition and exploration. In this exploration, the novel represents the vacillations between belief and unbelief that Rectenwald identifies as a central feature of post-secularism. The Victorian novel emulates the post-secular condition, with protagonists that possess both a capacity to simultaneously believe and to doubt. Faith, in this context, involves a wrestling that asserts a modern, robust spirituality. Conversely, the turn towards the idol also provides a means to reassert the spiritual in a way that harkens back to the roots of Christianity. Ecstatic experience—be it idolatrous or transcendent—marks out a place for the importance of mysticism.

A preoccupation of this nature is also known as a social imaginary, described by Taylor as stories or legends: the ways in which ordinary people, not merely the elite, imagine their social existence and surroundings (171). A social imaginary aids people in adopting new structures in society, and the novel was instrumental in the gradual adoption of modernity. Self-examination is a central feature of modernity and is developed through "various spiritual disciplines of self-examination", which Taylor attributes to the development of the modern novel (Taylor 539). Taylor identifies this move towards interiority as reflective of society's shift from the eternal to the here and now—away from the afterlife. The novel reflects a shift towards interiority and, as such, it explores the frontiers of intensely personal religion and faith. This spirituality is less about the afterlife than it is a working out of the spiritual in the everyday. Considering this, the standard subtraction story is challenged by a different story told in the Victorian novel, one that charts the course through a spiritual process to self-understanding. As such, the trope of idolatry is a central part of this movement towards the self (through suffering), which involves a rescue of the body in a reclaiming of intensity in the experience of the idol. In this journey, the subtraction story of modernity becomes what I call the addition story, a story of re-spiritualising the secular in its story of a journey towards the spiritual through suffering.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Victorian Religion: Inseparable from the Novel

> The foundations of nineteenth-century British Protestantism were indeed insecure, and out of this insecurity there was bound to emerge, and did emerge, a drift on one hand towards Rome and the other towards unbelief. (Wiley 11)

Basil Wiley's assessment of Victorian Protestantism is based on a framework that interprets it as fragile in the fluid religious landscape of Victorian Britain. British Protestantism was undoubtedly splintered and divided. The scattered nature of faith in this period increased as individuals became increasingly confident in their right to choose their faith for themselves. Wiley's interpretation, however, still accords too little place to the robust spirituality present in the Victorian period.

In any study of the Victorian novel, it is almost impossible not to consider religion. Robert Lee Wolff argues in his extensive study of Victorian novels that the majority of Victorian novels "even those dealing with primarily far different subjects touch on religious matters" (3). Vejvoda also indicates that the "history of religious conflict and worship in the Victorian era is a critical, highly nuanced aspect of the history of the novel" ("Dialectic of Idolatry" 2). As a uniquely personal form, the novel's success in this period owes a great deal to the dispersed nature of the religion, which contributed significantly to the fluid nature of nineteenth-century British Protestantism. This fluidity is evident in one example of the Wesleyan Methodists—a product of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. These revivalists allowed all types of people into their Chapel meetings, and they were criticised by Establishmentarians as a consequence (Knight, "Lay Religion" 70). Although the Wesleyan Methodists were not an official part of the Church, many Wesleyan Methodists attended both Chapel meetings alongside their regular services in their local Anglican Church (Knight, "Lay Religion" 28). As such, British Protestantism was by its very nature an ambiguous identity, interspersed with Dissenter divides. This fluidity can be seen in novels such as *North and South* (1855), when Margaret observes a unity in spite of continued splintering: "Margaret, the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm" (234). The novel made new expressions of pluralism and unity possible and was an important agent in the expressions of faith outside of the institution.

In Victorian Britain as a whole, an increasingly anti-institutional mindset was spreading, and evangelical religion was based on a personal understanding of God (Jay 51). In this approach, the Holy Spirit's role is greater, as it is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies the believer, not the Church (Jay 60). Because of this, modern historians, in their approach to Victorian religion, should not turn to church attendance to infer the religious nature of nineteenth-century culture but, as Frances Knight indicates, to private reading in the domestic setting ("Lay Religion" 36). Identification with the Anglican Church was broadly seen as synonymous with being a British citizen, rather than someone who attends Church (Knight, "Lay Religion" 32).

1.3.2 Religious Studies of the Victorian Period

1.3.2.1 The "Death of God" Narrative

The novel was vital in explaining the spiritual life of the Victorians, which contrasts with the twentieth-century narrative of the novel as central to the rise of secularism. [9] J. Hillis Miller remains one of the most influential scholars to have contributed to the "God-forsaken" master narrative of secularisation in the nineteenth-century context. Miller's reading does not necessarily read God as dead *per se*, but it reads God as inaccessible, with this process coming to completion in the nineteenth century. Miller describes this as coming about due to scientific advances and technology and the breakdown of class structures ("God in Victorian Poetry" 209); this translates in Victorian literature to characters who are alienated, who are in doubt about their identity (210). Miller cites *Wuthering Heights* as a prime example of a chaotic, self-contained world in which God remains inaccessible. The representation of nature as severed from any divine being is perceived as evidence of this. Nature has no order, according to Miller, and it is a patternless maze "created by a madman" (*Disappearance* 164). Such a focus emphasises the similarities in Victorian culture to the modern West, as can be seen in Matthew Sweet's argument, which seeks to reclaim the Victorian by arguing their similarities with our contemporary (secular) society: "to expose the Victorian-ness of the world in which we live" (xxii). This narrative is appealing, because it presents the Victorian period as foreshadowing contemporary secularity; this interpretation is also based on the subtraction story. Many scholars, such as Michael Rectenwald, Russell J. Perkin, and Timothy Larsen, have since challenged this view, arguing for the religiosity of Victorian culture, and my study forms a part of this emerging tradition.

1.3.2.2 The New Tradition: A "Religious Turn" in Victorian Scholarship

In the twenty-first century, scholars no longer have a determinative view regarding the process of secularisation, particularly its role in the nineteenth century. The standard master narrative of secularisation has been challenged in the last four decades by

[9] See, for example, Basil Wiley's *More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters* (1956), whose thesis regarding secularisation in nineteenth-century Britain, is rigorously critiqued by Timothy Larsen (Honest Doubters 11). Alan D. Gilbert's *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (1980) focuses on religion in Victorian Britain as marginal and replaced by secular forces.

scholars who acknowledge the continued persistence, and relevance, of religion in Victorian texts. Timothy Larsen calls for a reassessment of the "crisis of faith" narrative which, he argues, has been a dominant reading of the period (*Crisis of Doubt* 2). The "crisis of faith" narrative forms a part of the subtraction story, which is challenged by what I have termed an addition story—a continued presence and re-engagement with spirituality and faith. Larsen identifies the prominence of this "crisis of faith" narrative as the result an overemphasis on prominent figures, such as the positivist, George Eliot. He aims to correct such a view with examples of prominent secularists who converted to Christianity such as William Hone, Thomas Cooper, and Joseph Barker, drawing a parallel with famous Christians who lost their faith (*Crisis of Doubt* 18).

According to David Nash, Larsen's critique of the "crisis of faith" does not extend this argument far enough. The Victorian cultural landscape, in Nash's reading, is too eclectic for this approach, and Larsen's reading still perceives a narrative of embrace or rejection (72). A more nuanced approach, then, would be one that accounts for the fluidity within the secular and religious framework. Illustrative of this is Thomas Hardy, who was a well-known sceptic. Nathan Scott reads Hardy's fictions as communicating an incoherent stance towards religion and doubt, reflecting a type of grief at a fate ruled by arbitrary forces and not by God (276). Hardy also represents a hinge between the Victorian and the modern in his acknowledgement of a modern universe "of absurdity" such as that depicted by modernists such as Kafka and Gide (279).

Scholars such as Robert Lee Wolf specifically focus on the Victorian novel and the prominence of religion. In his view, all Victorian novels are concerned with religion (3), and novels for every religious controversy exist, ranging from Catholicism to the Oxford Movement (3). Russell J. Perkin also argues that religion was "central to the life of Victorian England", and that this directly implicates the novel as a dominant cultural form (5). Recently, this religious focus has also taken Victorian spirituality itself into account.

Victorian spirituality is usually interpreted from a modern perspective, incorporating concepts such as feminism. Emily Griesinger considers Christianity and feminism in *Jane Eyre* as frameworks that Brontë draws on to assert an individual spirituality; Jane's spiritual trajectory ultimately legitimises women's sexual passions as well their ability to discern God's will (52). Simon Marsden cites *Wuthering*

Heights to illustrate nineteenth-century British Protestantism as a portrayal of British spiritual life, with an emphasis on choosing one's own religion. The individual is the centre in British spirituality and spiritual truth lies in being faithful to one's own conscious ("Vain are the Thousand Creeds" 256). This interpretation applies a modern reading of individualism to British Christianity and does not truly consider what Russell Perkin calls the "otherness" of Victorian culture. This "otherness" is not merely their religiosity but also their spirituality—which I have identified as a characteristically primitive spirituality. My spiritually-attuned approach defines this individual focus as a symptom of Victorian revivalism and its significance in Victorian culture.

1.4 Post-Secularism and The Victorian Novel

> [B]ecause of its length, and bulk, the novel cannot sustain the pure tone of the parable or the tale; because of its restless, many-levelled movement, it is ill-equipped to portray the constancy of faith; because its engines are driven by conflict, and struggle, the novel is confounded above all by notions of peace and eternity. (Tartt 26)

Although Donna Tartt focuses on the contemporary novel, she does reveal a common view regarding the form of the novel and spirituality. Tartt assumes that faith must be constant in order to be legitimate but, in the Victorian novel, conflict is not the absence of faith; instead, conflict and struggle are often part of the formation of faith, and central to the protagonist's *bildung*. As such, faith is not shown as constancy, but rather a journey that involves struggle and grappling. I interpret negotiation and conflict in the Victorian novel in terms of the post-secular condition.

In his influential study, Taylor constructs a polemic against the master narrative of secularisation, or what he calls "subtraction stories" (22). Taylor argues that faith in God has not disappeared in the West, but it has become one option among many. In these conditions, faith is lived out "in a condition of doubt and uncertainty" (3,11). The standard subtraction story, according to Taylor, has been a highly convincing master narrative, framed in the image, or story, of growing up, maturing into a more enlightened society—the death of God narrative (575). A master narrative refers to a "broad framework pictures of how history unfolds", and is a narrative that

many critics have added to since the roots of modernity (573). Taylor views the subtraction story as giving:

> [T]oo little place to the cultural changes wrought by Western modernity, and the ways in which it has developed new understandings of the self, its place in society, in space and in time. (573)

In his account of secularity, belief in the supernatural has certainly declined and he acknowledges a drastic shift in the conditions of belief; that is, modernity has made earlier forms of religious life unsustainable (594). Religion, however, still shows itself to be relevant and persistent, and is not something that can merely be explained away (Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular* 83). Religion also becomes redefined in the post-secular framework, a task James K. A. Smith undertakes defining religion as "an embodied, material, liturgical phenomenon that shapes our desire and imagination before it yields doctrines and beliefs" ("Secular Liturgies" 161). Smith comes to this conclusion using the post-secular framework to reject intellectualist paradigms that understand religion as a set of doctrines and beliefs, and it also sees certain secular practices as religious ("Secular Liturgies"162).

In Rectenwald's study of nineteenth-century Britain, post-secularism becomes part of a pluralistic frame that influences secularism and religion. He defines post-secularism as recognising:

> [T]he persistence of religion and marks an acknowledgement of a religious and secular pluralism. Post-secularism accords to religion an enduring value—a place at the table in politics, a voice in the public sphere, and an abiding role in private life. ("Introduction" 6)

Here, religion and secularism are not classed as binaries; however, the main distinction between spirituality and secularism can be classed as immanence and transcendence. For Taylor, this distinction is based on human flourishing and the understanding of fullness. Transcendence refers to an understanding of human fullness as "unproblematically" beyond human life, with reference to God and the reality of an afterlife; this has shifted to a "conflicted age", in which human fullness remains contained within the immanent frame (Taylor 539). The immanent frame, in Taylor's view, involves severing the things of Nature from the one transcendent God (16). The immanent frame refers to the current structures modern life is confined to: "scientific, social, technological" structures that form the immanent frame, an earthly frame in which there is no reference to anything beyond the here and now (594).

In the Victorian period, secularism, according to Rectenwald, was developed by George Holyoake, and it responded to religious trends in the mid-nineteenth century that encouraged greater personal authority in spiritual matters—a religion of the heart ("The Three Newmans" 137). Rectenwald considers the Newman brothers, with their diverging spiritual paths, as reflective of post-secular, nineteenth-century Britain. Rectenwald perceives Francis Newman's published work *Phases of Faith* as inaugurating a new genre of what he calls confessional religious literature of doubt ("The Three Newmans" 155). In his book, Newman naturalises the soul, undertaking a spiritualisation of evolutionary theory, describing it as an organ through which the infinite is discovered (157). Newman's answer to traditional Christianity's decline in European cities is that the only true evidence of God, and faith, can be found in "inward and spiritual evidence only" (162). In this case, both the secular (science) and religious (the church) are influenced by Newman's post-secularism and reconciled with a stamp of intense personal relationship with God, entirely divorced from the Church. The post-secular position becomes one that accepts neither orthodoxy nor unbelief (167).

The conception of the post-secular, one that does not accept orthodoxy, offers a framework that considers the complex articulations of faith as a journey in the Victorian novel. A position of non-orthodoxy is centred on the individual and the negotiation of faith, which occurs through the experience of the idol and leads to an understanding of the individual heart. The secular form of the novel is injected with spirituality in the journey of individual faith, which is traversed through idolatry. In a search for the spiritual through the idol, the spiritual becomes immanised with an emphasis on the here and now; in seeking spiritual fulfilment through the immanent, spirituality is confined to the here and now.

1.5 Idolatry, Early Christianity and Ecstatic Suffering

A position of non-orthodoxy as represented in the idolatrous spiritual experience focuses on individual negotiation of faith, which emulates the post-secular journey of faith, paralleling early Christian martyrs and their experience of spirituality. In determining to examine the Victorian novel through the concept of the post-secular, the novel becomes an articulation of individual faith away from institutional interference, and the suffering of protagonists in the novels are represented in a way

that is not unlike early Christian martyrdom. Early Christian martyrs attained pleasure in their suffering, which parallels the idolatrous experience in the Victorian novel—an ecstatic suffering. Idolatry becomes a journey inseparable from suffering, which is characterised as spiritual. In its emptiness, a fullness exists in the idolatrous journey through the ecstatic possibilities in the act of worship.

Suffering is integral to the Christian faith, with Jesus Christ's suffering and death serving as the redemption of all sins. Isaiah prophesises Jesus' impending death, describing him as the suffering servant who will be glorified in his suffering.[10] Many of the New Testament epistles confront the issue of suffering as a Christian for the sake of Christ. The apostle Paul finds joy in suffering in service to God's church: "if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all" (Phil. 2.17). Elaine Padilla interprets divine suffering as divine fullness, which is an aspect of divine love; in this case, pathos is associated with fullness (25). In her reading, the biblical image of suffering should inspire us to reflect on "how the experiences of passion lead to the mystery of the divine self in which God confronts in us" (33). It is associated with life beyond the here and now, pointing Christians to better things to come. I expand Padilla's argument to suggest that the parallels between suffering and the body found in the accounts of the early Christian martyrs, are resurrected in the Victorian novel. The martyr becomes a metaphor for anti-institutionalism, a sufferer in a secular arena, outside the confines of a church.

The age of martyrdom took place in the early days of Christianity—the first 300 years after Christ's death. The first group of martyrs were those who lived under the reign of emperor Nero, shortly after Jesus' death, who blamed Christians for the great fire that blazed through Rome. Nero turned their execution into a spectacle in his own garden, with some being crucified and set alight to illuminate the night as crowds watched (Salisbury, "Struggle" 7). Tacitus, a historian of the period, observes that the age of martyrdom had begun with Nero's persecutions. These executions involved being sent into the amphitheatre to face beasts. According to early accounts, people would seek out the provincial governors to try Christians in their communities, since

[10] "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities … He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth … he was cut off out of land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken … he made his grave with the wicked … He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities … Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great…" (Isaiah 53.6-12).

there was great pleasure from the crowds who witnessed these spectacles (Salisbury, "Struggle" 8). In 249AD, persecutions worsened, and became less about merely execution, but also included torture. The Roman Empire was increasingly under threat with Persians infiltrating from the east and barbarians attacking from the North. Joyce Salisbury argues that Romans turned more ferociously to their traditional, pagan, practices, and they were disturbed by how Christians did not take part in sacrifices ("Struggle" 14). If Christians offered a sacrifice to the Roman gods, they were released, but if they refused, they faced torture. Interestingly, the Christians who faltered and offered sacrifices to the Roman gods did so under the threat of torture, but rarely when under the fiery trial. This increased the belief that Christians were imbued with divine power during their physical torture, and that ailment in the flesh involved being drawn further into the spiritual realm. Christians who witnessed their brothers and sisters being tortured took heart, and Christianity spread further than ever before (Salisbury, "Struggle" 16).

Early Christian martyrdom had a significant influence on Christian views of the body, specifically related to the resurrection of the flesh. During these grisly tortures, both Christians and Romans believed a miracle took place as the sufferer withstood his or her torture, and there was a great reverence attributed to being a martyr, since their bodies were believed to be imbued with God's glory (Salisbury, "Struggle" 16). Their bodies were seen as holy, with the flesh retaining the power that God had imbued into it to withstand the torture ("Resurrecting the Flesh" 31). Christians who witnessed these tortures "saw the theoretical link between the blood of the martyrs in the arenas and their own resurrection of the flesh" ("Resurrecting the Flesh" 28). There is, in this case, a strong link with suffering in the flesh and a divine joy of the afterlife. The purpose of torture was to draw the person's attention to their body and to make the victims aware of their own bodies to such an extent that they sacrifice all of their core tenets to escape the torture, which was often worse than torture itself. In contrast to the usual expectations, many of the accounts of these early tortures identify a disassociation from worldly concerns, and a drawing near to the supernatural, with sufferers not yielding to the torture ("Struggle" 17). As these early Christians experienced an intense suffering in the flesh, they were drawn into the

sphere of supernatural joy, experiencing an ecstatic suffering—joy in the midst of suffering. [11]

1.5.1 Early Martyrdom: British Revivalism

Revivalism in nineteenth-century Britain contains many parallels with early Christian martyrdom in the form of intensity and simplicity. In the nineteenth century, the primitive roots of the early Christians, and particularly their intense suffering, was drawn on by revivalism. The outdoor rallies of Methodism were often criticised for their intensity and emphasis on experiencing the Holy Spirit. William Briggs describes attending a revival meeting in 1762 with shock, writing to his friend about witnessing a man falling "into such an extraordinary strain, screaming in such a violent manner to compel a blessing upon the present meeting, that he seemed to be in a rapture and in fact was as one raving with agony" (Mack 2). The rapture that Briggs describes has close parallels with stories of early Christian martyrs, but, instead of gaining joy in bodily suffering, the rapturous passion appears to be a state of agony to the outsider. As an outsider to the faith, he perceived those who attended the outdoor meeting as mad, and he notes how the preacher addresses God in a personal manner, with disrespect (Mack 2). The liminal space between madness and sanity is a common concern in stories of martyrdom, since martyrs were never entirely understood by those who witnessed their sufferings. The outdoor rallies of Methodism present an unfamiliar picture of British Christianity, ripe with intensity and undogmatic in its approach, which does not equate to modern perceptions of British Christianity in the nineteenth century. Yet, even revivalism in the High Church drew on early Christianity, focusing on the wisdom of early Church Fathers before the Church became perceived as an institution. Revivalism in general proposes a conception of Victorian Christianity that is primitive and robust, vibrant and filled with intense fervour, implicitly drawing on early stories of martyrdom.

I suggest that, in the Victorian novel, the intense experience of idolatry depicts a spirituality informed by Victorian revivalism, one of ascetic fervor and ecstasy.

[11] The Bishop of Sirmeum withstands great pain from torture, since he is noted to be" gripped by a much stronger passion … and made no reply to anyone; for he was in haste to attain the hope of his heavenly calling" (Salisbury "Struggle" 17). The Bishop of Antioch (Ignatius) experiences a similar paradoxical joy in his focus on the afterlife "I care for nothing … so that I may but win Christ, let fire and cross, let the companies of wild beasts … let the grinding of the whole body … come upon me, be it so only may I won Christ Jesus" (Foxe 19).

Instead of an experience of God, however, idolatry is a spiritual experience of immanence, an earthly being. It is for this reason that idolatry does not always lead to God but can often lead to a state of sustained negotiation and uncertainty. This sustained negotiation and searching involves an individual journey of spirituality, leading to immanence or transcendence. The novel, in this case, can be seen as a legitimate catalogue of spirituality, able to convey individual spiritual experience over a traditional and dogmatic Christianity.

1.6 Methodology

In this way, the historical context of the Victorian period is central to the methodology of this thesis, as more complex understandings of religion in the nineteenth century have emerged over the last twenty years. Many scholars have noted the shortcomings of the "crisis of faith" in the context of Victorian Britain's cultural landscape. As mentioned earlier, Larsen identifies flaws in the traditional interpretation of faith in the Victorian period as a time of a faith in crisis (*Crisis of Doubt* 91). Russell Perkin indicates that religion was central in Victorian England and also challenges notions that the rise of the novel is synonymous with the demise of a religious worldview (*Theology and the Victorian Novel* 3). In the traditional subtraction story, religion and secularism are interpreted as binaries. This thesis reconsiders the Victorian novel by analysing these facets of nineteenth-century culture not in constant opposition, but as two cultural frameworks that both significantly influenced Victorian Britain; thus, this project adopts the broader methodological approach of Cultural History, particularly in its relationship with history and literature. Since, as Sean Andrew indicates, cultural studies is concerned with describing cultural contexts and cultural formations, it is compatible with the approach of this thesis (446).

The post-secular theoretical framework for this study, which applies the work of Taylor and Rectenwald to the Victorian novel, does not deny the authority of the novel but, rather, adopts a mode of textual analysis that studies both the culture portrayed in the text in light of the emerging ideas about and foundational shifts in our understanding of Victorian religious development. Taylor and Rectenwald see post-secularism primarily as a philosophical and sociological paradigm. My post-secular methodological model applies the concepts of post-secularism developed by Taylor, Rectenwald, and Smith to textual analysis and close reading of literature. Textual

analysis helps to determine how these texts have been shaped by the religiosity of their time. As Catherine Belsey indicates, the project of cultural criticism is to read the culture in the texts, not the other way around (167) in order to gain a better understanding of both history and literature. The post-secular literary model explores the relationship between words and post-secularism as developing richer notions of spirituality, reflecting the complex religious landscape of Victorian Britain.

I have chosen to focus on idolatry to illustrate the ways in which Victorian literature was permeated with spirituality in its complex expressions of worship. The post-secular interpretation of literature as spiritual challenges traditional notions of the rise of the novel as a form in the late eighteenth century. Ian Watt points out that the first appearance of the novel in the eighteenth century occurred due to "favourable conditions" (9). Cultural conditions that stem from the Renaissance—among them the writings of Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637)—brought about the modern assumption of truth. That is, the pursuit of truth as a solely individual matter (Watt 13). The pursuit of truth as strictly individual, however, is not merely a symptom of modernity, but a part of the movement of spirituality in nineteenth-century Britain. Revivalism discovers truth through the individual experience of God, and the trope of idolatry in the novel discovers spirituality through the experience of the idol.

The post-secular approach identifies complex and richer notions of spirituality and religion. My interpretation of Victorian literature applies James K. A. Smith's reading of religion as a "phenomenon that shapes our imagination and desire," as key in formulating the face of spirituality in the Victorian period ("Secular Liturgies" 161). Identifying religion as an inaugurator of desire not only extends it beyond liturgies and creeds, but also to the act of worship. The act of worship itself becomes vital in the idolatrous encounter, since worshippers always engage with their idol in an active and sensory manner. Idolatry becomes pivotal in personal transformation as the idol, being the centre of the idolator's existence, induces personal transformation. It is, however, only in suffering and intensity that the idolatrous encounter can become a true spiritual experience. In this association, the Victorian novel skirts around the institution of the Church, portraying multiple possibilities in spirituality. In some instances, the spiritual encounter of the idol becomes an immanent awakening, leading to personal development, and presenting a religion based on a moral framework. Other instances present the spiritual contact as opening up possibilities in redemption, ending in a discovery of the transcendent in suffering. Idolatry, thus, becomes vital in

asserting a spirituality inspired by revivalism and early Christianity, presenting God as being discoverable through emotion and experience—away from institutions.

Due to the post-secular approach of this thesis, the texts I have chosen are a series of Victorian canonical novels, as opposed to novels that overtly express faith or doubt. Victorian religious novels do not offer a nuanced perspective regarding idolatry, and they serve more as fictional tracts; my approach is similar to Russell J. Perkin's study of theology in the Victorian novel. Perkin's methodology is based on the understanding that religion was "central to the life of Victorian England" (5). Since religion was integral to Victorian life, it should significantly implicate the Victorian novel in general, not merely religious novels. Perkin also asserts that the Victorians should not be approached with a modern secular lens, as is often the case, but as a distinctly religious culture.

In this thesis, religion, as has been described above, is about experience and spirituality, rather than liturgies and creeds. The novelists discussed in this thesis do not adopt traditional approaches to religion but engage with spirituality in unorthodox ways. Although Brontë was a member of the Established Church, she was influenced by Dissenting views, and presents a more fluid approach to spiritual matters in *Jane Eyre*. While the little that is known about Emily Brontë assumes she was an isolated hermit, her approach to spirituality offers a refreshing revivalism in *Wuthering Heights*, which draws conclusively from Methodism. Dickens's approach is well-known as anti-institutional, but few recognise the uncomfortable sentimentality in his texts as evidence of the spiritual and an expression of faith through good works. In *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, spirituality can be found in the sentimentality the protagonists discover through spiritual guides such as Joe Gagery and Agnes Wickfield. Oscar Wilde's relationship with spirituality is antithetical, with a posture of artificiality and authenticity. In both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*, Wilde does not perceive spirituality as separated from sexuality, but intermingled in a material and spiritual conflation. In all cases, spirituality occurs outside the confines of an institution, and finds expression in the post-secular journey of spirituality.

1.7 Chapter Outline

The selected texts of this thesis tell the addition story, the story of a reassertion of spiritual experience as the nineteenth century progresses. There is no chronological trajectory of idolatry, but the thesis is organised in the structure of a story about the Victorians and their relationship with spirituality. Chapter Two offers in-depth historical background of cultural debates regarding personal authority in faith and the emergence of a "do it yourself" faith. Periodicals were the central platform for these disputes, and religious matters were debated in both religious and non-religious periodicals. For the Victorians, religious matters were a central concern, and the second chapter investigates the Nonconformist periodicals known as the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine,* as well as non-religious ones such as *Macmillan's Magazine*, *The Ecclectic Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *The Athenaeum*. Disagreements range from the spiritual dormancy of the Established Church to criticism directed at Nonconformists for disrupting the unity of the Church. This chapter focuses on the increasingly personal faith of Victorian Britain as a part of Christianity's reinvigoration in nineteenth-century Britain. The evangelical revival was pivotal in this reinvigoration, and it returned an affective focus to faith, one centred on experience and individual relationship with God. Revivalism also drew on the roots of Christianity, focusing on simplicity and passion, with Methodism often being criticised for its robust expressions of passion in its early days of outdoor rallies (Mack 2). In centring spirituality on the individual, revivalism draws on primitive forms of Christianity, which is explored in the novel in a post-secular negotiation of faith.

The third chapter of this thesis explores the figure of Charles Dickens, and two of his *bildungsromane*: *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861). The *bildungsroman* is often thought of as a story that only offers a practical notion of faith, but it also contains spirituality in its sentiment and emotion. In both *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the idol directs all desires and is grounded in intense experience. Overcoming these desires is pivotal in both David and Pip's journey and serves as a stepping-stone in their narrative of growing up. Idolatry thus becomes a transformative experience that does not entail a linear narrative of growing up, but a sustained negotiation of faith and its tension with works. The main focus of faith in Dickens is simplicity, which draws on early Christianity and revivalism; in Dickens,

the emphasis remains on the here and now (the immanent frame) through good works as an expression of sincere faith that flows from the inner life. This form of faith draws on New Testament teachings from the Gospels, repackaged for a Victorian Protestant readership to construct a simplified Christianity.

The fourth chapter explores idolatry in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Similar to Dickens, the Brontës (Charlotte and Emily) reconfigure the subtraction story, though with much stronger emphasis on the transcendent. In both *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847), idolatry is an essential part of discovering their intense, individual faith, as they wrestle with God. Jane explores the bounds of the passions, struggling to reconcile her joy in this life in her love for Rochester, the immanent frame, with great joy in God. Catherine and Heathcliff's idolatrous desire for one another is central in their sole focus on the life to come; their interactions are permeated with violence and intensity, which is an attempt to reconnect with the divine. Catherine and Heathcliff's suffering is always centred in the body, taking the form of self-starvation, and it is their bodily suffering that suggests a redemption for them both. In *Jane Eyre*, her period of suffering propels her on a journey of learning to order her loves and discovering both a joy in this life and a joy in God. *Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, depicts salvation as ambiguous and uncertain for the protagonists; yet, viewed through the lens of British revivalism and Post-Romanticism, it is nevertheless still possible.

The fifth, and final, chapter of this thesis explores the way in which a spirituality is returned to the Victorian novel. In contrast to a standard decline in spirituality, and reference to the supernatural as the century progressed, the very things that seemed antithetical to faith were used to engage with it. Wilde was one of the most eminent artists using illusion and artifice to understand religion. Religious ritual in tribute to the idol centres idolatry in the body and creates a problematic distinction between the pagan and the Christian. In the violence and intensity often accompanying ritual in both *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde highlights the pagan roots of Christianity and depicts a post-secular form of faith—an ecstasy of the useless.

1.8 Conclusion

Idolatry tells a new story about the Victorian period—an addition story. Previously, idolatry in the Victorian novel was interpreted as evidence of a turn away from God; that is, the subtraction story. As an external sin, it remains a symbol of spiritual deviance, and is evidence of the inherent anti-Catholic discourses prevalent in Victorian Britain. These readings focus on a secular interpretation of idolatry, as one that portrays the journey away from God as sin. While idolatry is grounded in a type of spiritual deviance, it also illuminates the cultural condition of Victorian Britain, which was searching for spirituality at the same time as it was seeking to fulfil its own desires. As such, idolatry is no longer a sin, but a pathway to a transcendent experience through a journey of self-discovery and knowing one's own heart.

The fluid and increasingly ambiguous nature of Christianity during this period is often perceived as evidence of a faith in crisis. Faith appeared to be in decline due to diminishing church attendance and hostility towards the Established Church. Christianity was in a constant state of flux, and the Church was widely seen as a spiritually void institution. Because of this, personal interaction with God became increasingly privileged over dogmatic Christianity. In this personal interaction, religion is redefined in the Victorian novel as a phenomenon that shapes imagination and desire, before it yields beliefs—an emotional experience. The nature of faith, thus, becomes increasingly ambiguous, and, outside the Established Church, the novel offers a model of individual worship, exploring the bounds of worshipping God and turning to idols in worship. Faith continues to remain uncertain in these new conditions, since no structured authority can identify the distinction between idolatry and worshipping God.

Idolatry in the Victorian novel is a contradictory process. Its foundation is secular—it is a mystical experience of a "fake" god—but its process is spiritual. Idolatry is rooted in the human heart, which finds fulfilment in the idol. True relationship with God involves satisfaction of ultimate desire; as the apostle Paul describes, Christ sanctifies his bride, the Church, as he enters in close relationship with his creation. The novel individualises this relationship, recasting it away from the Church, with the individual becoming the bride in a marriage to the idol (Eph 5.22-30). The idolatrous relationship is a dark mirror of Christ and the Church, which is only consummated in suffering.

In the consummation of relationship, the suffering that always accompanies the idolatrous relationship draws on pre-institutionalised Christianity. Apart from faith and doctrine, Christianity needs to be simplified. Christianity, in this state, is rooted in experience (the here and now), located in the body while also being immensely spiritual and attuned to the transcendent. Early Christianity has a romanticised aspect of being simple, even in accounts of martyrdom. It was a time of great suffering and great joy; Christians were being martyred; yet, they also performed great miracles—their Christianity was more experiential and un-dogmatic. Searching for Christianity's early simplicity, the Victorian novel's focus on the individual and the individual's transformation is drawn to early Christianity in its simplicity. Drawing on its birth, similar to the Romantics, Victorian Christianity seeks to reclaim its origins in the form of intense emotion. In a post-secular renegotiation of spirituality, idolatry articulates an intense individual, mystical spirituality.

Chapter Two: "The Strange Gods at Home": The Cultural Landscape and Idolatry in Nineteenth-Century Britain

> 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. (Arnold 1368-69)

Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867) is frequently cited as an example of the Victorian "crisis of faith." Jan Ivo Klaver notes that Isobel Armstrong's identification of the poem as "a threnody on the lost myth of Christianity" encompasses the "universality and generality of the ebbing of Christian faith" (25). Francis O'Gorman locates, instead, a Romantic inspiration in the poem, arguing that it avows nature's ability to emulate God (312). Michael O'Neil situates this loss within the post-Romantic sentiment that he identifies as a key characteristic of Arnold's poetry (111). Post-Romanticism readily acknowledges the loss of any appeal to a higher order, and Arnold's verse expresses strong feelings of disconnection from God. As the speaker stretches out his hands, the sea of faith retreats from him in a melancholy roar. Such an expression of emotion is evidence of Victorian literature's retreat from the spiritual—a retreating faith slowly ebbing away—yet as Klaver comments "if we try, however, to pin down the factors which led to this decline of faith, the picture becomes misty" (25). By focusing on periodicals, this chapter explores the cultural conditions that contributed to this sense of grief and argues that strong expressions of emotion in periodicals—in a reaction to faith's changing conditions—are evidence of Victorian culture's search for the spiritual. The splintered nature of Victorian religion, along with the advances in biblical criticism fostered a culture of individual spirituality that, more accurately, rejected organised religion rather than faith itself.

Thus, this chapter interprets spirituality in the Victorian period by tracing a trajectory of increased individual spirituality and a continued decentring of the

Established Church. The religious landscape of Victorian Britain was centrally concerned with personal agency, fostering a culture of a "do it yourself" faith. Extensive work outlining a full history of the Church, and its various religious sects, has already been undertaken by leading scholars such as Robert Lee Wolff, Gerald Parsons, and William Sachs, but I extend this by detailing the ways in which this dispersed cultural landscape was permeated with anxieties surrounding personal agency.[12] Idolatry in the Victorian novel, I argue in the chapters following, offered ways to articulate these anxieties about the consequences of modernity in the religious life of Victorian Britain.

2.1 Periodical Debates: Searching for the Spiritual

The vast array of debates in this area were well expressed in Victorian periodicals. *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* was a main platform for this type of engagement, often responding to disagreements with the Established Church. Personal agency in faith was a prevalent topic of contention, even in secular periodicals such as *Macmillan's Magazine*, *The Ecclectic Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *The Athenaeum*. Dissenters (also known as Nonconformists) and Establishmentarians often disagreed over people's personal rights in faith, and those loyal to the Establishment criticised Dissenters for disrupting the unity and strength of the Established Church due to personal preferences. For both Dissenters and revivalists, the Church was spiritually

[12] The majority of publications concerning religion in the last fifty years have returned a religious focus to the Victorian era. Theodore Hoppen's chapter "Godly People", which can be found in his study of mid-century Victorians, presents a comprehensive overview of religion at the time, referring to four major sections: the Old Dissent (sixteenth and seventeenth-century Baptists, Congregationalist, Quakers), the New Dissent (mostly Methodist), Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism (427). Hoppen also reads a change in the view of God as the century progressed, with an emphasis on the love of God, rather than His wrath (441). Gerald Parsons focuses on the significant relationship between the Church and the State, outlining the various power struggles in the Church as also monopolised in the government (29,30). William Sachs's *Transformation of Victorian Anglicanism* also indicates that the Church's power struggles also included political power play, describing how Nonconformists were allowed to participate in politics by mid-century along with the Catholics (33,34). Robert Lee Wolff's *Gains and Losses* contains an excellent introduction that discusses the religious novel in the context of the endless theological debates. He reads all Victorian novels as touching on religious matters (3). His study locates novels in every aspect of religious movements and debates, from Catholicism to the Broad Church. Frances Knight has completed two extensive studies of Victorian religion. Her first study (*The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society*) investigates the fluidity of Victorian Anglicanism, noting that to be a Victorian Anglican was an ambiguous position, in comparison with a Nonconformist or a Catholic. The Church of England's strong position was more vital in its role of English identity, perceived as revealing loyalty to the crown (32). Her follow up study delves into *fin-de-siècle* Christianity, which still reveals an ambiguity, but also of a problematic distinction between secular and religious aspects of culture (127).

void and had become an organisation of the state. In R. E. B.'s view, the English Church no longer existed as a spiritual organisation and had become one that existed merely for the purpose of public worship (*Fraser's Magazine* 241). John Henry Newman and his followers fervently sought disestablishment, perceiving it as vital to the spiritual life of the Church (Cooper 142).

As such, Dissenters advocated for Church and State separation as vital to the spiritual health of Christianity. Periodicals also included writers of doubt who questioned morality in light of scientific advances that disenchanted nature. In the May edition of *The Wesleyan-Methodist* in 1891, Sidney Mees notes the increasing focus on the material, which is disposed in favour of the spiritual (323). He refers to the diverging paths of the Newman brothers, arguing that the "substantial identity of these two signs of our times—at least as regards to their source—is beyond all question. Why do men doubt the reality of spiritual things? Is it not because of blunted spiritual perceptions?" (323). The differing viewpoints, in this case, are distinguished according to the spiritual and the material. From Mees's expression, it is evident the periodicals were platforms for expressing both disagreement and doubt, reflecting the uncertain cultural landscape of Victorian Britain. Even though periodical content was public, those who contributed often expressed their struggles and doubts, illuminating a culture of public negotiation and debate.

As outlined in the Introduction, my argument does not discount the reality of secularism and its lasting effects but sketches the cultural context of the literary texts discussed in this thesis to demonstrate the ways in which Victorian culture was post-secular. In particular, the public platform of periodicals and the Victorian novel presents a post-secular negotiation— faith is based on individual agency. The post-secular culture of Victorian Britain continuously pushed the Church into the margins and supplanted this authority with the individual's personal faith. The rise of secularism, as Taylor describes, involved a continuous focus on individual agency, which allows one to make one's own religion, and involves forging one's own path of spiritual inspiration (Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular* 88). This individual spirituality, however, was also a part of a shift within religion itself—represented by the revivals within the Anglican Church. The revivals were a part of reinvigorating a primitive form of Christianity in a culture increasingly focused on the here and now. The Victorian novel also explores this individual negotiation of faith, becoming a form of revivalism itself in discovering new forms of faith.

2.2 The Established Church and Religion in Victorian England

Religion was integral to Victorian society, and the Established Church was still classified as the national Church. Church attendance was certainly intermittent, and was decreasing as the century progressed, but the majority of the English population considered itself Protestant (Janes 8); and this sense of being Protestant was seen as synonymous with British identity, and thus also as a cultural loyalty. Victorian religious culture was fluid, a mix of many Dissenting groups interspersed with the internal Anglican divisions (Nash 68).

