Gravestones and Gravity: Emily Brontë's Dungeon Poems

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This article reexamines Emily Brontë's poetry focusing on dungeons and imprisonment, discussing how her prisoner characters compare their incarceration to being buried alive. Strong poetic and thematic dynamics of rising and falling also structure these experiences, particularly as manifest in depictions of the yearning soul flying away from the inert, living-dead body. Little Brontë scholarship has focused, thus far, on the actual narratives and themes of the Gondal poems, and still less on their philosophical significance, a lacuna this article hopes to begin to fill. It considers these poems in relation to the homophonic and etymological linkage of *grave* (receptacle for the dead) and *grave* (weighty, serious) with *engrave*, to inscribe something into a hard surface, often stone, using a lens informed by Mary Jacobus's work on the gravity of things in nineteenth-century poetry, and Simone Weil's writing on limitation and transcendence. Ultimately, it argues that Brontë's philosophical and poetic priorities lie in this movement between states, in the phenomenology of yearning for such a paradoxical liberation, and in the body's gravity, a metaphor for mortal time, upon which souls and poems might be engraved.

Introduction

DUNGEONS and their despairing occupants are among the most striking philosophical and physical architecture of Emily Brontë's poetry. This article reexamines a number of the poems from her Gondal notebook, focusing on how her prisoner-characters compare their incarceration to being buried alive. These poems are written out of tombs, many of them written on or carved into dungeon walls.[1] I use the homophonic and etymological linkage of *grave* (receptacle for the dead) and *grave* (weighty, serious) with *en*grave, to inscribe something into a hard surface, often stone, in order to discuss Brontë's poetic references to dungeon, prison, confinement, through a lens informed by Mary Jacobus

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on the gravity of things and Simone Weil on limitation. The essay then expands this discussion to poems not set within the fictional world of Gondal to explore the centrality of this fictional theme to Brontë's philosophy of reality itself, illuminating as it does her metaphysical questioning about the relation of materiality to immateriality, mortal body to transcendence. That Emily Brontë frequently wrote about imprisonment, unfreedom, or being caged and shackled has been extensively investigated.[2] I extend this research further to focus on, first, the actual fictional scenarios of the dungeon narratives, as these form part of a complex secondary world that has never been seriously critically explored as a work of fantasy storytelling in its own right; second, the philosophical ramifications of the recurrent invocation of living death; and third, the fraught relation between flight of freedom and grave/engraving/gravity. This material object-nature of the grave—the enclosure associated with death and by extension mortality and the human subjection to time—recurs frequently throughout Brontë's writing. Specifically, how this boundary of the sealed grave (representing the hypermateriality of death) might be breached would have been, as Christine Blowfield indicates, a very familiar idea for Brontë, since the parsonage where she lived directly overlooked Haworth's overcrowded graveyard.[3]

Dynamics of rising and falling, flying and sinking structure all these poems in distinctive ways, particularly as manifest in depictions of the splitting of soul from body.

Brontë's poetic universe opens endlessly out into bridges, channels, and portals between the real, the symbolic, and the imagined, in which static states of being are paradoxical because time itself never stands still, instead existing as a constant cyclical flow. Being imprisoned is being buried alive, in Brontë's work, because it means being cut off from this dynamic, processual, *flowing* time. Her prisoner-characters are sealed off, walled in, inert against the timely world with its perpetual motion. They reenter this current of time, of the natural world of sky and wind and seasonal change, by refusing gravity, by imagining their souls rising up out of the body/grave/dungeon, and flying away. Gondal's narrative architecture therefore opens a vital channel for Brontë's mysticism. Her interest is in this very mobility of the soul between worlds, times, and spaces, contrasted with its limitation by the gravity of the inert, abject body. Brontë's philosophical and poetic priorities are in this movement between states, between the relationality of immortal soul and mortal body, rather than a straightforward transcendence of the material.

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I locate this *holding-down* of the soul to the body in the same limiting gravity that Simone Weil will relate to grace and Mary Jacobus links to physical and metaphysical entombment. Without the tomb of mortality, the material upon which souls and poems might be engraved, there can be no poetry and thus no way of reaching out into the mysterious beyond, a beyond which is itself defined by this very reaching, by movement to and from the body.

Brontë is interested in exploring and playing with the boundaries of reality, experimenting with how they resist and attract each other. The structural opportunities and limitations of poetry symbolize and model this: imagination is the connective energy that moves between material and immaterial, transcendent worlds or states. Straining against the shackles of time, wandering lonely liminal moors and flinging the subjectivity wide-open to an ecstatic extreme of life-in-death or death-in-life, recurrent experiences when reading her poetry (and prose), are all limit-experiences of this kind. This question of reality explains my decision to concentrate primarily, though not exclusively, on the Gondal poems. Brontë's lifelong relationship with Gondal and the fluidity of the boundary between her real life and her fictional world (and between "Gondal" and "non-Gondal" poems) enacts this very intellectual playfulness with the limitations of reality, materiality, and her world. This article brings together, then, an exegesis of the Gondal poetry as a fragmented but significant work of narrative poetry with strands of critical inquiry on Brontë's theology, her mysticism, and her Gothic heritage, to evidence how her poetic negotiation of images and experiences of imprisonment illuminates her complex and radical mysticism.

Gondal

Much has been written about Brontë as a figure who bridges Romantic and Victorian periods, and the influence of the gothic tradition on her work has been extensively explored.[4] Certainly the visionary qualities of her poetry, her seeking the sublime and being inspired by the natural world, situate her in a Romantic legacy. However, little Brontë scholarship has discussed the importance of fantasy world-building to her work, a lacuna this paper hopes to begin to fill. From their earliest childhood, Emily and her siblings Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne read and wrote extensively, creating complex imaginary worlds and branching networks of characters. Of particular relevance is Gondal, the paracosm Emily and Anne created together. The turbulent kingdom of Gondal was home to a

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huge cast of characters including explorers, rulers, prisoners, rebels, outlaws, dreamers, soldiers, and tyrants.[5] Perhaps Emily's most striking and famous Gondal character is Augusta Geraldine Almeda, usually referred to as A.G.A., whose turbulent life encapsulates the roles of passionate, then treacherous lover (see poem 72, which this article will go on to discuss), warrior, wanderer, queen, and prisoner. Until the end of her life, Brontë wrote numerous poems set in Gondal detailing the perspectives, lives, and struggles of these characters, poems that seem to be the surviving fragments of a multifaceted fantasy epic: many of the poems she published in her lifetime are adapted versions of Gondal poems. Few Gondal poems have titles; this article refers to them by how they are numbered in Roper and Chitham's collection.

Stories these poems refer to or form part of touch on civil and international wars within the Gondal universe, crime, love, betrayal, imprisonment, grief, and the rise and fall of kingdoms. In Emily's diary of July 30, 1845, she describes a walk back across the moors from Keighley to Haworth:

> Anne and I went our first long journey by ourselves together—leaving Home on the 30th of June-monday sleeping at York—returning to Keighley Tuesday evening sleeping there and walking home on Wednesday morning—though the weather was broken, we enjoyed ourselves very much except during a few hours at Bradford and during our excursion we were Ronald Macelgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Augusteena, Rosobelle Esualdar, Ella and Julian Egramont Catherine Navarre and Cordelia Fitzaphnold escaping from the palaces of Instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans—The Gondals still flourish bright as ever I am at present writing a work on the First Wars—Anne has been writing some articles on this and a book by Henry Sophona—We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us which I am glad to say they do at present.[6]

This diary entry indicates that a substantial amount of historical and other prose fiction and other context for the Gondal saga supported the poetic material, but none of this seems to have survived. As a result, it is impossible to gauge (though some have tried) whether the surviving fragments form part of one narrative or several, or how they relate to each other.[7]

In the above diary entry, Emily does not speak of playing at or acting as, or even *becoming* these characters—she speaks simply of "being" them, as if one skin has been fluidly exchanged for another. Her use of "rascals" in the final line suggests a joyous, playful fondness for the world they have created: this kind of intellectual play with the limitations associated with a

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singular "real" world is crucial to Brontë's poetics and her mysticism. In 1845, when Charlotte Brontë suggested that the sisters attempt to publish their poetry, while Emily was reportedly unenthusiastic about this, she did edit her poetry, disguising many Gondal poems as non-Gondal poems. Most significant to this article are her alterations to the poem numbered 123, which became "The Prisoner: A Fragment," which I will discuss later. Overall, however, this project suggests that Gondal and the real world were easily and fluidly intertwined, and that it is this slippage that opens up Brontë's philosophy of interconnection between worlds, states, even realities.[8]

In the same way, the dynamics of restraint and release, opening and closing both grow out of and diverge from Brontë's material context. By many accounts she struggled when uprooted, for education or work purposes, from her home in the small Yorkshire village of Haworth, where her father was curate, and thrived on returning, which, many critics argue, she considered a setting-free from some of the requirements and impositions of the social world.[9] Whether or not we are to accept these perspectives as given, it seems clear that, for whatever reason, Emily preferred to remain home in Haworth. Emily Datskou explores the disruption of linear family trajectories and generational structures in Brontë's writing and suggests that "while we can read Emily's desire to stay home as an elevation of the domestic and thus the elevation of conventional gender roles and associated temporalities, a queer reading suggests that home, to her, was actually a way to elide socially-prescribed norms and temporalities."[10] Certainly it is interesting that it was not through travel, widening her horizons, or exploring further afield that Brontë seemed to find a meaningful expression of freedom—it was instead through returning to a place with which she had forged a powerful physical and emotional bond, a place that never ceased to inspire her and from which she could in fact exercise more meaningful freedom on her own terms.