Within the Church of England, the main point of dispute was personal authority in the process of interpreting the scriptures, versus the authority of the Church in this process. The Church of England contained three unofficial subareas, referred to in an article by W. J. Conybeare in the *Edinburgh Review*, as the High, Broad, and Low Church. Robert L. Wolff describes the High Church as closely related to the Roman Catholic Church, emphasising the Church's significant role in the individual's interaction with God (11). The High Church also attributed a high place to scripture and common prayer, but there was pronounced emphasis on the role and authority of the Church in interpreting scripture. The Broad Church refers to members of the Church who did not hold the strong views of Low and High Church. Broad Churchmen were less sharply defined than other parties and tolerated a breath of theological opinion (Schlossberg 2; Parsons 33). The Low Church stressed the importance of scripture, and its doctrines were closely related to Dissenting groups (Wolff 17). The internal divisions of the Church were not separate and distinct, but splinters of belief within it. These factions were exacerbated by revivalism, which, in general, refers to a period of spiritual renewal; the revivals occurred both in the Low and High Church and drew on pre-establishment principles of simplicity (R. E. B 241).

Nevertheless, Victorian Britain's main form of religious practice was a religion of the parlour. In her detailed study of Victorian Protestantism, Knight describes Victorian religion as personal. This means, in order to determine British faith, the modern historian must focus on religion in the domestic setting. Knight argues that "literary and documentary evidence suggests that private prayer in the home remained a commonplace in nineteenth-century Britain" ("Lay Religion" 36). In her view, Anglican piety occurred in the domestic setting, which is evidenced from well-documented family and private prayers. There were also vast numbers of tracts and

sermons in circulation, pointing to considerable evidence of domestic reading ("Lay Religion" 36). The poorest homes in Britain often owned a Bible, or a copy of the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer; frequent Church attendees as well as those who seldom attended Church owned these books. This was because a Bible or Prayer Book was seen as something of social and cultural value, and possessing a Bible was a "mark of respectability" among the poor ("Lay Religion" 37, 40). There was a continued value accorded to religion, and this religion increasingly did not include church attendance. Faith, in other words, was becoming a matter of the heart. The focus on an individual, "do it yourself" faith raises concerns for Victorians over the boundaries between faith and unfaith. That is to say, without an institution to determine the precise nature of faith, it becomes a porous, fluid term, and a source of anxiety explored in the form of the Victorian novel. The novel, that is, offers explorations of these new, individual journeys of doubt and faith.

2.3 Secularism and its Role in the Shift to Personal Agency

While Victorian religion had a prominent role in centring spirituality on the individual, secularism, and the rise of modernity, shifted the search for meaning from the collective to the subjective, from the external to the internal. In his theory of new moral orders, Taylor explains the ways in which modernity took shape in the West. Its roots can be traced to the seventeenth century, but it took centuries for the new moral order of individualism to take shape. Taylor reads the novel as a part of the "frontier of self-exploration", which had evolved through the spiritual discipline of self-examination" (539). Taylor specifies this further through description of the immanent order, which refers to an order articulated on its own "without reference to interventions from outside … the life of the buffered individual" (543). Modernity, then, refers to a shift in meaning and purpose that transitions from seeking meaning in external forces to drawing meaning from the inner life. Watt describes this as an "individualistic reorientation" that finds form in the novel in the eighteenth century. In this new modern framework, the pursuit of truth becomes subjective and internalised (Watt 13). This interiority has often been interpreted as hostile to Christianity, and scholars tend to perceive this "mystic identity" as a secularising force and as antagonistic to "real nature of Christianity" (Troeltsch 800; Bender 49). The debate in Victorian Britain

was centred on this very issue: the separation of Church and State as either detrimental or life-giving to Christianity.

Spirituality outside of religious institutions, with Victorian religion as a religion of the heart, often manifests in Victorian literature in the form of profound emotion. To the Victorians, emotion in literature accorded an opportunity to convey their grief at the challenge that scientific advances, such as Darwin's theory of Natural Selection, brought in the harmony between science and nature. To return to the example of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," this "confirms that our true condition is aloneness"—our bereavement from the transcendent (O'Neill 123). This solidarity refers to a world in which there is no higher power to appeal to in time of need or uncertainty. Since it adopts a posture of utter abandonment, the post-Romantic framework perceives Victorians as shifting from a religious to a secular society: the subtraction story. This is also evident in Philip Shaw's explanation of the post-Romantic sublime. The sublime is a Romantic term defined as a lofty experience grounded in feeling, which is beyond conventional understanding and, thus, surpasses words (2). Shaw interprets the post-Romantic sublime as a more secular phenomenon with no appeal to a higher order, in which the sublime is merely an illusion "brought about through our misperception of reality" (4). Shaw locates the post-Romantic sublime in modern culture, which, in contrast with previous generations, questions sacred objects of the sublime; however, the presence of immense emotion in Victorian literature portrays a grappling with both the secular and the religious in a post-secular struggle and reconceptualises post-Romanticism.

In facing the prospect of our "true aloneness", Victorians confronted it with a sense of grief. As Elisabeth Jay points out, for the authors who allegedly suffered doubt and lost faith, there is an absence of the kind of "secular indifference" present in the twentieth century (101). Michael McGhee also observes we should not minimise "the personal devastation wrought" by the changes in conceptions of God and nature in the nineteenth century (133).[13] Tennyson's "In Memoriam" also expresses an immense despondency:

> I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
> And gather dust and chaff, and call

[13] In another part, McGhee notes that Arnold "saw the confusion in their assumption that the reasonableness of religion is demonstrated by showing first the reasonableness of belief in the existence of God" (134).

To what I feel is Lord of all,

And faintly trust the larger hope. (1339)

Nathan Scott describes Tennyson's poem as confronting the loss of meaning, of grieving the loss of one centralised truth—a central feature of modernity (270). As Larsen argues, the expressions of doubt in literature should be read as indicating how much Victorians cared about the instabilities wrought on faith (*Crisis of Doubt* 11). Victorian literature conveyed immense grief and emotion, which is itself a counter to traditional perspectives of faith slowly ebbing away. Expressions of such strong emotion in Victorian literature might seem dramatic to modern readers, but the presence of raw emotion was interpreted by nineteenth century readers as spiritual (Larsen, "Vanity and Vexation" 46). In this framework, we should view the "crisis of faith", as a "peculiar mixture of doubt and confidence" (Meyer 587). It is not merely the mix of doubt and faith, however, but also a strong assertion of spirituality in the fervent emotion that characterises the search for meaning. Tennyson still stretches out his "lame hands of faith" in search for meaning, earnestly seeking not after God himself, but the transcendent. In this case, the precise nature of the "crisis of faith" becomes about the loss of a way to God; access to Him no longer seems possible. This path is constructed through strong expressions of emotion that affirms the yearning for spirituality.

While there were most certainly declarations against religion in the Victorian period, the anti-religious attitudes were often expressions of anti-institutionalism. Thomas Huxley's debate with Bishop Wilberforce reveals that Huxley's hostility was directed at institutional religion, rather than personal religion (Lightman 364).[14] This critique of institutional religion can also be seen in Brontë's dedication at the front of *Jane Eyre* to William Thackeray, boldly addressing those who called her novel anti-religious: "self-righteousness is not religion" (xxvii). This can also be seen in figures of organised religion in the Brontë's, as well as Dickens's, depiction of corrupt Churchmen, such as Mr Brocklehurst, Mr Bumble, and Mr Murdstone. The Church, with its dogmas and systems, was becoming less appealing to many Victorians who increasingly had more options in faith and attained greater personal liberty to choose

[14] Thomas Huxley and many other scientists, similar to Dissenters, attacked the power of the Anglican Church, expressing concern over "the deadening effect of institutionalised religion" and still regarded religion as maintaining a significant role in human life (Lightman 364).

their own religion. As well as the increasing personal authority in faith, greater personal authority was encouraged in the reading of the Bible.

2.4 Biblical Criticism and The Novel

Biblical criticism published during the Victorian period significantly influenced the authority of the Bible and constructed a problematic distinction between literature and the Bible. The two most important publications that altered the Bible's authoritative position are *Essays and Reviews* (1860), and *Lux Mundi*, published in 1889. *Essays and Reviews* was written by six clergymen and one layman (Scott 271). The series of essays was designed to address the various interpretations of the Bible that came from different denominations, and it encouraged people to approach the Bible as a work of literature, urging them that considering the genres of the various books is a vital part of interpretation. Benjamin Jowett's essay was the most persuasive, and comes at the end of the volume. Titled "On the Interpretation of Scripture", Jowett's main issue is with interpretations of the Bible: "[i]t is a strange, though familiar fact, that great differences of opinion exist respecting the Interpretation of Scripture" (331). In his view, scripture has become obscured by tradition "under a load of commentators" (337). He stresses the necessity to interpret the Bible in a literary sense:

> in what may be termed the externals of interpretation, that is to say, the meaning of words, the connexion, of sentences, the settlement of the text, the evidence of facts, the same rules apply to the Old and New Testaments as to other books. (337)

Jowett's essay drew a parallel with the ancient writers of antiquity, who were approached in this described manner. Literary genres, in this case, form an important part of individual Bible-reading, since different literary genres conveyed their meaning in contrasting ways. These essays were published to discourage literal readings and to adapt the Bible to modern understandings (Scott 272). Jowett argues that there is no foundation in the Gospel or the Epistles of supernatural, or higher views of inspiration, and the nature of inspiration can only be discerned through the examination of scripture (345). In doing so, Jowett confines the purpose of the Bible to the here and now, disregarding a past in which miracles existed. By insisting on approaching the Bible in this manner, Jowett makes the Bible accessible to an average reader, pointing out that this approach clears away,

> the remains of dogmas, systems, controversies, which are encrusted upon them. It would show us the 'erring fancy' of interpreters assuming sometimes to have the Spirit of God Himself, yet unable to pass beyond the limits of their own age. (338)

Jowett stresses the need for an individual approach, away from the Church, and argues that biblical criticism has been truer to the traditions of the Church "than to the words of Christ" (338). As such, the essay reflects an increasing turn away from the institutional style of religion, to a religion concerned with the inner life. For Jowett, literary imagination was vital in the process of private Bible reading, and the individual can attain divine revelation through imagination. This spirit of reading encourages readers of the Bible to transfer themselves to another age by means of their imagination. His essay, in other words, requires a level of imagination, and it addresses the significance of the "inner world" in reading the scriptures. These ideas were revolutionary, although they were derived from advancements in German Higher Criticism of the Bible (Scott 271). In Britain, these ideas were considered heretical, and the authors of *Essays and Reviews* were denounced, and both the press and public showed indignation and panic (Bowen 167). The publication of *Essays and Reviews*, nevertheless, played a vital role in questioning the role of the Church in the interpretation of the Bible and initiated a process that continued to lower the status of the Bible as a sacred text and imbued the novel with a similar status.

The climate that radically opposed *Essays and Reviews* was intellectually adapted over the next thirty years and gave way to the contrasting welcome that greeted *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (1889). *Lux Mundi* is a collection of twelve essays written by eleven Anglican teachers and edited by Charles Gore, who was the Principal of Pusey House (Bowen 173). Gore and the other contributors were a part of a new liberal Catholic party in the Church, some of whom had been a part of Tractarianism (Bowen 174). In the Preface, Charles Gore describes his reasons for producing these essays, noting that the purpose was to "succour a distressed faith" and to relate Christianity to the modern growth of scientific, historical and critical knowledge, as well as to politics and ethics (x). These essays serve as the post-secular example of an interdispersal of binaries, since they discourage reading the secular and religious as separate, or opposing, and to read the best thought of the time as "both scientific and religious" (x). Gore's aim is to help those who are struggling with the recent advances in scientific theory, citing Aubrey

Moore, one of the contributors, as an example of this, and describes him as wrestling "with the difficulties of adjustment" (xi). In his essay, titled "Christian Doctrine of God", Aubrey Moore refuses to accept division between religion and science (175). As with *Essays and Reviews*, the volume encourages people to approach the Bible as they would any other piece of literature, to consider the different books of the Bible according to their literary genre (Gore 253). Gore describes authors of the Bible as being inspired to think and write for God under "all the forms of natural genius" (260). Gore's aims to adapt the Bible to modern thought is telling of a trend throughout the Victorian period that climaxes at the *fin-de-siècle*—an increasing immanising of the Bible through offering possibilities of interpretation apart from the Church. The novel, in light of this, presents an immanised faith with more relevance in the here and now than the afterlife.

These publications raised questions over the continued value of the Bible in cultural discussions. The Bible was increasingly viewed as a great work of literature, rather than a book of divine inspiration (Scott 272); this further contributed a loss of central authority. These publications lessened the sacred status of the Bible as an authoritative text, and opened up discussions in periodicals regarding the sanctity of the Bible in relation to the novel. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, periodicals such as *The Athenaeum* note the great literary value of the Bible in its review of "The Literary Study of the Bible" (478). Because of this criticism according to the author, scripture's reliability had been significantly influenced, since there is uncertainty as to whether or not readers are reading the true Bible (478). At the same time that the Bible's sacred infallibility was questioned, the novel became an alternative moral primer for the common person.

2.4.1 The Novel and Faith: The Emotive Parallel

As a form, the novel was seen as the voice of the everyday person, one that elevates "earthly existence" and locates humanity at its centre (Bremer 241). Nearly four decades later, Charles Billson echoes this view in the *Westminster Review*, arguing that the English novel elevates the story of "common life" (610). Similar to revivalism, the novel centred discussions about faith on personal experience. In a piece published in *Good Words*, the novel versus Bible debate is presented in creative form, as a story about novels discussing their value with a worn-out Bible left in a library by a young

man. The theological novel presents an interesting topic within this debate, the immanising of religion as a simplistic, moral framework:

> But nobody does search you nowadays … I am what is called a theological novel, and they much prefer to read me; there is great interest in theology, I grant, but no religion. You are much too direct to suit the modern taste; no one wants religion, only just a delicate flavour of theology in their reading, just sufficient to quiet their conscience, and make them feel that they are religious, without giving them the trouble of being so. (772)

The theological novel's comment to the Bible presents an anti-institutional sentiment, with the Bible being irrelevant in changing modern times. At the conclusion of the piece, this irrelevance is undermined when the young man returns to retrieve his Bible and informs the librarian of his personal experience. The Bible becomes the book for the common person that gives strength in suffering:

> The books you have here may inform the mind, may train the intellect, and even quicken the moral sense, but this one book is more powerful than them all, for it alone can inspire men. (773)

It is personal experience of the Bible that becomes the way in which the words of the Bible feed the spirit, not the intellect (773). In all the discussions on either side of the debate, a trend of the everyday person emerges in the possibilities of engaging the emotions. The life of the ordinary person, away from the Established Church, is what matters the most, drawing parallels between the novel as a form and the trend of emotion in nineteenth-century British Christianity.

2.5 Faith and the Periodical Press: A Debate

Periodicals were one of the main platforms of this cultural debate, and religious issues were at the forefront, particularly personal authority in faith. Even non-religious periodicals were a platform for these issues. The *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* was one of the most prominent periodicals for this expression. An 1872 article, "Current Church-Questions", reviews a recently published collection of theological essays, and defends issues addressed in the series of essays. After noting that the various parties within the Church are a "peculiarity of our times" (59), the author defends the attacks directed at Nonconformists (Dissenters). The book discussed in the article criticises Congregationalists—a group of Nonconformists that had split away from the

Church—pointing out that Dissenting groups too readily allow all classes to join their Church, insisting that their churches need institutional structure. Although Dissenters believed in personal relationship with God, this was still in the context of growth in the "communion of saints" (70). The author of the article defends the Congregationalists by describing traditional Church services as "impracticable" and "real communion" as achieved in a Methodist-style meeting (70). These meetings often took place outside the physical space of a Church and placed emphasis on personally experiencing God.

Nonconformists readily expressed anti-establishment sentiments in periodicals, and Henry Allon's 1871 article, "Why Nonconformists Desire Disestablishment" in *The Contemporary Review*—a non-religious periodical—directly addresses articles that have called Nonconformists cult-like. Allon desired greater unity in the Church and pursues this by clarifying Nonconformity's main tenets (367). He defends the Nonconformist argument as being fundamentally religious, in spite of what articles in the *Quarterly Review* and the *Edinburgh Review* have stated. On the surface, these divisions were based on the ripe debate about Church and State separation: according to a Nonconformist view, the Established Church as an institution of the State causes the Church's spiritual character to deteriorate (384). Church and State separation is a fundamental part of the debate surrounding personal agency, since Nonconformist denominations, as well as revivalist groups, perceived this separation as essential to the spiritual invigoration of the Church.

Allon expresses anger at Broad Churchmen who desire to include all churches and all faiths in one national recognition, in an attempt to reduce the number of creeds:

> The only morality that can commend itself to an unsophisticated mind is for those who believe alike to associate together, and to hold their truth strongly. (390)

Allon's phrase "hold their truth strongly" expresses a highly modern conception of faith, based on strong personal conviction; in this context, church involves a group of individuals who share in common personal convictions. Such an emphasis often encourages strong anti-establishment sentiments, which Allon readily expresses. He writes that the influence of establishment "neutralises the elements of spiritual power in a church" and having various creeds apart from the Established Church offer "self-reliance … and flexibility" (391). Dogmas are not seen as genuine expressions of faith, but artificial and performative, and self-reliance is seen as the genuine experience of

belief in God. This stress on individual agency did not mean that individuals had limitless personal agency in Nonconformity, as the author indicates: "[t]he freedom of individual members is necessarily limited by its own standards," and if a member's belief was contrary to the standards set by the Church, that member "should relinquish his membership" (396). Even within the limited framework, this "opt-out" provides individuals with the freedom to choose their own creed as people associating "on the basis of common beliefs" (397).

C. H. Tasmania responded to Allon, in his article "The Church of the Future" calling Nonconformists back to the Established Church. Tasmania maintains that reconciliation would cause "greater diffusions of religious instruction throughout the neglected deserts, unreached by the more wasteful and isolated action of sect-torn Christianity" (157). Nonconformity is branded a "one-sided view of Christian teaching" in direct address to Allon's article in the *Contemporary Review*. The divided nature of the Church, according to Tasmania, is the outcome of "private judgement" (157). Here, private judgement is revealed as a central anxiety embedded in Victorian Britain's religious conscious. Meaning becomes a matter of individual interpretation, which is a concern for Tasmania; his stress on a return to the central authority of the Church captures an anxiety regarding the fragmentation of interpretation and meaning.

Tasmania attempts to foster unity in listing its benefits, arguing that the Nonconformists' freedom need not be sacrificed, and pointing out that individuals still need to regulate their worship to some central authority, "the Congregational union" (158). The anxiety of personal agency is addressed again and, according to Tasmania:

> [The more] that men exercise the freedom of thought, the more certainly they will challenge the dogmas to which they have implicitly subscribed … the greater must be the tendency to fly off into never-ending sects. (159)

The "sects" implicitly address the Nonconformists, who exercised private judgement, and were challenging the unity of the Anglican Church. He calls for a sacrifice of personal freedom for the common good of Christianity (159). Tasmania labels Nonconformity as exclusive, demoralising those on the outer (161). In his view, the fragmentation will eventually destroy the national faith (162).

In the same periodical, titled "Position of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England", R. E. B. expresses great disillusionment at the Established Church, reflecting the tensions between private versus public worship. The Church, as a spiritual organisation, has died out and, according to R. E. B., and become merely an

establishment of empty public worship (241). R. E. B. sees revivalism as having renewed spirituality, waking the Church from its slumbers; he refers to the Oxford Movement and the evangelical revival as changing the face of the Church from being a mere institution with religious purposes (243). He suggests positions of reform and unity in light of his disillusionment. The evangelical party fostered a spirit of individual spirituality, and R. E. B. draws a parallel between Nonconformists and the evangelicals, suggesting they should unite due to the shared tenets of finding authority in scripture.

As should be evident so far, there was a decided polysemic character to being Anglican, and this was further encouraged by the founder of Wesleyan Methodism, John Wesley, who urged his members to continue attending Anglican Church services in addition to Chapel. In spite of leaving the Church to spread his message to the people in the English countryside, Wesley remained a respected Anglican clergyman (Knight, "Lay Religion" 28). As such, Wesley's congregation followed his advice, and dabbled in other Dissenter, or Nonconformist, churches while continuing to belong to the Anglican Church. This spirit of church-dabbling, a "do it yourself" religion, continued through to the latter half of the nineteenth century. This trend ceased by the 1870s, and clergy members were beginning to make sharper distinctions between those loyal to the Establishment and Nonconformist members in their churches (Knight 28, 35).

The continued push towards an internalised, personal faith had various implications which, from careful study of the periodicals produced in this period, was causing anxieties about the immanisation of faith—faith stripped of dogma and used as a moral framework; for instance, the non-religious *Macmillan's Magazine* published an article on "The Proposed Substitutes of Religion" (1878). Here, Goldwin Smith struggles with the idea of a universe without a way to God, firstly expressing concern over its increasing focus on materialism—the here and now. Goldwin cites the simple truths of religion as a solution to the challenges wrought on religion by science, since these truths are, "intelligible to all, and strike all minds with equal force … A child learns them perfectly at this mother's knee" ("Proposed Substitutes" 258). He grapples with scientific advances, asking, "[h]ave we really come to this, that the world has no longer any good reason for believing in a God or a life beyond the grave?" and its impact on morality ("Proposed Substitutes" 262). Smith articulates the subtraction story in his writing, phrasing scientific advances as a new order to replace

religion: “science and criticism” has delivered people from the “dark and degrading superstition”; but he also notes that the “foundations of morality have been shaken” (“Proposed Substitutes” 263). Smith expresses a secular voice, though he does acknowledge the existence of God in his explanation of knowing Him in childhood. Reconciling his own views with new scientific advances involves simplifying religion, drawing in its simple truths.

This simple type of faith was based in a strong, anti-establishment stance. Isaac Pollitt, a Methodist minister, describes his experience of attending the service of a “latitudinarian” ex-clergyman in his 1885 article “The Future of Religion in England” also in *The Wesleyan-Methodist*. Pollitt’s observations of various positions regarding faith, as well as the very act of attending the sermon of a “wandering star”, reveals the severe fragmentation inherent in religion in the latter half of nineteenth-century Britain. As a Methodist preacher, Pollitt refutes the ideas of the ex-clergyman before passing his own judgements (841). He points out that those in the pulpit:

> [H]ave insisted on belief in this thing and the other as essential to salvation. Other preachers have gone to the opposite extreme, teaching that there is no hereafter, and that all religion is Quixotic. (842)

This preacher rejects the creeds, “recognising no religion”, and describes morality as the “Alpha and Omega of religion”. Morality becomes the vehicle to measure faith outside the establishment and, once again, a strong anti-establishment sentiment is expressed in a public periodical. This acknowledgement of “no creeds” assumes that humanity is fundamentally good, and the idol is perceived through creeds and dogmas—“the work of men’s hands” (842). This refers to an external, symbolic, idolatry usually associated with Catholicism.

Pollitt’s observation is echoed previously in Thomas Carlyle’s lectures. Carlyle sees symbols and creeds as idolatry, and calls Victorians to turn to great men as examples for how to live (11). The focus, as with Carlyle, is on the here and now:

> The motives for right action must no longer be the rewards of heaven and the punishments of hell; but, instead, we must appeal to an Englishman’s … natural and human love. (842)

This natural, human love is similar to Carlyle’s views regarding human virtue, which turn admiration from a virtue into a religion. In *On Heroes*, Carlyle offers the worship of great men as a guarantee of social survival in a society fragmented by social disruptions and social ideologies. The individual becomes the emblem of God in this

framework (“Hero as Divinity” 10). This is a form of immanisation, since spirituality remains contained within a tangible example for people to follow.

Pollitt disagrees with such secularity, arguing that morality must be “the offspring of a Divine principle implanted on the soul” (843). As a principle implanted on the soul, the relationship with God is not mediated by the clergy but is authentic. The moral framework for Christianity offers a way to live according to Christian principles apart from organised religion. Goldwin Smith expresses his concern over this new moral order in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, an order that places humanity in the place of God (“Proposed Substitutes” 257). This new moral order has come about, in Smith’s view, due to the emphasis on materialism and progress; the central concern here is again personal agency, and the consequence of progress implicates personal power, allowing people to will their own destiny (“Proposed Substitutes” 258).

In an 1870 article, J. W. writes about Original Sin, and religious dogma. Published in *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, the piece discusses the issues associated with religious dogma, which was the necessity for a saviour based on the doctrine of Original Sin; it stresses mankind’s need of a saviour, and views mankind as essentially fallen and sinful. J. W. describes people as declaring they are “not conscious of the possession of such a depraved nature” (49). In his view, this essential goodness is destructive to orthodox Christianity, because it weeds the need for God out of the picture (49). The belief of humankind as essentially good simplifies faith, and strips church-based dogma of its authority.

2.6 Primitive Authority: The Trend in Victorian Revivalism

As mentioned previously, the views regarding personal authority in the Established Church were diverse and Dissenters were a by-product of this continued splintering. The two main groups of Dissenting groups in Victorian Christianity were the New and the Old Dissent. The Old Dissent (Congregationalists) consisted of the majority of Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Quakers, all which have their origins in the seventeenth century. The New Dissent comprised of the Methodists, Calvinist Methodists and a minority of the Baptists (Parsons 71). All Dissenting groups split away from the Anglican Church to have their chapel meetings, except one group: the Wesleyan Methodists, which are a product of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. The feeling of loss and disconnection associated with the questions of faith

also meant that a central concern of Victorian religious life was emotion. The Wesleyan Methodists directed this strong emotion in the interaction with God, which serves as a reconciling bridge to what was regarded as a dried-up, institutionalised Christianity.

For Methodists, faith was rooted in emotion and personal experience. The paramount effects of the Wesleyans, in their emphasis on a personal interaction with God were commonly discussed in the periodicals. The foundations of Methodism are based on scripture and personally knowing God. In an 1841 article from the *Wesleyan*, the author describes an understanding of scripture "as it is made known to us", and stresses that nothing must interfere with the interpreting of God's word (848). In the *Contemporary Review*, Allon sketches a brief history of the battle between Dissenters and the Church; he argues that Nonconformists maintained "direct personal relations between the Spirit of God and the souls of men" and the Church's decision to eject Nonconformists implicates the Church spiritually, causing a spiritual degeneration (370). He describes Methodism as "a passionate yearning for religious life" that does not rest on theological dogma or ecclesiastical theory (371). Methodism's success reveals the yearning for a spiritual life in Victorian Britain. Rooted in feeling, Methodism's anti-dogmatic approach suggests the Church adopts a framework too rational to ensure a survival of Christianity in modern life. In the *Ecclectic Review*, this sentiment is echoed and the author stresses the need to draw on the Holy Spirit, and the attempts to reconcile faith to theological systems has "destroyed it" (569).

Both the Low Church revival of the eighteenth century, and the High Church revival of the nineteenth century had primitive, anti-modern tendencies. Methodism and Tractarianism draw from this rich history, anchoring their movements in a simplistic, original form of Christianity. Both revivals reveal the yearning for a simplicity in the Church of England, one that has a close connection with the Holy Spirit. The appeal of Wesleyan Methodism was its simplicity and vibrancy, which the Church of England had lost in its commitment to doctrine ("Religious Enthusiasm" 264). William Briggs's description of Methodist rallies parallels accounts of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. According to this passage, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and instant spoke in tongues:

> And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak Other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance … And they were all amazed

> and were in doubt, saying to one another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. (Acts 2.4,12-13)

On this day, God pours out his Holy Spirit, the Helper, onto his apostles, enabling them to speak in tongues and carry out His work in the world. In his assessment of the Day of Pentecost, David Smith describes an enthusiasm coming out of the mouths of the apostles:

> Their -ykwa-uokaxta was the eloquence of minds divinely illuminated and inspired with a holy enthusiasm. Their lips were opened, and they spoke as they had never done before—"with other tongues." (365)

Smith refers to the act of speaking in tongues, which is a language imparted by the Holy Spirit, intelligible to most outsiders. In the same passage in Acts, the Spirit allows the apostles to perform "wonders and signs" and it describes "awe cameth upon every soul" (Acts 2.43). The account of Wesley's rallies is parallel to the Day of Pentecost, with an enthusiasm coming out of new converts, who speak in tongues, filled with the Holy Spirit. While the Tractarians did not stress the same enthusiasm as the Methodists, their tenets were based on the apostolic age, which are the very roots of Christianity; thus, both movements have a unique association with early Christianity.

The Oxford Movement (Tractarianism) was a revival in the High Church, attaining its name through its means of spreading ideas or tracts. Its most famous figures, John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey, and John Keble were all scholars who studied at Oxford. Newman's writings are steeped in patristic studies, focusing on the apostolic age as one of inspiration to answer the present issues, particularly concerning Church and State separation; this model was found in the Christian Society of the Middle Ages, since religion and politics also experienced a separation during this period, and it offered models to meet the challenges of the British Church in the nineteenth-century (Yates, "Origins of Victorian Ritualism" 43). Newman published the *Tracts for the Times* in 1833, to address the question of Church and State separation, and the Church Fathers appealed to Newman, described as "music to my inward ear" in one of his tracts (Cooper 139). Newman refers to the apostles in this case, describing the clergy as the successors of the apostles, serving as their "shield-bearers … as Luke and Timothy were to St. Paul" (Cooper 140). This stripped the clergy of their social standing and popularity, and simplified Christianity, grounding it in its origins, on a firmer foundation, revealing a tradition of looking back to simpler

methods in order to revive Christianity. Similar to the Wesleyan Methodists, the foundation of Tractarianism was the Holy Spirit, which did not involve casting aside dogma, but looking to the apostolic age for grounding. Newman describes the foundations of Tractarianism in one of his first tracts:

> We have been born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. The Lord Jesus Christ gave His Spirit to His Apostles; they in turn laid their hands on those who should succeed them; and these again on others; and so the sacred gift has been handed down to our present Bishops … [t]he bishop "could not give what he had never received". It is plain then that he but *transmits*; and that the Christian ministry is a *succession*. (Cooper 140)

This emphasis on Christianity's roots, in the form of ancient wisdom and apostolic succession focuses the mission of Tractarians on ancient spirituality. Newman also focuses on the spirit in apostolic succession. The act of doing so, however, incited a great backlash against this group.

The act of reaching into a pre-Reformation past incited backlash against Tractarians, frequently interpreted as the revival of Roman Catholicism within the English Church (Atherstone 168; Pereio 66). Considering the pre-conceived notions regarding Catholics and idolatry, any reference to Catholicism in the Anglican Church, was seen as idolatry, and they were labelled "idolaters and sensualists" (Hanson, "Ritualism and Dandyism" 172). The infamous "No Popery" campaign extended to the Tractarians, who were seen as responsible for introducing an enthusiasm for idolatry (Hanson, "Ritualism and Dandyism" 181). Ellis Hanson points out that the deviant sensuality that had been stamped on the Catholics, in the attempts to demonise them, was also associated with the Tractarians. The sexual ambiguity of the key figures in Tractarianism, such as Newman and Frederick William Faber, aggravated the suspicion of sensuality and perversion—the discourse of idolatry ("Ritualism and Dandyism" 182). The Tractarians were seen as un-English in their parallels with Catholicism. Andrew Atherstone describes a torrent of sermons and pamphlets being produced in response to the tenets of Tractarianism.[15] They were described in the same

[15] Bishop Blomfield wrote: "[i]t is really hardly possible to believe that the writer of such a Tract can be of the Reformed Church" Atherstone also discusses the backlash Tractarians experienced within Oxford from the "Four Tutors" (T. T. Churton, John Griffiths, A. C. Tait, and H. B. Wilson) as "highly dangerous', attempting to mitigate "the very serious differences which separate the Church of Rome from our own" (Atherstone 171).

sexually deviant terms as the Catholics, figured as the "Great Harlot', as described by Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, the editor of the *Protestant Magazine* (Atherstone 171).

The Ritualists were those who continued the Tractarian tradition after Newman's conversion to Catholicism, with Edward Pusey as a key figure. Though much less aggressive than the Tractarians, the Ritualists introduced ceremonial practises in Anglican parishes (Peschier 3). Though there was great backlash directed at Tractarian writings, it was the Ritualists that incited a type of battle in the Church. The Public Worship Act allowed Ritualist priests to be persecuted for the rest of the century, sometimes resulting in imprisonment. As such, they were often classed as idolatrous and sensual (Hanson, "Ritualism and Dandyism" 172).

In his extensive study of Ritualism and Tractarianism, Nigel Yates identifies three different movements in the High Church from the 1830s to the 1840s; there were the Tractarians; the Ecclesiologists, who led a campaign for building new churches and restoration of old ones to medieval style; and the Ritualists, who wanted to introduce ceremonial aspects into church services ("The Origins of Victorian Ritualism" 48). Even within this revival, people's affiliations were not exclusive, with some accepting two, or none, or all three, which constructs a highly problematic and complex picture (48). Yates describes this intermingling as a "cross fertilisation" (49), meaning that Tractarianism and Ritualism can be seen as movements that are, to a certain extent, associated with one another.

While the High Church movements and Catholicism were seen as idolatrous**,** they continued to gain converts, especially at the end of the nineteenth century. The appeal of ritual and mysticism existed because the Anglican Church was perceived by many Nonconformists who contributed to the periodical press as lacking in spirituality and failed to engage with the culture's sense of loss and disconnection, as expressed in literature and periodicals. Early, primitive forms of Christianity manifested themselves from the mid to late Victorian period, serving as anchors in their engagement with Christianity in its simpler forms. This is not merely evident, however, in revivalism, but also in the ancient associations of Catholicism. Among intellectuals and literary figures, no other group added as many numbers to Catholicism as the Decadents in the late-nineteenth century. The Decadents and their significance in post-secularism is discussed later in this thesis, but the conversions to

Catholicism needs to be mentioned, since it also foregrounds the ways in which the Decadents integrated Christian ritual with the pagan. In her study of religion in the age of Decadence, Frances Knight maintains that the evidence shows that religion was not undermined by science, even by the 1890s, but that Roman Catholicism provided a "stable alternative both to Darwin's worldview and to liberal Christianity" ("Catholic Conversion" 76). Knight argues:

> [T]he paradox of rebellious Decadent writers rejecting the stifling Victorian world of bourgeois morality and the liberal theology of the Church of England in order to embrace the binding dogmas of Roman Catholicism can be explained, in part, by the crisis over faith … and by the consequent need for ancient, universal authority. ("Damnable Aestheticism" 76)

The loss of this universal authority refers to the Anglican Church's continued lack of authority due to the divisions and dispersal of Victorian religion in general and in the feeling of loss and disconnection.[16] Both major movements in the Church brought its fault lines of to the forefront, exposing the stories and legends that had captured the Victorian social imaginary. The continued fragmenting of Ritualism and the persistence of Methodism indicate that a trend of the primitive pervaded Victorian Christianity throughout the nineteenth century. Although there was an increasing anti-institutional sentiment inherent throughout Victorian religion, there was also the need to connect with religion through the body, particularly in the absence of dogmas. This persistence of a religion that connects with the body and the spirit presents a post-secular spirituality—an embodied spirituality through martyrdom.

The symbol of the martyr in the Victorian novel persists as an anchor to these primitive forms of Christianity. The secular martyr, one that worships an immanent being, suffers in his or her experience of the idol. In the idolatrous experience, bodily suffering always follows, often involving blood and violence. Taylor's theory of social imaginaries accounts for the changes wrought by modernity as not replacing religion, but changing its conditions; it also gives renewed value to stories and legends and their role in culture formation, and helps to explain the ways in which the revivals in Victorian England draw on the stories and legends of early Christianity.

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[16] The Church of England remains the national church of England, (not in Great Britain) and twenty-six Bishops sit in the House of Lords (Clements and Spencer 34). The Church of England at the Established Church resides in its "mutual recognition" with the Crown (Clements and Spencer 35).

2.7 Early Christian Martyrdom and Idolatry in the Victorian Novel

As discussed in the Introduction, in the Victorian novel, the journey towards the spiritual in the idolatrous experience involves suffering, which is transmuted from early Christian martyrdom. The image of idolatry in the Bible is captured in the adulterous wife, who consummates with her lover (the idol) for fulfilment and satisfaction.[17] In the Victorian novel, however, this process is inverted, with an idolatrous experience paradoxically offering levels of passionate intensity that make reaching God possible often through a better understanding of the self. Idolatrous experience in the novel is reconceptualised in this way due to the trend of British revivalism in the nineteenth century, which refocused Christianity on its primitive roots. In these roots, dogmas and systems did not exist, and Christianity was decidedly simple and continued to spread in spite of widespread persecution.

The background of these persecutions has been discussed in the Introduction, but a further explanation of martyrdom and its Victorian context is necessary. Suffering, for instance, becomes a contingency in the idolatrous experience, which has strong associations with early Christian martyrdom. For early Christians, there was a strange devotion to martyrdom itself, with many Christians voluntarily offering themselves up for suffering. There was an idealisation of suffering itself, due to the glory that came with suffering for Christ's sake. According to Mary Griffin's study of early Christian accounts, Christians believed they entered another period of training for the life to come with God in their time of testing as martyrs (1). Fellow believers perceived martyrs as faithful witnesses to their baptismal vows (Griffin 22). In their suffering, they experienced a new form of birth, a second baptism— a baptism in blood (2). Tertullian—a third century Church father—articulated ideas regarding martyrdom that were highly influential; he revered martyrs and martyrdom to the point that salvation was contingent on being a martyr. Though he certainly never expressed this

[17] For a detailed discussion regarding idolatry as a symbolic adultery against God, see pages 7-10 of this thesis.

belief overtly, his disappointment when persecutions decreased later in his life, reveals the strange idolisation inherent in martyrdom culture (Salisbury, "Resurrecting the Flesh" 27). This preoccupation, and glorification in suffering, in my reading, carries over to the Victorian social imaginary in the idolatrous experience. Suffering is portrayed as a form of sanctification and is an agent in redemption. This process can be seen in novels such as *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff, who is generally considered the most depraved character of the novel, attains a revivalist redemption; though, he only gains redemption after he suffers bodily.[18]

Stories of martyrdom also continued to be told in the Victorian period, with Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould—an Anglican priest—publishing a popular six-volume account in 1897. In these accounts, martyrdom is framed as a raw spirituality, a simple faith occurring outside the institution, often viewed as the binary to the Church. Saint Heller, a saint in ninth century Belgium, lived in caves, sleeping on the "bare rock" (404). Martyrs usually possess a madness not associated with institutional faith, often as a result of suffering. Saint Vitalian also retreats into isolation after he suffers humiliation at his church and lives out the remainder of his days in caves (406). The saint, in these accounts, is also often one that struggles with doubt, and suffers in this process. For some saints, suffering did not always end in closeness with God. For instance, Ignatius Loyola, a Spanish saint in the fourteenth century, intense bodily suffering induced an ecstasy of "ascetic fervor", and he fell into a swarming delirium after lashing his own back (Baring-Gould 716). However, his self-induced bodily suffering did not produce peace and closeness with God, and instead involved a process of doubt that forged his own path to God (717). Baring-Gould likens Ignatius with Luther, describing them both as men of God who sought him differently (718). The idea of the suffering saint, in this case, is anchored in an exceptionally personal path to God. This form of spirituality transfers into Protestant Britain as a social imaginary, and suffering becomes a redefinition of the path to God.

Considering that the martyrs Baring-Gould discusses in his accounts are not all fervent believers who were willing to die for God—but were sometimes doubters

[18] Heathcliff's revivalist redemption is made possible because he starves himself. Unable to live in his current state—"I cannot continue in this condition!"(324)—Heathcliff does not gratify the desires of the flesh. He tells Nelly: "[i]t's not my fault I cannot eat or rest" (333). His body does not bear the signs of starvation after his death, and Mason also notes the location of his body in front of the window, washed as if baptised ("Enthusiastic Tradition"11). Methodist redemption is possible for this sinner, whose last night on earth remains a mystery. For a more detailed discussion of Heathcliff's redemption and suffering, see pages 129-131 in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

who struggled to believe—the metaphor of the martyr can be seen as post-secular. As Misty Anderson notes, Methodism itself was a post-secular redefinition of faith in the modern world, emphasising a personal relationship with Him (7). The idolatrous experience captures this tension in a sustained negotiation of a path to God. In the form of intense emotion, idolatry portrays a revivalist notion of spiritual experience—an intense experience of the idol. For Methodists, relationship with God can be tested through experience, in whether or not the believer can feel him (Anderson 7). This configuration simplifies Christianity and centers it on individual experience.

In centering Christianity on individual experience, revivalism is reconceptualised in the idolatrous experience. As mentioned earlier, the novel as a form was an object of suspicion in the early nineteenth century because of the potential sensations it could arise. In the experience of reading, the emotions and escapism offered by the novel are identified by Carens as "the strange gods at home" in Victorian Britain ("Idolatrous Reading" 238). The reading experience itself becomes idolatrous in the desires it was feared to elicit in women (239). In the image of seduction, the novel becomes a way to express doubt in turning to idols; yet paradoxically it offers a means to God through the spiritual experience possible in idolatry. Away from institutions, the intense experience accorded by the idol asserts new avenues of faith in its parallels with revivalism and early Christianity.

Chapter Three: The "Offspring of a Divine Principle"? Idolatry in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*

> "The worship of a Hero is the transcendent admiration of a Great Man" (Carlyle, "The Hero as Divinity" 11).

Faith in a post-secular world was, for the Victorians, a journey—a pilgrimage of internal discovery and negotiation, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, it was increasingly one that placed personal agency at the centre of spiritual life and the Established Church firmly on the fringes. In the Dickensian *bildungsroman*, this pilgrimage involves resolving a tension between faith and good works, as well as asserting the preeminence of doing good. A decentring of the Established Church as the place of spirituality in favour of understanding the individual heart occurs in both *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* through characters who embody a Christian ideal based on New Testament values.

Carlyle's theory of the "Great Man" strips Christianity of its supernatural belief, focusing on immanent beings as examples of how to live. He aims to encourage transcendent wonder in the everyday, and he cites paganism as an example of this ("Hero as Divinity" 10). In this pursuit, Carlyle immanises the transcendent, containing it within the everyday with no reference to the supernatural. By pursuing sincerity, Dickens explores this notion of spirituality for the everyday in his *bildungsromane* in a similar manner to Carlyle. Dickens himself uses the term earnest at a speech in Edinburgh in 1841 to discuss his work, telling the audience, "I felt an earnest and humble desire and shall do till I die, to increase the stock of harmless cheerfulness" ("Speech: Edinburgh"). Carlyle uses historical figures to illustrate the importance of virtue in following the example of great historical figures "[w]e find in Knox a good honest intellectual talent, no transcendent one;—a narrow, inconsiderate man as compared to Luther: but in heartfelt instinctive adherence to truth" ("The Hero as Priest" 127). Virtue is perceived as evidence of faith, and Carlyle perceives figures such as Martin Luther and John Knox as heroes, because they discerned truth. Adherence to God's truth is a feature of the ideal man, which he clarifies as a man of sincerity and honesty ("The Hero as Priest" 109). Dickens presents his own rendering

of a "Great Man" in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* as one from a lower class, who embodies transcendent purely because of his sincerity.

Dickens's portrayal of idolatry in his *bildungsromane* also reflects Carlyle's view of it, who perceives it as a thing seen, "a symbol", and he refers to liturgies, which "are things seen" as the true idolatry ("The Hero as Priest" 104). For him, idolatry is based on creeds and systems that draw the transcendent away from humanity ("Hero as Priest"104). The liminal space between worshipping the Great Man and the worship of an idol forms an important part of this chapter—the need to distinguish between a corrupting Catholic idolatry and healthy British admiration for a great man. Describing idolatry as a symbol distances this sin from the British themselves, and locates it in the foreign, Catholic agent. It also outlines a form of heroic worship that could be safely carried out in the home—the Victorian domestic parlour—and it is just this type of worship that is embodied and enabled by the figure of Dickens and his works.

Dickens presents a Gospel of Modernity in the *bildungsroman* through protagonists whose spiritual expectations take the form of good works. The *bildungsroman* is an autobiographical novel, generally perceived as a secular journey of growing up—of moral and physical growth.[19] Derived from the German word "bildung", the genre refers to the development and formation of a young man. This word usually suggests a linear narrative; however, as Michael Minden argues, the development in the *bildungsroman* is circular—the protagonist always returns, in some sense, to his past (1). This genre has close parallels with autobiography and *David Copperfield* has similarities to Dickens's own life, since his account of his child

[19] Christopher Louttit does not discuss the *bildungsroman* as a genre, but does address the Dickens novels as a secular gospel exploring the value of work and its human impact (11). An emphasis on works interprets Dickens's *bildungsromane* (the majority of his work) as concerned with the material. This does not mean that scholars do not consider a complex development in Dickens's bildungsroman, but that this development is measured in terms of moral and physical growth, not spiritual growth. Robert Lankford interprets *David Copperfield*'s narrative as one that conveys a vacillation "between values associated with innocence and discipline" (461). Brigid Lowe identifies a key characteristic of the English bildungsroman as reflecting the struggles with modern world in its continues progress: " the plots of English *bildungsromane* are driven by the external constraints that attend their protagonists' growing up – a process that is posed as inherently problematical, reflecting, perhaps, the anxieties of a modern age increasingly at the mercy of an ever-accelerated rate of growth and change" (406). Joseph R. Slaughter considers the literary discourse of the genre and its correlation with human rights discourse, arguing for the genre to be viewed as a social work that centralises marginalised subjects and renders them "democratic citizens of the new nation state" (1410). Slaughter perceives the *bildungsroman* in both a social order "responsive to the human personality" and a trajectory self-fulfillment.

labour in a blacking factory is often presented as a parallel with David's time at Murdstone and Grimsby's (Buckley 31). Dickens, however, did not produce *David Copperfield* solely as a cathartic profit venture, but to present an earnest and authentic everyday spirituality through the character of David.

The type of anti-dogmatic Christianity that Dickens presents can be described as an immanent faith expressed through good works, which is evidence of a pure heart. An immanent faith draws on Taylor's notion of post-secularism, one constructed on binaries existing inside a pluralistic frame. Immanence does not consider life beyond the immediate and does not reference anything outside itself (transcendence) (Taylor 543). The immanent frame is an order understood on its own "without reference to interventions from outside" (543). Faith exists in the immanent frame, and in Dickens this faith operates through good works. Dickens's project of social reform is often interpreted as pure philanthropy—doing good for the sake of a better society. In the liminality between idolatry and hero worship presented in the Dickensian *bildungsroman*, however, good works gesture towards the transcendent, as true forms of faith, rather than good works as ends in themselves. The ideals in Dickens, thus, serve as springboards for Dickens to negotiate a new form of faith based on the quality of sincerity and purity presented in the New Testament. They are, however, portrayed as ideals from an older faith that needs to be adopted for modern times, since their purity remains an ideal the protagonists themselves are not able to achieve; nevertheless, Dickens does not disregard the past, but draws in the simplicity of early Christianity as models for his characters—a pre-institutionalised Christianity.

The liminality of the space between heroic worship in the Victorian domestic setting and idolatry can be explored through characters that symbolise a Christian ideal. As great men, and the one woman (Agnes), they embody Dickens's ideal example of Christianity, which is modelled on simplicity and sincerity. Serving as spiritual guides for the protagonists, their parts of the narrative contain strong references to Christ's teachings in the New Testament. Peggoty, for instance, forgives Em'ly even though she shames the family according to Victorian standards which reflects Jesus' teaching about forgiveness. He tells David: "[m]y unchanged love is with my darling child, and I forgive her!" (389).[20] These characters, in other words,

[20] In Matthew 5.39, Jesus addresses forgiveness: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

are idealised because their good works are genuine outpourings of their hearts, based on the central teachings of the Gospels. They become the anti-institutional expression of faith, since their good works are expressions of their faith.

Idolatry is firstly presented in the traditional format through creeds and symbols—organised religion. Characters who encapsulate institutional religion such as Mr Murdstone and Mr Bumble do not possess a sincere faith and use their positions of power to condemn and judge. Organised religion does not aid the protagonists in their faith but are often obstacles in the journey to knowing their own heart. These figures are contrasted with those Dickens positions as ideals, and all these characters are based on New Testament teachings from Christ's most significant recorded sermon: the Sermon on the Mount. Dickens valued New Testament teachings, and he draws on the principles of simplicity and humility of the children in both *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* as contrasts to the tyrants of organised religion. For the figures of organised religion in Dickens, faith becomes a matter of obedience and appearance, not a matter of the heart.

The two *bildungsromane* discussed in this chapter emulate a posture towards salvation and spirituality focused on the immanent frame. An experience of God is not the main objective for either protagonist; instead, faith and spirituality are grounded in the virtues discussed in the Gospels. Similar to Dickens himself, the quality of sincerity and purity, the qualities of a "Great Man" becomes the measure for final salvation. In this case, a faith based on a sincere heart, evidenced in good works, promotes a faith achievable for the average Protestant, Victorian reader—a Gospel of Modernity.

In the Dickensian *bildungsroman*, idolatry is an essential component of spiritual growth, involving a process of growing out of idolatrous desires. Formed on the post-secular basis of imagination and desire, idolatry initiates the suffering vital in prompting a negotiation of personal faith. In *David Copperfield*, David's explicitly identified idolatry for characters such as Dora initiates an internal struggle that must be overcome, since mastering these emotional attachments is pivotal in growing beyond childhood infatuation. Dora is associated with fiction and imagination in his first encounters with her: he calls her a "Fairy, a Sylph" (323). As a character of another world, David's idolatrous desires form based on the imagination, and growing up involves overcoming the idolatrous formations of childhood. Pip's idolatry in *Great Expectations* also manifests in his heart from a young age in worship to Estella,

a devotion fixed both on her and her social status. When Pip attains his great wealth, he confesses to Biddy, “I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentlemen on her account” (120). These misconceptions are constructed as an inner desire that must be overcome in order for Pip to achieve his spiritual growth.

Idolatry is explicitly evoked numerous times in *David Copperfield*. David expresses his adoration for Dora Splendow as idolatrous, “to dote upon and worship her” is to David, “the summit of human ambition” (326). He also observes Dora “had no idea the extent of my devotion” (329). David also refers to his attachment to Steerforth as idolatry when he discovers Steerforth’s seduction of Em’ily, thinking more “of all that was brilliant in him” in “my devotion to him” (375). Although David adores Steerforth, his encounters with Dora are consistently framed as idolatrous: “I never stopped for a word. I told her how I loved her. I told her I should die without her. I told her that I idolised and worshipped her” (401).

Great Expectations is a novel that frequently evokes explicit references to idolatry; for example, Miss Havisham, who is trapped by her idolatrous desires, shuts herself away. In recounting Miss Havisham’s story, Herbert Pocket tells Pip about her love for her betrothed, “she passionately loved him. There is no doubt she perfectly idolised him” (167). Pip’s idolatrous desire for Estella is one of the central plotlines in the text. He describes walking with her in the garden at Satis House’s garden, “I, trembling in spirit and worshipping the very hem of her dress” (217). Pip also tells Estella when he discovers her engagement to Drummle, “[y]ou are a part of my existence, part of myself … since I first came here, the rough common boy whose heart you wounded” (333). Pip identifies this attachment as formed in his childhood, and is one that continues into his early adulthood, becoming a significant part of his personal growth.

3.1 Dickens: Sincere Good Works or Profit?

As a public figure, Dickens was both an avid businessman as well as philanthropist. One of the central tensions I am interested in, which is also a tension in the novels discussed in this chapter, is the question of good works in Dickens’s faith as authentic,

or a part of his persona as businessman.[21] His fame among the British population was extensive, as *The Quarterly Review* states in 1850 no one "has occupied so large a space in the thoughts of English folk as Charles Dickens" (251). According to Malcolm Andrews, Dickens was a skilled money maker, one who loved his craft and used his popularity to his advantage. Dickens was especially excited by the profitable possibilities available in the public readings he conducted later in his life ("Community of Readers" 45). Dickens's popularity was the outcome of his efforts to construct a close relationship with his readers. The serial publication of his novels fostered a sense of personal attachment as readers undertook a pilgrimage with the protagonist; Dickens used this to equalise his relationship with his readers and the sense of a shared, everyday, life (Andrews, "Community of Readers" 12). Dickens used terms such as "labour of love" when he referred to his craft and its service to his readers, and he framed the serialised form of the novel as a journey that both he and his readers undertook together (Andrews, "Community of Readers" 25). Dickens's awareness of the marketplace raises questions as to whether or not his charitable ventures were solely part of his public image.

Dickens, however, was not solely a literary phenomenon, but believed in charity and giving to the poor as the result of a generous heart. He addresses the tension of obligation and cheerful giving in an 1886 article "Charity at Home" in his *All Year Around*. Dickens discusses charitable institutions, and the ways in which they make giving more of an obligation, rather than as a result of generosity from the heart:

> contributions are sometimes given from a sense of public duty, sometimes out of pure ostentation, with a stipulation that the same amount shall appear on the published list; at others for the sake of patronage and power. (287)

His aim in this article to encourage the "fullest amount of good" to be done in a "true spirit of Christian charity" among individuals in their own spheres, not solely through charitable institutions, "and that their pockets touches through their hearts" (287). Doing good in society, in Dickens's view, should be the result of the heart's motivations, which, I argue, extends to Dickens's view about Christianity. Although Dickens published this for public view—and therefore it can be perceived as

[21] Michael Slater also observes the author's desire to build a greater literary enterprise, and, thus, his books were issued with attractive binding, to increase profits and "enhance the status of and dignity of his oeuvre" (434).

promoting his public image—the sentiments expressed here are also evident in his novels, which always addresses the heart in the act of doing good; thus, Dickens was complex as a public figure; yet, his Christian purpose cannot simply be easily dismissed.

3.1.1 The "Religious Turn" in Dickensian Scholarship

Although Dickens was a successful author in the secular realm, his *bildungsromane* expresses a sincere faith—one centred on good works. The religious turn in scholarship in recent decades, discussed in the Introduction, has also shifted to Dickens and his works. Scholarship of the last ten years often considers the significance of the Bible in Dickens's life and his works. According to Jennifer Gribble, Dickens's view of faith was based on the tension between the Law and the Gospel. Jewish Law is based on obedience to the laws of the Old Testament, but the Gospels, in Dickens's view, were the source of all moral goodness ("Dickens and Religion" 592, 590). His avid use of the Bible as a source for his storytelling suggests more than an ethical interest, but a genuine Christian faith. Gary Colledge argues this case in his interpretation of the posthumous text *The Life of Our Lord* (1937). This text is often referred to as "an easy version of the New Testament", since it tells the story of the Gospels for children (Colledge 1). The text was written for the purpose of "awakening a Christian conscience" in the minds of his own children in urging moral responsibility (6). Dickens did not write this text for commercial intent, which means no profitable Christian message is presented; instead, it is one that seeks to provide his children with a view of Christ separate from religious institutions. The narrative remained unpublished long after Dickens's death, at his request (Colledge 5). Colledge cites this work as evidence of Dickens's belief in the teachings of Jesus, seeing him as a model for how to live. Dickens opens with the statement:

> My dear children, I am very anxious that should know something about the History of Jesus Christ. For everybody ought to know about Him. No one ever lived, who was so good, so kind, so gentle, and so sorry for people who did wrong. (*The Life of Our Lord*).

His last paragraph informs them of true Christianity, "to do good always", which suggests Dickens's faith was grounded in the life and example of Jesus. A faith based on this is regarded by scholars as authentic and simple, occurring in everyday life in

the form of good works (Na 128; Colledge 7). The everyday nature of faith is formed away from the Church and involves more negotiation and uncertainty outside the bounds of orthodoxy.

3.2 Works and Faith: Organised Religion versus Authentic Faith

3.2.1 Organised Religion and Idolatry

> Morality is the Alpha and Omega of Religion. Religion is a love of goodness and integrity, all else in the shapes of creeds and dogmas are toys and playthings: "idols … the work of men's hands". (Pollitt 842)

Reverend Isaac Pollitt's 1885 contribution to the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* reviews a sermon delivered by an anonymous clergyman in the "large halls of the Metropolis" (841). Here, true religion is evidenced through good deeds, simplified for a modern audience outside the usual arena of a church. Pollitt expresses anxiety concerning such a view, since it presents a possible morality apart from genuine faith; as such, Pollitt insists that morality must be "the offspring of a Divine principle implanted on the heart" (843). Pollitt's perception of the message reveals an anxiety surrounding idolatry and religion—the fear of religion becoming merely good works. In this framework, good works are not the "offspring" of relationship with God but are good works for the sake of a good society. This dispute, as I have already discussed, was common in the view of Dickens's faith. A disagreement of this nature was not uncommon, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, and it is this type of negotiation and debate about the divine source of the good in humanity that occurs in the journey of the Dickensian *bildungsromane*.

While Pollitt perceives the sermon as blasphemous, its ideas were not new but had been circulating among Victorian periodicals for at least forty years and were echoed by Thomas Carlyle decades previously. Great men, in Carlyle's view, can become a model for how to live, since their value is founded on virtue, particularly the virtue of sincerity ("Hero as Priest" 109). Pollitt's disagreement with the unnamed ex-clergyman is ironic, because both perceive creeds and dogmas as a hindrance to authentic religion. His anxiety concerns the multitude of opinions prevalent in

religious views, making truth difficult to discern (842). Dickens explores anxieties prevalent in the cultural landscape of Victorian Britain through proposing an authentic faith in his *bildungsroman*, one based on a sincere heart away from creeds and dogmas, inspired by New Testament principles.

The figures of institutionalised religion in the Dickensian *bildungsroman* do not perform good deeds but, instead, impose their authority to force obedience, revealing their idolatry. The damning conception of institutionalised religion addresses Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount regarding true faith, which is a transformation of the inner life (Matt. 5. 21-22). Jesus' teaching indicates that the heart is the root of sin, and, in my reading, Dickens contrasts these authoritative figures with the children, who retain their purity. In a conversation that appears to be a minor event in *David Copperfield*, Mr Chillip explicitly identifies Murdstone as an idolator, and he tells David, "Mr Murdstone sets up an image of himself, and calls it the Divine Nature" (681). Constructing a graven image of himself, Murdstone is explicitly identified as an idolator in this conversation—a false representation of the divine nature. Obedience to the Law does not equate to inner transformation as Chillip notes, "I don't find authority for Mr and Miss Murdstone in the New Testament?". David replies, "I have never found it either!" (681). The New Testament provides no grounds for Mr Murdstone's religion, since its core teachings focus on loving others as the cornerstones of the Law.[22] Through Murdstone's idolatrous self-aggrandisation, Dickens condemns his faith based on institutional obedience and furthers one based on the true Law—the one in the New Testament.

In Dickens's novels, organised religion is not a helpful structure in the journey of the protagonists but become barriers to their spiritual growth. *Oliver Twist* is well known for its unmerciful authoritative figures such as Mr Bumble, the parish beadle, who possesses a great sense of self-importance, and his religion is solely based on obedience. Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* to reveal the cruelty of the pauper houses, Britain's charitable enterprises; yet, he is also presenting a biblical morality based on the inner life. The passage shortly after Oliver requests more gruel highlights the abuse

[22] One of the Pharisees asks Jesus "which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22. 36-40).

of the pauper workhouse, an apparently charitable enterprise under the guise of "religious consolation" (59):

> he was kicked into the same apartment every evening at prayer-time, and there permitted to listen, and console his mind with, a general supplication, containing a special clause therein inserted by the authority of the board, which they entreated to be made good, virtuous, contented, and obedient, and to be guarded from the sins and vices of Oliver Twist. (59-60)

This supposed prayer positions organised religion, even in its interaction with God through prayer, as spiritually void, due to the truancy of good works. Religion, in this case, is purely based on obedience, and only serves as a form of condemnation. The parish beadle, Mr Bumble, views himself as a "mighty personage" and as one who was seen to have a divine right, for "a beadle can do no wrong" (246). Mr Bumble is shown to be one of the least virtuous characters, corrupted by his power, and concerned only with an appearance of belief in God.

Similarly, Mr Murdstone's membership in the Church does not prevent him from treating David with cruelty in *David Copperfield*, and the absence of good deeds condemns him as one whose religion is not sincere or authentic. Murdstone's stern religion is immediately portrayed as insincere; Betsy Trotwood calls him "a tyrant" (183), and David observes that firmness was "the grand quality on which both Mr and Miss Murdstone took their stand … [I] nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was just another name for tyranny" (51). His religion is based on the grounds of "obedience", not on doing good to others (108). To Murdstone, faith has no personal consequence, and religion is merely used to maintain power. David is presented as a hopeless, pure figure, beaten down by a tyrant. Murdstone's institutional faith solely involves obedience, and it does nothing to transform David's heart, leaving him feeling "condemned and wicked" after he beats David (58-59). Murdstone's actions do not show a transformed heart, and David observes he orders him "like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog" (108). Forced obedience to the Law only dehumanises David, drawing on Jesus' sermon of a changed heart. It is this background that leads David astray, whose heart has not been transformed. His heart is not disciplined by hard discipline to obedience, but through transformation that comes through his eventual suffering.

3.2.2 Authentic Ideals: Joe and Peggoty

The question of good works in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* is measured according to New Testament values, which are exemplified by characters positioned as ideals. These characters fulfil the role of spiritual guides, who serve as the marketable versions of New Testament teachings. In their simplicity, these characters embody a morality founded on biblical principles that address the significance of internal desires in directing the actions of a person. Biblical principles are grounded in the law of Christianity, and this is presented in the Sermon on the Mount in the Bible. This teaching addresses the desires of the heart, and Jesus specifically mentions a pure, sincere heart as a foundation for experiencing God. He teaches: "blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5.3;5). The characters who are pure in heart—Joe Gagery and Mr Peggoty—are the spiritual guides in both *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

The spiritual guides in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* embody the epitome of Christ-like love, and their passages are embedded in sentimentality, which signals the presence of the spiritual, as argued by Larsen, in nineteenth century literature ("Vanity and Vexation" 46). The ideal in *David Copperfield* is the pure-hearted Mr Peggoty, whose forgiving posture and relentless searching for his runaway daughter Em'ly emulates the love of Christ as told in the parables in Luke 15; in this passage, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of eating with sinners, and he responds with a series of parables that illustrate the value of the lost (those who do not know Christ) being found.[23] This chapter in the scriptures establishes God as the father-figure searching for his lost children. Mr Peggoty is framed as a searching father-figure, first established as the ideal due to his pureness in heart, one with no ostentations, serving as the anti-institutional binary to Murdstone. From his entry into the Copperfield household, Mr Murdstone is constructed as "cold" and David observes even his companions being wary of displeasing him (31). In contrast, Mr Peggoty is instantly framed as warm, addressing David "like an old acquaintance" (35) and "our intimacy was much advanced by his taking me on his back to carry me home" (35). The ideal,

[23] Jesus tells three parables to address the subject of the lost being found: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the Prodigal's Son. In all of these stories, the emphasis is on the joy at the lost item being discovered. For example, in the parable of the lost coin, Jesus tells of a woman "having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost" (Luke 14.8-9).

for Dickens, comes from the fisherman from Yarmouth, rather than Murdstone the gentleman.

Mr Peggoty's pure and sincere heart (similar to that discussed in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus) is the essential quality that casts him as ideal and is also integral to David's spiritual journey. David refers to Mr Peggoty as intensely earnest and phrases his retelling of Em'ly's stories of being away from home as told "with an astonishing air of fidelity" (592). Peggoty's fidelity and undefiled heart earns him a respect not bestowed on any other characters (except for Agnes). His relentless searching is a type of parable that reflects Christ's description of God and his relationship with his creation:

> So far as I know—and I believe his honest heart was transparent to me—he never wavered again, in his solemn certainty of finding her. His patience never tired. And, although I trembled for the agony it might one day be to him to have his strong assurance shivered at a blow, there was something religious in it, so of his fine nature, that the respect and in which I held him were exalted every day. (583)

Peggoty is cast as an ideal in David's eyes, and earns David's admiration as "exalted every day." In his transparent heart, Peggoty is an ideal father figure in David's eyes, mirroring Joe from *Great Expectations*. His assurance is shown to come from God when he finds Em'ly: "I thank my Heav'nly Father, as my dream's come true! I thank Him hearty for having guided me, in His own ways, to my little darling!" (590). Peggoty is not merely Em'ly's guide, but becomes her saviour and, as someone guided by God, is Em'ly's connection with God. The arc of Mr Peggoty's search thus follows a similar message to biblical parables: fearing punishment and condemnation, the sinning child runs away and returns, after a time, to a forgiving father. The Prodigal Son in Jesus' parable also fears returning to his father after squandering his riches: "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 5.18-19). Mr Peggoty undertakes a pilgrimage in search of his lost child. His love for Em'ly, his desire to heal her, reflects a biblical

language of intimacy spoken by Jesus in the Gospels regarding his lost children.[24] Peggoty tells David:

> To put that dress upon her, and to cast off what she wore—to take her on my arm again, and wander towards home—to stop sometimes and heal her bruised feet and her worse-bruised heart—was all that I thowt of now. (480)

Mr Peggoty's conviction that he can heal Em'ly attributes a godly representation to this man of a lower class, since healing suggests Christ-like divine power. Mr Peggoty's love for his dear child exists in a liminal divide between worship and, Christ-like, love. Using the Gospels as foundation, this love is cast as an example of the ideal, and Peggoty becomes the epitome of the "Great Man" in his ardent sincerity and pureness of heart. Peggoty is able to fulfil his wish to hold Em'ly again, and his physical affection involves carrying her, literally lifting her burden, and giving her an opportunity to start a new life, and become a new creation:

> With those words he took her up in his arms; and, with the veiled face lying on his bosom and addressed towards his own, carried her, motionless and unconscious, down the stairs. (590)

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the father speaks of the joy of receiving his son back, he says, "[i]t was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 5.32). Peggoty's affection and tireless pursuit of Em'ly also emulates the parable of the lost sheep in the Gospels, with God positioned as the shepherd that rejoices at finding his lost sheep:

> What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. (Luke 15.4)

When Peggoty finds Em'ly, his first act is one of grace and acceptance, carrying his bruised sheep in his arms.

In *Great Expectations*, Joe Gagery is the quintessential model of Christ-like love, and his parts of the narrative contain connotations of the Gospels, furthering a

[24] In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims why he has been sent: "he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4.18).

Christianity achievable for the modern, Protestant reader. It is not a figure of the Church that becomes a model for David of an authentic, sincere faith, but the blacksmith. Joe is pivotal in Pip's journey, since he convicts him of his shortcomings, and the need for grace in his life. Looking back, Pip signals his own inadequacy in comparison with Joe, because Pip's good deeds are—like Miss Havisham, self-interested—a means to assert his own superiority. When Pip discovers his great expectations, he already equates his elevated position with virtue, telling Biddy "Joe is a good fellow—in fact, I think he is the dearest fellow that ever lived—but he is backward in some things" (138). Joe is the primitive past that appears simple and unmodern to Pip. Pip's conversation with Biddy, however, reveals that Dickens casts Joe as the ideal. The firmness of his own superiority is clear when the reader is invited to judge Pip for his insincerity. His offer to help Joe is, in truth, a means to assert his own superiority, which Biddy suggests. Pip replies: "'If you have the heart to be so, you mean, Biddy" I said in a virtuous and superior tone; "don't put it off on me. I am very sorry to see it, and it's a—it's a bad side of human nature'" (139). Pip's tone conveys his own judgement on himself as he writes his autobiography. This is echoed later when Pip returns home after his sister's death, having been a gentleman for some time. Biddy tells Pip:

> how Joe loved me, and how Joe never complained of anything—she didn't say, of me; she had no need; I knew what she meant—but ever did his duty in his way of life, with a strong hand, a quiet tongue, and a gentle heart. (261)

Dickens reminds the reader of Joe as common labourer, working with his hands, and situates his actions as an outpouring of his heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ identifies those with sinning hearts to be the true sinners, and those who are pure in heart to be justified by God (Matthew 5). Upholding New Testament values of humbleness and purity, Dickens presents Pip in his superior position as inferior to the humble Joe. Pip falls short of this ideal because his promises are insincere, which, again Biddy observes: "[a]re you sure that you will come to see him often?" (261). Pip responds once more "[t]his really is a bad side of human nature … This shocks me very much!" (261) Pip tells us, though, that Biddy is right, and his injury against Joe continues:

> Once more, the mists were rising as I walked away. If they disclosed to me, as I suspect they did, that I should not come back, and that Biddy was quite right, all I can say is—they were quite right too. (262)

Pip alerts the reader early in the text that Joe embodies an ideal that is unattainable for the protagonist, recognising that he could never have been the son Joe deserved. This ideal quality presents a Christ-centred posture of love, and Joe Gagery's sections in the narrative contain the strongest references to the Gospels.

Similar to Mr Peggoty, Joe becomes the father that rejoices at discovering his lost son. In these intimate, biblically-inspired passages, a longing for the past and its simplicity, a Christian past emerges. Joe's intimacy with Pip engages with Methodist teaching regarding God and his immediate presence, presenting a new form of faith grounded in the Gospels inspired by revivalism. In Joe's presence, Pip becomes a child once more, submitting to him: "I was like a child in his hands. He would sit and talk to me in the old confidence, and with the old simplicity" (426). He also describes Joe taking him out for a ride, as a child being taken in a father's hand, "Joe wrapped me up, took me in his arms, carried me down to it … as if I were still the small helpless creature to whom he had so abundantly given the wealth of his great nature" (426). The image of Joe carrying Pip reflects the one of Mr Peggoty carrying Em'ly down the stairs in *David Copperfield*, furthering the ideal father-figure in Dickens. Joe serves as the religious undertone of the novel, possessing a purity and a simple faith, similar to that of a child. He is Pip's "guiding spirit" at his side "whose simple faith and clear home-wisdom I had proved, beguiled my way" (436). The cornerstone of Dickens's marketable Christianity is unadulterated simplicity. In spite of Joe's welcoming arms, however, Pip cannot regain his innocence, and he cannot fulfill the parable of the Prodigal Son as Em'ly does in *David Copperfield*.

3.3 The *Bildungsroman* as a Post Secular Pilgrimage

If spirituality is present through Mr Peggoty and Joe Gagery as perfect spiritual beings, neither David nor Pip embody this spirituality in the same manner as Mr Peggoty and Joe. The protagonist's journey in Dickens follows a more complex path, and idolatry becomes the means for exploring a post-secular negotiation of faith, since it is a journey inseparable from suffering. The *bildungsroman* as a genre is derivative of the trial narrative—a genre with origins in the eighteenth century. In her discussion of suffering in literature, Vivasvan Soni identifies the trial narrative as a genre that continued the tradition of the tragedy in its depiction of suffering. A trial narrative is usually written in a theological framework, depicting suffering as necessary to the

protagonist's spiritual growth (131). In this genre, there is an intrinsic value attributed to suffering, and suffering serves a "providential" end, even in narratives that are not overtly theological (132). This period of testing is always individual and is bound up in whether or not the character endures the suffering through to the end (132). Soni cites certain biblical narratives as stalwart examples, including the stories of Job, Christ and the martyrs. *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by John Bunyan serves as one of the finest examples, and it is this example that helps to explain how the *bildungsroman* can be seen, in my reading, as the genre that continues the tradition of the trial narrative in a new format.

3.3.1 The Gospel of Modernity

Presenting a Gospel of Modernity, Dickens portrays a post-Romantic posture in the spirituality of his protagonists. Post-Romanticism, as mentioned previously, accepts a world with no reference to a transcendent order, often on the cusp of suffering, in a spirit of bereavement.[25] In the *bildungsroman*, the protagonists are not bereft of God or transcendence, but they live in a flawed, post-Romantic world in which the way to the transcendent is not clear. They do, however, discover a redemptive possibility in good works. The experience of God for both Pip and David no longer remains as an expectation, and, instead, the protagonists aim to do good in this life, rather than the one to come. The title of *Great Expectations* presents the narrative as one of progress in wealth and social status, which is suggested when the lawyer Jaggers tells Pip of his new wealth to " be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place, and be brought up as a gentleman—in word, as a young fellow of great expectations" (129). The novel itself, however, turns more explicitly on the spiritual in its focus on moral and spiritual growth: it is through the disappointment of Pip's expectations that he comes to value not Carlylean greatness but simple good. Pip must accept his wealth comes from a convict he must learn to love; this love becomes vital in Pip's spiritual growth and learning to value others.

Similar to the trial narrative, suffering is integral to the growth of the protagonists in the *bildungsroman*, who suffer as a result of their idolatrous desires. David spends an extended period wandering on the Continent, and Pip is bed-ridden

[25] For a more detailed discussion of post-Romanticism, see the second chapter of this thesis, on pages 32-33.

from illness. When David returns from his time abroad, he returns to Agnes as the epitome of purity—one whose good works comes as an outpouring of the heart (716). Based on the values of the New Testament, good works and spiritual redemption are possible if good deeds are the "offspring of a divine principle". For Pip, this is more complex, and he cannot attain the pure faith discussed in the New Testament because his view of good works remains transactional (275). Riddled with guilt over his own corrupting influence over Hebert Pocket, Pip tells Wemmick, "I confessed that I feared I had but ill repaid them, and that he might have done better without me, and my expectations" (271). Pip perceives this good deed as essential in liberating him from guilt and remorse; thus, Pip does not understand the workings of grace and performs his one good deed for Herbert Pocket as a means of obtaining redemption for himself.

3.4 Idolatry and Emotion

In the texts discussed in this chapter, the profound emotion accompanying the idolatrous experience is an inseparable part of negotiating spiritual growth. Sentimentality and affection often signal a spirituality and idolatrous attachments are formed in the tender years of childhood and youth.[26] Dickens's sentimentality is uncomfortable for modern readers and scholars, and it has been viewed with suspicion in some academic circles (Carney 2). Idolatry in Dickens is expressed in passages of intense emotion and sentimentality, since idolatry itself is a core desire of the heart. Thus, the journey of idolatry becomes crucial in the spiritual journey of David and Pip.

David's infatuation with Dora captures his imagination when he is young, which is checked as he grows older. Shortly after his marriage to Dora—which, in keeping with idolatrous attachments, is a severe disappointment—David acknowledges his mistake as an internal one, first a "feeble ecstasy" (396), becoming the symptom of an "undisciplined heart" (570). The type of emotion described here is generally alien to modern readers, according to Gill Galanger. She identifies a strained prose in Dickens's representation of sentimentality in *The Old Curiosity Shop* when Little Nell dies. In Gallanger's view, Dickens's sentimentality, particularly when writing about suffering, does not translate for modern readers, who "deplore such

[26] The second chapter of this thesis discusses the significance of emotion and spirituality in nineteenth-century British literature on page 33 and pages 37-38.

pathos" (331).[27] The idolatrous attachments formed in youth produces the fruits of suffering essential in personal growth and the negotiation of faith. For instance, Pip's idolatrous attachment to Estella is formed in youth, "worshipping the hem of her dress" as he walks with her in the broken Eden of Satis House (217). Both David and Pip's hearts—their sentiment—are at the root of their suffering and become a means for both protagonists to explore their own understanding of faith. The post-secular framework does not prescribe emotion and rationalism as binaries. In moments of idolatry, a language of great affection and emotional intensity is expressed, as evidence of the heart's desire, and as a signal of a spirituality found in the experience of the idol.

3.5 Idolatry and Spiritual Growth in the *Bildungsroman*

In both *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, idolatry initiates an internal struggle that must be overcome, and becomes a vital part of spiritual formation in the protagonists. Pip's desire for wealth and status is birthed from his first encounter with Estella, which is not rational, or based on any logical connection, presenting idolatry as a childhood infatuation. His attachment to her forms from his childhood, and it signals a moment of emotion and suffering for Pip. He remembers his emotions being fierce when Estella shows nothing but scorn for him, and he "kicked the wall, and took a hard twist at my hair; so bitter were my feelings" (59). Pip's desire for her displaces his entire existence, and when he returns to the forge, he is no longer content with what he has: "I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too" (59), and he believes himself to be "ignorant and backward" (67). Writing about this event, the narrator Pip marks his meeting with Estella as having changed everything. The day:

> was memorable to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it … Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (68)

[27] Bethan Carney outlines the ways in which sentimentality is usually viewed with suspicion, due to growing rationalism, materialism, utilitarianism in the nineteenth-century (1).

As Pip writes about the past, he is aware of the idolatrous chains that bind him on the day he meets Estella. As such, his love for her is not birthed from conscious deliberation, and orients all of his other desires, which eventually begets suffering. After he discovers Estella's betrothal to Drummle, Pip confesses his devotion:

> You have been the embodiment of every grateful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made, are not more real, or more impossible to be displaced by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there and everywhere. (333)

The nature of Pip's remembrance of Estella is material, and figures as stones and buildings. Pip identifies his immense suffering during this meeting, describing his emotion: "'O Estella!' I answered, as my bitter tears fell fast on her hand" (332). His "ecstasy of unhappiness" forms part of his spiritual journey, as his idol is shattered. She is his religion, the shaper of his imagination and desire, echoing Smith's definition of religion, which "shapes our desire and imagination before it yields doctrines and beliefs" ("Secular Liturgies" 161). Because Estella is an idol that will never fulfil Pip, his belief in her only yields suffering.

3.6 The Child as Object in *Great Expectations*

The idolatry committed by other characters becomes inseparable from the idolatrous pilgrimage of individual spirituality in *Great Expectations* as warnings and lessons to the protagonist. In their idolatrous worship, both Havisham and Magwitch treat the orphans they adopt as objects. This liminality between person and object is a common theme in the study of Dickens and material culture, which specifically involves the implications on the value of persons. Current scholarship in Dickens and material culture focuses on the moral implications if its rise. In the economy of value and exchange, people increasingly view one another as objects (Bridgam 229; Cheadle 78; Grass 621). In this way, Dickens also considers the conflation between person and objects as the result of idolatrous worship. Both Miss Havisham and Magwitch's charitable deeds are not "the offspring of a divine principle", but a means for them to fulfil their own idolatrous desires.

Magwitch appears to be performing an act of kindness in giving Pip a fortune. He tells Pip, "I worked hard that you should be above work. What odds, dear boy? Do

I tell it fur you to feel a obligation? Not a bit" (293). Pip, however, is Magwitch's means of maintaining hope and enacting a type of revenge on the system that imprisonsed him; thus, his good deed of giving Pip wealth is transactional. He tells Pip when he reveals the true origin of his wealth:

> [D]ear boy, it was a recompense to me, look'ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman …When one of 'em says to another, "He was a convict a few years ago, and is a ignorant common fellow now …" I says to myself, "if I ain't a gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such". (295)

It is through Pip that Magwitch attains his value and elevates his social status. Although Magwitch certainly demonstrates an earnest love for Pip, he also sees himself as owning Pip, de-humanising his value. In claiming that he owns Pip, he treats him as an object with no wishes of his own, and Pip becomes his object of vengeance against the system that imprisoned Magwitch. Through this worship, Pip witnesses the consequences of idolatry, which convinces him of the necessity of forgiveness and grace in the simple faith modelled to him by Joe.