Brontë's poem "A little while, a little while" depicts the subject imagining herself back in a familiar moorland environment, this fantasy operating as a solace for the "weary care" of her reality (69). This depicted home-space does not necessarily refer to Haworth, despite certain similarities, including a reference to "wild moor sheep." A possible invocation of Haworth blurs here into an imagined space with a "distant, dreamy, dim blue chain/Of mountains circling every side." Yorkshire does not contain comparable mountain ranges: this suggests that the precise location of this poem is not as important as its overarching theme

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of wide-ranging freedom, including the freedom to not be confined by the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. However, this poem is deeply infused with a longing to go home; it is a spatial and temporal openness associated with that home which operates in this poem as the threshold for internal and external liberation. Here are the last two stanzas:

> Could I have lingered but an hour,
> It well had paid a week of toil
> But Truth has banished Fancy's power:
> Restraint and heavy task recoil.
> Even as I stood with raptured eye,
> Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear,
> My hour of rest had fleeted by,
> And back came labour, bondage, care.

Brontë describes the labour of material survival as "bondage" and "restraint." Here, freedom represents *the freedom to go home*, which for Brontë is strongly associated with imaginative capacity and with inspiration. "Truth" banishes a "Fancy" in which the speaker is free to return home, a fantasy of "bliss deep and dear" which is described as "raptured." Such language, while gentler, suggests a similar imaginative ecstasy to the mystic flight of poem 123, which will be discussed in relation to Simone Weil's concept of *decreation*, or the negation of the self into union with the universe and/or the divine. Imagination here, as there, lifts the speaker out of imprisonment, bondage, living death. In some ways Brontë's wanderings do go far beyond Haworth to snowy mountains, faraway kingdoms, and turbulent oceans. She travels extensively within the worlds she creates herself, poetically rewriting her subjective reality.

This love of wandering on the moors, constructed by Brontë's biographers and critics alike as specific and idiosyncratic, signals a physical freedom that was notably rare for a woman living in the early nineteenth century.[11] Despite how often Brontë writes about being caged and confined, physically she had more freedom of movement and thought than many women of her era.[12] This is noteworthy because it shows that her association of freedom with the relationship between the material and immaterial transcends her personal reality.[13] A sense of openness is consistently associated with the imagination, for Brontë simultaneously a connective and a liberatory faculty.[14] This experience of openness is something Brontë would have seen and felt in a very real, physical way on the wide moors and skies outside Haworth, and this is

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reflected in her poetry's frequent references to wind, sky, space, and movement in this and similar environments. In her poem "High waveing heather 'neath stormy blasts bending," the wild opening of space and movement collides and merges worlds, "Earth riseing to heaven and heaven descending/Mans spirit away from its drear dongoen sending/ Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars."[15] For twentieth-century theological philosopher Simone Weil, with a phraseology strikingly similar to Brontë's, the tension between "the descending movement of gravity" and "the ascending movement of grace" generates the relational and continual movement-into-being of creation: "We can only escape limitation by rising up towards unity or going down towards the limitless."[16] In these terms, the body, like the world, is the limitation that allows for creation to happen—God's for Weil, and perhaps for Brontë also the poet's. In her seminal work *Gravity and Grace* (1947), Weil understands time, space, and matter as the vital limitations that give shape to being and thus to the potential of reaching out toward God. For Weil this is necessary; these limiting boundaries are life itself. Limitation is being held back or held down from the divine or absolute by time, space, or the material, mortal body, Brontë's "drear dungeon." This phrasing entombs the body, holds it down. For it to be able to fully meet or encounter this dynamic world, "fetters" must be burst, bars broken, by an external, undefined, yet monumental force of immanent nature. The regular rhythm and bounding speed of this poem, not breaking structure but recklessly building and building the energy to do so, draws a parallel between the material, mortal coil and the poem itself: both are limitations.

Weil grapples, as does Brontë, with the problem, physical and metaphysical, of self-annihilation and renunciation of the material world to move toward a paradoxical beyond. For Weil, this radical other, this *beyond*, is specifically the Christian God, and her understanding of limitation is a theological one: without the limitations of space and time holding us back from God, there is no way of reaching out toward God. "It is God, she writes,

> who in love withdraws from us so that we can love him. For if we were exposed to the direct radiance of his love, without the protection of space, of time and of matter, we should be evaporated like water in the sun, there would not be enough "I" in us to make it possible to surrender the "I" for love's sake. Necessity is the screen set between God and us so that we can be. It is for us to pierce through the screen so that we can cease to be. (33)

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This is the essential paradox and the essential risk of Weil's mysticism, and this ceasing-to-be is what she calls decreation. Necessity, or limitation, marking the boundaries of our reality, represents the journey or movement toward this negation of self, this fusion with the infinite, for Weil with God.

Reading Brontë in alliance with Weil on limitation, for Brontë mortal time and the world operate as the shaping material that allows for mortal existence and subjectivity.[17] Body, cell, chain, and guard are limitations that act for Brontë much as gravity does for Weil: the focus of these prison poems on falling and rising is the space in which the tension between the imaginary and the real emerges. Within this space the awareness of or submission to the world emerges, in Weil's work, and in Brontë's the negotiation between wandering spirit and living-dead body. Distance from the divine, being *held back from* or *held down from* it, is crucial to the mystic work of reaching out to it. For Brontë, while the limitations of body, space, and time work quite similarly, her beyond, her radical other, whether or not she calls it heaven, is only sometimes a comparable, transcendent God. Her work often seems self-contradictory in that she sometimes seems to refuse the earth in favor of a truly transcendent experience (for instance in "Stars") whereas at other times she engages a pantheistic revelation within the world, such as in "High waveing heather" (31). Simon Marsden provides a helpful disclaimer at the beginning of *The Religious Imagination*:

> This book does not attempt to "claim" Brontë for either side of the faith/scepticism debate. Rather than seeking to resolve Brontë's depictions of uncertainty and incompletion into secure positions of either belief or unbelief, I want to suggest that they are convergent with the renewed emphasis upon paradox, aporia and otherness that have characterised the postmodern "return" of the religious in contemporary culture and theory.[18]

My work pursues a parallel approach: while it is not interested in making a theological argument about Brontë's poetry or in the specifics or lack thereof of Brontë's theology, it is important to note that the nuances of her thinking about ideas such as infinity, spirit, and materiality, the cornerstones of her poetry's mysticism, are informed by her spiritual context, which does correlate with Weil's specifically Christian mystical work. I don't think all of Brontë's work consistently cleaves to one philosophical or theological strain, nor do I think this detracts from the intellectual and spiritual opportunities it has to offer. If an attempt to read Brontë's work as making or discovering some specific cosmic

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argument does lead to internal contradiction, however, then, I argue, this reveals how her writing illustrates the paradox inherent in wrestling with the relationship between the world and the beyond, the material and the transcendent. To think or speak or write of these things, Brontë's work demonstrates, is by definition to *be in* contradiction. This is not a drawback of her work: its open struggle with and against and for the cosmically necessary limitations of space, time, matter, and language in the quest for union and revelation is the source of its complex power. Brontë understands imagination as the connective energy between mortal world and infinite, aligning a transformative and reconnective late Romanticism. When mediated by the necessary spatiotemporal limitations of poetic language, imagination is a bridge into the beyond—a vital way of experiencing, not mere reality, but reality in its truest, most vital sense, being freed from reality into reality.

Graves and Gravity

The grave is one of the most recurrent and important symbols in Emily Brontë's writing. Poem 86, for instance, "I see about me tombstones grey," is a meditation on the relation between the grave and the world beyond, while "Remembrance" (Poem 116) depicts one character speaking to another who lies in a grave covered by snow. In "A Day Dream," Brontë's speaker is told by celestial, airborne spirits "O mortal … to thee the world is like a tomb."[19] The material world, in this poem, is a living death—although as I will go on to discuss, materiality, limitation, and entombment have their crucial place in Brontë's poetic phenomenology just as they do in Weil's. The enduring symbol of Catherine's grave in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is closely linked to her inscribed words in the Bible found by Lockwood; these are the traces that remain of Catherine, to be interpreted and invested with significance by various members of the living who claim to have seen inside her soul.[20] Closed book and closed grave have a parallel significance in *Wuthering Heights*, in that Catherine is always (and obsessively) interpreted, never heard. The sealed space of the grave is, for Brontë, a paradox, because it is supposed to hold the body still in time, and the body is something that cannot exist still in time. This is why Catherine's ghost defies time, in its slippages between the child-ghost at the window and Heathcliff's memory of the adult Cathy. The physical site of this grave is so significant because it does not successfully seal Cathy in, as it is supposed to, whether or not her continued haunting presence in the novel after her death is interpreted

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to be actually supernatural or merely the impact of her memory. What is left outside of the equated sealed spaces of Catherine's grave and her Bible is what creates her subjectivity as far as the narrative is concerned—her connectivity to the people around her, through their memories and their (orally related) stories. She is sealed up but lives on through these free, fluid traces left behind. Similar to the grave (and the book), the prison space seals and fixes time. Prison poetry is also a living-on of the subject beyond the grave.

Graves, tombs, dungeons, castles, and ruins would have all been part of a familiar Gothic iconography by Brontë's time. Simon Avery has explored the influence of the Gothic mode and its tropes on Emily (and Charlotte) Brontë, highlighting how the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a vast number of gothic novels published in England and how "a standard set of conventions soon developed, which includes such elements as: settings in gloomy castles, abbeys and graveyards; dungeons, secret passageways and sliding panels; desolate landscapes, often beset by violent and stormy weather; a strong presence of the supernatural in the form of ghosts, vampires, and demons."[21] The relevance of this literary environment to Emily Brontë's work, especially the Gondal poems, is immediately apparent: these poems take place in dungeons, haunted castles, bleak moors and mountains, and storms.[22] Victor Brombert analyzes "the sepulchral atmosphere of death-in-life, the poetry of bars, locks, and bolts, the gloomy poetry of hostile silence" associated with gothic novels.[23] His focus is on the relationality between the gothic and the Romantic and suggests that "the setting of Gothic novels in dungeons, vaults and oubliettes" "can tell us a great deal about the structures of the Romantic imagination, and the favored dialectical tensions between oppression and the dream of freedom, between fate and revolt between the awareness of the finite and the longing for infinity."[24] This imaginative structure of the gothic prison similarly provided an immense creative and philosophical resource for Brontë. The space-time and arrangements of Brontë's imagined dungeons certainly demonstrate a strong gothic influence. However, themes of being walled-in, sealed-up are also crucial to what she wanted to do poetically and philosophically: "in its mythic dimension, the carceral imagery implies the presence of a threshold, the possibility of a passage, an initiation—a passage from the inside to the beyond, from isolation to communion."[25] Brontë uses the dungeon as exactly this kind of threshold to explore the transition between material and immaterial, as well as the need of the poem for a surface upon which (and into which) it might be written. Brontë's admiration of Walter

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Scott has also often been noted, and his work, too, draws heavily on the Gothic tradition with its "caverns, dungeons and secret passageways" and its "devices of delay and evasion."[26] Brontë's use of the gothic is, however, much more transformative, certainly to the extent to which the "familiar romance plot of legitimate restoration which is so common in Gothic" is perhaps the most frequently undone or hijacked plot recurring in the Gondal poems. Very little is obviously legitimate and even less is obviously restored in the surviving Gondal fragments.

Poem 122 is written from the point of view of a fictional Gondal character. The poem does not name them and they have no other surviving context, so this poetic scene comes to us as a fragment that may or may not have once been part of a broader narrative. They could feasibly be the same person as, for instance, Gleneden, Fernando, or Rochelle, the speakers of other prison poems this article discusses—they could just as feasibly not be. The poem is captioned "M.A. written on the Dungeon Wall—NC," NC presumably standing for "North College." The colleges can be understood to refer to quarters of a sprawling castle dungeon. Although no evidential material has survived, this certainly suggests that Brontë may have invented a whole imaginary prison complex, with northern and southern quadrants and systems and levels of incarceration and punishment, where many of her characters languished at various points in their stories. In this poem, as in other dungeon poems, the imprisoned body is engraved through the poem's very ontology into the structure of the cell itself. The body becomes the tomb, the soul's words imprinted on the walls for the poet to excavate long after the cell has been abandoned, whether by freedom or death. The body takes on an uncanny, fossilized hypermateriality, fixed in time. This poem thus explores the limitations of the body and soul but also their abilities to open, shift, and change.[27]

The writing on the wall here is the only trace this prisoner left behind: the poem stands in for the corpse abandoned in the tomb while the soul flies free. The poem begins

> I know that tonight, the wind is sighing
> The soft August wind, over forest and moor
> While I in a grave-like chill am lying
> On the damp black flags of my dungeon floor. (175)

The experience of living death is portrayed not merely through the overt invocation of "grave-like chill" but, more importantly, through the

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prisoner's inertia, in contrast with the moving, living world of wind, forest, moor. The harvest moon, the full moon closest to the autumn equinox, "neither will wax nor wane" for the prisoner, who craves just "one gleam of her heaven-bright face." Since the prisoner will not see the moon grow to fullness or shrink afterward, it illustrates their disconnect from the world and from nature's cycles of birth, death, and rebirth—notably, via an invocation of rising and falling on a cosmic level. Space, height, wind, and sky—the cosmic temporal movements of the stars and moon—are frequently associated with freedom throughout Brontë's writing. They are also set up as antithetical to the stillness and deadness of imprisonment. It is the ability to move fluidly between spaces, realities, and worlds (as well as the thematic importance of this movement) that most strikingly characterizes her poetic voice.

Brontë's prisoners have been forcibly cut off from this experience of time as movement. The transition between physical and metaphysical realities, the imaginative separation of held-down body from soul, happens in the fourth stanza:

> I chide with my soul—I bid it cherish
> The feelings it lived on when I was free
> But, shrinking it murmurs, "Let Memory perish
> Forget for thy Friends have forgotten thee!"

The soul is "shrinking," literally diminishing, being wasted. The struggle is between a body that is confined and failing and a soul that is held down by its indissoluble connection to the body. The soul's flight, refusing the gravity of the body, represents only a temporary escape. This chiastic "forget for thy Friends have forgotten thee!" is persuasive in both its framing repetitions and alliterations and its rhythmic pentameter, generating an almost hypnotic sense of conviction. Being forgotten is the prisoner's worst fear: they do not hopefully imagine their friends searching for or rescuing them, instead only wish that they would remember. Forgotten by the living, they may as well be dead. To be forgotten, to be unable, specifically, to "haunt" the pillows and dreams of those who loved the speaker, signifies being *nothing but* the body, an entrapping materiality. The prisoner's only recourse is to leave a trace behind—the poem of their soul, engraved into the walls of their dungeon cell. The poem turns on this tension between the mobility of the soul, the sounding of the poem, and the engraved words and body literally set in stone.

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Perhaps the strongest and clearest binary across Brontë's work is this dynamic between metaphorically/imaginatively rising or flying into the sky and falling back to the earth. Rising and falling in this way represent the mortal, time-bound struggle with gravity. Mary Jacobus, analyzing Wordsworth's epitaph poetry, indicates how Jean-Luc Nancy pinpoints that "the adjective 'grave,' derived from the Latin *gravis*, means 'serious,' 'weighty,' or 'heavy'—hence 'gravitation,' a theory of mass and force, relationship and determinacy. But the common English noun 'grave' derives from the Old English *graef*, 'ditch.'" Jacobus elaborates: "It has its roots in verbs for digging and carving—hence the related sense of engraving or incising: 'the point of a pen or of a stylus, any writing insofar as it traces out the interior and exterior edges of language.'" The word "grave," according to the *OED*, refers to "a place of burial; an excavation in the earth for the reception of a corpse." "Engraving" shares the same etymological pattern, and "to impress deeply; to fix indelibly" are among its meanings. Deeply and indelibly—the idea of engraving something is to fix it, to create something that will endure the ravages of time. Digging, cutting, burying, marking or writing, leaving an imprint: all these are ways of imagining something lasting long after the engraver has passed on. To leave words on a dungeon wall is to dig a grave: immortalizing, ossifying, preserving something that was once alive—attempting to prove to the future that this something was important enough to preserve. Jacobus says that "genres of death—graveyard epitaphs, for instance—are serious by virtue of this confluence of thought and earth, death and ditch, gravity and incised inscription."[28] These characters experience themselves as being buried alive—an interruption in the intraconnected cycle of living and dying.[29]

Jacobus goes on to suggest that "both human and nonorganic life end in the grave, muted and stilled, however much they harbor intimations of immortality and animism."[30] *Animism* etymologically suggests a relation between movement (animation) and life, physical or otherwise, specifically as infused by spirit (from the Latin *anima*)—presumably an immortal one. This plays a crucial role in Brontë's poetics. The soul lifts away from the body but exists only as connected to it. In 122, the poem is engraved upon the walls of the cell, seeking immortality in the form of not being forgotten, just as her soul is engraved in her body. It exists because of its limitation by the body, a phenomenological paradox resulting in the tension between flight and fall, gravity and liberation, which charges so much of Brontë's work. Jacobus writes later, in her discussion of Nancy's *Tombe de sommeil*, or *The Fall of Sleep* (noting the

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homophony between *fall* and *tomb* in the original French), "those graves, they have no words to utter."[31] Brontë's graves, though, have many words, and utter them they will.[32] In poem 122, the body becomes the engraved writing. For Brontë as for Wordsworth, there is a strong tension between stillness and movement: words inscribed into stone remain, but their writer and their reader are in motion, transient.

These poems form a "genre of death," to use Jacobus's term, in their own right, burying themselves in order to achieve a kind of infinity. Trapped in time, they can mark or make a continuity only through writing themselves into the walls of their very tombs—often for the next prisoner to find. It is impossible to know how much Brontë would have known about the science of gravity in its nineteenth-century formulation, and this is not a word she seems to have used in a cosmological sense at all. While this homophony is interesting, then, it is not a metaphor or a link Brontë specifically employs. However, it helps illuminate her radical mysticism, opening up as it does the tension in her poetry between rising and falling, between the limitation of the body and the dream of escape, transcendence associated with the soul. Escape is explored in her poetry but rarely happens: this manifests in the prison poems as the imagined rising and flying of the soul away from the static, incarcerated body, hence the strength of the theme of gravity, implicit though it may be, in these poems—the grave, the engraving, is the weight of the body holding down the soul. Brontë's writing on the dungeon walls is, too, a confluence of stone and thought, gravity and the desire to escape gravity.