3.6.1 Magwitch and Pip's Journey of Sincerity

Though not positioned as the ultimate ideal, Magwitch becomes a model of simplicity, and develops a quality of authenticity and sincerity in the protagonist as Pip witnesses his sufferings. Although Magwitch treats Pip as an object of revenge, he is a similar figure to Joe, possessing the same pure love, and he earnestly adores Pip with a child-like love. Pip is initially repulsed by Magwitch, who instantly warms to him, clasping his hands and desiring to "have a look at my gentleman agen" (304). Pip is instantly repulsed, stating that the "abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast" (293). Magwitch's appearance is most pivotal in shattering Pip's idolatrous desire for wealth. Pip's expectations are tainted—and his idol shattered—when he discovers the apparently unvirtuous source of his fortune. He recoils from Magwitch's touch (294) and realises "how the ship in which I had sailed was gone to pieces" (297). It is through suffering with Magwitch—who loves him earnestly—that Pip learns to treat others well. In this sense, Magwitch is a part of Pip's redemption.

Pip's relationship with Magwitch is a journey in which Pip learns to have compassion for others, regardless of class. In understanding how to love a convict, someone with little perceived virtue, Pip learns to show regard for others; it is also one of the first signs of virtue as outpouring of the inner life in his character. It is also his regard for Magwitch, moreover, that alerts Pip of his treatment of Joe:

> For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (408)

Pip's heart softens from his encounter with Magwitch, convicting Pip of his failings and limitations, unable to salvage his great expectations. When Magwitch is arrested, Pip continues to stay by his side, undertaking the journey of suffering with him. He visits Magwitch in prison: "he was ever ready to listen to me, and it became the first duty of my life to say to him, and read to him, what I knew he ought to hear" (416). Pip remains with Magwitch throughout his prison ordeal, visiting him everyday and accompanying him to his trial, with "his hand in mine" (417). Pip suffers the ordeal of trial with him, pleading with those authority on his behalf "setting forth my knowledge of him, and how it was that he had come for my sake" (418). Pip does not sleep after Magwitch's sentence, writing appeals and roaming the "streets of an evening, wandering by those offices and houses where I had left the petitions" (419). On his pilgrimage with Magwitch, Pip's idolatrous attachment to wealth and social status is shattered and he comes to realise his ungrateful treatment of Joe. Magwitch, as such, serves as a type of guide to Pip in his journey to knowing his heart.

3.6.2 Estella as Object: The Coldness of Idolatry

The consequences of idolatry in the lives of Estella and Miss Havisham further Dickens's exploration of a new form of authentic faith through presenting the consequences of idolatrous desires. The idolatrous relationship between Estella and Miss Havisham portray an experience that is opposite to the "warming of the heart" experienced in the revivalist experience of Christianity. Similar to Magwitch, Miss Havisham's relationship with Estella is transactional, and she uses her as an object for revenge. She is convinced that her adoption of Estella is a good act; she tells her, "I

have lavished tender years upon her!" (279). She also tells Pip, "I adopted her to be loved. I bred and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved" (221). In spite of this statement, her true motives are revealed later as she whispers in Estella's ear to break "their hearts, my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!" (89). Estella is Miss Havisham's religion and her object in executing revenge on all men; she is the centre of her existence—her only hope to continue living. In this idolatry, Estella is no longer a person but becomes an object constructed for the purpose of breaking the hearts of all men.

Miss Havisham worships Estella as her means for enacting revenge, and Estella returns this devotion to Miss Havisham as her god-creator—the person who has molded her existence; this has the opposite result of "warming the heart" found in revivalism. Estella tells Pip when she walks with him the garden of Satis House, "I have no heart" (218), and when Pip protests, she elaborates, "I have no softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense" (219). Idolatry transforms her into a cold object incapable of feeling, countering the warmth of the revivalist experience. In this experience, spirituality warms the heart and induces intense experience (Anderson 3). In contrast to this, Estella becomes "stock and stone" (279), and she accuses Miss Havisham of turning her cold: "I am what you have made me" (279). Estella's reference to her nature as being formed—the nature Miss Havisham has formed in her from a young age—emphasises Estella's inability to act according to her own wishes. Though Estella's accusation is also an expression of her idolatrous attachment to Miss Havisham. She attributes her entire being to Miss Havisham, pinning her as the god-creator in her life and treating her in kind to the cold object Miss Havisham turns her into.

3.6.3 Miss Havisham's "Traditional" Idolatry

Miss Havisham's idolatry is constructed around the idea of vestments and objects—a more Catholic-based idolatry. Miss Havisham's worship of her lost love presents a view of objects that is post-secular, capable of possessing both immanent and spiritual possibilities. Satis House, the house trapped in time, is a shrine to Miss Havisham's idol. Pip notices the decaying objects when he first visits Satis House,

> I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white a long time ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and

> like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. (55)

As the objects of the ritual of marriage decay, so too Miss Havisham decays, and Pip does not distinguish between object and person in his first descriptions of her. He refers to her as some type of waxwork he had seen at a fair. The wasted prayer book and withered objects (55), are all signs that Miss Havisham cannot escape her first idol, a man who promised to marry her (167). No conscious deliberation follows Havisham's devotion and the objects in Satis House become a religious shrine because they are treated as such. When her betrothed does not arrive for the wedding, Miss Havisham never removes her wedding garments, and "laid the whole place to waste … and she has never since looked upon the light of day" (168). Once objects of pure beauty, keeping with their original purpose in material culture, these are transformed into a religious shrine to her idol. The objects of the sacrament are all that remain of the marriage, associating it with the religiosity of a church, as well as with the immanent objects that mean nothing in themselves. Idolatry, in its association with materialism and church ritual, is shown to be destructive, and this provides context for Pip to negotiate his own journey.

The idolatrous journey of Miss Havisham reaps disastrous consequences, which serves as a type of divine comeuppance and becomes integral to Pip's journey. Miss Havisham's encounter with flames initiates a period of profound suffering for Pip, which is essential in his pilgrimage of spiritual growth. In a passage of emotional potency, Miss Havisham is condemned by her idolatry, and what she has done to Estella, repeating to Pip "[w]hat have I done?" (364). In witnessing Miss Havisham's sorrow, Pip seems to extend grace to her, and also appears to understand the workings of forgiveness and grace. He tells her, if "you mean, Miss Havisham, what have you done to injure me, let me answer. Very little. I should have loved her under any circumstances" (364). In spite of this statement, his heart remains unforgiving towards her when she shows remorse, "I could look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed" (364). Pip, however, witnesses a comeuppance that serves as his final major stage of spiritual growth.

After Miss Havisham's moment of remorse, a strange pagan intensity occurs. Pip first sees some apparition as he leaves Satis House, "[s]o strong was the impression that I stood under the beam shuddering from head to foot before I knew it was a

fancy—though to be sure I was there in an instant" (366). When he returns to Miss Havisham's room, he sees her sitting by the fire. Although Pip describes her as being "upon the hearth close to the fire", his description of her ablaze does not identify a source of the fire, and as he withdraws his head to go quietly away, "I saw a great flaming light spring up. In the same moment I saw her running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her" (367). Pip is gripped by a fear as he holds her down after the blaze, as they wait for help, and "I held her until it came, as if I unreasonably fancied (I think I did) that if I let her go, the fire would break out again and consume her" (367). Though it does not seem rational to assume that the flames erupted from the fire, Pip's fear suggests that it this is a moment of divine intervention; thus, presenting an intensity similar to early Christian martyrdom as Miss Havisham is transformed into idolatry's martyr.

Such a moment of intensity strongly associates idolatry in Dickens with a primitive Christian past, and it is also a significant part of Pip's negotiation of faith. Miss Havisham is one of the few characters in *Great Expectations* explicitly identified as committing idolatry. Her unhealthy attachment to her betrothed is worded as idolatry: "she passionately loved him. There was no doubt that she perfectly idolised him" (167). Her idolatry sends her on a pilgrimage of suffering that ends in destruction. In the other texts discussed in this thesis, the protagonists are the ones who suffer bodily, often in death and blood. Martyrdom, in Dickens, occurs to other characters that serve as a warning to the protagonist. Her madness is akin to the accounts of Christians in Sabine Baring-Gould's volume, as he writes about saints living in caves, suffering bodily in their separation (708). In her isolation, Miss Havisham becomes idolatry's saint, though unlike saints who reach transcendence, Miss Havisham's redemption seems lost, presenting a moral lesson for Pip. Like many Christian martyrs, she is set ablaze, and she becomes a martyr for her idol of wealth; however, she does not experience the same glory as Christian martyrs. Ecstatic suffering does not exist in Dickens, and it remains a moral framework grounded in suffering, focusing on mending the deeds of this life.

The encounter with Miss Havisham forms a pivotal part of Pip's idolatrous journey. Before the blaze occurs, Miss Havisham identifies herself in Pip: "[u]ntil you spoke the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done" (364). Pip becomes a mirror for Miss Havisham, as she becomes a mirror for him of idolatry and its dangers. After his

experience with Miss Havisham, Pip describes the mental anguish of seeing her ablaze as worse than the injuries he sustains: "If I dozed for a minute, I was awakened by Miss Havisham's cries … This pain of the mind was much harder to strive against than any bodily pain I suffered" (369). Miss Havisham's mental ailing is similar, and Pip sits with her throughout the night. He witnesses the need for New Testament principles presented in the Gospels. Her suffering hinges on being forgiven, which Dickens reminds us at the close of the chapter: "I leaned over her and touched her lips with mine, just as they said, not stopping for being touched, 'Take the pencil and write under my name, 'I forgive her'" (368). Pip witnesses the need for forgiveness through Miss Havisham, though he cannot extend it in the same manner Joe does. Miss Havisham's suffering, however, presents the necessity for forgiveness in redemption.

3.6.4 Idolatry and the Rite to Personal Growth in *David Copperfield*

Similar to *Great Expectations*, idolatry in *David Copperfield* is rooted in emotion and intense feeling and is inseparable from the spiritual growth of the protagonist; as such, it occurs against the protagonist's better judgement. Unlike Pip, David's internal attachments do not induce the same level of suffering as Estella does, but they do cause David to suffer and convict him of his "undisciplined heart" (541), serving as stepping stones in his journey. The aim of his journey is to discover a sense of self not influenced by external forces, asserting an individual spirituality based on an internal journey. Betsy Trotwood charges David to be firm, and not to be influenced by others:

> what I want you to be, Trot … is a firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution … with strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody or anything. (232)

David's journey of growth involves discovering a true understanding of his aunt's words in committing the error of allowing others to influence him. This idolatrous influence produces the growth necessary to develop the strength of character praised by Betsy Trotwood.

David's idolatrous attachments form in his early years and personal growth involves overcoming the childhood emotion accompanying the idolatrous experience. Similar to Pip, these attachments are formed beyond conscious deliberation. His idolatrous experience of Miss Larkins is described as a passion that is "is beyond all bounds" (227). To David, Dora is not of this world, but the land of dreams and divinity;

he calls her "more than human" and associates her with fairies and spirits (323). Similar to Miss Larkins, David's idolatry of Dora Splendow is grounded in emotion based on intense feeling that signals a presence of the spiritual. In David's view, "[t]o see her lay the flowers against her dimple chin, was to lose all presence of mind and power of language in a feeble ecstasy" (396). His love for her is a burning passion: "[i]t was a fine morning, and early, and I thought I would go and take a stroll down one of those wire-arched walks, and indulge my passion by dwelling on her image" (326). The word "image" evokes biblical connotations surrounding idol worship as a "graven image" and furthers the biblical definition of idolatry as seeking sexual and spiritual fulfilment through an idol (Ex.32.4-5). David's idolatrous attachment to Steerforth is also framed as an emotional appendage and is associated with childish emotion. David's early encounters with Steerforth reveal a deep attachment, "I admired and loved him, and his approval was return enough" (86). Steerforth's influence over David continues into his youth when they reconnect. He has a mystical influence over David, who is entranced during his week spent with Steerforth: "my own heart warmed with attachment to him" (252).

Overcoming the idols of Steerforth and Dora is presented as points in David's story that propel his growth. Steerforth is positioned as the false guide. Agnes (his spiritual director) warns David against his "bad Angel" (304). This early warning signals Steerforth as the false leader and David's pilgrimage becomes about this journey. David must learn this lesson, and this painful lesson commences when he must inform Mrs Steerforth of the elopement. As David stands at her door, he remembers "that house where I had been, a few days since, so happy: where my youthful confidence … had been yielded up so freely: which was closed against me henceforth: which was now a waste, a ruin" (385). Worded as an ode to his childhood, this passage signals a turning point in David's life in which the transition from childhood to adulthood is achieved in the suffering from David's attachment.

David's idol is also broken in his marriage with Dora, initiating a journey of suffering. His marriage does not meet his childish expectations, and, as with all idolatrous attachments, it produces suffering. David takes the "tolls and cares of our life, and had no partner in them" (521). His marriage with Dora becomes a continuous toil of frustration, and his idol does not fulfil its promise:

> The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, it if were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a

> strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting. (569)

The idol provides an immanent, temporary satisfaction that leaves David unfulfilled, and both attachments become essential in his journey of suffering, which yields the fruit of personal growth.

Both David's significant idolatrous attachments are extinguished—the characters perish; in these deaths, a season of intense suffering is initiated. After Dora and Steerforth's deaths, David goes abroad on a type of pilgrimage in the wilderness—a time of suffering. His suffering is so immense that he believes he "should die. Sometimes, I thought that I would like to die at home; and actually turned back on my road" (665). He describes proceeding "restlessly from place to place, stopping nowhere … I had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere" (665). During this period, it is Agnes who sustains David, and she becomes an essential part of the final stage in his spiritual growth. Suffering is the stepping stone to Agnes, and she identifies this suffering in her letter to David.: "She knew (she said) how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. She knew how trial and emotion would exalt and strengthen it" (666). Intense emotion becomes a strength of character and sentimentality in Dickens and signals a presence of the spiritual.

3.6.5 Annie and the Doctor in *David Copperfield*: Hero or Idol?

The devoted relationship between Annie and Doctor Strong also forms an important part of David's *bildung*. It is through Annie that David is comes to terms with his wayward heart, which is the cause of his marriage to Dora. It is also another place in the text that contains an uncomfortable level of sentimentality in its expressions of devotion. Similar to Mr Peggoty's physical affection, Annie and the Doctor express affectionate language, as well as physical affection, towards one another.

> She had her arms around the Doctor's neck, and he leant his head down over her, mingling his grey hair with her dark brown tresses. "Oh, hold me to your heart, my husband! Never cast me out! Do not think of disparity between us, for there is none, except in all my many imperfections. Every succeeding year I have known this better, as I have esteemed you more and more." (543)

David signals to the reader that Annie Strong is another ideal in the novel through a certainty of her sincerity: "'[a]ll that has ever been on my mind since I was married', she said in a low, submissive, tender voice, 'I will now lay bare before you'" (539). David observes her to be "beautiful and true, I thought, as any Spirit" (541). The Doctor calls her "Annie, my pure heart!" (542) Annie is established as a sincere witness of character and her admiration for the Doctor is legitimised, not presented as idolatry but a heroic admiration.

This type of admiration is endorsed as a positive affection, since it is not based on intense idolatrous desire, but on affection that directs love to God. To Annie, her husband, Doctor Strong, is the core of her existence: "I can remember nothing that I know without remembering him. He stored my mind with its first treasures and stamped his character upon them all" (540). She also identifies him as her guide: "I looked up to him I can hardly describe how—as a father, as a guide one whose praise was different from all other praise" (540). As her guide, the Doctor prevents Annie from following the wrong affections: "If I were thankful to my husband for no more instead of for so much, I should be thankful to him for having saved me from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart" (541). It is these words that echo in David's mind later as he comes to realise the result of his troubles in his marriage with Dora—his idolatrous heart. As such, these characters form a part of David's own journey of growth. The passage above also legitimises a human devotion that is also spiritual: a devotion to one connected with God. As ideals, these spiritual guides form a palatable Christianity for the here and now, and embody Carlyle's notion of the "Great Man" as examples of how to live.

3.7 The *Bildungsroman* as Trial Narrative

3.7.1 Immanent Expectations: Sincerity

Presenting a Gospel of Modernity, Dickens portrays a post-Romantic posture in the spirituality of his protagonists, based on the here and now. Post-Romanticism, as mentioned previously, accepts a world with no reference to a transcendent order, often on the cusp of suffering, in a spirit of bereavement. The experience of God for both Pip and David no longer remains as an expectation, because of the post-Romantic world they inhabit. The solution to having faith in a post-Romantic world of suffering

involves an immanent faith in the practical notion of good deeds; yet, it does not present this as an inferior form of faith, since its legitimacy is tested in the quality of sincerity—derived from the New Testament. For the protagonist of *David Copperfield*, his final aim is not to achieve a sublime experience of the transcendent: his goals are more suited to, and more achievable for, a modern Victorian reader. His expectations reflect a post-Romantic stance of immanent expectations that cite the Bible as his moral source. The central concern of the protagonist in *David Copperfield*, as he writes retrospectively, is the legitimacy of his earnestness.

Though David is aware of his idolatrous fallacy in marrying Dora, as his journey continues, he realises the cornerstone of a true faith, one that is authentic and sincere. David asserts that he possesses the authenticity necessary for justification, in spite of his undisciplined heart. He provides a defense for his idolatrous love for Dora Splendow: "If I did any wrong, as I may have done much, I did it in mistaken love, and in my want of wisdom. I write the exact truth" (529). The pure heart is the heart that has no ostentation, and possesses an unmitigated love for others, reflecting biblical principles cited by Christ in the Beatitudes.[28] David's defense is grounded in his honesty, "the exact truth." David acknowledges his other weaknesses, but does not surrender the quality of earnestness, and adopts it as the pure heart he possesses. The word "earnest" is repeated throughout the novel as the key quality of the protagonist. Steerforth tells David shortly after their reacquaintance, "you are in earnest, and are good. I wish we all were!" (268). David thus describes a type of life principle, grounded in earnestness:

> My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well … that in great aims and in small, I have always been thoroughly earnest … there is no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. (497)

David summarises earnestness, or a pure heart, as his mantra. This principle rings true to the Sermon on the Mount—"blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God" (Matt. 5.5); however, seeing God is not something that David seeks. Instead, his aim is much humbler: not seeking a transcendent experience of God. Earnestness functions as an end in itself—as a virtue—and as a means for redemption. The true test of faith

[28] Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount upholds the humble and pure and heart as blessed in the sight of God. Matthew 5 reads: "[b]lessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" and "[b]lessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5.5,8).

becomes contingent on whether or not this faith is sincere, or a mere façade, which is tested and legitimised through suffering.

The purity and sincerity of Pip's heart is more problematic in *Great Expectations*, since his view of doing good is not "the offspring of a divine principle". Pip wishes to do good to others, but his motivations are not always pure; moreover, his ability to execute this is shown to be subject to external forces beyond his control. Similar to Magwitch, Pip's act of goodwill towards Herbert Pocket is transactional and serves as a type of transactional redemption. He describes helping his friend attain a partnership in a business as "the only good thing I had done, and the only completed thing I had done, since I was first apprized of my great expectations" (380). Miss Havisham is also granted a type of redemption through this good work when Pip asks for her assistance: "[y]ou said speaking for your friend, that you could tell me how to do something useful and good" (361). Wemmick points this out as well: "I must tell you one thing. This is devilish good of you" (271). Pip anxiously wishes to construct an image of himself as one who does good; he describes himself after he makes the arrangements with Wemmick: "I did really cry in good earnest when I went to bed, to think that my expectations had done some good to somebody" (275). Pip's good deed is transactional and based on redemption that elevates his tainted expectations. The certainty of Pip's faith, in contrast, remains uncertain, but his sincerity in desiring to do good remains, wishing to do good for Herbert Pocket. He approaches Miss Havisham in his quest, to do something "useful and good" (361). Drawing on the trial narrative, the protagonists are transformed by suffering, but their redemption remains a negotiation.

3.8 Redemption in the Dickensian *Bildungsroman*

3.8.1 Agnes as Feminine Ideal

Through Agnes David learns the true workings of grace in redemption, not attributing his own sincerity as final justification, but relying on Agnes for this. She embodies the female equivalent of the "Great Man", and she is Dickens's ultimate spiritual ideal in *David Copperfield*. David expresses great inadequacy in comparison with Agnes, which cements his need for her as justification. He reflects on seeing her during his drunken theatre visit: "the agony of mind, the remorse, and shame I felt, when I

became conscious the next day! ... my recollection of that indelible look which Agnes had given me" (302). When he sees Agnes later in the day, he confesses his remorse, telling her, she is his "good Angel" (304). He finds throughout his life, before he is with Agnes, there "is no such thing as fulfilment on this earth" (497). Throughout the novel, there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and restlessness, which Agnes soothes in her domestic plainness. She is the domestic angel, reflecting the predominant view of gender during the Victorian period, which maintained separate spheres between the masculine and the feminine (Ruskin 101-2). The masculine sphere was seen as one that included work, and the feminine sphere was confined to the domestic setting. Domestic angels were seen as a type of ideal, creating calm and order in the home and were seen as angels sent to earth to help guide men (McAleavey 192). John Ruskin attributes a "true queenly power" to women not solely in their households but "all over within their sphere" (102). Agnes is positioned as one with this influence of all in her sphere, as David comments, everyone "who knows you, consults you, and is guided by you, Agnes" (233). David realises her purity when he is in Wickfield house:

> I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained-glass window in a church… But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and that I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes afterwards. (191)

Agnes's "tranquil brightness" becomes David's personal spiritual guide, his stained-glass window outside of the walls of a church.

David reaches Agnes at the end of his suffering in the wilderness, which initiates his final period of spiritual growth before he discovers redemption. Suffering in the *bildungsroman* initiates a period of growth, but its end contrasts with the trial narrative and cements the novels as journeys of post-secular pilgrimage. In *David Copperfield*, David cannot reach God, but relies on the grace of his Angel, a figure in the immanent frame, for redemption.

For David, his most intense period of suffering occurs when his two idols are lost, and his dear Dora and Steerforth pass away. Shortly after this event, David embarks on a literal pilgrimage on the Continent:

> The desolate feeling with which I went abroad, deepened and widened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could

> distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees, it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost—love friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered—my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained—a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon. (664)

David's idols are shattered, sending him on a journey of hopelessness—a pilgrimage of suffering that ends with Agnes. Agnes is a key figure in the *bildungsroman* journey of suffering, since she serves as the moral compass to align him with a divine vision. Scholars often describe Agnes as vital in David's journey. Robert Garnett suggests that that the novel should be seen a process through which David achieves Agnes (215). His reading casts Agnes as David's spiritual guide, and the conclusion as the end of a religious pilgrimage in which he achieves Agnes (215). Conversely, Carl Bandelin reads Agnes as David's salvation through which he loses himself to find himself in her (611). She serves as his way to salvation, which he dramatically declares at the conclusion of the novel. For David, his redemption is simple, and his path leads him to Agnes. This path is simpler for David because he possesses a pure heart, earnestly seeking good through Agnes:

> For whom do I live now, Agnes, if it is not for you! ... all my life long I shall look up to you, and be guided by you, as I have been through the darkness that is past … O Agnes, O my soul, so many thy face be by me when I close my life indeed … when realities are melting from me … still thee near me, pointing me upward! (716)

David's sentimental expression of dependence on Agnes is contingent on her immediacy—her presence in the here and now; yet, through her David also is aware of his inadequacies and the necessity for grace, which is based on New Testament teachings on grace. Christianity is contained in a person, a tangible, Christ-like figure for the immanent frame. It is true that Agnes's position is highly gendered and she is the Dickens character that irks many critics, often seen as a lapse in Dickens's style, or as a mark for his taste in young virgins (Garnett 214). In spite of this, Agnes embodies the ultimate form of Christian simplicity and child-like faith in *David Copperfield*, which David returns to at the conclusion of his story.

In my reading, David's dependence on Agnes for salvation suggests a humanistic approach to salvation. If David gains Agnes as his religion, an idolatrous dependence is present. His dramatic emphasis on "who do I live for if it's not for you!"

suggest a type of compensation—the need for Agnes to be this salvation. Agnes "points" him upward, serving as a mediator to God. Agnes becomes the female priest as reflected in Carlyle's "Hero as Priest"; she is the virtuous ideal for David to look to; yet, she is also his avenue to the divine in her simplistic qualities, and David's return to his childhood. This simplicity is based on a domesticated form of revivalist Christianity outside the confines if the Church. Agnes is David's reward for completing his moral journey—his tangible reward on earth. David's recompense is not an afterlife with God, but a domestic angel. His goodness is proven to be the "offspring of a divine principle" and he is joined with his earthly angel, whose goodness is a direct result of her heart.

3.8.2 Pip's Redemption: Unattainable for Pip as "Modern Man"

As with *David Copperfield*, the protagonist of *Great Expectations* longs to return to the past and regain a child-like simplicity, but Pip's journey follows a more complex trajectory and is post-Romantic. Pip's journey of idolatry ends with the faithful Joe, who presents a possibility of regaining child-like faith and redemption. In the latter part of the novel, Pip experiences a bodily suffering integral to his journey of casting aside the worship of money and wealth. After undergoing the trial of being alongside Magwitch, Pip falls gravely ill. He describes being sick, half aware that he "had a fever and was avoided, that I suffered greatly, that I often lost my reason, that the time seemed interminable, that I confounded impossible existences with my own identity" (422). Joe becomes symbolic of the past that has never changed, the one constant for Pip. As he starts to recover from his illness, he notices that:

> while all its other features changed, this one consistent feature did not change. Whoever came about me, still settled down into Joe. I opened my eyes in the night, and saw in the great chair at the bedside, Joe. (422-23)

Joe's constant presence helps Pip to recognise his ungrateful heart, and he tells Joe: "O Joe, you break my heart! Look angry at me, Joe. Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. Don't be so good to me!" (423) Joe's response is that of a loving father: "[w]hich dear old Pip, old chap … you and me was ever friends. And when you're well enough to go out for a ride—what larks!" (423). Similar to the ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Joe is Pip's spiritual guide, a "gentle Christian man!" The Christian man, in this case, is presented as a simple man whose good deeds is an

outpouring of his heart. As a representative of the God the Father, who longs to bring his strayed sheep back to him, Joe is a simplified, New Testament likeness of God. It is through Joe's love that Pip comes to realise the need for forgiveness in his life, and it is the first time in the text that Pip seeks forgiveness.

Similar to *David Copperfield*, the suffering produced by idolatry in *Great Expectations* is an agent of transformation. Having lost Estella to Drummle and Magwitch to death, the idol represented by his great expectations is destroyed, which initiates his period of illness and suffering:

> For a day or two, I lay on the sofa, or on the floor—anywhere, according as I happened to sink down—with a heavy head and aching limbs, and no purpose, no power. Then there came one night which appeared of great duration, and which teemed with anxiety and horror; and when in the morning I tried to sit up in my bed and think of, I found I could not do so. (421)

Unlike *David Copperfield*, Pip's suffering does not return him to his past but causes further uncertainty—the way home is not clear. Pip returns to the forge, eager to marry Biddy and start a life with his childhood friend and his adopted father. Catherine Waters indicates that Pip's rebirth of a better self can be seen through his desire to marry Biddy, and he likens himself to the prodigal son when he returns home ("Great Expectations"169). He describes "leaving arrogance and untruthfulness further and further behind" as he draws near to Biddy and Joe (436). Jerome Buckley also argues that Pip's rediscovery of his first affections, reconciling with Joe, and the end with Estella, is his "passport to maturity" (60). Although Pip experiences a nostalgic simplicity when he returns to Joe and Biddy, he cannot regain the innocence that has been lost. Biddy and Joe are married. Even in his own prospects, Pip cannot attain what has been lost through Estella. The innocence and simplicity remain for Joe and Biddy, and Pip's dreams of marriage have gone, and he tells Biddy "that poor old dream, as I once used to call it, has all gone by" (440). Pip has strayed too far from home, and the way back is no longer accessible to him.

In *David Copperfield*, his angel remains unmarred, and his earthly reward is clear, but in *Great Expectations*, a post-Romantic reality of unfulfilled desire remains throughout the novel. *Great Expectations* maintains a sense of unfulfillment, as Dennis Walder argues ("Social Gospel" 147). As with *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* expresses a desire for a security that can never be satisfied but faces the

reality of unfulfilled satisfaction. The reader remains staring into the abyss at the conclusion of the novel, along with Pip, whose angel, Estella, is marred. When he sits with her in front of Satis House, the "freshness of her beauty was indeed gone … what I had never seen before was the saddened softened light of the once proud eyes" (441). The ending at Satis House does not convince us that Pip has developed a healthy relationship with his past entirely—he is still uncertain.

In a Post-Romantic confrontation, Pip and Estella sit marred by the world, unable to regain their child-like simplicity. It presents a type of futility not explored in Dickens's previous *bildungsromane*. Pip does not remain untouched by the marketplace but emerges hardened and corrupted. Though Pip is with Estella on the last pages of the novel, it is only after he discovers that Biddy is already married. This desire is never fulfilled, and the novel ends with a narrator who is displaced (174). Thus, *Great Expectations* expresses the Post-Romantic sprit of unabashedly facing the uncertainties and realities of life. Though it does not end in the nihilistic way that Barry Qualls indicates with regard to Dickens and his later novels. Qualls argues that Dickens invokes God, but celebrates man as man's only aid in the end, and doubts the existence of God, seeing him as unknowable (90). God, however, is not unknowable; instead, the novel demonstrates a post-secular end of uncertainty: the path to God remains unclear. He is able to be discovered in the spiritual guides in humble worldly positions, portraying a Gospel for Modernity.

3.9 Idolatry and the "Modern Man": A Conclusion

Idolatry is essential in the story of growing up for Pip and David. Formed in childhood beyond conscious deliberation, idolatrous attachments signal a primitive sentimentality uncomfortable for the modern reader, but familiar to the Victorian reader in revealing spirituality embedded in the protagonists' journey. Spiritual growth involves overcoming these attachments, which is only initiated once the consequences of idolatrous attachment is enacted—suffering—are enacted. This suffering, however, mars both protagonists, who cannot attain access to transcendent, but seek immanent fulfillment instead. In the fruits of growth that emerge from idolatrous suffering, both protagonists negotiate their own faith.

As "modern men", Pip and David cannot achieve the spiritual simplicity embodied in Dickens's ideals. Ideals of faith such as Joe Gagery and Agnes Wickfield

are figures of nostalgia for a past that cannot be regained, one based on the simple purity of early Christianity before the Church was institutionalised. Simplicity continues to survive in the virtue of sincerity, which is an immanent quality presented as sincere evidence of faith, if it is revealed to be a result of the heart's intentions. Even Pip intends good, in spite of his misinterpretation regarding salvation as transactional, thereby granting him the possibility of salvation. Through sincerity, then, the Gospel retains value to the "modern man", and presents a palatable Gospel for Protestant, Victorian readers. As such, the novel becomes an important site of renegotiations in personal faith, and also draws on the early past of Christianity in this pursuit.

Chapter Four: "The Grinding of the Body" and Personal Agency: Idolatry in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*

> I care for nothing … so that I may but win Christ, let fire and cross, let the companies of wild beasts … let the grinding of the whole body…come upon me, be it so only may I win Christ Jesus. (Foxe 19)

Idolatry and worship were frequent subjects in the lives of the Brontës and their works, particularly the role of the affections in directing imagination and desire. As children, the imagination was the centre of their worlds, and they created landscapes in which they were not restricted by societal expectations. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë explore this imaginative freedom in their novels and use it to negotiate their personal relationship with God. Well-versed in the Bible and a breadth of texts from both theological and non-theological sources, the Brontë sisters speak to the debates of their time engaging with issues of personal authority and faith through the trope of idolatry in their novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Throughout these novels, there is constant negotiation of the importance of faith versus good works. Through worshipping their idols, the protagonists traverse through the finely balanced aspects of idolatrous experience: transcendence and immanence; and this balance translates into a struggle between faith and good works as the means to redemption. Good works ultimately justify and promise to redeem in the works of Dickens, whereas *Jane Eyre* portrays a more even contest in this negotiation. In contrast, *Wuthering Heights* does not consider morality as any part of salvation, but in keeping with Methodist tenets, portrays salvation as potentially available to the worst sinners.

Idolatry is evoked numerous times in the novels of the Brontë sisters. In *Wuthering Heights*, the subject of idolatry is frequently explored. Shortly after Catherine dies, Nelly sympathises with Heathcliff's sorrow, aware of his profound devotion to her, "I went and opened one of the windows, moved by his perseverance to give him a chance of bestowing on the fading image of his idol one final adieu" (170). Heathcliff calls Catherine "my soul" centering all transcendent existence on her. This is more than simply figurative; Catherine becomes Heathcliff's soul and he is unable to live without her. Indeed, Nelly describes his grief at losing Catherine close to his own death as idolatrous, suggesting that "he might have had a monomania on

the subject of his departed idol" (324). In *Wuthering Heights*, idolatrous worship is continually associated with the Catherine and Heathcliff relationship.

In *Jane Eyre*, idolatry springs from a self-conscious awareness and anxiety directed at her attachment to this world. As a child, she clings to her doll for comfort as a "faded graven image" (22), referring to the commandment in Exodus 20. After Rochester's proposal, Jane becomes aware of her attachment to her betrothed of whom she "had made an idol" (242). Jane's idol is shattered when she discovers Rochester's previous marriage and she observes, "him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty—'Depart!'" (279). Jane is aware of her idolatry as an attachment to her earthly love for Rochester and flees. Idolatrous devotion is also a concern in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) between Arthur and Helen Huntingdon. Helen disagrees with Arthur when he demands to have the chief place in her affections, "[w]hat are *you*, sir, that you should set yourself up as a god, and presume to dispute possession of my heart with him to whom I owe all I have and all I am" (160; original emphasis). As, such, the Brontë sisters confront the subject of idolatry in many of their novels.

Spirituality in the work of the Brontës is influenced by both revivalism and Romanticism, which were an extensive part of their personal library as children. The development of idolatry and its relationship with spirituality may be seen to come from the influence of Patrick Brontë, who was tolerant to a breadth of views regarding faith. Although he was an Anglican clergyman, he allowed his daughters to read an extensive range of books and magazines; he also had a profound influence in his children's views, and was actively engaged in their education (Stoneman 5). As well as magazines and periodicals that discussed contemporary issues, such as *Fraser's Magazine* and *Blackwood Edinburgh*, the Brontës' non-fictional pursuits included texts discussing idolatry and its relationship with the passions, with a specific exploration of happiness on earth. *The Doctrine of the Passions* by Isaac Watts (1791) refers to idolatry as capturing desire (40). Charlotte Brontë also possessed Hugh White's *The Gospel Promotive of True Happiness* (1852). White addresses earthly happiness as idolatrous and outlines ways to keep "these earthly affections subordinated to the love of God" (315). Although published after the novels in question, its presence in the Brontë library suggests that the subjects of passion and idolatry were important concerns. The Brontë sisters also read Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth's writings (Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion*

16). In her teenage years, Charlotte Brontë read Lord Byron's poetry and fiction, such as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-14), "Turkishtales" and "The Bride of Abydos" (1813-14), containing the Byronic hero—full of allure and passion (Stoneman 10). The passion of Romanticism and the engagement with nature can thus be seen to form part of the formula of faith in the Brontë novels.

As mentioned previously, revivalism contains parallels with early Christian martyrdom in the nexus between intense experience and spirituality. Both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* portray the "grinding of the body" as a means to attain spirituality. In the quotation above, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, who succeeded the apostle Peter, affirms his passionate devotion to God, and welcomes the "grinding of the body". The martyr's eyes remain fixed on the afterlife, and his bodily suffering accords him further confidence as he asserts his bold statement, attaining spiritual joy in spite of his bodily suffering. Physical suffering occurs for the protagonists of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* in worship to their idol, or it comes as a result of worshipping their idol. Suffering, the "grinding of the body", initiates a conversion experience, which portrays spirituality as a journey.

Critics often interpret idolatry in *Wuthering Heights* in passionate terms, enacted in the violent interaction of Catherine and Heathcliff. In this framework, suffering is interpreted as evidence of a world with an inaccessible God. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, envisions a despondent view of passion in the novel, describing it as an animal instinct governed by emotions (3). Nature is not an ordered phenomenon created by a higher being, but as J. Hillis Miller argues, it is a chaotic, "patternless maze created by a madman"—a universe of an absent God (*Disappearance* 184). Emma Mason reads *Wuthering Heights* in a Christian/Methodist framework, arguing that the intense emotive language expressed in the novel is caused by religious enthusiasm, which occurs when "one fancies himself inspired" ("Religious Enthusiasm" 263; Hempton 35). As such, Mason's reading interprets Brontë as rejecting Christian conventions, looking to "a secularised point in time" where its ideology can be freed from the Christian notion of God (274). The portrayal of passion in the text, however, does not reject a Christian framework, but formulates unconventional paths to God, and, in this way, explores new avenues of faith informed by revivalism; as such, Catherine and Heathcliff's passionate relationship reflects the unstable religious cultural conditions of faith in the mid-nineteenth century—a new post-secular condition.

The Brontës construct their protagonists as outsiders of the Church through their relationship with organised religion. From the condemning Joseph to the self-righteous Brocklehurst, these figures form a stark contrast with the protagonists' revivalist-inspired faith. Jane appears conceited in her self-will, and her disagreements with Brocklehurst initiate her personal spiritual journey, particularly in regard to salvation. Catherine and Heathcliff remain condemned children of the moors in the eyes of Joseph, cast as revivalists outside the Church. In both cases, idolatry becomes the means through which the protagonists remain outsiders to institutionalised notions of faith and spirituality.

In both Brontë texts, the protagonists' idolatrous journeys culminate in a redemption inspired by both revivalism and post-Romanticism. Through idolatry, a spirituality is constructed, one centred on individual experience and desire. The bedrock of idolatry is internal desire, and religion, as it appears in the texts, refers to phenomenon that "shapes our desire and imagination" (Smith, "Secular Liturgies" 161). In *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, the idol captures the protagonists' desires, and shapes their beliefs—it becomes the centre of their existence and propels their post-secular journey. The protagonists experience an ecstasy in their engagement with one another, becoming the centre of one another's existence, exceeding the conventional definition of idolatry as a symbol or creed. Jane is Rochester's "comforter" and his figurative "frantic prayer" and Catherine describes Heathcliff as "in my soul" (281,161). I interpret the religious passion between the lovers—Jane and Rochester, and Catherine and Heathcliff—as instigating a process of intense suffering in the flesh (the body), which raises both sets of protagonists to the state of the post-Romantic sublime. According to Wordsworth, the sublime is interconnected with emotions, in which nature raises the Romantic poet to an "elevated profound passion" (81); as such, the sublime is often associated with the transcendent. In this experience of the sublime, a unique conversion experience emerges inspired by post-Romantic and revivalist principles.

In this chapter, post-Romanticism is central in the idolatrous experience, particularly in *Wuthering Heights*. Post-Romanticism is framed in these texts as a distinctive Brontëan conception, formulated in the complex engagement with the sublime. In their idolatrous encounter with each other, Catherine and Heathcliff reach the post-Romantic sublime, which is re-imagined as a state of profound elevation attained in bodily suffering. The post-Romantic sublime traditionally adopts the role

of ultimate sceptic, and the state of the sublime (the elevated state associated with the transcendent) is revealed to be a product of the imagination and illusion, which occurs on the trajectory of the transcendent being replaced with the immanent (Shaw 2).[29] As an outsider, Nelly cannot understand Catherine and Heathcliff's experience, and adopts the customary role of the post-Romantic sublime—the sceptic. Considering this, the sublime is no longer a state of elevation achieved in nature, nor is it a product of fiction, but it is state of elevation attained in bodily suffering, broadly similar to the early Christian martyrs. The reconceptualised term for post-Romanticism does not perceive it as an agent in the decline of religion, in which it comes after Romanticism; rather, post-Romanticism portrays possibilities of reaching the spiritual in a negotiation with the sublime.