By the end of poem 122, the speaker has surrendered reality to a despairing dream, in which the prisoner imagines themselves as a ghost haunting their living friends, whom they are convinced have forgotten them: "Alas, I did think that they were weeping/Such tears as I weep—it is not so!" They envision the friends sleeping peacefully, calmly—resting, as the prisoner cannot:

> My spirit should startle their rest and tell
> How hour after hour, I wakefully number
> Deep buried from light in my lonely cell!

Again, burial and entombment are correlated with being cut off from the world of time, light, and movement. An exiled spirit, they are now doomed to wander, in a poetic if not literal forever, the labyrinths of their own disintegrating mind. This *spirit-self* is the speaking, lyric part of the dead words written on the dungeon wall, the part that can imaginatively

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escape, take flight. It must still return to the corpse, however, to reanimate the making of the poem. The dream depicted allows the prisoner of poem 122 to move beyond the tomb, haunting the living world beyond, but in order for it to be inscribed they must have returned and carved their immortal soul's journey into the walls of an immortal stone. This limitation thus frees the soul for the possibility of escape but also tugs it down into falling, despair, decay. Rebecca May argues that in Brontë's writing, especially *Wuthering Heights*, "the body is an impediment to fulfilment" and that the "erotic energies" of Cathy and Heathcliff "eclipse, outstrip, supersede the body. Only in death is the body useful; its dissolution brings about a co-mingling more permanent and utterly uninterruptable."[33] I disagree with this absolutism because while characters in crisis—and Brontë is demonstrably interested in the philosophical possibilities of crisis—do frequently attempt to cast off the "shattered prison" in order to escape, the ethical principles of her writing do not tend toward the refusal of the material world as an endpoint but rather an ongoing and vital negotiation of limitation with transcendence. Brontë's freedom of the soul is not equated definitively with its separation from the body. On the contrary, the body's ability to move and to be part of the moving world of time is a crucial part of the soul's journey. It is the limiting vehicle for the soul's movement, the wall upon which the immortal poem is inscribed. "If time is a prison that confines us," Janet Gezari writes, "then Brontë's poems return again and again both to the prison site and to the prison break."[34] Although I am not sure time is the problem so much as when time is stopped or fixed, this spectral return is key to her philosophy of mortality and its poetics.

The prison wall is, in poem 122, a semipermeable membrane between the living death of the dungeon and the outside world of moving, flowing time.[35] In poem 26, "Gleneden's Dream," this membrane is instead represented by the prison guard, or "whacher," to use Brontë's word (55). Gleneden does not write upon the walls of his cell: his poem takes the form of a conversation between prisoner and guard. This power imbalance is crucial here because poetry, equated contextually with speech, is portrayed as a reaching out across this membrane to someone who will not reach back. Gleneden's conception of time is structured by his connection (or the lack thereof) to the seasonal rhythms of nature:

> Tell me, whacher, is it winter?
> Say how long my sleep has been?
> Have the woods I left so lovely

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Lost their robes of tender green?
Is the morning slow in coming?
Is the night time loath to go?
Tell me, are the dreary mountains
Drearier still with drifted snow?

Sleeping, dying, being buried, and being imprisoned are strongly associated with one another throughout this poem, and all are equated with being disconnected from the world. The transformations of nature represent the movement of time for the prisoner, exiled from the world as he is. Again, here, time is something moving, in process, dynamic. Waking thus signifies coming into a kind of temporal communion with the world, something Gleneden will find impossible: imprisoned, drifting between fever dream, memory, and imagined escape, he cannot ever truly wake into the dynamic temporal world beyond his cell.

The whacher's response reinforces Gleneden's exile from this world of time, space, and movement: "Captive, since thou sawest the forest/All its leaves have died away." This firmly locates Gleneden back in the prison cell. The whacher goes on:

Ice has barred the Arctic water
Soft south winds have set it free
And once more to deep green valley
Golden flowers might welcome thee ...

The world, in the interconnected processes of time and space, works by a continuous network of stasis and kinesis from which Gleneden is cut off. The water freezes, then flows free once more: exactly what he cannot do. The cruelty of suggesting that, were he free he might be welcomed back into the world by the flowers in the valley, is powerful because it forces him to recognize his wasted potential, the fact that he is still, technically speaking, alive.[36]

"Gleneden's Dream" is structured via its immensely strong movements in and out of the "real," across the membrane of the prisoner's relationship with the whacher. The whacher represents access to what is beyond the dungeon—a threshold, so to speak, but their relationship, speaking to each other—a speech that stands in for the poem's very ontology—is completely enclosed. Gleneden journeys into his own mind, which becomes in his delirious state a journey out into the world of possibilities beyond the dungeon: his fever dream transports him to what we can assume is a memory of the crime for which he is imprisoned, though it might also be a fantasy of what he wishes he had done:

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assassinating the tyrant now apparently ruling Gondal. During this latter part of the poem, the metrical and rhythmic patterns, previously so regular and singsong, become wilder. Lines are broken by dashes and exclamation points, there are numerous enjambments, and the rhythm seems to stop and start, breathless and desperate as Gleneden shifts from describing a memory to actually living and experiencing it again: he goes from describing "I saw the city," his poetic language intense and jagged but still contained, to:

> Now he smiles with royal pride!
> Now his glance is bright as lightening!
> Now—the Knife is in his side!

The poem flashes into the now, to the present tense: Gleneden has moved out of reality and into the immediacy of the vision—this is happening to him right now, as he speaks. The dash transposes reality from Gleneden's description of events to their actual happening. The fall begins immediately, however, as the following stanza returns to the past tense, and by the final stanza he is overcome by his entrapment in reality once more—in a time that is fixed, unmoving, unchanging. The poem ends:

> Shadows come! What means this midnight?
> O my God, I know it all!
> Know the fever-dream is over!
> unavenged, the Avengers fall!

He literally falls from his state of delusion or vision back into the dungeon cell.

This poem is structured and charged by its competing dynamics of rising and falling. Gleneden's fever dream begins and ends with him lying "on the dungeon floor," inert and defeated. The abjection of his body, its closeness to a corpse in all ways other than its poetic eloquence and emotional power, is the most striking thing about it. It also recalls his description of the desecrated landscape of Gondal, "hut and castle, hall and cottage/roofless, crumbling to the ground." What is destroyed and broken is literally down, thrown to the ground, buried or associated with the low, low earth. Even the blood flowing from the Tyrant's body, "his red heart's blood drenched my dagger," is a submission to gravity, dragging the fluids of the body outward. Heaven is "descending in a vision" (recalling also the similar phrasing of "High waveing heather"), a moment of connection between the high and the low, the falling and the

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rising. Freedom and openness are associated throughout with motions of rising upward; as far as Gleneden is concerned, his revenge quest is heaven-sent, *from above*. This makes complete narrative as well as thematic sense, since dreams of flight and light must be especially enticing to prisoners dying sick and abandoned in dark dungeons. Gleneden is not a mystic character (in the way that Rochelle is in poem 123, who fully embodies the mystic opportunities of the prison cell), but his experience of visionary rise and fall makes for a comparable imaginative negotiation of dungeon and metaphysical thresholds.

In poem 72, "F. De Samara—Written in the Gaaldine Prison Caves—To A.G.A.," similarly, it is the desire for revenge that drives the imaginary movement out of the prison cell (100–102). Fernando, the poem's narrator, was a lover of A.G.A., whom she seems to have betrayed and imprisoned. Fernando's words are not spoken to a prison guard, nor written on the walls: they are directed out of the cell to A.G.A. herself, a curse and a promise of vengeance. Simon Marsden argues that "images of iron and steel in Brontë's writing echo a biblical vocabulary in which the hardening of the heart symbolizes the failure to open oneself to communion with the other, whether human or divine, and to live in healthy relationship. The hardened individual fails to love and forgive other people, and thus denies the calling to realize him or herself fully as a relational being."[37] Considering the recurrent theme of vengeance (and violence more generally) in the Gondal poems, this dynamic is certainly there, but Brontë's main driver in this poem, at least, is not a moral one about the importance of forgiveness. Fernando's drive for revenge on A.G.A. may well be what prevents him from experiencing the kind of visionary ecstasy that Rochelle in 123 can access, but it is this very prevention that Brontë is interested in exploring. It is the movement in and out of the visionary, the bridges built and then burned, limitations recognized, surpassed, and stumbled upon, that her poetry traces so strikingly and originally.

Here, too, motions of rising and falling structure Fernando's experience. The poem begins: "Thy sun is near meridian height/And my sun sinks in endless night." One sun, A.G.A.'s, is rising while the other, Fernando's, falls. This dynamic movement becomes calcified by their respective power positions. It also highlights his disconnect with the world and with time in the sense of time as something moving—his night is endless, he is outside of the natural rhythms and movements of space-time. This culminates in a bitter sense of his own waste:

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> Thy raving, dying victim see;
> Lost, cursed, degraded all for thee!
> Gaze on the wretch—recall to mind
> His golden days left long behind.