A uniquely Brontëan conception of spirituality emerges in the spiritual journeys of the protagonists, with distinctive tenets regarding salvation. In the Methodist conversion narratives of leaders such as Joseph Humphreys, conversion occurs as a result of a period involving ailment, which results in spiritual zeal (Hindmarsh, " The Revival of Conversion Narrative" 83). Considering this, the conversion narrative involves a journey distinguished in its suffering. Heathcliff's potential conversion occurs when he fasts in the same way as Catherine before her death, slowly becoming detached from the here and now in suffering, achieving a joy in spite of sufferring. Nelly observes his abnormal bliss during his starvation: "the same unnatural—it was unnatural—appearance of joy under his black brows; the same bloodless hue: and his teeth visible, now and then, in a kind of smile" (328). Heathcliff's bordering madness is similar to Christian martyrs, and a possible redemption is suggested in his final hours, since no one is with him.[30] Fulfilling their wish of permanently becoming children of the moors is presented as a possibility, as Nelly tells Lockwood of an old man seeing Catherine and Heathcliff walking in the moors "looking out of his chamber window, on every rainy night, since his death"

[29] Post-Romanticism involves struggling and suffering in the journey to the sublime, and it is a term accorded to Victorian verse. Acknowledging a more chaotic world at the mercy of coincidence, post-Romanticism does not seek an external order—confirming "our true aloneness" (O'Neill 123, 111). See the second chapter of this thesis for a more detailed definition of Post-Romanticism on pages 32-33.

[30] In Christian martyr narratives, the boundaries that distinguish madness and spiritual experience are not always fixed. According to Sabine Baring-Gould's accounts of martyrdom, Inigo Lopez tortured his own body, falling into a "long ecstasy of ascetic fervour" (716). His self-torture does not, however, lead to redemption, and gives him "no peace of mind" (717). His self-inflicting pain is shown to be the symptoms of a madman.

(336). In *Wuthering Heights*, salvation eventually culminates in a revised and haunted afterlife, portraying a deviation from the standard Methodist conversion, and one also influenced by post-Romanticism—a heaven on the moors of Yorkshire. In this narrative, redemption occurs through experiencing the post-Romantic sublime. In *Wuthering Heights*, there is a surrender to God in the spiritual realm, leaving all dominion to Him in terms of salvation for the two characters. In contrast, *Jane Eyre* shows earthly happiness as an important component of faith in God, finding a way to bring heaven onto earth. She disagrees with the staunch St John, who perceives any earthly joy as idolatrous: "save your constancy and ardour for an adequate cause; forbear to waste them on trite transient objects" (346). At the conclusion, Jane expresses great earthly happiness as a blessing from God, and, therefore, a part of his will, as well as a fulfillment of her own desires: "I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest" (399). Jane's spiritual journey eventually results in knowing her own heart and understanding her relationship with God on her own terms, in spite of St John's disapproval (who is the representation of organised religion). Both Brontë sisters portray salvation as individual and as a journey of negotiation, with differing views regarding the focus on this life versus the life to come.

4.1 The Brontëan Childhood: A Formation of Spiritual Outlook

The Brontë sisters were familiar with Dissenters and revivalists, both in their hometown and in their personal reading. Charlotte and Emily Brontë were two of six children, daughters of an Anglican Churchman, Patrick Brontë. From a young age, the Brontë children were exposed to a posture of openness to ideas about God and the individual, both through a tolerant father, and exposure to Dissenters (Burstein 434). Their childhood existence in Haworth—a small industrial town in Yorkshire—is often perceived as bleak and isolated from any outside influence.[31] Elizabeth Gaskell has

[31] Many of the letters Gaskell includes in her biography construct Haworth as a bleak and isolated town, and the Brontë household as excluded from the outside. In a letter dated December 15th, 1846, Brontë writes: "I hope you are not frozen up; the cold here is dreadful. I do not remember such a series of North- Pole days. England might really have taken a slide up into the Arctic Zone; the sky looks like ice; the earth is frozen; the wind is as keen as a two-edged blade. We have all had severe colds and coughs in consequence of the weather … You say I am to 'tell you plenty.' What would you have me say? Nothing happens at Haworth; nothing, at least, of a pleasant kind" (Gaskell 13-14),

largely contributed to this view, but recent scholars have since rewritten this narrative with the deciphering of their childhood stories. To Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë's writings seem wild and permeated with vivid imagination (Stoneman 3). Such imagination was cultivated by Patrick Brontë, who was interested in national politics, closely involved with the parish, and had a vested interest in his children's education (5).[32] He was also open to other creeds of faith and chose to work in harmony with the many Dissenters in Haworth (Burstein 434).Wesleyan Methodism had a particular influence on Patrick Brontë, with its focus on God's grace as allowing individuals to choose what they believe. Charlotte Brontë was well-acquainted with those from whom she differed, not merely in Haworth, but also in Roe's Head. The town had a number of committed Methodists who regularly attended Chapel (Gaskell 85). As such, these influences translate in the Brontë novels into unconventional and unregulated expressions of faith.

Their extensive range of reading included radical Methodist magazines that told of miracles and fanaticism (Gaskell 40). They also had access to a breadth of theological readings, several translations of the Bible, an extensive range of devotional literature, and religious magazines, such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Fraser's Magazine* (Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion* 49). As well as *Fraser's* and *Edinburgh Magazine*, Charlotte read the *Leeds Intelligencer* and *Leeds Mercury*, which often reported on current issues (Gaskell 66). Patsy Stoneman notes that the Brontës' early writings mimicked the styles of these magazines, especially *Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine*, which included Gothic and supernatural stories. It was these influences that not only shaped the Brontës' literary imagination, but also their religious views.

4.1.1 The Subject of Idolatry in the Brontë Library

The subject of idolatry was present in the personal reading of the Brontës, particularly in terms of the struggle it presents in this life and the life to come. Charlotte Brontë often wrestled with her imagination and desires, attempting to align them with God—

[32] Juliet Barker was a former curator at the Brontë Parsonage Museum and seeks to correct the image of the Brontë family constructed by Gaskell. Barker writes about Patrick Brontë: "home life was secure and stable, with their father always ready to spend time with them, despite the pressures of his own work" (111).

a post-secular wrestling with both the rational and the emotional. Brontë read theological texts that implored their readers to regulate their passions and align their hearts to God. Isaac Watts's *The Doctrine of the Passions* (1791) contains Brontë's signature at the front, and the text addresses idolatry as a passionate experience, which Watts condemns. In it, Watts stresses the necessity of having command over one's emotions. Watts was a Dissenting minister and produced a large number of educational and theological works. He is thus another example of the Dissenting influence on the Brontës' lives, expressing revivalist notions in his writings, desiring to bring a sense of glory back into the way church is practiced (11). Watts's discussion of passion is framed in terms of idolatry, which occurs when an object seizes the chief place in the affections. Idolatry occurs "when we look upon an object as good, and suppose it possible to be attained, our desire goes out toward it, which is a tendency or propensity to obtain [some] absent or unpossessed good", which comes from an instinctive, animal nature (40). The tendency, in Watts's view, is to separate flesh and spirit, to call the body the animal instinct. Brontë engages with this view in *Jane Eyre*, and, as M. H. Scargill argues, *Jane Eyre* portrays the conflict between flesh and spirit (121). Brontë, however, is not merely portraying this struggle, but advocating for a particularly embodied Christianity, engaged with the emotions and the body. Jane's struggle with her idolatrous desires is key in discovering this branch of faith, which perceives human beings as worshipping creatures.

Charlotte Brontë's reading material can also help to illuminate her view about human interaction with God. It is likely that Brontë defined idolatry as inseparable from human desire and emotion; her theological reading included discussions on idolatry as rooted in the affections. One reading that explicitly addresses idolatry comes from Reverend Hugh White, who describes idolatry in emotive terms, centred in the human heart:

> [T]he idolater in earthly love, even when not successful in the pursuit of the object on which he has concentrated all of his desire and hopes of earthly happiness, must still pay the penalty of his impiety and ingratitude to God, for robbing Him of His … *chief place in His affection*. (315; my emphasis)

Because idolatry is based on the affections (emotions) it is not an abstract and symbolic, Catholic sin, but as something all people are in danger of committing. What is most striking about this late eighteenth-century text, is the way in which it associates

joy in this life as important in a relationship with God. He argues that there is infallible joy in "endeavouring to fan the flame of grateful love to the Saviour … to bring down more of heaven's love and heaven's joy in his heart" (518). Faith, in this case, is framed as individual and relational and as relevant in the here and now. Another source from the Brontë library comes from Reverend J. Buckworth, who also describes the interaction with God as experiential and personal. He elaborates by providing evidence through which God works in us:

> The state of mind—the fervency of devotion—the inward contrition—the bent of the desires, and the warmth of the affections, are the evidences by which he, as a spirit, necessarily forms his judgement on us. (43)

According to Buckworth, God longs to have a personal relationship with his creation, and evidence of being a Christian is based on the affection—the bent of the innermost desires of the human heart.

As Charlotte Brontë's sister, Emily Brontë had access to the same reading materials. Although she was private about matters regarding faith, what is known correlates with her elder sister's view about faith. Such a faith involves a personal relationship with God, not associated with orthodox religion. Her faith, as Mary Taylor states, was between her and God (Winnifirth 63). Emily Brontë is often perceived as the most individual, and thus unusual, of the three sisters. Because she was charged with writing such an immoral novel, Charlotte Brontë added a preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* that further cements the legend of Brontë as an "isolated genius" (Stoneman 217). Brontë stresses her sister's isolated and unworldly existence. Even leading up to her death, Emily Brontë appears more focused on life beyond the here and now than her older sister. She refused to take medication in the lead up to her death (Gaskell 81). [33]As Hillis Miller argues, she possessed a strong Methodist view of life in the here and now: every joy obtained in this life is temporary and fleeting, and true joy can only be gained after death (*Disappearance* 184). What can be inferred about Emily involves a revivalist notion of faith as an intense, individual experience, which reflects the influences she was exposed to in the varieties of Christianity permeating the nineteenth century.

[33] Charlotte writes in a letter to Ellen on November 23rd, 1848: "she resolutely refuses to see a doctor; she will give no explanation of her feelings, she will scarcely allow her feelings to be alluded to" (Gaskell 81).

4.2 Revivalism and Conversion: The Pilgrimage

In British revivalism, a tension between conversion as an instantaneous phenomenon—often involving screaming, or dropping to the ground—and as a gradual transformation was present. The primitive link with early Christian martyrdom exists in the instant conversion experience, which occurred in the Methodist outdoor rallies. This type of conversion was viewed with great suspicion by outsiders, and it is this kind to which William Briggs refers to during his attendance at a Methodist rally, with many "groaning suddenly announcing that God had saved them and made them perfect" (Mack 1). Methodists, however, also perceived conversion as an "expression of personal religious transformation", which was evidenced in good works and charity—a more gradual process of conversion (Anderson 1). The conversion experiences of early Methodist leaders were centred on experience; yet, they also involved a period of suffering; that is, their conversion was both an experience and a journey: "each passed through a crisis of moral and spiritual insufficiency that led to the brink of despair, before the crisis was resolved by an intense experience of spontaneous spiritual joy" (Hindmarsh, "The Early Methodist Journalists" 90). *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* explore conversion as a journey, distinguished in its period of suffering. *Wuthering Heights* contains a pronounced link with the instant conversion experience in Catherine and Heathcliff's ravings and madness. This intensity, however, is shown to be a part of a journey of suffering, which takes the form of physical suffering.

A passage from Romans in the Bible helps to illustrate the relationship between suffering and Christianity, in which the Christian is called to put to death the "deeds of the body" to gain life (Rom. 8.13). That is, suffering in the flesh for Christ—any form of physical suffering for the sake of Christ—means the Christian will gain life through the Holy Spirit. Here, religious passion is best understood in context of the Christian faith, in which pain and pleasure are interconnected, and provide a link to God. This correlation occurs through a pain experienced in the flesh to be glorified with God. In her reading of suffering for Christ's followers, Elaine Padilla argues that a strong correlation exists between suffering and pleasure. Suffering, in this case, births in Christians a joy, since all that the Christian suffers is for the sake of God's glory, which is also called an ecstatic suffering (33). While none of the characters set

out to suffer for the sake of Christ, the suffering they experience in their physical bodies draws them toward the spiritual.

Fasting has a significant correlation with spirituality and suffering in *Wuthering Heights*, and in presenting conversion as a journey, rather than an instantaneous transformation. Heathcliff refuses to take any food and is drawn to the state of the post-Romantic sublime in this process. His body becomes imbued with mysterious strength, and Nelly observes a strong trembling in his frame and a joyful glitter in his eyes as he denies any food (328). Fasting, in this case, accords spiritual possibilities for the most depraved character in the novel, since Heathcliff puts to death "the deeds of the body" and embraces the afterlife above the here and now (the immanent). Heathcliff's suffering is not a sign of his depravity and evil, which is the approach of scholars such as Miller, but it is the result of his idolatrous worship of Catherine (*Disappearance* 164). My reading views the horrible suffering in *Wuthering Heights* as a mechanism for spiritual passion, suggesting the possibility of a personal path to God. In *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, conversion—and thus reaching the transcendent—becomes possible after their period of agony in the worship of the idol, which serves as a type of baptism in intensity. Although none of the protagonists emerge from their suffering as Methodist preachers filled with zeal, the end of their journeys suggest the possibility of a revivalist redemption.

4.3 Looking Back to Early Martyrs: Conversion and Suffering

The protagonists in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* experience a spiritual ecstasy through the grinding of the body, a physical suffering, which reflects a revivalist notion of faith in the form of experience and emotion. Revivalism associates the Brontës' depiction of passion and its intensity with early Christianity, particularly in the conversion experience of Methodism in the eighteenth-century British revival. A common feature of evangelical theology in the revivals within the Church at the time is the "affective element in conversion" (Beynon 92). Conversion becomes emotional and experiential, and it is through these affective elements that the protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* experience a revivalist conversion. In both texts, affective conversion occurs in ecstatic suffering parallel to primitive forms of Christianity.

All of the early martyrdoms involved an intense emotional experience, and they were often perceived as "madness" to spectators. In his book of collected accounts of Christian martyrdom, Herbert Musurillo describes Pionius's martyrdom:

> Hastily he went to the amphitheater because of the zeal of his faith, and he gladly removed his clothes as the prison-keeper stood by. Then realizing the holiness and dignity of his own body, he was filled with great joy; and looking up to heaven he gave thanks to God who had preserved him so; then he stretched himself out on the gibbet and allowed the soldier to hammer in the nails. (163)

The martyrs share a characteristic increasing joy and spirituality, distinguished by the intensity of their suffering; that is, the greater the pain, the more martyrs seemed to disassociate from earthly concerns. Another account from the Bishop of Sirmeum, named Irenaeus, recounts the Bishop being tortured until he was bloodied and bruised. His family were brought in to plead with him, but he remained unmoved. The account details him being gripped "with a much stronger passion … and made no reply to anyone; for he was in haste to attain the hope of his heavenly calling" (Salisbury, "Struggle" 17). His torturer accuses him of "lying" to him afterwards when questioned about his family, with detachment so extensive that he remembered no earthly associations and could not remember his family.

The stories of martyrdom translate in the Brontë novels into a high regard for the body in the spiritual experience, endowing suffering with a high honour in the divine realm. Martyrdom literature, such as *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, identifies the martyrs as heroes of faith, bestowed with the highest honour, suffering for their faith. This view was often extreme in some cases, with Christians offering themselves over voluntarily to die, a type of divine suicide (Salisbury, "You Shall Not Kill" 114). This view extended to a ritualistic worship, with the bodies of martyrs seen as sacred objects; people believed the flesh retained the "power that God had given it during its ordeal". This became such a central tenet of early Christianity that, by 360AD, the burial shrines of martyrs had become a large part of Christian worship ("Resurrecting the Flesh" 31). Legends and stories of martyrdom influenced Christian views about the body as an important agent in the spiritual experience.

4.4 The Brontës' New Post-Romanticism

Through the post-secular experience of idolatry, the Brontës craft a new form of spirituality, one that combines post-Romanticism with revivalism. A distinctly Brontëan notion of spirituality involves reformulating post-Romanticism from a position of spiritual abandonment to one that presents spirituality as possible, thus locating it in the post-secular framework. Situated in this way, the redefined image of post-Romanticism is one that materialises in the suffering of the idolatrous experience and the passion accompanying the sublime. In order to understand the post-Romantic vision in the Brontë novels, it is important to contextualise post-Romanticism and its role in the subtraction story. The Romantic movement was the artistic component of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. For the Romantics, religion no longer has a traditional, Christian conception and becomes pantheism—God is reflected in Nature. In his public lectures, Coleridge argues that nature is the symbolic language of God, portraying "the bright impressions of the eternal mind" (*Lectures 1795* 94). The Romantics identified themselves as the elect, "Prophets of Nature", who would speak to readers, as Wordsworth writes in his *Prelude*, of "their redemption, surely yet to come" (441-2). This position conveys the poet as a biblical prophet, elevating his position as a creator of art.

Both Romanticism and post-Romanticism assume that struggle and conflict are evidence of religion's continued decline, as explained by scholars such as Terry Pinkard; in his view, the post-Romantic position accepts the narrative of God's truancy and adopts a position of acceptance (402). Contrasting with the God-like position of the Romantic poet, the post-Romantic poet accepts the loss of God; yet, the poet continues to search and struggle for meaning in a world no longer governed by a higher order—a chaotic Nature controlled by struggle. As argued previously, the post-secular framework revises the presence of struggle and chaos as evidence of a godless universe; instead, through revivalism struggle and suffering offer new possibilities in the spiritual experience and allow the protagonists to discover their own forms of faith outside the Church.

A unique spirituality is conceptualised in the Brontë novels, one that injects post-Romanticism with spirituality in the idolatrous experience. Here, the sublime is attained. The sublime is a unifying element in English Romanticism that centres spirituality on the individual in nature (Luenberger 80); it refers to an elevated state

achieved by the Romantic poet as the elect (Luenberger 80). The Romantic poets obtained the state of the sublime in nature as the transcendent reflection of God. During this state of elevation, according to Wordsworth and Coleridge, the sublime produces a profound unity between mind and Nature. In the sublime itself, however, an element of uncertainty remains, since it portrays an object or event, in which "points of comparison disappear"; it occurs when the poet reaches something beyond thought and language and it engages with an unknowable, infinite force that remains a point over which finite beings can "hover" (211) (Shaw 2; Millbank 208). Within the experience of the sublime, an element of the unknown remains, as the finite comes into contact with the infinite.

4.4.1 Post-Romantic Spirituality

Post-romantic spirituality enacts a connection with the spiritual world that takes place in nature, but it involves a difficult journey. The type of suffering that O'Neill describes is central to the journey of the post-Romantic soul, though in the Brontës' work, post-Romanticism differs from the kind described by O'Neill. In the experience of bodily suffering, the protagonists in both texts reach an elevated state, which draws an exact parallel with early Christian martyrs. In contrast to mere suffering in the journey of the post-Romantic poet, this suffering and intensity raises the poet to the state of the sublime.

A renewed view of post-Romanticism emerges in the post-secular framework, implicating the traditional meaning of the post-Romantic sublime. Instead of being a product of the imagination, the post-Romantic sublime is a spirituality centred in bodily suffering. Nelly becomes the agent of uncertainty and fear as she faces the sublime, and trembles with fear. Both Catherine and Heathcliff terrify Nelly as they reach the sublime in their suffering, and Heathcliff fills her with terror during his self-imposed fast. Thus, Nelly comes into contact with something unknowable to her—the sublime. She tells Lockwood, "I cannot express what a terrible start I got, by the momentary view! Those deep black eyes! That smile, and ghastly paleness! It appeared to me, not Mr Heathcliff, but a goblin" (329). In a posture reflecting the sublime, she is terrified when faced with the transcendent, but, moments later, is convinced she is foolish in her fear—"I set myself to reflect, how I had tended him in infancy; and watched him grow to youth; and followed him through his whole course;

and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror" (330); her position as unreliable narrator, however, undermines her cynicism, and suggests the possibility of spirituality. Catherine and Heathcliff's spirituality involves a journey of suffering to the sublime, which continues to remain a place of uncertainty as focalised through Nelly.

Post-Romantic spirituality in the Brontës is not a contained and linear trajectory of finding God but is presented as a journey that involves struggle and constant negotiation. In *Jane Eyre*, idolatry highlights the tension between faith and works central to Jane's discovery of her own faith. At each point of idolatry, Jane faces this question, and does not reach an equilibrium until the end of the novel. She faces one of her first struggles in her childhood when she is humiliated in the front of her fellow pupils at Lowood. Being loved by people is the greatest value in existence for Jane, and Helen reminds her of a love that exist beyond the immanent: "[y]ou are too impulsive, too vehement; the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or other creates as feeble as you" (59). Jane continues to wrestle with her love of "feeble creatures" and loving God in her idolatrous attachment to the immanent, and desiring happiness in this life.

4.5 Revivalism versus Organised Religion in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*

The Brontës explore a new form of faith in the spirit of revivalism by presenting organised religion as lacking any true spirituality. *Wuthering Heights* depicts a diversity of opinions regarding spirituality, and the absence of any monolithic representation of faith in the novel emulates the splintered Christian faith of Victorian Britain. The Brontë novels rarely contain any positive portrayal of orthodox religion, and this can be seen through the condescension from the main churchgoing figure in *Wuthering Heights*. The most pronounced portrayal of religion in *Wuthering Heights* is, of course, the conceited Joseph, branded as the figure of Calvinism in the novel (Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion* 82). His own sense of sanctimony renders him as a figure of institutional judgment, representing the oppression of the Church and the desire for more imaginative forms of faith; however, Joseph should be viewed beyond his satirical function, and also as a character that presents the less imaginative

perspective in a situation, enacting a tension between a less spiritual view of the world and one more focused on works—viewing the appearance of righteousness as justification (Wiltshire 25). After Catherine's dramatic sobbing out in the storm, Joseph reduces her state to a silly girl, chasing after men—"[r]unning after t'lads, as usuald!" (87). Everyone around Joseph is condemned in his eyes, especially Heathcliff, commenting on his death that the "divil's harried off his soul" (335). Joseph sees Catherine and Heathcliff as irredeemable sinners, and his religion fails to compel them to turn to God. Joseph's faith is framed "the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible" (42). Nelly is the figure of institutional propriety, judging Joseph as the Bible-bashing Calvinist, and viewing Catherine and Heathcliff as outsiders in relation to the Church and God.

The major figure of organised religion in *Jane Eyre* is equally as conceited as Joseph, and also reflects the lack of coherence in the religious cultural landscape of Victorian Britain. Mr Brocklehurst, the headmaster of Lowood School, is the figure of sanctimonious institutionalism, and figures as a contrast to Jane, who challenges his narrow views of salvation. This interrogation of religious views occurs from the early stages of *Jane Eyre*, when Brocklehurst arrives at the Reed household to examine Jane. Salvation is of particular concern in this questioning, framed in the condemning vernacular of fire and hell. Brocklehurst asks Jane, "[d]o you know where the wicked go after death?". Jane self-consciously observes the orthodox nature of her rehearsed reply: "[t]hey go to hell" (25). He then asks, "[w]hat must you do to avoid it?" (25). For Brocklehurst, salvation is contingent on doing good, and does not address personal relationship with God as the means into heaven. Those who practice piety are the ones who attain heaven, which is why he scorns Jane for her own personal Bible reading. When Jane tells him the Psalms are "not interesting" he informs her: "[t]hat proves you have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it" (26). He insists that she would not be permitted into heaven were she to die that instant, because a good heart should translate into what Brocklehurst views to be righteousness. Although Jane disagrees with Brocklehurst's Pharisaism, he is also representative of Jane's anxiety about good works as a means for justification, not God's grace—the tension between good works (immanence) and faith (spirituality)—and it is a burden she carries throughout the novel.

4.5.1 Unfriended Creatures: Catherine, Heathcliff and Jane as Religious Outsiders

From early in her life, Jane is cast as the Nonconformist outsider, which is evident from her answers to Brocklehurst's questions, as well as her shaming in front of the school. Brocklehurst is shown to be hypocritical and cruel, inviting the reader to thoroughly cast him as evil. He forces the school girls to wear plain, cold, dresses, while his daughters and wife are attired in "velvet, silk, and furs" (55). After their grand entrance, Brocklehurst calls Jane forward for committing a minor indiscretion. He shames her in front of the entire Lowood cohort, calling her a servant of the "Evil One" (56). Here, Jane is cast as an outsider: "an interloper and an alien" (56). In casting Brocklehurst as an unfeeling, cold, figure, organised religion is shown to be spiritually dormant and corrupt, due to its lack of empathy and sentiment. As such, Brocklehurst represents the rejection of organised religion, and asserts a view of religion as centred on emotion and intensity. Like Catherine and Heathcliff, Jane is the Nonconformist outsider, who wrestles with the narrow view of salvation presented by the institution.

As with Jane, both Catherine and Heathcliff are positioned as outcasts according to conventional views of God and spirituality, especially in the engagement with the post-Romantic sublime. Catherine and Heathcliff's violent intensity, shared by Jane, is beyond Nelly's narrow understanding of the world with the Church of England at its centre; as the unreliable narrator, she cannot fathom their intensity. Both Catherine and Heathcliff are presented as outsiders to this conception, as children of the moors:

> They both promised to grow up as rude as savages … it was one of their amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and stay there all day … The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again … and many a time I've cried to myself to watch them growing more reckless daily, and I not daring to speak a syllable for fear of losing the small power I still retained over the unfriended creatures. (46-47)

Organised religion is presented as futile in transforming the heart, and it attempts to force transformation through obedience to the law. The curate sets a chapter of scripture to memorise, which, as a law, does nothing to change Catherine's heart.

Joseph's punishment, likewise, does little in changing Heathcliff, since it requires obedience, and not a change of heart. Catherine and Heathcliff's bond forms outside of the institution in nature, cementing a revivalist spirituality of passion and intensity. The unfriended outsiders are also outsiders to the traditional understanding of God and spirituality, maintaining a close relationship with the landscape.

Post-Romantic spirituality in *Wuthering Heights* is attained in bodily suffering, which refers to both fasting and self-inflicting violence in the shedding of blood. The violence and brutality in *Wuthering Heights* is often perceived as evidence of an animal world governed by pure instinct. Self-inflicting violence, however, becomes a type of spiritual rite, since violence allows both characters to reach the post-Romantic sublime. In their self-imposed violence, Catherine and Heathcliff appall Nelly, and she functions as the traditional position of the post-Romantic sublime—one that perceives the sublime as an illusion. In both instances, it is the possibility of losing the idol that arouses levels of violence to the point of spilling blood. A possible separation from Heathcliff sends Catherine into a frenzy of self-violence, rousing her to bash her head against the arm of a sofa, causing her lips to bleed (118). Linton looks on this scene with "compunction and fear", noting the blood Catherine sheds: "[s]he has blood on her lips!" (118). Nelly perceives this from her institutionalised perspective as "a frenzy" and implores him not to take notice of it. Catherine's act of violence on her body, however, pushes her into an elevated state of the sublime: "she started up—her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out" (118). Nelly does not perceive it as spirituality but expresses cool concern of possible broken bones.

Similarly, Heathcliff experiences an intense and rapturous passion when Catherine dies, sobbing and crying for her to haunt him, rousing him to slam his head against a tree trunk. Nelly perceives Heathcliff as acting animal-like—"a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears" (169). No spirituality is present in Nelly's perception, and his behaviour only encourages a sanctimonious position in Nelly, who is stunned. She is appalled at the blood, noting its presence on the bark: "I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained; probably the scene I witnessed was a repetition of others acted during the night" (169). She departs his presence, believing Heathcliff merely needs consolation, not taking into account that Heathcliff screams for Catherine to haunt him. For Heathcliff, life is only possible in death, expressing a form of faith solely

focused on the afterlife. The intense passions displayed in these passages arise from intense suffering, which is physically manifested through the blood that both Catherine and Heathcliff spill; thus, asserting an individual spirituality outside of Nelly's conception.

4.6 Passion in *Wuthering Heights*: A Transcendent Focus

Idolatry in *Wuthering Heights* is usually associated with the passionate love of Catherine and Heathcliff. J. Hillis Miller perceives the worship in the Catherine-Heathcliff interaction as the passion that fills the void of no hope or God (*Disappearance* 186). Miller's secular focus reads idolatry as a sign that God is absent in the world of *Wuthering Heights.* In Miller's reading, chaos rules in the *Wuthering Heights* universe, and no clear moral judgements can be made. My reading, in contrast, views God as present but ambiguous, reflecting the post-secular condition: faith and doubt existing in a common frame. Religion, moreover, is a post-secular phenomenon in the Catherine and Heathcliff interaction. This uncontrollable love portrays human beings as desiring creatures above all else—desires are birthed outside of the protagonist's control. The storm that erupts between Catherine and Heathcliff is a storm of passion that neither of them are able to command. One example includes Catherine and Heathcliff's exchange before her death. A similar concern is raised in this passage, during Catherine and Heathcliff's stinging exchange before Catherine's death. Catherine tells Heathcliff: "I shouldn't care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn't you suffer? I do!" (160). Heathcliff replies to her:

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

Heathcliff's torrent of emotion appears as mere selfishness, but this final exchange reveals an important aspect about their relationship. Their bond is presented as its own religion in a post-secular sense, and being united is their sole focus, which can only be in death. The post-secular conception of religion is portrayed as a liturgical phenomenon, beyond conscious deliberation, and the sublime draws both protagonists beyond this conscious reflection (Smith, "Secular Liturgies" 161). Desire emerges before belief, which is why their relationship transcends any earthly attachments.

Catherine does not consider her marriage to Edgar as an obstacle in her relationship with Heathcliff, and she does not yield to Edgar's requests that she should choose between him and Heathcliff: "I require to be let alone! … I demand it!" (117). Idolatry transcends any rational framework of religion and secularism as binaries. Catherine and Heathcliff are also both aware, however, that their only remaining hope of attaining a union can only happen in the afterlife, and their devotion to one another drives this as the central feature of faith in the text.

4.7 Idolatry and the Post-Secular Journey in *Jane Eyre*

In *Jane Eyre*, idolatry is interpreted traditionally as an external sin associated with symbols, but I interpret idolatry as a central feature of Jane's journey in the tension between life in the here and now and the afterlife; idolatry becomes a journey of negotiation between the immanent and the transcendent as Jane eventually comes to understand her own heart. In the symbolic view of idolatry, Rochester is conceptualised as the figure of Catholicism who promotes Jane's idolatrous desire, invoking overtones of anti-Catholic literature (Vejvoda, "Dialectic of Idolatry" 113). Vejvoda develops her argument in a later paper, arguing that *Jane Eyre* explores the Protestant idol of marriage. Similarly, Carens specifically discusses the trope of idolatry in Victorian literature, identifying marriage as the true Victorian idol in novels such as *Villette* (1853), which is a form of idolatry the Victorians themselves never acknowledged in their demonisation of Catholics as the ultimate idolators ("Breaking the Idol" 338).

This Protestant idolatry is explored in *Jane Eyre* through the personal spiritual journey of the protagonist. Jane's idolatrous struggle rests on the tension of resolving happiness in the here and now (the immanent frame) and pleasing God (the transcendent). Carens also interprets idolatry as pointing to an anxiety about human love and the idol of marriage. Even though Victorian culture widely believed that marriage was made in heaven, Victorian Protestants were also concerned that passionate love might slip into idolatry ("Breaking the Idol" 337). In *Jane Eyre*, the self-conscious identification of idolatry offers a dialogue of exploring individual faith away from the institution of the Church. Alison Searle's study of idolatry in *Jane Eyre* is one of the most recent, and most ground-breaking, interpretations of idolatry in the text. Searle links idolatry with the imagination, arguing that idolatry is linked with

imagination and desire, which is grounded in theological principles of idolatry (40). To Searle, both Jane and Rochester learn to rightly order their loves through suffering and cast aside their idolatry by the end of the novel (43).

In my reading, idolatry extends beyond the realm of the domestic sphere, beyond its symbolic function, and addresses the central role of desire in this uniquely Protestant idolatry as not merely theological but also post-secular. That is, idolatry involves a struggle between the life to come and the life in the here and now; in this struggle, Jane's conversion narrative is a journey of knowing her own heart. As the narrator who looks back to her childhood, she is aware of idolatry as being an externalised object, a symbolic form of one's love. When she is alone and friendless in the Reed household, Jane takes her doll into her crib, self-consciously observing that

> [H]uman beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. It puzzles me now to remember with what absurd sincerity I doted on this little toy. (22)

Jane is most consciously aware of her inclination to love earthly things above God, and, in this passage, Jane is convicted of the Catholic sin of idolatry, "a faded graven image". The Catholic sin of idolatry involves worshipping physical vestments, which can be seen in the devotion Jane shows to her childhood doll, identified in the binary reading of Catholics versus Protestants. Here, the overt recognition of idolatry in this novel is birthed from an aversion to symbols, creeds, vestments—any institutional reference to religion.

Culturally speaking, the suspicion of creeds and symbols was a widespread assumption, with Carlyle's famous lectures as one example of this disinclination; [34] however, the idol at home, the Protestant idol, is also explored in this section, with Jane not merely finding comfort from her doll, but also experiencing pleasure from having the doll close to her, identifying deep love and cherishing as characteristics of idolatry. Her allusion to Exodus 32 explicitly directs the reader to the idolatrous

[34] Carlyle's lectures focused on worshipping great men as a moral example. He defines idolatry as a thing seen, "a symbol", which is a symbolic—and typically Victorian— interpretation of idolatry ("The Hero as Priest" 104). For further discussions, refer to the third chapter of this thesis on pages 56-57.

fulfilment she finds in the doll, just as the Israelites worship a golden calf.[35] To Jane, however, this idolatry remains external and symbolic, derived from the image of a golden calf. The intensity identified in this passage does not solely address the intense passion between Jane and her doll, but the experience the doll offers her in this exchange. The doll provides the comfort of a companion, a pleasure fulfilled in the warmth and companionship it provides. An intimacy is exchanged between Jane and the doll, and her desires are fulfilled.

4.7.1 The Desire for Love: A Struggle between Flesh and Spirit

Jane's anxiety about her idolatrous desires also includes a love for people as her religion, which focuses on the here and now—the immanent frame. As Jane grows older, she struggles to understand her own heart in the context of loving others and maintaining a relationship with God (a tension between the here and now and the afterlife). Helen Burns is representative of Jane's wrestling with emotion and passion in her love for other people. As a child, Jane tells Helen,

> I know I should think well of myself; but that isn't enough: if others don't love me, I would rather die than live … to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or let a bull toss me. (59)

Helen's response addresses the inherent issue in idolatry: a struggle between flesh and spirit. She warns Jane against caring too much about the happiness in this life, telling her, after her humiliation in front of the entire school:

> Jane! you think too much for the love of human beings … there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is around us … God waits only for the separation of spirit from flesh to crown as with a full reward. (59)

Helen has her eyes fixed on life in the transcendent sphere, and the heavenly reward will only come after spirit is separated from flesh. She remains focused on the crown she will receive, the joy that will come after death. Helen identifies Jane's idolatrous attachment to love that can be found on earth and reminds her to focus on life beyond

[35] Exodus 32 contains the first reference to idolatry. When Moses is on top of Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, God informs him, "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee out of Egypt" (Ex. 32:8).

the here and now. Jane admires Helen, yet she struggles to accept a view about spirituality that excludes a focus on the world of the flesh, and this is a negotiation that continues throughout the novel. This is, in other words, a post-secular negotiation between flesh and spirit.

Jane's idolatrous passion for Rochester casts further tension in her earthly attachments and her focus on the transcendent and becomes part of her journey in knowing her heart. The idolatrous relationship that evolves between Jane and Rochester is usually interpreted as reflective of Charlotte's anti-Catholic sentiments (Vejvoda, "Idolatry in *Jane Eyre*" 250; Peschier, "Introduction" 6). This interpretation does not fully consider Charlotte's background, and it does not address the complexities of the relationships in *Jane Eyre*.[36] The romantic relationships in Jane's life reflect Brontë's awareness of the contemporary debates regarding faith, and her negotiation of these debates, as Jane discovers a journey to God through the suffering that idolatry brings. Jane's encounters with Rochester are full of passion; their union is frequently described with a religious intensity by both of them, appealing to the supernatural as a part of their union. When Jane tells Rochester that she loves him, he tells her:

> [I]t is strange; but that sentence has penetrated my breast painfully. Why? I think because you said it with such an earnest, religious energy, and because your upward gaze at me now is the very sublime of faith, truth, and devotion; it is too much as if some spirit were near me. (248)

Rochester sees Jane as a spirit, the replacer of God in the form of intense experience, a religious energy that he equates with faith in God. Jane's sublime faith is in Rochester, not God, though, in describing her as a spirit, Rochester sees the divine itself as justifying such devotion, since it is the spirit that utters these words, not the flesh. Here, idolatry becomes a discourse for negotiating passion, framed as a transcendent experience.

Idolatry raises both Jane and Rochester above earthly concerns to an elevated state of the sublime, which causes a contradictory result of attachment to the immanent frame. When Rochester requests Jane's hand in marriage, she perceives this as an earthly paradise, upholding happiness in this life above anything else, and thinks "of

[36] Recent autobiographical research suggests that Patrick Brontë was relieved when the Catholic Emancipation Bill was passed in 1829, and Charlotte shared his views regarding this oppressed group and the right for fairness in the law for all people (Stoneman 6).

the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow" (225). Rochester's intense experience of Jane drives him to cast aside his marriage to Bertha, raising him above any earthly concerns for marital duties, and any sense of honesty to Jane. It is his worship of her that drives him to deceive her:

> I am bound to you with a strong attachment. I think you good, gifted, lovely: a fervent, a solemn passion is conceived in my heart; it leans to you, draws you to my centre and spring of life, wraps my existence around you, and, kindling in pure, powerful flame, fuses you and me in one. It was because I felt and knew this, that I resolved to marry you. (278)

Rochester's internal desire, conceived in his heart, raises him to the state of the sublime, in a passion that centres his existence on Jane. His attachment to Jane, however, exceeds mere intense emotion, and raises him above any earthly attachments. The state of the sublime dissolves Rochester's marriage in his eyes, and he justifies this in expressing his spiritual hunger and thirst for fulfilment through Jane. This love is also is self-seeking and idolatrous, a dark mirror of Christ and the Church, as he confesses:

> I was wrong to attempt to deceive you; but I feared a stubbornness that exists in your character. I feared early instilled prejudice: I wanted to have you safe before hazarding confidences. This was cowardly: I should have appealed to your nobleness and magnanimity at first, as I do now—opened up to you plainly my life of agony—described to you *my hunger and thirst after a higher and worthier existence.* (278; my emphasis)

Rochester's hunger and thirst are similar to metaphors in the Gospels of spiritual hunger and thirst. Hanson interprets Wilde's *Salomé* as containing these types of metaphors, and he argues that hunger and thirst in the Gospels "are repeatedly evoked in the Gospels as metaphors for the yearning after righteousness" ("Seduction and the Scarlet Woman" 202). A similar image is evoked here as he justifies his idolatrous worship, framing it in terms of his hunger and thirst after a worthier existence. Rochester also seeks to own Jane in his deception, yet he also internally desires a spiritual fulfilment through her.