Isolated from the cycle of suns rising and setting, of time and growth and movement, his is a living death, an "early tomb." Mary Janowitz suggests that "human ruins necessarily invoke a sense of dread, the dread of regression to pre-consciousness and a world without speech . . . that sense of uncanny which derives from the frightening edge between the inert and the living."[38] Fernando's invocation of his own abjected body is visceral:

> Go, load my memory with shame;
> Speak but to curse my hated name;
> My tortured limbs in dungeons bind
> And spare my life to kill my mind.

"Spare my life to kill my mind" penetrates to the heart of this anxiety surrounding the body's materiality. It is, on a certain level, the same as the fear of being forgotten—that the self is nothing but its bodily prison, that it can be worn away to nothing but matter. The body becomes, by this formulation, the literal tomb of a mind that has been murdered.

Fernando's temporary escape is, like Gleneden's, through memory, stimulated by love and rage: "O memory, wake! Let scenes return/That even her haughty heart must mourn!" He summons in this moment of extremity the memory of a "lone green wood," "the moon of summer," images of a lake, a sky. He craves, very specifically, reconnection with the world. This is unsurprising, but the point is that Brontë is using the prison environment to explore this flight of the soul away from the body, and then its fall back into it. As Kristeva says, "the time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth."[39] Fernando's abjection points toward the possibility of the sublime in all its paradox, the revelation through limitation of something beyond, a flight that does not end in fall. The poem's patterning of distortions and inversions represents this possibility and its thwarting, its betrayal: life becomes death, speech becomes a curse, A.G.A. is a "false friend." The emotional trajectory of the poem is wild and uncontrolled, highlighting his madness of despair. Fernando, who is self-aware enough to recognize his own "raving," shifts in and out of memory, imagination and reality, the punctuation patterns and meter

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jumping and jarring even while the overall structure and rhyme scheme remain steady. This signifies how even his delirium cannot break him out of the confines of the prison, his inescapable "real." At times he is fully, furiously within himself, at others, utterly abject, he is disconnected and dissociated, for instance when he recalls singing with A.G.A. by the lake, referring to himself in the third person, a lost and idyllic other now who "smiles and sings." His emotions become his environment, his subjectivity becomes scattered out across space and time; there is in fact, ironically enough, a reciprocity here between himself and the world, as they haunt each other. The emphatic, desperate final line—"this hell shall wring thy spirit, too!"—is unconvincing in its own conviction of A.G.A.'s potential for empathy, which would equate her situation with his. The "killing" of his mind by betrayal, madness, and imprisonment is the grim subject of this poem.

The Mystic Flight

Only one of Brontë's prison poems depicts an actual escape. Poem 123, "Julian M—and A. G. Rochelle," details how a nobleman named Julian finds Rochelle, a childhood friend from whom he has been separated by what seems to have been Gondal's civil war, now a political prisoner locked up in a dungeon. Weak but defiant, she tells him about her soul's mystical flights out of the dungeon and that she therefore no longer fears either death or violence. Julian then secretly sets her free. Even her leaving the prison, then, with her dependence on Julian, involves a complex and disturbing power dynamic. Brontë reworked the original, Gondal version of this poem (dated October 9, 1845) for its publication in the 1846 collection with her sisters, *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. In the Roper edition of Brontë's poetry, this second version appears as 124, "The Prisoner: A Fragment." My argument discusses 123, the original version that appears in the Gondal notebook, because it is richer in terms of the narrative phenomenology of Gondal. Moreover, 123, whereas "The Prisoner" is not, is framed by Julian's narration and centers on his recording of Rochelle's situation and her words. What sets 123 apart from other prison poems depicting the traveling of the soul beyond the body is that it is witnessed by an external party, Julian, who does not experience it himself. Julian interprets Rochelle as a transcendent visionary. This distinguishes Rochelle's from other prison visions in Brontë's work, which are frequently portrayed as delirium or madness (like Gleneden's and Fernando's). Because Julian idealizes and hence others Rochelle, her

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mystical experience evolves from a dream into the exploration of a philosophy. It also means that the framing structure focuses on a breached threshold signifying authority, the patriarchal house that will be visited by the wandering Rochelle.[40] Thus, the earlier version of the poem is more pertinent to my argument.

Poem 123 imprisons Rochelle in a number of ways (176). The most literal is, of course, her dungeon. Julian's easy freedom of movement and ability to command this space makes her incarceration all the more vivid in contrast:

> In the dungeon crypts idly did I stray
> Reckless of the lives wasteing there away;
> "Draw the ponderous bars, open Warder stern!"
> He dare not say me nay—the hinges harshly turn–

Julian can afford to be "idle" and "reckless" because he has complete power over this space as well as the actions of the warder and the prisoners. The only window in the dungeon is described as a "grated eye." This visceral image not only breaks even the small patch of sky the prisoners can see into barred segments, but its suggestion of surveillance also creates the effect that the eye looks both inward and out, further compounding the impression of there being no way out, perhaps not even a world beyond. The focus on small details of the prison environment such as the hinges of the cell door further emphasizes the sheer overpowering weight of the restraining boundaries in this space. As demonstrated by the hinges' alliteration with "harshly," generating a scraping, grinding sound effect in itself, there is, even sonorously, no chink, no way out. Rochelle is revealed in "chill chains" and has been beaten. Julian's first words to her highlight her physical powerlessness: "Confined in triple walls, art thou so much to fear/That we must bind thee down and clench thy fetters here?" The almost-onomatopoeic *clench* recalls the "grated eye" of the window and the harshly screeching hinges, suggesting the clenching of a fist. Rochelle's physical limitations are absolute, ingrained in an externalization of her captors' very bodies into the prison complex.

However, Rochelle is also imprisoned by Julian's narrative and the power imbalance between them, and this is not something she can escape by the end of the poem. It is Julian who tells this story and relates Rochelle's words to the reader. The first three stanzas, beginning "Silent is the house—all are laid asleep," which frame the poem, are narrated in

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the present tense, so that the rest of the poem works like a flashback. Julian trims the lamp to guide the wandering Rochelle; however, unless she follows the light, like the lethal guidance of a will-o'-the-wisp, toward him, she has nowhere else to go. The lamplight, despite its initial welcoming depiction, is not merely a comforting guide but a directive. Rochelle's words are contained within Julian's narrative: it is important to remember, when reading this poem, that there is actually no access to Rochelle except through Julian, and nothing can be known about her outside of what he wants us to know. He is an unreliable narrator, with his own ulterior motives in visiting the prisoners (scorn), and helping free Rochelle (at least partially), in the hope of earning her "equal love," which, considering she is a political prisoner he has secretly set free, putting her entirely in his debt and power, is a tragic paradox. This complicates the poem's narrative of escape from captivity, which Julian presents as a rescue effort at great risk to himself.

Gezari argues that "the poem's language connects Julian's wanderer, the 'angel' who 'nightly tracks that waste of winter snow' with the prisoner's 'messenger of Hope' who visits her nightly. Both Julian and A. G. Rochelle are versions of the poet-figure in 'Stars' who is confined to her bedroom and exiled from the night of dreams she longs to recover. Both have access to a mode of self-experience in which the self flows with the world or feels itself like an undifferentiated part of it."[41] While I agree that Brontë connects Rochelle, "the Wanderer," with the messenger who comes "with evening's wandering airs," I don't think this gives Julian any experience of "flowing with the world." It blurs the boundaries between Rochelle and her messenger and thus her externalized experience of *being other*, the inspired mystical fusion with the universe that inspires it. However, whether or not we are to understand that Julian subconsciously recognizes this, it remains strongly differentiated from himself. His attitude to Rochelle remains one of benefactor, by which he holds all the power. To reiterate: she has no choice but to follow his guiding light in the framing stanzas, because to follow the actual narrative of the Gondal saga (such as it is) she is now an outlaw in a kingdom conquered by her enemies. While this is definitely preferable to her dungeon cell, the fact remains that she has nowhere else to go.

As Rochelle describes her vision, the rhythm and flow of the poem speed up:

> He comes with western winds, with evening's wandering airs
> With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars;

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> Winds take a pensive tone and stars a tender fire
> And visions rise and change which kill me with desire—

This acceleration depicts the messenger as continually in the process of becoming one with the universe, a process of fusion that will become Rochelle's. He seems to change the very space that brings him: the winds take a "pensive tone," the stars a "tender fire." Whether he is coming in with the night, or bringing these very space-time movements of the cosmos into being, is left deliberately open. The "pensive" and "tender" nature of this visitation makes it accessible and intimate to Rochelle: the final risk she envisions becomes less terrifying through this framing. The final line flows even more intensely than the rest of the stanza via the repetitive conjunctions and the springing movement between the sibilance of "visions" and "rise," which moves in an almost syncopated rhythm to "desire," which also chimes with the alliterative "I" (eye) sound and the rhyme with "fire." The impression here is of racing toward a cliff, ready to leap, when beyond the precipice is nothing but a blazing light. The dash at the end of the line halts its intense forward movement, increasing this impression of the precipice, but also links it definitively to what comes next. The actual architecture of the poem thus mirrors the experience of fusion with the universe, the falling-away of the world as the subject is liberated from gravity and into the space-time flow of the universe.

A description of an intense mystical experience follows. Rochelle describes how

> But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm descends;
> The struggle of distress and fierce impatience ends;
> Mute music sooths my breast—unuttered harmony.

This mirrors medieval mystical depictions of the meditative calm that precedes fusion with the infinite.[42] The world literally falls away—the cares and trials and tribulations of life on earth cease to matter, and everything diffuses into a silent harmony: again, a recurrent feature of recorded mystical or ecstatic experience.[43] Weil's understanding of the void provides a helpful framework for understanding this leap of faith into fusion and a divine *beyond*, as Rochelle's subjectivity opens itself out. Weil says that "to accept a void in ourselves is supernatural" because this void is the point of infinity, of the impossible, of the absolute other, which is also absolutely constituent—for Weil, the void is the way to God (11). She describes how

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> Man only escapes from the laws of this world in lightning flashes. Instants when everything stands still, instants of contemplation, of pure intuition, of mental void, of acceptance of the moral void. It is through such instants that he is capable of the supernatural. Whoever endures a moment of the void either receives the supernatural bread or falls. It is a terrible risk, but one that must be run—even during the instant when hope fails. (11)

Distinctions between Weil and Brontë's spiritual priorities notwithstanding, this risk echoes the climax of Rochelle's visionary experience in stanza 21, after which she, too, falls back to her dungeon floor:

> Then dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals;
> My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels—
> Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour found;
> Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final bound! (179)

The Invisible or Unseen transcends body and affect, senses and subjectivity. This "inward essence," the soul or the part of being that is infinite, is portrayed as a winged entity, a spirit seeking its home, harbor, in flight from the time-bound world, symbolized by the dungeon. Rochelle's experience tracks out to this edge of time and existence. Brontë's "gulf" mirrors Weil's void—an unknown and unknowable space that is by definition *beyond* but also fundamentally *within*. Theological philosopher Martin Buber describes the "two basic metacosmic movements of the world—its expansion into its own being and returning to association (with God)."[44] This is helpful for understanding Brontë's mysticism because in her work these movements are one and the same. The expansion into the divine is both a journey and a return. This "final bound" is an introspective, imaginative moment of leaping into the void—an implosion so profoundly annihilating it becomes explosive. For Weil, to reiterate, this refers to God. For Brontë, the exact nature of the beyond is ambiguous. It may be God, but it seems more an experience of becoming-with the universe of perpetual motion and free-flying escape from gravity. Rochelle's mystical experience depicts a subject collapsing in on itself and thus opening to fusion with the universe: this is decreation, in Weil's terms—a kind of *im*plosion of the matter and mass contained by time/gravity into flight.

Rochelle's epiphanic flight is opened up to her by her prison environment, something she "could never dream till earth was lost to me." Through the abjection, the entrapment in time of her physical body, she begins to glimpse its separation from the part of her that is soul, gravity-defying. Note in this section the focus on dynamics of falling and

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flying—the world of time, the earth, is gravity-bound. Liberated from it, she becomes fused with an immaterial cosmic spirit-of-motion, associated with wind and stars and height. Trapped in time when she falls back into her dungeon reality, she also finds herself gravity-bound again. Here, it is through loss and privation that the self can fall away and result in the mystical flight that gives her temporary freedom from her living death of incarceration.[45] This suggests that it is the very understanding of subjectivity as sealed in time that is the true prison to be escaped. For Brontë, subjectivity is inherently relational, unsealed. Rochelle's prison cell is an externalized symbol for this same sealing-off from the continuous, eternal flow of the universe.

It is her isolation from the world that stimulates the ability to dream this expansively, to transcend this absolutely. She has nothing left to lose and thus reimagines her imprisonment as an opportunity: "Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less;/The more the anguish racks the earlier it will bless." Brombert is neither the first nor the last to suggest that "the prisoner's cell and the monastic cell look strangely alike"; hence, he argues, the significance of the prison environment to depictions of Romantic or mystical experiences.[46] To recall Weil, "time's violence rends the soul: by the rent eternity enters" (83). The philosophical potential and ramifications of this are immense and, for the purposes of my argument, suggests that in this instance Weil is thinking about worldly suffering in parallel with limitation. This suffering seems to function, for Weil, as the limitation against which our souls must struggle and survive, which brings them into consciousness of the infinite pattern of the (divine, for Weil) universe. For Brontë, poetic limitation stands in for the limitation of mortality and the world, also translated as the prison cell.

Brontë is fascinated by ruptures or rents in time just as Weil describes. Moments when the subject or soul suffers or is torn are all moments of opening: the prisoner of poem 122, Gleneden, and Fernando all have visionary, supernaturalized experiences as a direct result of their suffering, even if these are presented as purely imaginative or delusional. Rochelle's mystic flight cannot happen except via her experience of extreme suffering, as if to suggest there can be no freedom without constraint. There is a strong parallel to be drawn here with the Christian mystical tradition in which the experience of pain is part of the encounter with the divine—particularly, it seems, for women mystics. Teresa of Ávila, for instance, describes her "transverberation" when an angel stabs her with his spear.[47] Anchoress Julian of Norwich meanwhile feels Christ's dying pains in one of her visions. She realizes "here saw I a

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great oneing betwixt Christ and us, to mine understanding: for when He was in pain, we were in pain."[48] "Oneing" is Julian's word for the merging or melding of her self into God's. Pain, perhaps like passion, in mystic writings, is the point at which bodily/subjective boundaries can be open enough to blur into each other.[49] Brontë's poetic experiment queries the necessity of this pain to the experience of transcendence or the divine, though she does not seem to be trying to reach a definitive conclusion so much as exploring pain as a phenomenal sign of the material, mortal world, a limitation to be negotiated.[50]

Decreation, in Weil's terms, is both opening and annihilation, and the cost of pursuing this extreme mystical or spiritual ecstasy can be high. Rochelle depicts this risk as a joyous flinging of herself into the void. The rhythmic flow in stanza 21 accelerates forward, culminating in the "bound!" with its exhilarated exclamation point. Here, as for Weil, the boundary between flying and falling is neither firm nor sealed. The return from this vision, the fall back to earth, is experienced as literally a reanimation of the body:

> O, dreadful is the check—intense the agony
> When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see;
> When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,
> The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain! (179)

This final line, alliterating and alternating "feel" and "flesh," equates the imprisonment of the soul in the temporal, finite body with the experience of incarceration in the dungeon. She experiences returning to her body as a fall from her daring flight; now, subject to gravity, which stands in for space and time, she is again bound by the limitations of material being in the world.

Flight is here strongly connected with death, which is to say immortality, while the living death is associated with falling, imprisonment, and being buried alive. Brontë's poem beginning "Aye there it is! It wakes to night," like 123, describes an experience of mystic flight and ecstasy, with a similar language of imprisonment and freedom. This is not a Gondal poem, though as Chitham and Roper argue in the introduction to their 1995 edition of Brontë's poetry, it does not necessarily make sense to make this binary division in Brontë's work. Moreover, the context of this poem remains enigmatic (4–5). There is no obvious stimulus for the subject's experience in this poem of infinite fusion except for the sound of the wind, which recurs as an inspiring force in many of Brontë's

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poems.[51] This very ambiguity focuses it on the ontological question of the soul's imprisonment in the body (122). Here, like in 123, where Rochelle's "messenger of Hope" "offers, for short life, eternal liberty," liberty is depicted as a climactic and highly mystical fusion with the universe. This is also potentially the poem in which Brontë is least ambivalent about the idea of the mystical flight.[52] This is potentially because the poem culminates with an image of unqualified fusion, a decreative negation of the individual lyric speaker.

Here, the mystic decreation collapses the traditional lyric distinction between subject and object. From the beginning, the identities of and divisions between "I" and "thou" are unclear. They also do not represent typical subject/object positions within the lyric tradition. The first stanza contains neither pronoun: "Aye, there it is! It wakes to night/Sweet thoughts that will not die/And feeling's fires flash all as bright/As in the years gone by!—" The repetitive internal rhyming of the "eye" sound in "night," "die," "fire," "bright," and "by" in the first stanza stand in poetically for the "I" pronoun, already creating the impression that the "I," the expected subject, exists only through its relationality to the rest of its nebulously divine reality. The "it" is also indeterminate here: it is the agency that wakes the immortal "sweet thoughts," but the enjambment between lines 1 and 2 leaves it open so that "it" may also be what is waking. This again binds the poem's references to separate parties into an intraconnected network of agency. "It," "I," "thou," time, space, matter—none of it is sealed off or bounded from anything else in this poem. This is further emphasized by the conjoined alliteration and sibilance in line 3, "feeling's fires flash," which creates an effect of actual flashing, certainly, but also reinforces the poem's self-reflexivity, its liberatedness even within its own form. This poem shares other stylistic elements with 123, including its speed and bounding rhythm, which is similar to how Rochelle describes her experience of mystic ecstasy. The second stanza is structured like a prophecy or an incantation with the anaphoric beginnings of each line: "And I can tell by thine altered cheek/And by thy kindled gaze/And by the words thou scearce dost speak,/How wildly fancy plays." The only punctuation between any of the stanzas is in the form of exclamation marks and dashes, refusing any pause or deceleration. Brontë's original 1841 version does not even have any commas within the stanzas, and the overall effect is one of desperate speed, recalling Rochelle's vision, of rushing toward a precipice, a daring, hopefully but not certainly gravity-defying leap of faith.[53]