4.7.2 Rochester: Idolatry as Immanent Satisfaction

In Jane and Rochester's idolatrous relationship, a problematic distinction between sexuality and spirituality is constructed as part of legitimising satisfaction in this life. Idolatry is frequently phrased in sexual terms, with Israel described as the harlot who turns to other gods. Paul, the apostle, pictures God as a husband to His people, with the Church as his bride (Eph 5. 23-27).[37] Rochester's declarations do not merely reveal an idolatry of marriage, as Carens's reading argues, but an ecstasy, an intense experience of passion—both sexual and spiritual in nature—as the foundation of this idolatrous attachment. The "fervent solemn" passion of physical desire is intertwined with a her as his "spring of life." In considering the usual identification of idolatry as anything physical, such intense declarations of love would not seem idolatrous to Victorians, yet this is not how idolatry is identified in the Bible.

This problematic boundary between sex and spirituality is also present in revivalist hymns. Rochester's expression of love for his idol reflects the language of Methodist hymns, which refer to interacting with God on an intimate and personal level. One hymn reads: "O precious side holes' cavity/ I want to spend my life in thee … yes I will forever sit/ There where thy side was split" (Mack 3). In referring to being inside Jesus, this Methodist hymn evokes a sexual image of intimacy with God. Methodism's interactions with God is grounded in an emotional connection with God—a warming of the heart (Anderson 3). Jane's relationship with Rochester reflects this sexual and spiritual intensity: a post-secular duality, as well as a revivalist exploration of faith.

Through her attachment to Rochester, Jane comes to realise her attachment to the immanent frame, and becomes a pivotal part of her journey in understanding the tendencies of her own heart—the key stepping stone in negotiating her branch of faith. The passionate declarations of love that characterise Jane and Rochester's relationship are soon followed by an acknowledgement of idolatry, as Jane realises that Rochester has become her religion—has warmed her heart. The intensity between her and Rochester moves her to acknowledge him as idol:

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[37] See pages 8-9 in the first chapter for a discussion of idolatry as a figuratively sexual sin against God.

> My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope in heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol. (242)

Jane recognises the ways in which she cannot escape that which has become her religion. She has sought only the good of this life and not the good of the life to come. This passage marks the start of Jane's doubt in her idol, which—as with all idols—is broken. After discovering Rochester's wife, Jane's idol is shattered, and she retreats into her room, describing the "whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass" (262). Jane's relationship with Rochester follows the post-secular continuum of a wrestle between the transcendent and the immanent. Jane's central struggle throughout the text occurs in legitimising her own happiness as a valid form of faith. Idolatry, thus, becomes a journey of conversion in *Jane Eyre*, which is established in childhood and continues through to Rochester.

Jane struggles with God as she asserts her own will and happiness in the here and now, while trying to keep God in view. Any prospect of not being united with Rochester is unbearable to her, and she has a fierce outburst when she faces the possibility of him marrying someone else:

> Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? ... Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! *And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth*, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, not even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are! (223; my emphasis)

Although this passage portrays the feminine spirit asserting itself against patriarchal authority, it also conveys Jane's personal struggle to find individual happiness that aligns with God's plan. In mentioning God as her creator, Jane calls for all earthly restraint to be set aside in her pursuit of Rochester. Although she refers to God as creator, Jane also cannot stand to become nothing to Rochester. She appeals to

Rochester's spirit, while asserting a self-will that demands happiness in this life, not life beyond the grave. There is a focus on the immanent frame, life within the physical, while calling on the transcendent to legitimise this form of happiness.

4.8 Fasting and Faith in *Wuthering Heights*

Fasting in *Wuthering Heights* draws both protagonists to the sublime and opens the possibility of a conversion experience inspired by revivalism. When a separation occurs between Catherine and Heathcliff, the consequences are strange and chaotic—a portrayal of the sublime. Heathcliff, after overhearing Catherine's infamous confession to Nelly, runs away from the Heights. Catherine's physical suffering commences shortly after Heathcliff's departure. To Nelly's institutionalised mindset, the unknown forces at work in Catherine terrify her: "I shall never forget what a scene she acted, when we reached her chamber. It terrified me" (88). She cannot conceive of it as anything other than "the commencement of a delirium" (88). In the three years of their separation, Catherine suffers "seasons of gloom and silence", though Nelly perceives the possibility of happiness in her recent marriage to Edgar Linton (92). When Heathcliff returns to the Heights, though, the intensity of their idolatrous desire reignites, and Catherine begins to act in a manner that both Nelly and Edgar perceive as mad.[38] In truth, Catherine experiences a Methodist conversion, reaching a state of the sublime in this process.

Nelly's unreliable narration has been noted by modern scholars, and it is through her undependable narration that Brontë presents a distinct position in relation to spirituality and Catherine's conversion.[39] The recent criticism regarding the two

[38] As well as Nelly's fear of Catherine in her bedchamber, Linton is also afraid of Catherine's rages: "Mr Linton stood looking at her in sudden compunction and fear", and he is also shocked by the blood on Catherine's lips when she slams her own head against the arm of a sofa (118).

[39] Gideom Shunami has been a part of modern scholarship's reassessment of Ellen Dean as narrator who is not objective, and not without her own personal prejudices. In his view, Nelly manipulates situations in the novel, such as withholding information about Heathcliff from Catherine. She is well-aware of Heathcliff's eavesdropping on Catherine's infamous confession: "I am Heathcliff', but she conceals this from her (455). Thus, Nelly believes she can manage Catherine's life. He also points out that Nelly does not understand Catherine's "spirit" (456). Shunami perceives Nelly's biggest flaw as: "her sanctimonious position results from an ignorance of her true role and a misunderstanding of the spirit of others" (457). She is, thus, incapable of describing the characters as they truly are (465). Terrance McCarthy also considers the other principal narrator, Lockwood, who is "incapable of appreciating things that are so important here" (50). McCarthy stresses the need to consider Lockwood as narrator, since he recounts what is told to him by Nelly, making him the main narrator. He perceives the supernatural occurrences at Wuthering Heights as figments of his mind (50).

principal narrators are in accord that both Nelly and Lockwood do not understand the events at Wuthering Heights. Both narrators perceive the events through the superficial lens of traditional society and judge the spirituality as symptoms of madness (McCarthy 51). Nelly's uncertainty is most apparent when Catherine and Heathcliff starve themselves and reach the sublime as a consequence of suffering.

Separation from Heathcliff is inconceivable, and this idolatrous attachment pushes Catherine to start inflicting violence on herself; as martyr, her self-starvation commences shortly after Edgar demands Catherine separate herself from Heathcliff permanently (118). She does inform Nelly that she fasts to punish Edgar (121), but her bodily suffering elevates her to an ecstasy where she discovers Heathcliff. Catherine first tears her pillow with her teeth, increasing "her feverish bewilderment to madness" (122) and immediately starts reliving her childhood with Heathcliff.[40] The physical effects of starvation in Catherine parallels with Methodist conversion experiences, which often involved "Droppings-down, Ravings and Madnesses" (Hempton 33). Nelly takes Catherine's hand, and "bid her be composed, for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame" (123). Catherine experiences a loss of self in her experience of her idol, as her starvation draws her towards the spiritual.

4.8.1 Catherine's Spiritual Journey

In *Wuthering Heights*, conversion is not instantaneous as it often was in Methodist rallies, but it involves a period of suffering, which specifically associates Catherine's conversion with a journey. The Methodist conversion experience often entailed loss of self in the experience of God, and the converted person often appeared to be mad (Anderson 4). For the saints of Christianity, physical suffering spurred a stronger connection with God and raised them above the earthly concern of bodily pain (Foxe 18). In this case, Catherine experiences both post-Romantic and revivalist notions of spirituality. The post-Romantic sublime is reconceptualised in post-secular and framework as Catherine suffers: Catherine does not intend to suffer for God as Christian martyrs did; yet, in her fleshly suffering, her devotion to her idol draws her into the Romantic state of the sublime. Catherine is raised above earthy concerns, not aware that she risks severe illness by hanging out of the window, desiring to open her

[40] The feathers in the torn pillow remind Catherine of her time in the moors as a child with Heathcliff: "This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot—we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dare not come" (122).

window in the middle of winter to see Heathcliff. In spite of Nelly trying to "force her to retire", Catherine remains in her state of elevation, staring out of the window: "Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself … I won't rest till you are with me" (126). Catherine knows that it is only in death that she can join her idol, which is why she remains convinced she is dying (122,123). It is Catherine's separation from her idol that induces suffering and eventual spiritual ecstasy, raising her above any earthly awareness

Catherine's body suffers some mysterious agony of burning during her ecstatic experience. She tells Nelly, "Oh, I'm burning! ... Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words?" (125). Although Catherine experiences great bodily suffering, she is raised to a state of elevation and possesses physical strength that surpasses her illness. The burning that Catherine refers to is an important part of her in her conversion experience, since it signals profound physical agony. Burning from her ecstasy, she desires for Nelly to open the window in the middle of winter (122). She remains unaware of the earthily scenes around her. In spite of being starved for three nights, "gaunt and thin", she overpowers Nelly:

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

Like Matthew Arnold, Catherine confronts the personal landscape of struggle and confusion, but instead of deteriorating further, Catherine's body is imbued with strength (O'Neill 120). Here, the strength imbued on Catherine's starving body during her act of worship associates it with early Christian martyrs.

It may seem unusual to compare Catherine with the early Christian martyrs, but it is through the paradox of pain and pleasure that a strong association exists between her suffering and the suffering of early Christian martyrs. The basic psychology of physical suffering and torture was carried out by the Roman Empire to make victims acutely aware of their own bodies, to force them into submission. The opposite occurred with Christian martyrs, with tortures only driving them further into a focus on the next life, making them less and less likely to yield (Salisbury, "Resurrecting the Flesh" 26). As Catherine undergoes self-starvation, she can be said to experience, according to Padilla, a passion "for better things to come"—a type of supernatural joy at the prospect of what is to come in the afterlife—a joy at being united with God (44).

A miracle occurs in Catherine's body, an ability to withstand her suffering and gain strength as she experiences a loss of self. Following the trajectory of a Methodist conversion narrative, Catherine reaches the peak of her sublime shortly before her death, at the epitome of her physical suffering. Ill from starvation, Catherine attains a state of painful pleasure, unaware of her surroundings. She does not recognise Edgar, "she gave him no glance of recognition … he was invisible to her abstracted gaze" (127). Catherine's state is reached when she fasts, mirroring the spiritual journey of many early Christian martyrs. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Sirmeum, does not recognise his family after being physically tortured to the point of shedding blood, and he "made no reply to anyone" (Salisbury, "Struggle" 17). The importance of bodily suffering in the spiritual experience grounds the story of *Wuthering Heights* specifically in early Christian martyrdom. This martyrdom, however, occurs in the post-secular framework, and is not a spiritual experience of God, but of the idol. Catherine is only aware of her idol, Heathcliff, desiring the afterlife where they can be united. She raves about being buried "twelve feet deep" with Heathcliff, exclaiming, "I won't rest until you are with me!" (126). Catherine cannot see Nelly but is solely focused on her idolatrous union with Heathcliff.

4.8.2 Fasting: The Post-Romantic Sublime

To Nelly's institutionalised mindset, Catherine's condition is identified as madness, though we may question how Catherine's starving body is able to ward off an able-bodied woman such as Ellen Dean. As an unreliable narrator, moreover, Nelly's assessment of Catherine's condition as pure madness is not unerring. It also means that Catherine's body is likely imbued with strength beyond her physical condition, which is parallels to the legends of martyrdom and the beliefs about the tortured body. Other Christians perceived the flesh of martyrs as retaining God's power—the power God has given to endure the torture (Salisbury, "Resurrecting" 31). The loss of self also presents a type of religion that appears mysterious and mystical but is a personal assertion of Catherine's own religion. In a form of revivalism, Catherine experiences what Methodists perceived as a key feature in their religious experience, as "primitive participants in a mystical experience of divine presence" (Anderson 3). The "mystical experience of divine presence" occurs in physical suffering as a sacrifice for the idol, paralleling with early Christian martyrs' spirituality was induced in an act of sacrifice

for their faith. Spirituality is present in Catherine and Heathcliff's influence over one another, with an evaporation of self.

Similarly, Heathcliff reaches the state of the sublime in his act of fasting and Nelly's narrow conceptions of spirituality renders her fearful of Heathcliff, who remains a mystery to Nelly. His behaviour at the end of the novel contains strong otherworldly references, which commences when he starts to starve himself. His infamous monologue after he ceases his violent behaviour highlights the strong relationship that suffering and spirituality present in the novel. Heathcliff tells Nelly he is surrounded by Catherine's image—a strong reference to his idolatrous attachments to Catherine.[41] His idolatry has led him to a place of "great pain, amounting to agony" (323). During this unsettling time for Nelly, she observes that Heathcliff experiences "both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes" as he stares at something unseen to earthly eyes (331). To her narrow conceptions of faith, conversion is not an important part of salvation. She views personal piety as essential, and fears for Heathcliff's soul. In her limited view of the Christian, believes Heathcliff a condemned sinner, imploring him to see a minister to explain the Bible to him (333). To Nelly, Heathcliff can only obtain salvation if a member of the clergy visits him. What she refers to as Heathcliff's godless indifference, continues, and he tells her:

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

Heathcliff's heaven involves a personal mediation of spirituality, and his joy remains fixed on what is to come in the afterlife. When Nelly insists he take some food, he assures her:

> [i]t is not my fault I cannot eat or rest … you might as well bid a man struggling in the water, rest within arm's length of the shore! ... My Soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself. (333)

Continuing the thread of idolatry inherent throughout the novel, his devotion to Catherine reflects a devotion that the early martyrs possessed for God. Both Catherine and Heathcliff are presented as the irredeemable sinners in the eyes of Nelly. Yet, like

[41] In Exodus 20.4, idolatry is described in the Ten Commandments as an image: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath."

revivalists, they are on the outside, separated from the Church. In spite of his "godless indifference" (334), the text leaves Heathcliff's fate in the afterlife ambiguous.

Heathcliff's strange joy commences after his self-induced fast, and he returns in the morning after wandering in the moors all night. Young Cathy describes Heathcliff as "so different from his usual look" that she "stopped for a moment to stare at him" (326). When Nelly lays eyes on him, she observes the physical results of sleeplessness and starvation on him as "pale, and he trembled; yet, certainly, he had a strange joyful glitter in his eyes, that altered the aspect of his whole face" and his starving body is not referred to as weak; he shivers in a "strong thrilling, rather than trembling" (327). Heathcliff appears to be in the process of achieving an elevated state, the sublime, though this takes full shape when his self-starvation commences. His joy can be seen as similar to the joy of the bishop of Antioch, in the face of terrible suffering for his faith; he was willing to "let the grinding of the whole body" come upon him only that he could win Jesus (Foxe 19). A type of joy is experienced by Heathcliff at the possibility of joining his idol in the afterlife.

Though Heathcliff certainly cannot be said to exhibit the moral qualities of a martyr—he causes great misery to others for his own gain throughout his life—he gains a type of spirituality through his suffering. Though Heathcliff is observed as "dark almost as if it came from the devil" (36) when he is first introduced at the Heights, it is when his self-starvation commences that he appears to Nelly as "a ghoul or vampire" (330); Nelly has a legitimate fear of Heathcliff when she enters his room to take supper to him—in an attempt to stop the fast—and screams in fear of him, sure that Heathcliff is a creature of some other world (330). Though she knows it is absurd "to yield to that sense of horror" (330), she declines Heathcliff's entreaty to sit with him, telling him that "his strange talk and manner" frightens her (334). Nelly comes face to face with the sublime and trembles with terror. This state of the sublime continues as Heathcliff denies himself earthly gratifications, such as food and sleep. He increasingly becomes connected with the supernatural, thereby enacting the same suffering martyrs underwent to gain access to God. The suffering of the martyrs links with post-Romanticism through suffering and uncertainty; a new conception of post-Romanticism emerges in Heathcliff's last night, one that does not interpret uncertainty as an absence of God. Instead of merely depicting "our aloneness", post-Romanticism in *Wuthering Heights* portrays a means to the sublime, though this road remains unclear and mysterious.

4.9 Sanctification and Suffering in *Jane Eyre*

The suffering that both Jane and Rochester experience serves as a form of sanctification, which shares similar characteristics to that of the early martyrs. Just as Catherine and Heathcliff experience this sanctification through a starving of the body, Jane and Rochester suffer physical ailment as a vital part of their spiritual journey, though their physical suffering justifies their happiness in the here and now. Rochester begs her to stay, but Jane knows she "must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty—"'Depart!'" (279). Her departure is hastened by her self-conscious awareness of her idolatry, and, thus, idolatry forms a part of Jane's journey—a stepping stone in her faith. Jane abhors herself as she departs, feeling the road of suffering as a part of God's plan: "I was hateful in my own eyes. Still, I could not turn, nor retrace one step. God must have led me on" (284). Similar to Catherine, Jane wanders in the wilderness, undergoing an extensive period of physical suffering in her starvation.

Jane does not attain the same experience of the sublime as Catherine and Heathcliff in her physical suffering, but her suffering does illustrate the conflict between the immanent and the transcendent present throughout the text. She outlines this stage as a pilgrimage without purpose, wandering from town to town in despair and uncertainty. The period of starvation is pivotal in her journey, however, and it drives her to seek God, instead of Rochester to satisfy her (literal) hunger. Jane accounts of this time, referring to it as a period of great suffering: "[m]uch exhausted, and suffering greatly now for want of food, I turned aside into a lane and sat down under the hedge" (288). Her suffering intensifies as her hunger worsens: "Oh, for but a crust! for but one mouthful to allay he pang of famine!" (290). As her wandering turns into days, she describes her suffering by degrees: "I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on" (290).

Physical suffering draws Jane to the peace that would come in life beyond the here and now, and contains a parallel with the spiritual experience of early Christian martyrs. On her journey, Jane experiences a desire to be with God, more so than life on earth:

> I looked back at the bed I had left. Hopeless for the future, I wished but this—that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me

> while I slept … Life, however, was yet in my possession, with all its requirements, and pains, and responsibilities. The burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled. (287)

Her account also has certain parallels with Christ's journey in the desert; in Luke 4, having just been filled with the Holy Spirit, Christ is tempted in the desert for forty days, and "in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered" (Luke 4.2). Satan tempts Jesus three times during his time of testing. Although Jane is not tempted by the devil as Christ is, she is being tested in the form of physical ailment, exposed to the elements without food or water. Her flesh is sustained by God, as the Christian martyrs were. Both the Romans and Christians were amazed at the resilience of Christian martyrs, believing their flesh to be permeated with supernatural grace to withstand bodily pain (Salisbury, "Struggle" 16). Jane, however, contrasts with Christian martyrs, clinging to this life in despair on the threshold of death:

> This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned—I wrung my hands—I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching such horror! ... I can but die … and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence. (296)

The type of suffering Jane experiences, just as with Catherine and Heathcliff, is akin to the suffering of the early Christian martyrs, although Jane does not have her eyes fixed on the afterlife, and she does not experience the same joy in the face of suffering; her suffering, however, does draw her closer to God and provides her with a hope beyond the here and now. As such, Jane is a post-secular martyr, with her eyes fixed on her desires in the immanent, while being drawn to seek the transcendent in her suffering. In the case of Catherine and Heathcliff, they are able to experience rapturous joy, since life after death brings joy. The grinding of the body is welcomed in order to glorify Christ. Jane resigns over to God in the midst of her suffering, but she does so in trust, not expressing the same joy as Catherine and Heathcliff: "thrusting back all my misery into my heart, I made an effort to compel it to remain there—dumb and still" (404). Here, the immanent frame takes precedence over what will happen in the life to come. Jane does not welcome the afterlife with joy, and despairs at the

possibility of perishing. Catherine and Heathcliff die, but Jane's time has not come, as St John declares, "all are not condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want" (404).

Because of his idolatry, Rochester experiences the same sanctifying suffering through suffering in the flesh, which is a mechanism of transformation. Rochester acknowledges this when Jane returns to him:

> I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me forever … I began to experience … the wish for reconcilement to my maker. (395)

Rochester's chastisement also involved physical aliment, a literal suffering of the flesh, ending up blind and crippled (393). The process of striving in the text, in Searle's reading, portrays sanctification through suffering, in which both Jane and Rochester learn to love God first (43). Both Jane and Rochester acknowledge the role of idolatrous suffering in their journey. This is the case, though it also reveals a social imaginary—that serves as a type of God replacer— embedded in Victorian culture to reconcile this view. Suffering is portrayed as absolutely necessary in the process of salvation. Rochester's declarations of being reconciled with God, whose hand was in his suffering, anxiously asserts this.

4.10 The Post-Romantic Salvation in *Wuthering Heights*

The question of whether or not Catherine and Heathcliff obtain a kind of salvation can be better understood in the context of revivalism in Victorian England. Since the spirituality of both protagonists is grounded in suffering, their agony moves them away from their godless indifference to salvation. Although Catherine and Heathcliff are morally bankrupt characters in Nelly's view, redemption is possible for them both, which is based on Methodist beliefs regarding grace. In this case, salvation is available even to the worst sinners. It is passion in *Wuthering Heights* that fashions the two protagonists into martyrs and incites a conversion experience of Methodist influences. Spirituality in *Wuthering Heights* is post-Romantic not merely because it entails a road of suffering, but because the source of spirituality in the text remains uncertain (Thormählen, *Brontës and Religion* 109). As has been discussed, the source of Catherine and Heathcliff's sublime state remains a mystery. These ambiguities in the

text open up the possibility of a revivalist redemption. The key moment of Heathcliff's spirituality is his last night on earth—no one is near him. Nelly hears him "groaning, and murmuring to himself" all throughout the night (334). Heathcliff experiences a struggle on his last night as he undergoes a spiritual conversion. As mentioned previously, Methodist conversion often included groanings and madness, marking Heathcliff's final moments on earth as a possible Methodist conversion experience. Mason argues that Heathcliff's death can be seen as a conversion experience, with his body bearing the signs of some type of change.[42] Nelly finds Heathcliff's body "washed with rain; the bed clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still. The lattice flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill" (335). His body is washed—as Mason points out—as if baptised ("Enthusiastic Tradition"11). Mason's interpretation of Methodism in *Wuthering Heights* focuses on religious enthusiasm—which involves an imagined experience of God—as an emotive experience "freed from the restraints of an external catalyst, whether this be a Christian God or the authority of nature" ("Religious Enthusiasm" 274). Mason identifies this as a Romantic insurgence against Christianity, but this insurgence, I argue, reflects Christianity of the Victorian period, as a revivalist form of faith.

Heathcliff's last night also has parallels with the conversion experience of early Methodist leader George Whitefield and, considering Brontë's extensive library and exposure to Dissenters, she was likely aware of Whitefield's conversion experience. A spiritual despondency fell on the famous leader in 1735, and he isolated himself from religious exercises and social contact (Hindmarsh, "Early Methodists" 107). On Wesley's advice, he fasted for Lent and conducted other fleshly mortifications that left him gravely ill. Whitefield remained confined indoors, and he identified this period as a time of "spiritual purging" (107). After a six-month hiatus, Whitefield returned with more evangelical zeal than ever before (109). Although Heathcliff does not return from his suffering as a preacher filled with the Holy Spirit, the nature of his physical suffering further associates Heathcliff's last night with revivalist redemption. Heathcliff's baptism through suffering grounds his end firmly into the early roots of Christianity. Martyrdom was often viewed as a second baptism,

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

a new form of birth in the baptism of blood (Griffin 2). In their faithful witness, early Christian martyrs were seen as being faithful witnesses to their baptismal vows; that is, a fulfilment of their promises to God when they were born again in the Holy Spirit (Griffin 22). Heathcliff's washed body does not contain signs of starvation, and the physician is baffled by his cause of death, suggesting that his wish to join Catherine is granted by unseen forces (335). Heathcliff has finally achieved his heaven, and the sexton controversially fulfils his final wish of being buried next to Catherine (336).

Since the narrators are key figures of doubt in the novel, Nelly's clash with Catherine and Heathcliff's views about spirituality casts further doubt on her account of the strange events at the Heights, and on her assumption that they have not received salvation. Even though she believes the boy who tells her he saw Catherine and Heathcliff's ghosts in the moors "probably raised the phantoms from thinking … on the nonsense he had heard his parents … repeat", she is not confident of this fallacy, admitting to Lockwood, "I don't like being out in the dark now" (336). Lockwood's skepticism continues:

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

Lockwood's conclusion is implicitly questioned here, and, as Anne Williams indicates, there is no reason to assume that Catherine and Heathcliff do not receive the spiritual afterlife in union they desire—being united with one another in nature (126). The exact nature of this afterlife, whether it is hell, or heaven, remains unclear.

Reflecting post-Romantic notions of the poet, the nature of Catherine and Heathcliff's afterlife is complex. I would like to suggest that both characters have attained their heaven in a type of re-imagined post-Romantic afterlife. Engaging with the debates of her time, Brontë becomes a self-fashioned post-Romantic poet, presenting a complex picture of spirituality in a post-Romantic world, in which the individual can reach God through means other than the Church. The concern of salvation remains between Catherine, Heathcliff and God. Thus, the novel reflects the cultural shift occurring towards a personal and experiential interaction with God. Brontë attributes the final authority to God, to decide if Catherine and Heathcliff truly are unredeemable.

4.11 Jane Eyre's Personal Religion: The Conflicting Conclusion

The final passages of *Jane Eyre* have faced greater scrutiny than any other passage in the text and are the most significant passages in Jane's assertion of her own faith. St John, not Jane or Rochester, has the final word. Shifa Hochberg reads the final passage as critiquing St John's sterile religion, which contrasts with the redemptive union of Jane and Rochester (2). Their union, according to Keith Jenkins, creates an Eden, which serves as a rebellion against "patriarchal religious traditions" (311). In Maria Lamonaca's view, Jane compromises through taking on the role as household angel and renounces her spiritual autonomy ("Jane's Crown" 257). Others read the end as an illustration of feminine independence, one that resists St John's advances, and that shows Jane discovering true equality and sanctity in marriage (Searle 53).

St John is given the last word, because he is symptomatic of Jane's negotiation of faith, and he is the final part in her journey of knowing her own heart. He also serves as the institutional binary (the figure of religious authority) to Jane's intense faith, which is focused on the body. St John's faith is based on a religion of the book in a lifetime of piety as a missionary. His decision to choose Jane as a potential partner is based on her suitability as a partner in the mission field, not on any feeling of love. To St John, a wife that "fits his purpose" is the reason for marriage, whereas Jane implores him to "seek one fitted to you" (359). Jane is aware of this, and is reluctant to agree because, he "will never love me; but he shall approve me" (358). She does not perceive becoming a missionary as pleasing to God, but in giving her heart to God, she can satisfy Him: ""I will give my heart to God!' I said. "*You* do not want it!"" (360; original emphasis). Both characters dispute grace, and, as such, disagree on the tension of works versus faith as means of sanctification and redemption.

Both Jane and St John engage in a religious debate when she proposes to clean and refurnish Moor House. St John tells her, "this world is not the scene of fruition; do not attempt to make it so; nor of rest; do not turn slothful" (346). To St John, enjoyment in this life means rejecting the spiritual. He comments that he will excuse her for the next two months:

> I allow you for the full enjoyment of your new position, and for pleasing yourself with this late-found charm of relationship, but then, I hope you will look beyond Moor House and Morton, and sisterly society, and the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilised affluence. (346)

Jane disagrees with St John, calling his admonitions "wicked", asking why he wants to stir her up "to restlessness!" He warns her not to "cling so tenaciously to ties of the flesh". Jane sees happiness in this life as a legitimate form of service, finding enjoyment in God in the here and now: "I feel I have adequate cause to be happy, and I *will* be happy" (346; original emphasis). Idolatry, in this case, is framed in a focus on the here and now, and St John's accusations suggest that idolatry involves clinging to the flesh—the immanent frame. In this case, idolatry reflects Jane's wrestling with this issue. She notes disapproval again when she shows him the newly furnished Moor House: "he would never rest, nor approve of others resting around him" (347).

Jane and St John's disagreements, in my reading, also reflect the religious debates circulating in Victorian Britain, exploring precisely what constitutes a Christian life and the road to salvation. St John perceives any earthly happiness as idolatrous, and Jane firmly disagrees, though this continues to be a fixation until the end of the novel. Her resistance falters, even after her declarations against him, and Jane strongly desires his approval. When he asks her to learn Hindostanee, Jane submits and "daily wished more to please him"; yet she also feels she has to disown her nature to do so (353). Jane struggles with her own desires and is anxious to reconcile these with the will of St John, whom she admires greatly in his good deeds. The trope of idolatry, in this case, becomes a mechanism for exploring contemporary debates in the novel and a part of the anxiety surrounding faith and works in *Jane Eyre*.

When St John asks her to join him as a missionary wife, Jane, once more, wrestles with a conception of faith based on the book, and life beyond the immanent frame. Although St John's request "was as if I had heard a summons from Heaven", she also tells him nothing "speaks or stirs within me when you talk" (356). The only justifiable reason to depart from John would be an intense, spiritual experience of God, a stirring in her spirit. When Jane hears Rochester call her in her spiritual vision, she gains agency and boldly asserts herself against St John's approval, assured that pursuing Rochester is aligned with God's will. Jane asserts an individual spirituality in this experience, affirming "[i]t was *my* time to assume ascendancy. *My* powers were in play and force" (372; original emphasis). She retreats and prays in her own way, which she notes is a "different way to St John's, but effective in its own fashion" (372). Jane does not follow the book in her faith, but she achieves a spiritual equilibrium nevertheless. Her faith remains between her and God, and Jane discovers this through

knowing her heart, and returning to Rochester. The debate has been settled, and an individual spiritualty centred on feeling is achieved. Jane chooses the experience of Rochester over a lifetime of good deeds as a missionary wife.

In spite of this affirming experience, Jane remains anxious with her choice to be happy in this life, rather than following St John. Her descriptions of him at the novel's close have the characteristics akin to early Christianity: "faithful, and devoted, full of energy, and zeal, and truth, he labours for his race" (400). In spite of his severity, St John is portrayed as the passionate martyr, and his focus remains on the life to come:

> he anticipated his sure reward, his incorruptible crown … No fear of death will darken St John's hour: his mind will be unclouded, his heart will be undaunted, his hope will be sure. (400-401)

In spite of this focus, St John is constructed as the man of the book, the intellect, a strong evangelical. Jane's parting words to St John contain direct references to scripture—1 Corinthians 9. St Paul writes in his epistle:

> What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make gospel of Christ without change … And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (1 Cor. 9. 18, 25)

St John's crown is joining Jesus after his time of suffering in life as a missionary, and, as a man of the book, Jane purposefully justifies his chosen path with a passage from scripture. Jane's reconciliation with a religion that is in the flesh (the immanent) is juxtaposed with St John's intellectual, book devoted, religion. His prominence at the text's conclusion has inspired conflicting interpretations. Maria Lamonaca interprets these final passages as evidence of Jane's conflicted theology, since she conflates her own desires with God's desires ("Jane's Crown" 260). According to Lamonaca's gendered reading, the ambiguities in *Jane Eyre*'s final pages reflect the tensions of real Victorian women of faith in attempting to meet often conflicting demands in their lives ("Jane's Crown" 260). In my reading, this scope needs to be extended further in the context of the Victorian cultural landscape, and the anxieties surrounding individual happiness versus the will of God.

Jane informs the reader in great detail of her martyrdom, laying her life aside in Christ-like meekness:

> Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go … there was pleasure in my services ... because he

> claimed these services without painful shame or damping humiliation … he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes. (399)

It is her final act of laying herself aside, her way of never wearying in her service, which remunerates for choosing blissful, earthly happiness, over a missionary life with St John. Happiness in this life, in which the desires of the individual are fulfilled, is shown to be a legitimate form of service—"My Edward and I, then, are happy" (400). Like Watts, *Jane Eyre* asserts a positive view of passion as being capable of being renewed (Beynon 100). Their journeys of suffering renew the passions of both Jane and Rochester, which promotes the view of the passions discussed by Hugh White—one of the reading materials in Brontë's personal library. White addresses joy in God found in this life, writing that there is "infallible joy of endeavouring to fan the flame of grateful love to the saviour … to bring down more of heaven's joy into his heart" (518). In Jane's faith, her joy in God is expressed through her happiness with Rochester. She does, however, also emphasise her good deeds in taking care of Rochester for the rest of her days, which incorporates a Methodist salvation—including good deeds and spirituality. As well as an anti-modern, primitive, bent, Methodism was a faith for modernity. Evidence of experiential transformation included good works and self-improvement (Anderson 3). Thus, a post-secular entanglement was often evidence in Methodism itself—a combination of the emotional and the rational. Considering this, Jane negotiates her own branch of faith inspired by Methodism. This interpretation also ties the novel with Jane's childhood, completing the full circle of the journey central to the *bildungsroman*, and she rejects the institution of her childhood in favour of her own faith. In this final passage, Jane's mention of St John can be seen as an expression of her uncertainty, yet her faith remains between her and God, in whom she feels justified.

Chapter Five: An Ecstasy of the Useless: Idolatry in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*

> If I could hope that the Church would wake in me some earnestness and purity I would go over as a luxury, if for no better reasons. But I can hardly hope it would, and to go over to Rome would be to sacrifice and give up my two other gods "Money and Ambition". Still I get so wretched and low and troubled that in some desperate mood I will seek the shelter of a Church which simply enthralls me by its fascination.
> (Wilde qtd. in Ellmann 66)

In the epigraph to this chapter, Oscar Wilde confesses his fascination with Roman Catholicism to his friend, William Ward. Any scholar approaching the subject of Wilde and his works must grapple with paradox, since he lived in "constant terror of not being misunderstood" ("Critic as Artist" 111). Such playful epigrams extended to religion and Wilde, who "expressed his religious feelings and attitudes lightly, casually, even flirtatiously" (Rapoza 52). More than light-heartedness, however, Wilde explores the experience of being spiritually enthralled by Roman Catholic ritual, embracing experience itself. In what Hanson has described as the seduction of Roman Catholic ritual in Wilde's creative works, religious ritual forms part of Wilde's embracing of British anti-Catholicism, which is grounded in Roman Catholics' traditional identification as idolators and sensualists ("The Scarlet Woman" 124). The excerpt from Ellmann's biography of Wilde reflects Wilde's description in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with the "fuming censers, that the grave boys, in their lace and scarlet, tossed into the air like great gilt flowers, had their subtle fascination for him" (101). The fuming censers enthral Dorian as a worship of the experience in itself. In this case, Wilde embraces the materiality and spirituality of Roman Catholic ritual, welcoming the idolators of Victorian Britain.

The significance of anti-Catholic hysteria in Gothic fiction has been discussed at the start of this thesis to illustrate the ways in which idolatry's association with Catholicism has a long history in the British imagination and identity.[43] Roman

[43] For a more detailed discussion regarding the roots of anti-Catholicism in Gothic fiction, see pages 2-3 of this thesis. The Catholics served as foreign agents in Gothic fiction and provided a basis for British, Protestant, identity as directly opposing the idolatrous influences of Catholicism.

Catholicism often figures as a seductive mistress, seducing God-fearing Protestants into idolatrous snares (Peschier, "Construction of Anti-Catholic Ideology" 15). In Gothic fiction, Roman Catholic ritual as a site of fear as can be seen in texts such as *The Abbess* (1799); in this novel, a priest kneels before a statue of the Virgin and punishes himself through repeated blows in the groin (Haggerty 27). Roman Catholic ritual, in this case, is positioned as a site of perversion and disgust, and Wilde embraces Roman Catholic ritual in his attraction to the perverse. Wilde's engagement with idolatry and religion embraces the Gothic fear of Roman Catholic ritual and employs it as an avenue to ecstatic forms of worship. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and *Salomé* (1891), Wilde welcomes the material, thereby presenting it as a legitimate means to gain access to the spiritual, engaging with both pagan and Christian ritual as possible sites of the perverse ("The Hero as Priest" 104). Religious ritual becomes a pathway to spirituality in the two proposed texts for this chapter, with the final aim of the experience itself.

In Victorian religion, as discussed previously, a primitive movement occurred close to the time Wilde attended Oxford, known as the Oxford Movement or Tractarianism. Wilde was influenced by John Henry Newman in his personal life, and this forms part of Wilde's espousal of faith, which contained both Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic influences (Rapoza 52). James Eli-Adams perceives Wilde's interest in Newman and Tractarianism as both religious and structural, paralleling with Wilde's interest in a double life "another extremely exacting ode of masculine discipline" (*Dandies and Desert Saints* 170). The Tractarians were known as "idolaters and sensualists" and suffered a backlash for their favour of primitive Christianity, which foregrounds the similarities between British Protestantism and the demonised Roman Catholics (Hanson, "Dandyism and Ritualism" 172). In these texts, Wilde deliberately and provocatively harnesses the debates and discourses surrounding idolatry and its Anglo and Roman Catholic manifestations by imbuing the everyday with elements of ritual and spirituality.

Any critic considering spirituality in Wilde must also take sexuality into account. Patrick O'Malley perceives religion as part of Wilde's "devious", transgressive, style (170); he interprets Wilde's treatment of Catholicism and sexual transgression as a means to articulate his rebellion against social norms (178). Through

idolatry, I argue Wilde rebels against social norms, with sexual transgression and spiritual experience as intermingled and inseparable in a process of worship. Wilde's depiction of idolatry is consistent with its biblical underpinnings, in which it is framed as sexual transgression against God, who says in Jeremiah, "I saw that, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had committed idolatry… for I am a husband to you" (Jer.3.14). As opposed to a sin, however, Wilde embraces this idolatry, framed as sexual transgression, enthralled by the experience of spirituality itself apart from God.

Wilde's interest in religion and spirituality is not confined to Roman and Anglo-Catholicism, but also to some extent includes Decadence, which can be seen in his representation of pagan ritual in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*. Drawing on both John Ruskin and Walter Pater's influence, Wilde forms his own notion of religion and spirituality by interweaving the pagan and the Christian. Wilde's use of language, as Hanson argues, reveals a liminal divide between seduction and Catholicism, which I argue extends to the liminal distinction between Decadence and Catholicism ("Seduction and the Scarlet Woman" 202). Roman Catholicism forms a significant part of Wilde's relationship with the Bible in both his essays and his creative works, since, under the influence of Roman Catholicism, "the language of the Bible had become something decadent, seductive, and gorgeous" (Hanson, "Scarlet Woman" 123). In this seduction and fascination, Roman Catholic ritual is a common feature in Wilde's works, and its significance has been noted by Ellis Hanson, Patrick O'Malley, and Joseph McQueen.[44]

Although words retain this sacramental weight in their spirituality in *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the epitome of ecstasy can only be attained in baptisms of blood—the ultimate ritual of sacrifice. The spiritual experience attained in the process of worship—through religious ritual—refers to an experience known as *ek-statis*. Philip R. Wood's identification of this term includes a divine, out of body, experience, which also takes aestheticism into account, "*ek-statis* experience beyond a constructed subjectivity, is the core feature of all significant aesthetic experience" (98). *Ekstatis* as the core of aesthetic experience becomes vital in spirituality, since

[44] Ellis Hanson argues that *Salomé* and *Dorian Gray* is about the seduction of Christianity "especially in its more voluptuous biblical and ritualistic manifestations" ("The Scarlet Woman" 124). Joseph McQueen draws a parallel between words and their ability to enchant the secular, which is explored through the performavity of the Catholic mass in Wilde's essays (887). O'Malley argues that there is a genuine faith expressed in *Salomé*, and the last scene echoes Catholic Eucharistic sacramentalism. In this case, God's love is literally embodied in Christ's bloody sacrifice and re-enacted in the performance of Mass (180).

ecstasy is at the heart of Wilde's aesthetics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*. Ecstasy, in its most excessive form, is gained in blood and religious ritual—in a spiritual and material combination; in this case, pagan ritual and Christian martyrdom are interweaved into the civility of Roman/Anglo-Catholic ritual.