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The second stanza suggests that one character is observing something affecting another, but the following one refuses this reading: "Yes I could swear that glorious wind/Has swept the world aside/Has dashed its memory from thy mind/Like foam-bells from the tide." The "I" is now *within* the "thou," describing the experience of the world being literally dashed from their mind, erased, overcome by the "glorious wind." The adjective here is key because it makes the observation subjective, hinting that the "I" is feeling the ecstatic uplift of the wind as well. After this, the remaining half of the poem depicts the experience of mystic fusion with a universal "all": "And thou art now a spirit pouring/Thy presence into all/The essence of the Tempest's roaring/And of the Tempest's fall—" "Thou art now" has shifted subject and object into one.[54] This experience could not be known or felt by an external party, but it also no longer makes sense for the poetic subject to refer to themselves in the first person, because this awakening has undone all boundaries and constraints between the I and everything else in the universe.[55]

Brontë is clear in the final stanza that this is something which, although it can be imaginatively encountered, can, in its true form, only be reached after dying. Marsden in his analysis of the later version of 123, "The Prisoner," indicates how

> the imaginative encounter is always incomplete in mortal life, always awaiting a consummation ahead of itself.... The poem celebrates the renewal of feeling and of imaginative encounter, yet it also represents this experience as incomplete, a fragment of a union the consummation of which can be imagined only in the final release from mortality.[56]

Mortality cannot remain in this state of ecstatic fusion but must fall: as Weil also suggests, it is not possible to be-with the void while living, because to live is to be-with the paradox of and distance from the void, "the void is the supreme fullness, but man is not permitted to know it" (23). For Weil, there is no heaven without the limitation of the world and time, just as the soul's flight into grace depends on the body's limitation by gravity. Rochelle in 123 does not in fact die; she only glimpses the freedom of the void, of heaven, of true reality, imagined as a homecoming. She ventures into death, the unknown, and then returns, and as Julian interprets, "Earth's hope was not so dead heavens home was not so dear," she is not yet completely ready to surrender utterly to this unknown. The sound effect of his specific phraseology here is key: hope is associated with Earth because hope is an engagement with time, which is

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negated by the idea of heaven; but it is also linked sonorously by the internal rhyming long "o" sound with "home." The "visionary awakening," to use Marsden's term, that her poems often turn upon anticipates how Brontë reimagines death as "the final collapse of boundaries between the human subject and the numinous life that animates the whole of the creation, a union with the eternal that begins in mortal life and anticipates its consummation in the release from mortality."[57] In "Aye there it is!" the final stanza begins "thus truly when that breast is cold/Thy prisoned soul shall rise." Whether or not Brontë's invocations of heaven and the eternal are to be consistently correlated with Christian spirituality, dying is the only way for this kind of liberatory ascension to happen, and she depicts the living, material body as the prison of the soul.[58]

However, this does not mean that Brontë actually intends this worldly, bodily prison to be seen as something absolutely negative or which should be rejected, despite the harshness of the language here. Brown argues that Brontë's

> poetic self craves annihilation and ecstatic identity—an identity not comprised of the interior alone, but in relation to everything beyond it. It is everywhere and nowhere. It is built on gaps, erasures, and empty spaces. Because it is nothing, it is everything. This erasure invokes motion between the body's confines and ecstatic metaphysical liberation, body and earth, borders of a marginalized but generative interior space and rigid walls of creative and societal norms.[59]

While I agree with the gist of this, I also think Brown's point slightly contradicts itself. Even if Brontë's "poetic self," which Brown later relates to a "God-self," craves annihilation, related to decreation, Brontë does not necessarily or consistently distinguish between this poetic self and any other idea of self, nor does she crave annihilation in any kind of uncomplicated way. If there is a recurrent craving in Brontë's writing, it is to break free, yes, but the emphasis is more on the break than the freedom that lies beyond. It is the motion, the exploration of boundaries, walls, and limitations, that fascinates her poetically and philosophically. As with Rochelle's captivity, it is the experience of throwing off shackles that allows for access to the idea of freedom, which is to say unity and the void. As Weil also suggests, "limitation is the evidence that God loves us" (105). It is this very paradox, that neither embracing nor rejecting the world is the way to reach God, or the Infinite, or the Universe, most generally a divine form of the Romantic Absolute, that fascinates Brontë

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poetically because this is the haunting and painful yet necessary and inspiring condition of being mortal, of existing as a subject in the temporal world. Moreover, the final two lines of "Aye there it is" ("the Dungeon mingle with the mould—/The captive with the skies—") do not suggest the need to reject or annihilate the living body. It will *mingle* with the soul, becoming one. It is their separation that is the prison, not the body per se.

For Brontë, the moment of escape is rarely the philosophical endgame. In the context of the mystic search for a divine truth of the universe, the search is much more interesting to Brontë than the absolutism of the truth at its projected end. She is constantly thinking and rethinking the worldly relationship with the divine, which is to say, what interests her is what stands in between—time, mortality, the poem itself, which are often all one and the same. The recurrent references to escape, flight, freedom, and transcendence in her work are not obsessive about the idea of absolute freedom so much as the experience of its absence. For Brontë, limitations, such as Weil's gravity, are material via which she can imagine her way into other worlds, hence the hyperimportance and hyperreality of her recurrent heavy symbolism of prisons, bars, chains, stone walls. Paola Tonussi argues that Brontë's chain imagery "renders the dramatic awareness of being closed, 'hindered' or 'fettered' but physical conditions are often a mere starting point to reach 'another,' different if not contrasting dimension. Nobody knows what the transition might lead to, where actually one could arrive once freedom is gained: a 'fetterless' tomorrow appears unfathomable."[60] This same unfathomable opens up the mystic. Jacobus in her analysis of Rilke and Wordsworth suggests that "the force of gravity becomes the sheer force of poetic language to generate meaning—recovering, hurtling, falling."[61] Without falling, for Brontë, without gravity, without limitation, there can be no poetry because there can be no worldly being and therefore no reaching, no movement away or beyond. Imagination depends on the limitation of gravity, of the possibility of falling. In Jacobus's terms, Brontë's world is a dynamic one of perpetual motions of rising, falling, growing, losing. The grave is the symbol for this, the place where the body lies static, but also a place from which imagination can rise, change, develop, where others can be inspired or emotionally moved, where the body also becomes engraved into the world. The body works for Brontë in the way that limitation works for Weil—a vital yet imprisoning materiality that must be navigated in order to reach out into the universe.

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Brontë's dungeon poems equate the experience of the prison to the experience of the tomb. These poems turn on a mystical exploration of the relation between body and soul—for Brontë, not a binary but a phenomenological experience of the limitation of the world's very existence. Hers is also a dynamic intervention into the concept of time. Brontë's poetry, as exemplified by her relationship with her imaginary world of Gondal, constantly challenges the limits of the real and the worldly, shifting between the yearning for renunciation of and freedom from the material world entirely, and fusion with a beloved natural environment. Each extreme annihilates the boundaries between subject and universal, radical other, and each signifies an ultimate and paradoxical mystical liberation. The tension in her poetry between the two represents a philosophical statement about the dynamic rising and falling of the soul, the balance between yearning for transcendence and the gravity necessary for such yearning to emerge. This tension, for Brontë, is where poetry can happen.

Notes

1. Brontë, 123 "Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle," 178. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically by page number in the text.
2. See, for instance, Vine, "Romantic Ghosts," 103; Tonussi, "The Image of Chains," 277; Gezari, *Last Things*, 73.
3. Blowfield, "Emily Brontë," 132–45.
4. See Avery, "'Some strange,'" 121; and Allen, "Emily Brontë," 8, on Brontë's use of gothic tropes and ideas. Vine's "Romantic Ghosts," meanwhile, provides a strong account of some of the difficulties of periodizing her work so neatly.
5. See Chitham's introduction to *The Poems of Emily Brontë* (1995).
6. Emily Brontë, Diary Paper, July 30, 1845.
7. See Fannie Ratchford's *Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse*, which brings together all the fragments into a coherent linear narrative. This is an interesting project but doesn't really work—the fragments are diminished both in terms of their sense and their power by being sealed into this contrived framework, not least because of Ratchford's amalgamation of at least three different powerful women characters into one.

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8. This is further evidenced throughout Emily's much-discussed diary papers in which the conquests and successions of Gondal characters merge seamlessly with her peeling potatoes and thinking about neglected music exercises in the Haworth parsonage.
9. Gaskell's is the primary text describing "the physical suffering on Emily's part when absent from Haworth," "recurring several times under similar circumstances," which "became at length so much an acknowledged fact, that whichever was obliged to leave home, the sisters decided that Emily must remain there, where alone she could enjoy anything like good health." Gaskell later describes how Emily "suffered and drooped" when away from home (*Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 156). While on the whole Gaskell's evaluation of Emily is unsubstantiated and superficial, historical evidence does seem to bear out that she really did not thrive when away from her home in Haworth (126–27). Claire O'Callaghan explores some of the specifics and practicalities regarding Emily's departure from Roe Head school in an attempt to deconstruct some of the more patronizing or pathologizing myths surrounding Emily's biography (*Emily Brontë Reappraised*, 50–53). Winifred Gérin meanwhile, in her 1971 biography of Brontë, while playing into the commonly constructed stereotype of Emily as being "too wild" for the conventional world around her, does provide some importance historical context for Emily's time at Roe Head school but qualifies it by admitting Emily's youth and unpreparedness for certain circumstances at certain times in her life (*Emily Brontë*, 52–55).
10. Datskou, "Queer Temporalities," 141.
11. See Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*; also Gérin, *Emily Brontë*; and Gezari, *Last Things*.
12. This is not to suggest that Brontë was not constrained or unaware of the social constraints placed upon her gender. On the contrary, it is likely that her awareness of these constraints inspired a deeper meditation on the metaphysics of space and time as limitations. The experience of being caged is fascinating to Brontë less as an autobiographical response to her actual situation and more as a philosophical conceptualization of imprisonment in the body, in the world, in time.
13. Additionally important to note because of how frequently Brontë's work is read reductively according to an often-unsubstantiated biography.