Idolatry is often explicitly identified, often by Basil Hallward, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Dorian is the chief object of these affections. Basil tells Dorian "I worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself" (89). Idolatry is identified again after Basil's confession, and Dorian wonders to himself if there ever will " be some one who would fill him with a strange idolatry?" (90). When Basil tells Henry his reasons for not exhibiting the portrait, he says, "I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry" (24). Basil also reminds Dorian, "you were made to be worshipped" (90). The worship of Art and beauty is a central focus in the text for both Basil and Dorian, and imagination injects spiritual possibilities into Art only when it is accompanied by idolatry; ecstatic and spiritual possibilities are only possible through idolatry due to the suffering that it initiates. Reading fiction enacts an idolatrous influence and Dorian's imagination is captured. The mysterious yellow book—often perceived as Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884)—poisons the protagonist in his worship (96); the full influence of this idolatrous worship is enacted in ritualistic repetition as Dorian reads the same chapter "over and over again" (109). Ritualism and repetition gain the same weight it usually incurs in a Church-setting and causes Dorian to suffer, initiating a spirituality in this suffering. He becomes encased in a horrible fate, doomed to perish in the same manner as the protagonist of the yellow book—with a dagger. The imagination becomes the sight of suffering, which is occurs in the ritual of reading.

Roman Catholicism is often overdetermined in the approach to the subject of religion in Wilde (as can be seen with O'Malley, McQueen, and Hanson), and the significance of paganism tends to be seen as a separate topic, more specifically relevant in considering Wilde as an aestheticist and Decadent figure. These binaries do not exist in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and his play *Salomé*, but they intermingle through ritual in the idolatrous experience. In *Salomé*, violence and blood are essential in attaining the moment of *ekstatis*—a divine, out of body, experience. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* engages with the ecstatic possibilities available in the worship of Art, and blood is not required to attain an *ekstatis* in this worship. The worship of Art in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* engages the imagination and induces suffering for the

protagonist; his ultimate moment of ecstasy, however, occurs when he sheds the blood of an innocent person, which parallels with Salomé's moment of ecstasy. Salomé's *ekstatis* exceeds Dorian's moment in its intensity, because she tastes the blood of a fair martyr. Combining pagan rituals with Catholic ritual, attaining ecstasy in the moment of idolatry involves shedding blood and discovering pleasure as blood is spilled; this paradox is at the heart of early Christian martyrdom: discovering joy in suffering. In *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the joy usually associated with Christian martyrdoms is also a perverse pleasure, thereby intermingling the pagan and the Christian.

5.1 *Salomé* as The Other

As a historical figure and subject of art, Salomé has always been associated with the figure of the Other in relation to British Protestantism. Although her story is first told in the Bible, artistic representations since have branded her as the seductive Other, associated with foreign agents (Catholicism, French) (Hanson, "The Scarlet Woman" 122). The play was first published in French, and was perceived as a French symbolist drama, whereas Britain labelled it a work of Decadence; it was banned from the British stage until well into the twentieth century (Frankel, "Dance of Writing" 55). In this play, Wilde embraces the Otherness of Salomé to assert a renewed pathway to spirituality through the idolatrous associations of Roman Catholicism in Victorian Britain.

Salomé's story has not only been told in the Bible, and the quiet heroine of the biblical narrative was given a name by the first century Jewish scholar Flavius Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*, which is the first written historical record of John the Baptist's beheading (Dierkes-Thrun 15). According to Françoise Meltzer, the story of Salomé has a long history, appearing in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance before a resurgence in the nineteenth century. She appears in Henrich Heine's "Atta Troll" (1843) as a beauty with no morality (16). She is also a subject of art in the nineteenth century, painted by French artist Gustave Moreau in 1876 called *Salome Dancing Before Herod*, and this influenced Gustave Flaubert in his writing "Hérodias", also published in French in *Trois Contes* (1877), which focuses on the figure of Herodias. Wilde himself was aware of the biblical account, expressing the biblical Salomé as docile and disappointing (Ellmann 344). He was most indebted, according to Petra

Dierkes-Thrun, to Stéphane's Mallarme's "Hérodiade", which was circulated among his symbolist friends in France before the publication in 1898 (18). Mallarme makes Salomé a more prominent feature of the story, and both versions of the character are inappropriately sexual. Salomé, in other words, pursues Jokanaan sexually, eventually forcing him to yield to her advances by requesting his execution. As such, Wilde's production and inspiration for this play drew on decidedly anti-British sources not merely as a rebellion, but as a way to engage with spirituality through transgression—through idolatry.

In writing his play *Salomé*, Wilde performs the ultimate interweaving of the pagan and the Christian, the Catholic and the Anglican. *Salomé* is a play based on a biblical narrative, which is infused with Decadent, perverse and decorative language. The play is an altered retelling of the beheading of John the Baptist in Mark 6 and Matthew 14. In both the play and the biblical account, John is imprisoned by Herod the tetrarch of Galilee for confronting the him about his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife. On the tetrarch's birthday, the beautiful daughter of Herodias—who remains nameless in the biblical version—dances for Herod, who is pleased enough with her dance to promise an oath to grant her whatever she desires. Wilde not only endows the daughter with an identity in naming her, but also presents her with a sexual confidence, harnessing her seductive power to obtain her heart's desire. Salomé sexually desires the prophet in Wilde's rendition, and forces him into her hands when he resists her. In a Decadent retelling, Salomé requests his head on a platter to obtain her one desire: to kiss his mouth. Salomé kisses the head of the prophet, attaining sensual pleasure as she tastes his blood and bites into his lips.

Intense devotion in *Salomé* is not a new concept, with Sharon Marcus identifying it through Wilde's elaborate language. She reads idolisation as being the object of someone's gaze in Wilde, an affect created by the language that distances the characters from one another, portraying a celebrity-fan relationship of worship (1009). Marcus's interpretation is based on the influence of commodity and consumer culture, but I interpret the elaborate language as the evidence of Wilde's Decadent style, as well as his extensive engagement with the Bible and Christianity. This intermingling occurs in the context of church ritual in *Salomé,* which contains Church-based liturgy in its repetition of threes, which is framed in the language of Decadence and Song of Songs.

Throughout *Salomé*, religious ritual becomes a performance, a repetition of threes in Church-based liturgy, attributing a sacramental weight to idolatrous worship. Idolatry becomes a ritualistic process through which the worshipper must pass before reaching an ecstasy. In a set of three, ritual accumulates to the ultimate *ekstatis* at the end of the play; firstly, idolatry is constructed in the act of looking through Herod's worship of Salomé. Herod becomes the first step in the act of worship, but never attains an ecstatic experience, continuing to worship Salomé from afar; secondly, idolatry is consummated in the shedding of blood, an act of sacrifice, as Narraboth takes his life in worship to Salomé and attains an ecstasy. The epitome of this *ekstatis*, however, occurs in taking the life of a fair body and tasting blood. In the paramount ecstasy, Salomé's worship is consummated in shedding blood, and consuming it when she kisses Jokanaan on the lips. Ecstatic experience connects the spiritual and the aesthetic: immanent objects (idols) and idolatrous worship supplants the ecstatic suffering of Christianity with the ecstatic encounter with the false or artificial god, an idolatrous worship founded on the familiar patterns of Church language and Church ritual.

5.2 Idolatrous Ritual, the Imagination, and Suffering

For Wilde, words carry spiritual agency in the act of worshipping beauty and in a ritualistic repetition inspired by pagan and Christian ritual. Through Christian Ritualism, Wilde also embraces the spiritual possibilities of the imagination, with repetitive acts enacting spirituality in the capturing of the imagination. This conception of spirituality and religion is post-secular, as defined by James K. A. Smith, which is material and embodied, shaping desire and imagination before belief emerges ("Secular Liturgies" 161). Worship becomes embodied and subconscious in the act, and Art becomes spiritual. For instance, the Catholic vestments that Dorian collects retain no sacred value for the protagonist, due to his lack of worship, and it only retains an aesthetic value. Even though it quickens his imagination, Dorian is not influenced, because his desires remain untouched: "[i]n the mystic offices to which these things were put, there was something that quickened his imagination" (105). When imagination, however, accompanies worship, ordinary objects attain sacred value. As Dorian reads the mysterious yellow book, it enacts a strange, idolatrous, influence, and the "heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to

trouble the brain" (96). Here, Dorian's suffering commences through his idolatrous worship.

In *Salomé*, Wilde explores the spiritual agency of words through repetitions in sets of threes. Princess Salomé is referred to as "pale" three times in an exchange between Herod and Herodias.[45] In the act of worship, this repetition constructs anticipation of fulfilment in the idol, as Herod implores Salomé to dance for him. The number three is significant in both the pagan and the Christian. In pagan ritualism, the number three was prominent; for instance, an act of purification involved sprinkling participants thrice with water (Lease 61). This tradition of the triad continued to through to Christianity gaining significance in the faith itself, with the notion of the Holy Trinity (Lease 73). *Salomé* constructs the words "look" as significant in idolatrous worship, which is repeated throughout the play. The Page of Herodias tells Narraboth (The Young Syrian): "[y]ou are always *looking* at her. You *look* at her too much. It is dangerous to *look* at people in such fashion" (69; my emphasis). The structure of call and response in Christian Churches is also predicated on repeating phrases three times (Lease 61). The First and Second Soldier serve as Priest and congregation in further construction idolatry in ritualistic repetition. They describe Herod's worship of Salomé: "First Soldier: He is *looking* at something, /Second Soldier: He is *looking* at someone./ First Solider: At whom is he *looking*?" (70; my emphasis)

Religious ritual in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is derived from Roman and Anglo-Catholic influences, more so than *Salomé*, particularly in the worship of Art and Beauty. The portrait is the central feature of the novel in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and therefore Art is the central focus of worship in the novel. Words are endowed with spiritual agency in the act of worship, performing the function of liturgy in a Church-based setting. In doing so, Wilde constructs a deliberate act of idolatry according to its definition in Victorian, Protestant culture as described by Carlyle in *On Heroes* ("The Hero as Priest" 104). The words that Dorian utters in worship to his own beauty as he beholds his portrait performs a ritual of transubstantiation. Dorian becomes a work of art as he grieves the reality of losing his beauty, and he wishes to retain it forever, exclaiming, "I would give my soul for that!" (33). In speaking this

[45] Herod: Do you not see your daughter, how *pale* she is?/ Herodias: What is it to you if she be *pale* or not?/ Herod: Never have I seen her so *pale* (87; my emphasis).

wish, the words act as agents of transformation, because Dorian's suffering commences. Prior to this incident, Dorian has remained unmarred and no reference has been made to suffering relation to the fair lad. As he engages in the act of worship, however, the narrative shifts and reveals suffering: "a sharp pang struck through him like a knife and made each delicate fibre in his nature quiver" (33). In idolatrous worship, the experience of suffering is unavoidable, which enacts the weight of religious ritual normally confined to a church setting.

5.3 Decadence and Wilde: The Biblical and the Pagan

Wilde embraces both the sacred and the profane in his engagement with the Bible, which contrasts with other Decadent writers. Although the Decadents were often Roman Catholics, the subject matter of the Bible, as Wilde employs it in *Salomé*, is distinct. The Decadents often included the obscene alongside the spiritual, but they used pagan stories to frame their discussions, rather than Christian ones (Malik). Decadence includes a universal principle of decay or decline, which can be traced back to Roman and Greek mythology (Weir 2). They embodied an elegantly defiant rejection of conventional morality and viewed civilisation as corrupt, and they took a perverse pleasure in that corruption, "preferring the civilised to the primitive and the artificial to the natural" (Carter 6). Decadence originated in France a generation before, with writers such as Theophile Gautier (1811-72), who coined the term *l'art pour l 'art*, inspired by Charles Baudelaire (1821-67). The public often equated the Decadents as a religious movement, though in an ironic and cynical manner. Periodicals in North America called Wilde the "apostle" of the aesthetic movement, and he delivered public lectures on the topic during his tour of North America in the 1870s (Hofer and Scharnhorst 49, 3). In this conception, there is always a tension between the sacred and the profane, which Wilde explores in his writings.

Wilde was not merely influenced by Walter Pater's writings, but also by John Ruskin's moral cherishing of art and nature. This metaphysical and secular tension occurs in Wilde's creative works between the pagan and the Christian. The influence of the Hellenic and the Hebrew was also a central part of the debate in late nineteenth century aestheticism and Decadence, and Wilde was one of the central subjects of these debates (Tate, "Decadence" 589). Andrew Tate observes that Wilde was particularly influenced by Ruskin's Christian aestheticism, whose aestheticism was

grounded in his lifelong fascination with the Bible ("Decadence" 589). Wilde travelled to San Maniato in Florence in June, 1875 to visit the paintings referred to in John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1860). Ellmann considers this trip as the origins of Wilde's awareness regarding the tensions of the metaphysical world in the here and now. His "first impulse to write" emerges from Wilde's consciousness of this tension (53). Ellmann interprets Wilde's poem "San Maniato"—written during his visit to Florence—as exploring these tensions, which depicts a battle of the sacred and the profane (54).

Wilde's Decadence in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* delights in pagan ritual and perversity, while also engaging with the Bible, as Hanson has noted ("The Scarlet Woman" 131). The Bible was the book Wilde returned to because he found the teachings of Christianity fascinating (O'Malley 167). In Hanson's view, *Salomé* reveals this fascination, presenting biblical language as seductive ("Dandyism and Ritualism" 201). Biblical language exceeds seduction in the idolatrous experience, but forms part of religious ritual and is inseparable from Decadent language, delighting in the beautiful and perverse. For instance, in *Salomé*, the princess tells Jokanaan, "[t]hy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut with a knife of ivory" (78). In Song of Songs, the woman describes her lover in language reflecting decadence, "[a]s a piece of pomegranate are thy temples with thy locks" (Song of Songs 6.7). Here, biblical language mirrors the pagan myths, since the pomegranate is also central to the Persephone myth that binds her to Hades (Myres 52). Hanson perceives Wilde's endeavour as one that highlights the ways in which the Bible contains decadent language, conflating the sacred and the profane. Wilde, however, interweaves biblical and Decadent language in a pattern, usually in threes, to create an avenue to the spiritual through the material. The means to spirituality can only be achieved through religious ritual in worship to the idol and words have the same agency as ritual in a Church-based setting. Thus, Wilde employs the decorative language of Decadence in *Salomé* along with biblical language of desire, combining the sacred and the profane as an avenue to ecstatic worship.

5.4 *Ekstatis* and Aestheticism

Idolatry in *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an ecstatic experience that occurs through taking part in ritual, with blood and violence required for the epitome

of this experience. Wilde engages with Pater's famous questions in *The Renaissance*: "What is this song or picture … to me? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure?... How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?" (Preface viii). Wilde explores the relationship between ritual and mystical influence in chapter nine of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, portraying the transformative potential of intense and ecstatic experiences of Art. Wood identifies "the inflection of religious experience into secular humanist forms" as a central feature of modernity (93) in part through the aesthetic experience of Art. This inflection of the religious includes a type of Medieval Christianity that prizes a mystical experience of God.

Mysticism has to do with the inner "realisation of spirituality through a transforming consciousness of God's immediate presence". De Villiers also adds that the mystical relationship with God is "anchored in the transformative of the experiential" (5). Mysticism is explicitly addressed in Wilde's novel, "[m]ysticism with its marvellous power of making common things strange to us, and the subtle antinomianism that always seemed to accompany it, moved him for a season" (101). Antinomianism does not adhere to any dogma but focuses on inner workings of the Holy Spirit ("antinomianism" *Britannica*). Here, the everyday is imbued with spiritual potential and with the fleeting nature of experience itself is embraced. The transformation that Wood addresses is key to the mystical experience, and, as mentioned previously, *ek-statis* the central feature of aesthetic experience (98), which he traces back as far as Plato, asserting that "aesthetic modernism" is "the modern West's reinvention of mystical experience" (109). Wood describes the contradictory notion of aesthetic mysticism through its association with beauty as a mystical experience; in aestheticism, this experience of beauty provides access to a state of being outside oneself, which is not merely outside one's "constructed subjectivity" but is inhuman and, therefore, divine (97). I am interested in Wood's emphasis on mysticism and the ecstatic as the "core" of aesthetic experience, since ecstasy is at the core of Wilde's aesthetics in *Salomé* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The strong divide between the aesthetic and mystical emerged after the Reformation, since outer beauty was often feared to encourage idolatry; this disrupted the harmonious accord between church institutions and mysticism (Bruce 117). Pieter De Villiers points out that in the Middle Ages, aesthetics enchanted faith. Since the Middle Ages was a time when people who lived in dreary conditions could experience the sacred during worship services, liturgies in the Middle Ages were characterised by

"vivid sensory experience in spaces enchanted by brilliant mosaics, devotional statues and richly coloured vestments" (3). Wilde reaches back to this beautified form of Christianity, rejecting Victorian concepts regarding idolatry and beauty. Beauty and idolatry are presented in the act of looking, of beholding beauty, but Wildean idolatry also extends to an interrogation of experience itself.

In the Wildean idolatrous experience, participation is necessary for there to be an *ekstatis*; that is, spirituality is only possible in a religion that includes the body. Including the body involves suffering, which parallels with early Christian martyrdoms and the spirituality attained in suffering. A religion of the body requires participation in the idol, which is an active engagement grounded in experience. Sybil Vane never attains *ekstatis* because she only beholds Dorian through Art. Her brother expresses concern over this, pointing out, "you don't even know his name" (59). Sybil responds by identifying him as a fictional character: "[h]e is called Prince Charming" (59). Dorian equally becomes disenchanted with Sybil when she refuses to embody Art in Shakespeare's plays. He remains the fictional Prince Charming until her death. Narraboth, in contrast, actively engages with Salomé to the extent of shedding his own blood in worship to her. When Salomé pursues Jokanaan, Narraboth responds by violently killing himself, "[d]o not speak such words to him … Ah!" (79). Narraboth attains his greatest suffering and greatest pleasure in taking his life, which parallels with early Christian martyrs, who often voluntary stepped forward to be violently executed in order to attain a glory in death (Salisbury, "You Shall Not" 114). In religious ritual, pagan perversity meets Christian martyrdom when blood and violence occur. In the idolatrous experience, an ecstasy of the useless occurs, and idolatry becomes the means through which the ecstasy can be attained, with no higher purpose than to attain pleasure intermingled with suffering.

5.5 Wilde's Paradoxes: Christianity and Bacchic Excess

The process of idolatry—the ritual—creates an anticipation of fulfilment in both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé*, but for an *ekstatis* to be attained, it has to be consummated in suffering. Wilde draws on the similarities between the Christian and the pagan through the violence and intensity that often accompanies the worship of the idol. Drawing on Pater's interpretation of the Bacchic Maenads, the flame-like experience is achieved in excess and ecstasy. Wilde's parallel with the ancient martyrs

is found in his interweaving of Christian martyrdom with the pagan notion of *schwarmerei*—a term Pater uses to describe the rapturous spirit that raptured out of the Bacchic Maenads in coming together in religious ritual and violence. The holy women ate "raw flesh, and drank blood", which commemorates the "sacrifice of a fair boy deliberately torn to pieces … a symbolic offering" (Pater "Dionysus" 48). In blood and spectacle, Maenads "swarm" in an ecstasy as they sacrifice to Dionysus. In Christian martyrdoms, faith became a spectacle, and martyrs attained an ecstasy because of their bodily suffering. The Roman Emperor Nero invited spectators to witness his execution of Christians, and they were turned "into a spectacle designed to please the crowds" (Salisbury, "Struggle" 8). Excess provided the main form of entertainment in these executions, and they were elaborate—designed to entertain spectators (Salisbury, "Struggle" 8). Accounts of martyrdom describe martyrs attaining power from heaven as they suffered bodily, receiving joy in their suffering—ecstatic suffering. [46] The crossover between Bacchic excess and Christian martyrdom is the joy attained in violence on the body, in worship of the idol.

Christian martyrdom and pagan ritual contain the crossovers of violence, or suffering, as a means to ecstasy, and characters who suffer for their idol gain *ekstatis*. In *Salomé*, unnatural desire inflects the biblical narrative as Salomé kisses the severed head of Jokanaan. Early Christian martyrdoms were usually performed for crowds (Salisbury, "Struggle 8). Jokanaan's suffering becomes Salomé's avenue to ecstasy as she performs the pagan ritual of drinking blood. When Salomé kisses the severed head of Jokanaan, it is brought onto centre stage and the audience is reminded of the many witnesses—a vital part of spectacle—to the bloody scene when Herod comments "she is altogether monstrous" (98). The physical presence of Jokanaan's head takes precedence over its symbolic or mystical significance and idolatrous ritual becomes material. The physical head provides excess and ecstasy for Salomé; when she tastes his blood, she attains a decadent pleasure—"I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit" (97). Salomé's experience of her idol exemplifies ultimate engagement, tasting Jokanaan's bloodied lips in her *ekstatis*. Similar to the Bacchic Maenads,

[46] An example of joy attained in suffering comes from early Christian accounts of martyrdom during the Roma Empire: "Hastily he went to the amphitheater because of the zeal of his faith, and he gladly removed his clothes as the prison-keeper stood by. Then realising the holiness and dignity of his own body, he was filled with great joy; and looking up to heaven he gave thanks to God who had preserved him so; then he stretched himself out on the gibbet and allowed the soldier to hammer in the nails" (Salisbury "Resurrecting" 26).

Salomé drinks the blood of a fair male and "swarms".[47] Wilde, in my interpretation, explores his own brand of Bacchic intensity and Christian sincerity, and in doing so, highlights the savage roots of civilised Christianity.

5.6 Herod's Visual Worship of Salomé

Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, idolises the beautiful daughter of his wife, Salomé, which locates idolatry in the act of looking. Herodias warns Herod not to "look" at her daughter three times; Herod also confesses to Salomé: "I have looked at you too much." In this repetition of the word "look", idolatry is located in the body—in beholding beauty. The patterns of repetitive words serve as a liturgy centred on Salomé's body, and patterns in language construct Wilde's vision of worship, which is grounded in violence and intensity. Perverse desire is a vital part of religious ritual, and Herod's initial engagement with Salomé promotes a Decadent notion of delighting in the perverse and the unnatural. Joseph Donohue argues that "deep-rooted desire" is constantly articulated in the act of seeing (130). Deep-rooted sexual desire springs forth in the heart of Herod as he beholds Salomé's body. The perversity and unnatural nature of this desire is noted by Salomé, which creates an incestuous image: "[i]t is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know what it means" (72). Herod always describes Salomé in terms her physical features—her beauty, her body:

> Ah, you are going to dance with naked feet, 'Tis well! 'Tis well. Your little feet will be like white doves. They will be like the little white flowers that dance upon the trees …Never have I seen her so pale … O sweet and fair Salomé, you who are fairer than all the daughters of Judea. (87, 91,92.)

In these elaborate metaphors, Herod's idolatrous desire creates an anticipation through repetition. Alluding to a sexual display in the act of viewing "naked feet", Herod anticipates a satisfaction in the visual display of dance.

Herod's sexual advances are first attempted in the form of consuming food and drink, reflecting Decadent images of sexual desire in the symbol of consuming fruit and drink together. He first asks, "Salomé, come drink a little wine with me … Dip into it with thy little red lips, that I may drain the cup" (82). Herod's allusion to her

[47] The fairness of Jokanaan's body is reiterated constantly, often framed as a "column" of ivory (97).

red lips can also be interpreted as the symbol of blood, which is a foreshadowing of her lips tasting blood by the play's conclusion. When she rejects his request, he attempts once more: "I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy white little teeth. Bite but a little of this fruit and then I will eat what is left" (82). In his idolatrous desire, Herod perceives Salomé as an object, but when she refuses to engage in any act of consumption with him, he changes his request to one that still does not account for her humanity. It is for his own pleasure that he seeks the dance: "I am sad tonight. Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salomé, I beseech you" (89).

5.6.1 Church-Ritual: Herod's Worship of Threes

Although a perverse desire is present in Herod's desire for Salomé, his worship is not solely sexual, but is idolatrous as well. Words are granted the weight of religious ritual in Herod's worship of Salomé's body, which creates an anticipation of fulfilment. In *Salomé* the constant repetition occurs in threes, drawing on both Christian and pagan ritual in worshipping the divine. In the case of Herod's worship of Salomé, it is performed in Anglo-Catholic and Anglican Church-based liturgy of call and response:

> Herod: Where is Salomé?...Ah! There she is!
>
> Herodias: You must not *look* at her! You are always *looking* at her!
>
> Herod: I am not ill. It is your daughter who is sick. She has the mien of a sick person. *Never have I seen her so pale*.
>
> Herodias: I have told you not to *look* at her.
>
> Herod: *Never have I seen her so pale*
>
> Herodias: You must not *look* at her. (80, 82, 87; my emphasis)

In this extract, Herodias performs the role of priest who, in a Church-based setting, calls the congregation in a pattern of call and response. This Church-based pattern is designed to make worship a response. Herod answers Herodias each time in this pattern, worshipping his idol in a pattern of Church-based liturgy. Here, Herod's beholding of Salomé gains greater, Christian, significance in the language structures of the Church imbued throughout their interactions. Herodias's role as priest is ironic, since she is the character with the greatest apathy towards religion. Herod fears Jokanaan, convinced he is a true prophet, "drunk with the wine of God" (87). Herodias cannot conceive this spirituality, asking Herod, "[w]hat wine is that, the wine of God. From what vineyards is it gathered?" (87) The wine of God, referring to the spirit of

God, is inconceivable to Herodias. Herodias's reluctance to pay any lip service to religion becomes a part of Wilde's playful approach to religion, serving as the cynical priest. Herod is afraid of Jokanaan and is constantly aware of the supernatural in the play hearing the beating of invisible wings (89, 90). Herod, as a fearer of an unknown God, becomes the congregation responding to the priest.

5.6.2 Herod's Lack of Suffering: A Failed *Ekstatis*

In Wilde's version of *Salomé*, the dance is not a central feature of the story, unlike the other versions, such as Flaubert's version of the tale. In Wilde's rendition, the patterns of worship across the play takes centre stage; in other words, Herod's act of worship—his constant repetition and act of looking—is granted the weight of sacrament and, thus, the act of worship itself becomes the central feature. Across two pages of the play, Wilde creates a sense of anticipation, in which Herod begs Salomé to dance for him, only to disappoint the true satisfaction of experiencing the dance. Herod's repetitive language in anticipation of fulfilment can be seen when he tells her: "Now I am *happy*, I am passing *happy*…Your daughter is going to *dance for me*. Will you not *dance for me* Salomé? You have promised to *dance* for me" (90; my emphasis). The patterns of repetitive words serve as a liturgy centred on Salomé's body as performed in the spectacle of dance. In spite of this overt build up of anticipation, the dance is never described, but is summarised: "Salomé *dances the dance of the seven veils*" (92; original emphasis). Wilde advances a visual of the dance, but withdraws this promise, with a summary of two sentences. In Wilde's version, it is Salomé's influence over Herod that takes centre stage, and the outcome of his expectations remains the central feature until the end of the play.

Herod's model of worship falls short of Wilde's ideal model, since he never actively engages with his idol, but beholds her from afar. In Herod, Wilde creates an anticipation that is disappointed because Herod does not suffer in his ritualistic worship of Salomé. The tetrarch discovers that his hope is empty at the conclusion of the play, and orders Salomé to be executed: "I am sure that it was a great crime against an unknown God … Kill that woman!" (98,99). The emphasis is on the ritual itself, the liturgy of words and repetition that have a strange influence over Herod. His idolatry is granted the weight of sacrament in his exchanges with Salomé, but his experience is never ecstatic; such immense disappointment at the play's conclusion

highlights the necessity of participation in the act of worship. Herod only observes, but does not participate in the ritual himself—he merely looks:

> It is true, I have *looked* at you all this evening. Your beauty troubled me. Your beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have *looked* at you too much. But I will *look* at you no more. Neither at things, nor at people should one *look*. Only in mirrors should one *look*, for mirrors do but show us masks. (93-94; my emphasis)

Wilde constructs the ideal of beauty and elevates the artificial over the real in Herod's triple repetition. Herod's confession closely resembles Wilde's writing on this subject in "The Truth About Masks". He writes: "A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true" (228). In this passage, the artificial is elevated, with mirrors only showing us masks. Through Herod, Wilde does not merely construct a Decadent aesthetics, but Herod's lack of ecstasy reveals a central feature of Wilde's vision in the act of worship in *Salomé*—the centrality of shedding blood in the religious ritual. The other two characters who commit idolatry in the play shed blood and it through blood they achieve the ultimate ecstasy.

5.7 Biblical Decadent Discourse and An Offer of Sacrifice

5.7.1 Narraboth's Decadent and Biblical Discourse

The pagan and the Christian in *Salomé* interweave through the ecstasy of early Christian martyrs and Bacchic Maenads, as well as through the liminal distinction between biblical and Decadent language in the idolatrous experience. Narraboth's (the Young Syrian) worship is also initially framed as an act of beholding beauty. Similar to Herod, this is communicated in verbal repetitions to Salomé's body through looking. In a Decadent discourse, Narraboth declares his worship of Salome's body, and he repeats: "How beautiful is the Princess Salomé tonight" (three times):

> The Princess has hidden her face behind her fan! Her little white hands are fluttering like doves that fly to their dove-cots. They are like white butterflies. They are just like white butterflies … She is like a dove that has strayed … She is like narcissus trembling in the wind … She is like a silver flower … How pale she is! Never have I seen her so pale. (71-72)

These descriptions focus on Salomé's physical features, with strongly decadent, pagan imagery, and express Narraboth's carnal worship in the ritualistic repetition of three. The reference to Narcissus associates Salomé with Greek mythology, and a green flower is also a well-known symbol of ambiguous sexuality. Wilde interthreads this Decadent (and pagan) sexual imagery with biblical language to construct a liminal divide between the sacred and the profane, ultimately undoing these binaries in the experience of ecstasy. Narraboth's vernacular expresses desire that parallels Song of Songs, conflating the sacred and the secular in this process. In Song of Songs, the woman describes her lover:

> O my *dove*, that art in the clefts of the rock … thou hast *doves'* eyes within thy locks … *His head* is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. *His eyes* are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, washed with milk, and fitly set. *His cheeks* are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers (Song of Songs 4.1, 5.11, 2- 15)

Both Jokanaan and the lover from Songs of Songs use the dove as an emblem of sexual allure and seduction—desiring what is forbidden. Song of Songs has been described as a book that illuminates language of Decadence in its an elevation of sexual desire (Hanson, "Seduction and the Scarlet Woman" 193).

5.7.2 Salomé's Decadent and Biblical Discourse

The duality of Narraboth's language is also present in Salomé's descriptions of Jokanaan's body. As well as Church-based liturgy, the repetitions in sets of threes in the exchanges between Jokanaan and Salomé foreground the ways in which the language of the Bible is similar to the Decadent language. Salomé tells Jokanaan:

> *Thy body* is white like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. *Thy body* is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys … *thy body* is hideous. It is like the body of a leper … *Thy hair* is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine trees of Edom in the land of the Edomites. *Thy hair* is like the cedars of Lebanon … *Thy mouth* is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings! (77-78; my emphasis)

Salomé also cites the Old Testament in noting enemies descended from them (the Edomites) and the region of the Messiah (Judea) in her Decadent descriptions of his body. Although Salomé finds his body "hideous", she still desires to taste his mouth, which portrays a Decadent value of desiring the repulsive and perverse. In Song of Songs, Salomé's repetition is mirrored when the woman describes her lover in sets of threes, in rich descriptions of specific body parts.

> Behold*, thou art fair*, my love; behold, *thou art fair*; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: *thy hair* is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead. *Thy teeth* are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing … *Thy lips* are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: *thy temples* are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks. *Thy neck* is like the tower of David builded for an armoury. (Song of Songs 4. 1-5; my emphasis)

In both passages, repetition becomes a vital part of seduction, which forms part of religious ritual in the spiritual experience of idolatry. Repeating words and phrases three times follows a Christian liturgical pattern, and imbues his sexual desire with sacramental worship.

5.7.3 Narraboth's Sacrifice: *Ekstatis* in Blood

In contrast to Herod's disappointment in his idol, Narraboth and his ritualised experience of Salomé becomes a site of fulfilment in its disappointment and perversity—in suffering. Narraboth worships Salomé in a sacrifice of his body and shedding his blood, and he attains a great pleasure in this destruction. Narraboth's ritualistic act involves a sacrifice of his body, which is a moment of ecstasy beyond his control. At the same time, a carnal pleasure can be located in this moment of death:

> Princess, Princess, thou who art like a garden of myrrh, thou who art the dove of all doves, look not at this man, look not at him! Do not speak such words to him. I cannot suffer them … Princess, Princess, do not speak these things … *He kills himself and falls between* Salomé *and* Jokanaan. (79; original emphasis)

His cries reflect a surrender to Bacchic madness, as he gains an *ekstatis* in his tearing into his body. Taking his own life his not framed as a suicide but as a sacrificing of himself, and he continues to repeat words of worship to Salomé—"thou who art the

dove of all doves"—not ceasing to take pleasure in her beauty. In taking his life, Narraboth does not merely fall to the ground, but separates Jokanaan and Salomé, thereby intervening with Salomé's act of worship (as she worships Jokanaan).

The significance of blood and body in Narraboth's sacrifice is highlighted in the ritual of repetition. Herod observes this as he sees Narraboth's body and the blood, "I have slipped in *blood*! It is an ill omen. It is a very evil omen. Wherefore is there *blood* here? … and this *body*, what does this *body* here?" (81; my emphasis). The Second Soldier does not describe him committing suicide but says, "[h]e killed himself, sire" (81). The abundance of blood present suggests an elaborate and excessive bloody act in taking his own life—an active engagement with his idol. In the same way that the Bacchic Maenads took pleasure in tearing a body to pieces, so too does Narraboth gain pleasure in tearing his own body. Since Narraboth achieves this ecstasy as a result of his worship, it also parallels with Christian martyrs and the means through which they gained ecstasy in their suffering. As has been discussed previously, martyrs attained the highest form of spiritual experience when they suffered bodily for the sake of Christ. Narraboth is also able to experience pleasure in ecstasy due to his bodily suffering.

Narraboth's death also parallels the Christian martyrs in its spectacle. The Page of Herodias serves as a key witness, who repeats the ritualistic act three times: "The young Syrian has slain himself! The young captain has slain himself! He has slain himself who was my friend!" (79). Again, liturgy is presented in threes, and the repetition of "slain himself" reminds the reader of Narraboth's active role. At the same time, this is a moment of violence and spectacle. Narraboth's self-slaying is also made a spectacle in its witnesses. The repetitive observation highlights the witnesses of his death (Salomé, Jokanaan, The Page of Herodias, and the First Soldier). In this aesthetic and religious ecstasy, the dramatic overstating signals the decadent excess and violence of this moment; similar to the early Christian martyrs, those who witness his suicide perceive it as a spectacle of blood, violence and death, but for Narraboth, it is a sincere offering to his artificial god, thereby elevating the artificial above the real and finding beauty in collapse and death.

5.8 Ritual and Words: Art in The *Picture of Dorian Gray*

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde embraces paradox, depicting ordinary objects as having mystical possibilities in the process of worship, and words as having ecstatic possibilities if they are accompanied by idolatry. As the title of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests, the painting is the central focus of the novel, which functions as both mystical and material object. The ritual of worship forms an important part of the painting's transformation into Dorian's soul. The artwork initially appears to be an ordinary object endowed with great beauty. It is only referred to in vague terms as a "full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty" (18) until Dorian's act of worship occurs. It is Dorian's association of the painting as his "soul" that ties the painting to his wish that he could remain young while it aged: "I would give my soul for that!" (33), and we presume, guided by Dorian's own account, that it is the wish that works the magic. Dorian, however, is simple and childish at the beginning of the novel. Joseph Carroll comments, this is "not a fairy tale but a horror story", which suggests his wish was likely granted from powers unseen (96). This transformation, instead, occurs as a consequence of Dorian's moment of *ekstatis* when he starts to worship his own beauty through the painting.

When the painting starts to bear Dorian's soul, the changes are described in great detail. Henry Wotton's words have a profound influence over Dorian, and Basil notices as Henry starts to speak "that a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before" (28). Words perform powerful agency in the ritual experience of Art. As Henry's words take effect, Dorian thinks about words: "[w]ords! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear and vivid and cruel! One could not escape them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things" (29). In Joseph McQueen's view, this passage conveys the capacity of language to "express more than it says", being more real than life itself (880). Words become an Anglo-Catholic ritual, and "like the Eucharistic bread—are both enchanted and material; that is, they are the very opposite of secular modernity's excarnated, disenchanted matter" (McQueen 880). Dorian's words when he utters his wish thus function as a prayer, granted to him from powers unseen. For McQueen, words are an escape from secularism. Wilde dislocates liturgy from its Church-based setting, and places it in his novel to elevate the act of worship. In this

case, the process is liturgical in the form of words, and is vital in the experience of *ekstatis*.

5.8.1 Dorian's *Ekstatis*: Suffering and Idolatry

Words gain greater agency in the act of worshipping Art. As Henry speaks, Dorian begins his transformation; however, it is Dorian's own words of worship, along with the presence of the painting (an object) that performs the final ritual of transubstantiation. Dorian studies the painting, and the "sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation" (33). Revelation suggests an endowment of divine knowledge as Dorian experiences his *ekstatis*. The painting is also described in more detail than before, signaling a change in the artwork. Basil comments that: "[y]ou were perfectly still. And I have caught the effect I wanted—the half-parted lips, and the bright look in the eyes. I don't know what Harry has been saying to you but he has certainly made you have the most wonderful expression" (29). The painting is endowed with Dorian's soul as he speaks: "[e]very moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if only it were the other way! If the picture could change, and I could always be what I am now!" (34). When Dorian speaks his wish, it is not a fairytale or childish wish that transfers his soul into the portrait, but a religious ritual performed through the power and ritual of words.

The division of Dorian from his soul is an ecstatic act—he is outside himself. The final transformation occurs because Dorian starts to suffer. Experiencing an ecstatic suffering, the painting reduces him to sobs and joy, which enacts the transformative experience: "[t]he hot tears welled into his eyes; he tore his hand away, and flinging himself on the divan, he buried his face in the cushions" (34). In spite of his grief, he also experiences joy and cannot be without the painting, "I am in love with it, Basil. It is a part of myself" (34). In worship to his idol, his beauty, Dorian offers a sacrifice of words and an offering—his own body. The ordinary object is transformed into a sacred object of great value, while still remaining an artwork. Conversely, Dorian becomes both portrait and person, as he stars to enact a strange influence over those around him. The mystical and the material become indistinguishable in the moment of idolatrous ritual.

5.8.2 Dorian: The Man as Artwork

The ecstatic possibilities of Art are explored through Dorian as a work of art. He becomes an object with a strange influence over those who come into contact with him. From early in the text, this distinction becomes problematic; when Basil implores Henry Wotton to keep his immoral discourse to himself, Henry replies, "which Dorian? The one who is pouring tea for us, or the one in the picture?" (35). The question of Dorian as artwork continues in the form of influence, drawing on Pater's aestheticism of influence: "How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?" (Preface viii). Dorian "fascinated many" (106) and has a "strange and dangerous charm" (107). His mystical influence is evident in his exchanges with Basil, who often yields to his charm. Even when Basil occupies a clear moral high ground, he is influenced by Dorian. After discovering Dorian's cruelty to Sybil Vane, Basil regrets reproaching him: "[t]he lad was infinitely dear to him, and his personality had been the great turning point in his art. He could not bear the idea of reproaching him anymore. After all, his indifference was probably a mere mood that would pass away" (87). Alan Campbell is enraged by "the purity and refinement" of Dorian's face, which still has great influence over him, in spite of discovering Basil's body in Dorian's home (126). Both Dorian and the painting are beautiful works of art, conflating the distinction between person and object.

5.9 Worship and Gaze: Dorian and Sybil

The idolatrous relationship between Sybil Vane and Dorian echoes Herod's purely spectator-like interaction with Salomé. Both Dorian and Sybil expect a spirituality, and by consequence ecstasy, from their idol. Sybil does not encounter her idol; she identifies looking at him—a specular of Herod's beholding—as the foundation of her worship: "[t]o see him is to worship him" (60). Sybil's conception of Dorian is not as he is in reality, but as he is in art, her "Prince Charming" (51). When her brother expresses concern over their engagement, Sybil ardently insists that "he is called Prince Charming" (59). Again, looking is located in the worship when she attempts to convince her brother of Dorian's worthiness, "[i]f only you saw him, you would think him the most wonderful person in the world" (59), and repeats this once more: "I have seen him, and oh! to see him is perfect happiness" (61). She does experience an ecstasy

in her interactions with Dorian, but this desire is never consummated. An "ecstasy of happiness dominated her" when she is in Dorian's presence (71). The relationship between both characters is based on a mere gazing and beholding of one another.

Dorian, in turn, solely worships Sybil for her beauty and for her art. Dorian descriptions of Sybil combines Decadent and biblical imagery—similar to *Salomé*. Dorian tells Henry Wotton about Sybil's beauty:

> imagine a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, with a little flower-like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose. She was the loveliest thing I had ever seen in my life (49).

Sybil is the epitome of pagan beauty, framed as an ancient Greek beauty in metaphors of nature. This imagery is repeated again when Dorian sees Sybil perform onstage, and he sees the "curves of throat were the curves of a white lily. Her hands seemed to be made of "cool ivory" (69). These descriptions of Decadent language in the act of worship are intermingled with biblical language; as such, they reflect Wilde's use of language in *Salomé*: "[t]hy body was a column of ivory set on a silver socket …Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory" (97; 78). Similar to *Salomé*, the elaborate descriptions occur in a succession of body parts, in which the worshipper beholds the physical beauty of his or her idol.

These elaborate descriptions also distance Sybil from Dorian as an object of worship and form a part of his worship purely based on gaze. Salomé tastes her idol, and attains her ecstatic suffering, but Dorian remains at an artistic distance, only admiring her through art. Dorian rejects the offer to find out about Sybil's life: "[t]he Jew wanted to tell me her history, but I said it did not interest me" (51). He also observes how Sybil regards him "as a person in a play" (51). Both characters treat one another as mere works of art, and Dorian cannot separate Sybil from her art: "[l]ips that Shakespeare taught to speak have whispered their secret in my ear. I have had the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth" (65). Although he kisses her, his engagement remains inactive, not in an active gazing into her eyes, but only in her art.

5.9.1 Sybil as Work of Art

But once Sybil sheds her role as actress, it is revealed that Dorian worships artifice in his elevation of fiction above reality. Sybil's terrible performance onstage shatters his illusion: "[y]ou have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art, you are nothing" (72). Dorian descends into a "the aesthetic of artifice", only living his life through Art (Shea 133). Dorian's devotion to artifice echoes Wilde's remark in "Critic as Artist" concerning life, which is described as deficient in comparison with art, and there "is no mood or passion that Art cannot give us" (156, 158). Dorian seeks this passion through Sybil, who embodies art as real. In this worship, person and object become conflated, and Sybil is revealed as having a mere object value in Dorian's eyes. Having moved beyond his constructed subjectivity into the sphere of illusion, Dorian remains unmoved, unable to see the reality of Sybil's suicide, seeing her as "wonderful tragic figure" in a play (83). Sybil remains a quotidian object, as Dorian does to her, in his pure speculative position. Idolatrous desire in Wilde's creative works must be consummated before it can afford an ecstatic suffering. Dorian and Sybil merely experience an aesthetic intensity that is not transformative.

5.10 The Idolatry of Basil: Dorian as Idolatrous Object

5.10.1 Basil's Transgressive Desire

In *Dorian Gray*, the ecstatic possibilities of worshipping Art is explored through the central feature of the story—the painting. It is through the material, the work of art, that spiritual possibilities are accorded to both Dorian and Basil, and the question of whose soul is in the painting remains ambiguous. Near the completion of the portrait, Basil confesses to Henry the "reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid I have shown in it the secret of my soul" (20). The question of whose soul is captured in the painting is one of the texts ambiguities, and this also conflates the distinction between Dorian and the painting as object. The idolatrous desire of Basil Hallward is constructed as a sexual and spiritual desire, which is explored through the painting as well as Dorian himself. The biblical metaphor of idolatry is framed as a sexual desire for idols, and they are also looked to for fulfillment of these desires, which are not

divided in the biblical discussion of idolatry.[48] In the Bible, however, idolatry is framed as a sin committed against God, often arousing his anger. In *Dorian Gray*, idolatry becomes a means to gain ecstatic possibilities in the everyday. Similar to *Salomé*, idolatry occurs in the act of looking when Basil and Dorian first make contact. Dorian has an instant influence over Basil, which is framed in sexual metaphors of desire that symbolise a spirituality, a conflation of the two. Basil explains his experience of encountering Dorian for the first time as a force over which he has no control—an intense experience:

> A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul …You know yourself, Harry, how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray. Then—but I don't know how to explain it to you. Something seemed to tell me that I was on the verge of a terrible crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for me exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows. (21)

Basil is consumed by Dorian, experiencing a self-surrender in the face of true art and beauty; yet, this confession is also encoded with a desire that was transgressive in the Victorian period. Meredith Collins reads aesthetic novels as engaging with transgressive desire in an oblique manner, due to its deviancy to the culture of the time (18). Basil makes eye contact with Dorian and, moments later, "[w]e were quite close, almost touching. Our eyes met again" (22). Basil's first encounter with Dorian is active. Instead of mirroring Herod's mere looking at Salomé, Basil looks into Dorian's eyes; the added description of the near touch and the closeness of their bodies signals the active engagement between the idolator and his idol—a deep relational foundation. This passage also violates the heterosexual norms of the Victorian period, and the passages deemed too inappropriate were changed for later editions due to their

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[48] See pages 8-9 of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of idolatry and how it is defined according to biblical principles. Then prophets of the Bible refer to idolatry as sexual transgression: "Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain… and there hath *played the harlot*. And I said after she had done all these things, she will return to me; but she returned not … And I saw, when, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had *committed adultery* … for I am a husband unto you" (Jer.3. 6-9; 14; my emphasis)

transgressive desire. (Frankel, "Picturing *Dorian Gray*" 137). In the 1890 edition of the novel, Basil's confession to Dorian even more overtly represents an amalgamation of spiritual and physical desires: "[i]t is quite true I have worshipped you too much with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend" (232).

5.10.2 The Portrait of *Ekstatis*

Due to the complexity of everyday objects in *Dorian Gray*, Basil worships both Dorian and the painting. He acknowledges the material value of the painting —and therefore the painting as an object—conceding to Lord Henry's praise that it is his best work (18). The painting has a value in the marketplace, and it is a commodity that Lord Henry insists Basil should exhibit. Although Basil perceives the painting as a material object, the painting also contains Basil's soul. He raises this concern with Henry Wotton, refusing to exhibit the painting, because he has "put too much" of himself into it (19). Basil confesses that the material object of the painting contains the vestiges of his own soul, thereby also acknowledging a mystical quality in the painting.

Basil earnestly seeks spiritual fulfilment through the painting, which results in suffering. For both Basil and Dorian, the painting contains both a spirituality and materiality, and is pivotal in their journeys of suffering. For Basil, the painting's presence is an "intolerable fascination"—an ecstatic suffering. Basil's fascination with the artwork as capturing his soul doubles Dorian's own fascination with it, which also suggests a foreshadowing of Basil and Dorian's shared fate. Longing to fulfil his desires, he visits Dorian, earnestly seeking to look upon—again looking is central in idolatry—the painting he created. Dorian's suffering is also encapsulated in the painting, in the unbearable fear of having his corrupted soul discovered. He experiences both a joy and a suffering in his idolatry of the artwork.[49] Similar to the physical presence of Jokanaan's head in Salomé's ecstasy, the physical presence of the painting supersedes the mystical or symbolic significance, and through the painting ritual is made material and bodily.

Dorian finds he can no longer leave England, since he cannot bear to be parted from the portrait. This suffering gradually increases, and after a "few years he could not endure to be out of England", and gave up the villa that he had shared at Trouville

[49] Dorian's experience of both suffering and joy is captured in the painting. Dorian "would sit in front of the picture, sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fasciation of sin, and smiling with secret pleasure" (106).

with Lord Henry, as well as the little white-walled house at Algiers because he "hated to be separated from the picture that was such a part of his life, and he was so afraid that during his absence some one might gain access to the room" (106).[50] For both Basil and Dorian, the painting contains something unknown and mystical, and Basil questions Dorian: "[h]ave you noticed in the picture something curious?" (89). Basil experiences suffering and joy in being away from the painting: "[w]hen you were away from me you were still present in my art … Weeks and weeks went on, and I grew more absorbed in you" (89). Basil's suffering is revealed in his confession to his idol. Desiring both Dorian and the object of the painting, he becomes enraged when Dorian refuses to show him the work of art:

> Do you mean to say that you don't like what I did of you? Where is it? Why have you pulled the screen in front of it? Let me look at it. It is the best thing I have ever done. Do take the screen away. It is simply disgraceful of your servant hiding my work like that. (87)

Basil still perceives the painting for its surface value (as a work of art)—"[i]t is the best thing I have ever done"—yet, he cannot depart from his idolatrous intense experience of the panting, desiring to see it once more, raising the question of whose soul is in the painting. He reminds Dorian that the work of art is his to own, even though he explicitly surrenders it as a gift to Dorian at the start of the novel. Dorian, as art and person, enacts a spiritual influence over Basil, who regrets his anger: "If you wish me never to look at your picture again, I am content. I have always you to look at" (89). Both painting and person have a spiritual influence in their physical presence as objects. Because the painting contains his soul, and causes an ecstatic suffering, it is transformed from quotidian object into a mystical object that influences Basil and incites his worship.

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[50] Dorian also finds it difficult to entertain and indulge in pleasure, in fear of the painting: "Sometimes when he was down at his great house in Nottinghamshire , entertaining the fashionable young men of his own rank who were his chief companions, and astounding the country by the wanton luxury and gorgeous splendour of his mode of life, he would suddenly leave his guests and rush back to town to see that the door had not been tampered with, and that the picture was still there. What if it should be stolen? The mere thought made him cold with horror" (106).

5.11 Ritual and Repetition: Idolatry and the Imagination

In *Dorian Gray*, ritualistic repetition does not only focus on words, as it does in *Salomé*, but on ritual and its relationship with the imagination. In *Dorian Gray*, this ritualistic repetition frames religion as that which captures imagination—as James K. A. Smith discusses—portraying a post-secular conception of worship.[51] Just as Dorian can only love Sybil through Shakespeare's plays, he can only live his own life through the literary. While Dorian's moment of awakening when he sees the portrait of himself is significant, it is the reading of the poisonous book from Henry that ignites a desire to continue down the destructive path, and it is this book that causes an ecstatic suffering. Nicholas Frankel argues that books in *Dorian Gray* have more social agency than the characters and refers to Henry who leaves what we assume to be the mysterious yellow book to do what he cannot do in person—influence Dorian ("Picturing *Dorian Gray*" 148).

Wilde highlights the extensive influence of this mysterious yellow book over Dorian's imagination at the start of chapter eleven: "[f]or years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never sought to free himself from it" (97). Following Pater's theory of aesthetics, the yellow book has strange effect on Dorian, and its influence is enacted because it captures Dorian's imagination; he is convinced that the book "contains the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" (97). Living his life involves practicing rituals in the process of reading and delving into the sphere of illusion; his obsession, or idolatry, is centred on the physical book itself, and in the act of repetition the book enacts its influence. Dorian buys nine different copies of the same edition "and had them bound in different colours" (97). Frankel reads Dorian's actions as activating a sacred interaction with the physical object of the book itself, which is "transformed into something more than it appears to be, something resembling a Bible" ("Picturing *Dorian Gray*" 150). Frankel argues that the performative aspects of writing come through Dorian's immersion in the yellow book. While the physical appearance of the text is significant, Dorian's own actions, in my reading, is a performance of religion, akin to a ritualism that usually takes place in a religious

[51] See page 19 in the first chapter for a thorough outline of James K. A. Smith and his conception of religion in the post-secular framework; also notice the significance of Smith's discussion about the act of worship and the interconnectedness of imagination and desire.

context; the sacred value attributed to the physical object through this performance—the book in this case—activates a strong influence at the literary level. In the world of fiction, Dorian finds his religion: “It was the creation of such worlds as these that seemed to Dorian Gray to be the true object … of life” (100).

5.11.1 Imagination and Idolatrous Suffering

The imagination becomes the central site of Dorian’s suffering, and it combines a Decadent perversity with a biblical consequence of idolatry. In a Decadent discourse, Dorian elevates the perverse and embraces the unnatural: “There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful” (109). Dorian concludes that fiction is the only means through which to live life. Decadent perversity of embracing illusion over reality also creates a moral element in the consequence of idolatrous worship. In the Bible, the implications of idolatrous worship involve a transformation of idolator into idol. Psalm 115 constructs idols as objects and concludes: “[t]hey that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 115.8). In this trajectory, a moral aspect exists in the process of idolatry—a comeuppance of inevitable suffering. Dorian does not merely experience a Decadent *ekstatis* as he retreats into illusion (or the imagination); he also suffers in the act of ritual. He becomes encased in a horrible fate, reading the same chapter over and over again, bound to the same fate as Domitian—the protagonist of the mysterious yellow book. In a meta-foreshadowing Domitian wanders through a corridor “looking with haggard eyes for the reflection of the dagger that was to end his days”, reflecting the passage where Dorian stabs the painting and kills himself (108). Through the repetitive act of ritual—reading the mysterious book over and over again—Dorian becomes the work of art and starts to suffer.

5.12 Bacchic Violence and Ritual in *Dorian Gray*

In *Dorian Gray*, the highest form of ecstasy in idolatrous worship is achieved in a Bacchic moment of violence and shedding blood. The world of *Dorian Gray* is constructed as civilised and aristocratic. Even Dorian’s impious behaviour remains hidden underneath the polite veneer of the novel’s world, and many of his deeds remain a mystery: “civilised society at least, is never ready very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating” (107). The latter

half of the novel abruptly, or so it seems, breaks with this civility. In the death of Basil and Dorian, an intermingling of Christian martyrdom can be found in Paterian intensity, accumulating in blood and violence. In an ecstatic experience of the painting, Dorian commits murder:

> The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within, and he loathed the man who was seated as the table more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything … He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein behind his ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again. (117)

The painting as a mystical object drives Dorian to this sudden inflection of violence and perversity. Dorian's act is portrayed as a suggestion from the mystical object of the painting—"an uncontrollable hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered to his ear by those grinning lips" (117). "The passions of a mad animal" emulate descriptions from Pater's writings about the holy pagan women. Bacchic maenads tore a fair boy "to pieces" in "a symbolic offering" (Pater, "Dionysus" 48). In a Paterian perversity, Basil becomes a martyr for Dorian in a Bacchic moment of violence. Pleasure and pain meet in this moment, closely resembling Salomé's pleasure when she kisses the severed head of Jokanaan. Similar to *Salomé*, Dorian attains an *ekstatis* in sacrifice, and Basil is transformed into an object. After his murder, Basil is referred to as an object, and Dorian sees the "thing was still seated in the chair, straining over the table with bowed head, and humped back, and long fantastic arms" (117). When Dorian returns to the room, he "could not help seeing the dead thing. How still it was! How horribly white the long hands looked!"(118).

5.12.1 Conversion and Ritual: Transubstantiation

The significance of conversion and transubstantiation in Dorian's experience of the painting comes to fruition in his death. His death suggests that Dorian's wish to retain his beauty was granted from powers unseen and is a mystical experience. Patrick O'Malley argues that a final transubstantiation occurs when Dorian stabs the painting and the blood marks bleed where Christ was pierced, both hands, both feet, and Dorian is transformed into Christ. He interprets the dagger that Dorian plunges into the painting as emblematic of the final injury of Christ on the cross in the piercing of his

side (182). O'Malley's perception of this passage is based on blood and violence, in the "transubstantiation of the flesh into symbol" and Christian theology becomes aestheticism (184). Dorian, instead, performs the final ritual of pagan sacrifice in his self-murder. Similar to Narraboth's death, Dorian is seized by a moment of Bacchic madness that drives him to stab what he knows to be his soul: "[a]s it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that it meant. It would kill the past and when that was dead he would be free" (159). Both Basil and Dorian must shed blood in their deaths to perform the final pagan ritual of release.

The violence in the otherwise elegant world of *Dorian Gray* is also vital in the interpretation of the novel as a moral tale, and its conclusion restores proper moral order—the monsters are destroyed;[52] others perceive this as problematic, since the world that corrupted Dorian still exists (Karschay 204). Idolatry presents this final passage as both a moral and Decadent moment. Both Basil and Dorian's worship are encapsulated in the painting, and it is this worship itself that enacts a mystical possibility in a material object. The text progresses towards the goal of elevating the process of worship itself and completing the ritual in the sacrifice of blood. In this case, a sacrifice of death provides the highest form of ecstasy that Dorian seeks throughout the novel. Transubstantiation occurs in this final performance of ritual. In his ecstasy, Dorian stabs the painting, and as he sacrifices his own soul, a conversion occurs, and he is no longer divided from himself. It is only in violence that Dorian can have his full pleasure, depicting a Bacchic revelry in violence, alongside a Christian interpretation of idolatry—those who worship idols will be consumed by them. Dorian is consumed by the painting and destroyed. For this reason, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is both a moral story and a pagan story delighting in the perverse—it is a post-secular tale.

5.13 Salomé's Gaze and Offering: A Tribute to an Idol

On the trajectory of spirituality and ecstasy, Salomé's ecstasy can be seen as the greatest form, which exceeds Dorian's end, because she exceeds in participation—she tastes the blood of a martyr. Salomé's worship of the biblical prophet, Jokanaan,

[52] Stephen Arata perceives Dorian's death as evidence of his acceptance of *bourgeoise* morality, and takes his own life as a result of this realisation (4). Regenia Gagnier interprets *Dorian Gray* as a moral book in its representation of insatiable desire ("Wilde and The Victorians" 23).

combines Herod's gaze and Narraboth's offering, beholding the beauty of the prophet, and offering a sacrifice in the final act of ritual. Similar to Herod, Salomé describes Jokanaan's beauty in Decadent language of elaborate metaphors. To her, Jokanaan is an object to be sexually consumed: "I am amorous of thy body! ... I will kiss thy mouth" (77). Salomé's desire to kiss Jokanaan is active and sensory, and her engagement is an immediate contrast to Herod's economy of the visual. In the pagan ritual of sacrifice, Salomé attains her ecstasy. At the conclusion of the play, Salomé holds the severed head of Jokanaan on a cistern:

> I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great rivers can quench my passion … I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire … Ah! Ah! (99; my emphasis).

With Decadent perversity, Salomé equates consuming Jokanaan's blood as similar to the act of sexual contact. The Decadent value of embracing the unnatural and the perverse is permeated in Salomé's final moment, finding pleasure in in suffering and the shedding of blood. In sacrificing the body of a fair and beautiful man, Salomé drinks his blood, and "swarms". Pleasure, however, also contains suffering, and Salomé's expression of unquenched thirst and unsatisfied passion emulates a suffering at the same time as ecstasy.

Salomé's *ekstatis* is attained in a perverse moment of tasting blood. Early Christian martyrs accomplished spiritual ecstasy as they suffered bodily for the sake of their beliefs. Jokanaan's blood is shed as a result of Salomé's idolatrous desire, and Salomé shares in this suffering in tasting the blood of the fair martyr:

> thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will … All other men are hateful to me. But thou, thou wert beautiful! Thy body was a column of ivory set on a *silver* socket. It was a garden full of doves and of *silver* lilies … Ah! I *have kissed thy mouth*. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood? ... But perchance it is the taste of love. They say that love hath a bitter taste … But what of that? What of that? *I have kissed thy mouth*, Jokanaan (97; my emphasis).

She attains a Decadent pleasure—delighting in death and sacrifice—as she shares in the suffering; thus, the Decadent delight is combined with the suffering of Christian martyrdom.

Salomé's ritualistic repetition accumulates in this climax, which further situates this passage in the ritual of Church. As Carmen Skaggs argues, this passage is a sacramental act that represents the spiritual union between Jokanaan and Salomé. In this ritualistic act of spiritual union, the contact with the orifice induces a spiritual and sexual ecstasy, which climaxes at the intercourse with blood; in this pivotal moment, the pleasure derived from perverse desire is depicted alongside a spiritual ecstasy achieved in the final act of ritual. Hanson perceives Salomé as highlighting the way in which the Bible is sensuous ("The Scarlet Woman" 130). *Salomé*, however, does not merely sensualise the Bible, but the final climax—of the young daughter tasting the blood of a prophet—depicts the biblical narrative as savage. The innocent daughter's tasting of blood connects the Bacchic violence of paganism it its graphic consumption. We are presented with perverse suffering and violence, intermingled with religious ritual. It is the experience itself, the ritual act of sacrifice, that allows Salomé to attain an intense experience of her idol. Like early Christian martyrs, who were sanctified in the shedding of their own blood, Salomé revels in the blood of her false god; her post-secular moment accumulates in the paradox of ecstasy and suffering—the ecstasy of the useless.

The final monologue of the play also presents a highly biblical concept of idolatry and its consequences, alongside a Decadent revelry in blood. Wilde uses both the pagan and the Bible is his conception of spirituality, reflecting a post-secular intermingling of experience as an end in itself with a moral message based on the Bible. Wilde inserts a pattern of worship in *Salomé* not included in the biblical narrative, and both Salomé and Narraboth eventually receive a biblical consequence for their idolatry. Psalm 115 illustrates the consequences of idolatry as death. Idols do not contain life and becoming like the idol involves becoming death. Salomé and Narraboth both perish in their idolatry; yet, in their death, they gain the epitome of Decadent experience, framed as the ultimate Decadent fulfilment. Prior to her death, Salomé's ultimate wish to kiss the lips of Jokanaan are fulfilled, and before she dies she achieves an ecstasy and cries: "I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan" (99). Similarly, Narraboth cries out "Ah!" and his act of suicide is not framed as a surrender, but an active engagement: "*[h]e kills himself and falls between* Salomé *and* Jokanaan" (79; original emphasis). Both deaths are framed as perverse victories, as well as tragic consequences of idolatry, as Herod says: "[t]ruly, I thought he looked too much at her"

(81). Wilde thus interweaves Decadence and Christianity in the idolatrous consequences of blood, sacrifice, and death.

Salomé is consumed by her own desire. She is represented as both monstrous, and as an independent agent in her will, through fulfilling her wish of kissing the prophet on the mouth. Salomé's monstrosity is punished by Herod, who orders her execution—another departure from the biblical narrative. Her monstrosity, however, consumes her; she is consumed by the desire to kiss Jokanaan's mouth, even if it is a dead man's mouth. Her death should be seen, rather than punishment, as an inevitable result of her idolatry—ecstasy. The theological basis for idolatry sees those who commit idolatry as eventually being consumed by their idols. In his exegesis of Isaiah 6, theologian Beale emphasises the central point of this passage as what you revere, you will resemble, which is also echoed in Psalm 115: "Their idols are silver and gold…/They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them" (Psalm 11. 4,8). Salomé's inevitable death suggests a moral reading of the play, yet it also proposes a contradiction, since mystical experience is shown to lead to ecstatic destruction.

5.14 Personal Suffering in Wilde: A Conclusion

In Wilde's work, the material is inseparable from the experience of the spiritual. As such, Wilde's texts contains spirituality in the everyday experience of Art (the immanent), while injecting the everyday with spiritual and ecstatic possibilities in the act of worship. The elevation and glory attained in the violence of the Bacchic Maenads and the spectacle of Christian martyrdom becomes the core feature of Wildean spirituality. The deaths of both protagonists in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* become the final seal in glory and the pleasure attained in shedding blood. Alongside this, however, Ruskin's influence over Wilde is prevalent, and many scholars interpret the deaths of Dorian and Salomé as portraying the moral elements in the narratives. The consequences of idolatry involve death and destruction, and the flame-like experience extinguishes itself. At the same time as presenting an ecstasy of the useless, both texts explore the biblical consequences of idolatry in the protagonists' final moments. The consequence for those who worship idols are "[t]hey that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them" (Psalm 115.8). Psalm 115's conclusion regarding idols confronts being transformed into the idol, becoming

a thing. Wilde embraces the futility of idolatry to further his ecstasy of the useless through a biblical guise—intermingling pagan and Christian. Instead of a sin, idolatry becomes a positive expression of affection in the ecstasy it accords, which becomes an ecstasy of the useless.

Sacramental worship focuses the experience of worship itself, locating worship in the body; "fire" becomes the end of the ultimate idolatrous experience. Outside the Church, idolatrous worships can enchant the everyday and offer ecstatic possibilities to the individual not possible in the establishment. These ecstatic prospects are accorded because of intensity, and the need for blood. Similar to *Wuthering Heights*, the blood spilled in idolatrous ritual becomes a symbol of martyrdom that dislocates martyrdom from its past and locates its relevance in a modern setting; that is, martyrdom still attains relevance in its ability to inflect a vigorous spirituality into the Victorian novel.

Chapter Six: "Sunk into our bones?" Faith and Suffering, Suffering and Literature

> Yet, for all this, and though the christian Religion was such a true, and kind, and good one, the Priests of the old Religions long persuaded the people to do all possible hurt to the christians; and christians were hanged, beheaded, burnt, buried alive, and devoured in Theatres by Wild Beasts for the public amusement, during many years. Nothing would silence them, or terrify them though; for they knew that if they did their duty, they would go to Heaven. So thousands upon thousands of christians sprung up and taught the people and were cruelly killed, and were succeeded by other Christians, until the Religion gradually became the great religion of the world. (Dickens, *The Life of Our Lord*)

Charles Dickens's second last paragraph in *The Life of Our Lord* (1934) precedes the most-often quoted paragraph in his story, which implores his children to "do good always." Dickens explicitly identifies early Christian martyrs as hope for the present suffering, using it as his springboard to implore his children to do good unto others. In referring to the brutalities of primitive Christianity, Dickens crafts a view of the ideal Christian as one that can withstand suffering with the afterlife in view. Immediately after, Dickens implores his children to do good to all persons, even "to those who do evil to us" (*The Life of Our Lord*). He offers a refreshed articulation of faith based on the values of Christ in the New Testament, and, in this way, this short novel demonstrates the ways in which Victorian literature was innovative in the approach to faith.

This thesis has challenged the traditional conception of the novel as a form "confounded above all by notions of peace and eternity" in a reassessment of the presence of conflict and struggle in belief (Tartt 26). Idolatry is above all a struggle, a "dialectic", a search for the spiritual in the immanent frame; the form of the novel is delicately balanced between immanence and transcendence due to its capability of articulating conflict and struggle, while exploring avenues of faith. The immanent frame is contained in the immediate (the here and now), with no reference to the supernatural, whereas the transcendent refers to what lies beyond the natural and the

immediate (Taylor 543). Contrary to Tartt's view, the length of the novel allows it to portray faith, not as a constancy, but as a journey. Outside the bounds of structural authority, faith becomes uncertain with no higher order to identify the distinction between belief and unbelief. This uncertainty articulates the post-secular condition, which involves doubt and faith coexisting and comingling to formulate new ways of interacting with the transcendent.

Victorian religion was dispersed and yet pioneering, evidenced in the revivals that encouraged continued discovery and exploration in faith. Revivalism, while not anti-institutional in its mission, empowered the individual in the search for spiritual meaning and experience onto the individual. A freedom of this nature also creates a multiplicity of belief and meaning and "the struggle for belief is never definitely won" but remains one option among many (593).

As scholars approaching Victorian literature from a modern perspective, we need to carefully consider our grasp on suffering and its complex engagement with faith. The traditional approach by scholars such as J. Hillis Miller, Phillip Shaw, and Michael O'Neill interprets suffering and bereavement as evidence of a turning away from God; doubt, in this case, is incompatible with faith, and is interpreted in the "crisis of faith" narrative. This narrative, as demonstrated in this thesis, has been challenged over the last thirty years and classed as overdetermined in the study of Victorian culture and its complexities, particularly its relationship with religion and spirituality. Faith and doubt cannot exist in the subtraction story, and are perceived as binaries, but, in the addition story, faith and doubt intermingle to create new forms of belief.

In the Victorian novel, suffering is a textual strategy that conceptualises the idolatrous experience as essential in attaining an experience of the transcendent—an ecstasy. The forms of faith discovered in the idolatrous experience parallels with religious revivalism in the emphasis on emotion and experience, creating a pathway to the transcendent through ecstasy. Within the similarities between idolatry and revivalism, a deeper analogy exists with early Christian martyrdom. Accounts of early Christian martyrs in the Roman Empire contain detail of bodily suffering, and they have a startling correlation with spirituality. As Christian martyrs experienced bodily suffering, they attained an experience of God, and the idolatrous martyr attains a spiritualty in the suffering that accompanies an experience of the idol. The idolatrous experience in the Victorian novel shares this correlation with martyrs,

which highlights a primitive trend in Victorian Christianity—one grounded in experience and emotion.

6.1 Being Human

If we were to ask the question of an era: "what does the society worship?", protests might be raised due to the strong religious and doctrinal connotations in the word "idolatry". As this thesis has demonstrated, however, idolatry is not necessarily associated with sin, but with the heart's desire and with imagination, with a persona religion that involves knowing one's own heart. It is for this reason that the question above can be useful in determining a cultural condition; in any era of literature, the question can be asked: "what do the protagonists of this text desire more than anything else?". Thus, this emerging paradigm helps to answer the humanities' endless task: to interrogate what it means to be human.

Since post-secularism has not been considered previously in a focused study of the Victorian novel, particularly its role in idolatry, this thesis initiates a new area of interest, particularly scholars interested in Victorian religion and spirituality. Kathleen Vejvoda's thesis, published just under twenty years ago, identifies idolatry's strong symbolic link with Catholicism in the Victorian novel ("Dialectic of Idolatry" 298); however, the recent refocus of cultural and literary studies has demanded a reassessment of what we would consider religious and secular novels, and has helped to extend idolatry beyond its Catholic and marital discourses. While it is helpful to interpret idolatry metaphorically, interpreting idolatry as a literal metaphor of the Victorian post-secular condition, locates the Victorian novel firmly in the contemporary culture of religious and secular debates, since it expresses uncertainty about individual faith and its ambiguities. In the individualistic expressions of faith that were increasing—encouraged by the spirit of revivalism—idolatry becomes a means to express this individual faith, while wrestling with its uncertainties.

Because idolatry extends this field of enquiry beyond its symbolic meaning, further texts from the Victorian period should be considered for future study as part of the ongoing reassessment of the role of spiritual concerns in Victorian texts. In terms of continuing the project of Protestant idolatry, the notion of the idol of marriage could be approached with the post-secular framework, since marriage is

often the site of idolatry in the Victorian novel. Both Carens and Vejvoda identify marriage as an idol, using novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* (1853) in their studies, but, in the post-secular framework, novels such as *Villette* could be considered beyond symbolic idolatry and in terms of spirituality. Throughout the course of this thesis, I have identified many other Victorian novels that are centrally concerned with idolatry; these novels include: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Georgia Fullerton's *Ellen Middleton* (1844); William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848); George Eliot's *Romola* (1863); and Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885).

The historically focused chapter in this thesis, "The Strange Gods at Home", could be extended into a project that focuses purely on periodicals and magazines of Victorian England, investigating personal authority in religion and the ways in which this reflects the post-secular condition. This periodical study could also include other English-speaking literatures, such as those of Northern America, or Australia, to trace parallels and points of difference regarding the issues of personal authority in religion.

Idolatry need not be constrained to the form of the novel, and much remains to be investigated in the form of poetry—especially considering breath of religious poetry produced in the Victorian period. Poems famous for expressing their "doubt" could be reassessed with a post-secular approach. In "Goblin Market" (1862) an ecstatic suffering is enacted in the relationship between Laura and Lizzie—a duality of spiritual and sexual ecstasy. As a part of redefining the traditional notion of the post-Romantic, poetry that accepts a bereavement from the transcendent could be reassessed with the post-secular lens. Thus, poetry for future study includes: "The Passing of Arthur" (1859) by Lord Alfred Tennyson; Robert Browning's "Saul" (1855); Algernon Charles Swinburne's "Before a Crucifix" (1871); and Arthur Hugh Clough "The Questioning Spirit" (1847). These poets themselves all have interesting relationships with religion and the Church, which opens a field of inquiry for further study. The form of poetry in itself, as a form perceived to be more sacred than the novel, could also be explored further, as a question of form and post-secularism.

Idolatry offers a trope in fiction for articulating new formations of faith, and, as such, it reconceptualises the traditional view of Victorian Britain as "Anglican", and "fragmented". Fragmented suggests a weakened religion, but Victorian religion was dispersed and innovative, injected with vibrancy and fervour, invigorated by the spiritual renewal of revivalism. Revivalism shifted the search for spiritual meaning

and experience onto the individual; in this case, faith is explored with little reference to the Establishment, and reformed according to a model of the pre-institutionalised Church.

6.2 Happiness in the Immanent Frame: Dickens and Charlotte Brontë

In all cases, idolatry constructs a fine balance between transcendence and immanence, and in the novels of Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens, discussed in this thesis, the focus remains on happiness in this life. As journeys from childhood to adulthood, the chosen texts of Brontë and Dickens present idolatry as stepping stones in the journey of spiritual growth. Once these idolatrous desires are overcome, the protagonists achieve their equilibrium, particularly in *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre*. Jane feels secure in her faith as enough justification to perceive her earthly bliss as legitimised by God, because her interaction with God is based on relationship. David relies on Agnes as an embodiment of the divine for his justification, and believes his sincerity justifies his faith. For Jane, the focus in this life remains in discovering joy sanctioned by God, with a healthy attachment to this life.

Dickens, however, portrays good works as the epitome of faith, proved to be legitimate in the quality of sincerity. *David Copperfield* asserts that his narrative is grounded in a pure heart and a sincere account of his pilgrimage. For David, good works form part of his articulation of faith and they are not transactional, and he accepts the necessity of grace in his life; for this reason, he readily accepts Agnes as his ultimate justification in her purity. Pip, in contrast, relies entirely on good works, not associating this with any faith of his own, but in an attempt to justify himself. *Great Expectations* is the text in this thesis with the greatest confinement to the immanent frame, ending with a protagonist who remains uncertain of his faith, discovering that his good deed for Herbert Pocket did not accord the redemption he wished for. In these articulations of faith, the here and now attains more prominence than the transcendent, but the transcendent is never cast off.

6.3 Blood and Life Beyond the Immanent in Emily Brontë and Oscar Wilde

Idolatry in *Wuthering Heights*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *Salomé* manifests in violence and often in blood. In contrast to *Jane Eyre* and the Dickens texts, Emily Brontë and Wilde's characters do not seek justification and express a spirituality riddled with intensity and passion. Both Brontë and Wilde present blood as a type of rite in the idolatrous experience: Heathcliff bleeds when he slams his head against a tree trunk; Catherine's lip bleeds when she bangs her head against the arm of a sofa; Basil's blood seeps onto the table after Dorian murders him; and Salomé tastes Jokanaan's blood after he is executed. None of Brontë or Wilde's characters seek to do good, or express any anxiety about (nor any desire for) salvation; yet, they are the ones who attain the highest, and most intense, forms of spiritual experience and ecstasy; this is because they are the ones who suffer more acutely than the characters in Dickens and *Jane Eyre*.

Wuthering Heights conceptualises spirituality as contingent on bodily suffering. While both protagonists shed blood, it is in the act of fasting that they attain an intense spirituality, in a rite for their idol. In *Salomé*, suffering takes a dramatic form in sacrifice. Narraboth's suffering must extend to ritualistic sacrifice for there to be an intense spiritual experience. Similarly, Jokanaan becomes the ultimate sacrifice in Salomé's ecstasy. Similar to Christian martyrs who suffered for God, the characters of Wilde and Brontë only attain spirituality in a spiritual rite of suffering, which occurs as a result of their idolatrous worship. The form of suffering presented in these novels associates literature from the Victorian period with the spirituality of the early Christian era, sealed in blood.

In the phenomenon of suffering and spirituality of the Victorian period, the novel demonstrates the ways in which Victorians perceived the imagination as significant in faith. In adopting the post-secular framework for the sociological study of the modern period, James K. A. Smith argues: "the shaping of our character is to a great extent the effect of stories that have captivated us, that have sunk into our bones" ("Erotic Comprehension" 33). Smith addresses Taylor's argument regarding social imaginary and the ways in which people "imagine their social existence", which is carried in stories and legends" (Taylor 171). Idolatry recognises and identifies the stories that have "sunk into [the] bones" of the Victorians. The idol is no longer purely a metaphor for subversiveness and rebellion, but it is confronted for what it is: a liminal moment of transcendence and immanence. Redemption is possible in the moment of suffering and weakness, as it came for Christ, who

suffered and died for many. In conception, the imagination can become the central point of nexus in immanence and transcendence, opening up continual avenues for redemption and spiritual possibilities.

The post-secular was formulated to explain the phenomenon of religion and its continued persistence in the West in the modern period, in spite of predictions that religion would become irrelevant in the modern age (Habermas 17). Jürgen Habermas's lecture addresses the cultural condition of the postmodern period and argues that the "visible conflicts that flare up in connection with religious issues give us a reason to doubt whether the relevance of religion has waned" (17). Habermas cites the persistence of religious conflict and fundamentalist radicalisation as evidence of this (20). For Habermas and Taylor, post-secularism offers a framework to study the reasons behind religion's continued persistence in the West, arguing that one does not replace another but secularism and religion intricately inform one another. In my view, the loss and expression of grief in the Victorian period at religion's newly contested conditions continues today. Taylor argues that Christianity's view of enchantment leaves a void, and society experiences the loss of a world of meaning and self-transformation beyond the everyday (592). The imagination offers possibilities in this loss, with stories that continue to capture imagination and enchant the banal and the everyday.

In the nexus of imagination and faith, therefore, the novel can be extended beyond its function as secular individual experience, severed from the past. In turning to the immanent object for fulfilment, a transcendent experience occurs. Imagination and faith interconnect the Victorian novel, with faith articulated in same breath as doubt. The transcendent experience accorded in idolatry is always grounded in emotion and is often sealed in blood. Seeking a spiritual experience away from the Church, the secular martyr attains his or her spirituality in the secular setting, paralleling the secular arena in which Christian martyrs suffered. In this way, idolatry bridges the gap between the secular form of the novel and nineteenth-century British Christianity in its emphasis on personal suffering in the idolatrous experience.

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