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14. See also Marsden on how Brontë's diary-writing habits illuminate her engagement with time as limitation ("Imagination," 36).
15. I have used Brontë's nonstandard and inconsistent original spelling (and, where relevant, grammar and punctation) here and throughout this article. My selection of Roper and Chitham's comprehensive edition of her poetry (which also uses this spelling as it compares manuscript versions and fragments of her poetry with published versions) is largely though not exclusively due to my appreciation of their refusal to distinguish in any definitive way between Gondal and non-Gondal poems, a crucial foundation of my thinking about the specifics of Brontë's mysticism.
16. Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 105. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
17. See Weil, *Gravity*, 14.
18. Marsden, *Emily Brontë*, 1.
19. Emily Brontë, "A Day Dream," in *Poems by the Brontë Sisters*, 89–92.
20. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 20.
21. Avery, "'Some strange and spectral dream,'" 121.
22. Allen considers the poem "The Prisoner," the later version of the Gondal poem labeled 123, "a good example of 'Gothic.'" Allen, "Emily Brontë," 8.
23. Brombert, *The Romantic Prison*, 148.
24. Brombert, *The Romantic Prison*, 4.
25. Brombert, *The Romantic Prison*, 7.
26. Robertson, *Legitimate Histories*, 2, 70, 8.
27. See also Shell on the cultural metaphor of "incarcerated creativity" with reference to the sixteenth-century Jesuit martyr John Ingram, suggesting that, as she relates Catholic priest Henry Morse writing "the idea of writing on walls, turning a means of enclosure into a means of expression, came to emblematise resistance" ("The Writing on the Wall?"). Ahnert similarly argues that "the fact that prison writings have shaped perceptions of the sixteenth-century prison as they have suggests that prisoners were not simply 'done unto.'" This perception of the Reformation prison, its more monstrous and dramatic aspects highlighted in the gothic mode, and the related idea of prison writing as not just resistance but a reaching out, reaching across the threshold, is a significant cultural model for Brontë's poetry. Ahnert, "Writing in the Tower," 170.
28. Jacobus, *Romantic Things*, 121.

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29. Simonsen also discusses Wordsworth's inscription poems, arguing that "for Wordsworth, inscription enshrines speech, consummates it for future use and produces a 'perfect form' that may survive." There is an attention to the durability of words carved into stone, but these also deliberately survive under Wordsworth's name, an attention to the immortality of the author as well as the words. Simonsen further argues that "this epitaphic, written voice is divorced from the poet's body," a body that will pass away. Simonsen, *Wordsworth and Word-Preserving Arts*, 40.
30. Jacobus, *Romantic Things*, 10.
31. Jacobus, *Romantic Things*, 75.
32. Thinking further about this idea of epitaph, Lutz provides a compelling summary of the work of historian Philippe Ariès. She suggests that he sees the elegy and the epitaph, "at least early in their history," as "the same thing. The elegy was often what was carved into the tomb or gravestone. Ariès points out that the French called these little memorial poems tombeaux. Inscribing the poem on the tomb makes it not just a text about and on the mortal remains but also a marking of the bones and flesh, something like a textual shrine or language that actually 'contains' a corpse" (*Relics of Death*, 113). Brontë's dungeon poems work the same way, though she is not writing in the elegiac mode. The textual shrine written on the dungeon walls contains the missing body of the prisoner in the same way. The body that is now missing has become absorbed by the structure of the dungeon. The marks inscribed upon the wall symbolize both the erasure and the hyperreal presence of the memorialized body. The dug grave is another mark inscribed upon another surface.
33. May, "'This Shattered Prison,'" 419.
34. Gezari, *Last Things*, 6.
35. See also Adams, "'The Service I am Here for,'" 237: "the prison wall, metaphorically leaky and physically ramshackle, is dichotomous: a site of enclosure and a visible barrier, but one that can be penetrated and through which subversive material can be exchanged."
36. The idea of living and dying in connection or communion with the inhuman or natural world recurs throughout Brontë's work. In *Wuthering Heights*, the dying Cathy exclaims: "I wish I were out of doors—I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free," later referring to her "resting place" as "not among the Lintons, mind, under the chapel-roof; but in the open air with a head-stone."

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When Cathy relates her dream, she says: "Heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke up sobbing for joy." Living under the Linton's roof and being disconnected from the world that is so beloved to her is, for Cathy, a living death of its own kind (Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 135–37, 81).

37. Marsden, *Emily Brontë*, 94.
38. Janowitz, *England's Ruins*, 108.
39. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 326.
40. Notoriously, when Charlotte edited Emily's poems after her death, she excised this opening frame and added two stanzas of her own, titling the cannibalized poem "The Visionary."
41. Gezari, *Last Things*, 78.
42. See Turley Houston on the "epistemology of mysticism," an analysis of physical and mental qualities associated with transcendent experiences, in a history of women mystics and mystic writers from Beatrijs of Nazareth to Elizabeth Barrett Browning (3–5).
43. Greek Platonist philosopher Plotinus describes how speaking about "the Good" "introduces a deficiency," a duality, because this Good is outside of representation, knowledge, or even binaries of being and nonbeing; it is "ineffable" (340–41). If we cannot speak about God without diminishing what we are speaking of, he suggests, then a nonspeaking, a speaking-out of the self to negate both the self and the act of speaking, to come before God through an emptying out and thus an opening, is the only way to worship. This is transmitted through the Christian Neoplatonists into the apophatic mode: see also Milbank, *God and the Gothic*; Turner, *The Darkness of God*; and Boesel and Keller, *Apophatic Bodies* (among others) on the *apophatic*—the mystic negation of sound and language as a mode of worshipping something that cannot be spoken about.
44. Buber, *I and Thou*, 165.
45. This theme of loss opening up the way to transcendence recurs in Brontë's poetry, as, for example, in "To a wreath of snow, by A. G. Almeda." Augusta Almeda—one of Brontë's most important and interesting Gondal characters, sometime tyrant queen, sometime passionate lover, sometime despairing exile—addresses the falling snow seen through her dungeon window as "voiceless, soulless, messenger/Thy presence waked a thrilling tone/That comforts me while thou art here/And will sustain when thou art gone." It comforts

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and thrills, and gives the prisoner hope even in its absence, because it is a reminder that she is not dead, she is still a part of an intraconnected universe of which the snow, like the wind, is the signal. A.G.A. is less a mystic than Rochelle, and her snowy messenger is depicted more as a pantheistic nature-spirit. This demonstrates not simply the development of Brontë's mystical philosophy through her poetry between December 1837 and October 1845, though: it shows that the idea of a mystical experience stimulated by a natural force has an indefinite but inclusive theological correlative for her (Brontë, *Poems*, 49).

46. Brombert, *The Romantic Prison*, 3.
47. Teresa of Ávila—transverberation: "I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it, even a large one. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God" (*Autobiography*).
48. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapter 18, n.p.
49. While the phallic imagery of the piercing cannot be denied, the point is that these are biblically inspired ways of experiencing pain—the ways of describing these experiences that were available to these women. I am not interested in making judgments about the validity of any of their visions, but I do think that the way someone experiences an encounter with a force that is supremely other will be mediated through the ideological constructs through which they understand the world.
50. Perhaps a limitation with a particular significance to women, and their specific constraints in Brontë's context.
51. For example, "The wind I hear it sighing" (96), "The night wind" (107), "Shall Earth no more inspire thee" (121), and others. See also Chitham, "Emily Brontë"; and Stoneman, "'Addresses,'" on Shelley's potential influence on Brontë.
52. In poems such as "The night wind," for instance, this ambivalence is strong. This poem depicts the subject pulling away from an enticing, inspiring natural force, insisting upon their distinction from each other. How this ends or what we are supposed to take away from it remains ambiguous.

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53. As opposed to the edited version printed in *Poems of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (1846), which comes across as more traditionally measured and slower.
54. As O'Neill suggests, "Brontë's echoic reworking of biblical phrasing ('I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,' Acts 2:17) suggests that the 'spirit' is an immanent 'presence' rather than a transcendent entity. The recipient of inspiration has, indeed, turned into its agent, the influenced changed into a source of influence." O'Neill "'Visions Rise, and Change,' 58.
55. This represents a powerful (and ahead of its time) philosophical statement. Subject and object in lyric poetry usually represent self/other positions, but Brontë makes this formally ambiguous, nonsensical, and paradoxical, deconstructing the subject as a sealed category in the first place. Her "universal influence," "from Thine own influence free," exemplifies decreation. The self is opened so radically that it ceases to be: this is a way of being that is free entirely from the influence or agency of the individual self. The universal influence, a divine intelligence or pattern, cannot be known or conceptualized by the mortal mind. This idea of a power vaster than thought or knowledge, something that *cannot be known*—hence the importance of negating or surrendering the self in order to reach it—is central to neo-Platonic and Christian mysticism.
56. Marsden, *Emily Brontë*, 128.
57. Marsden, *Emily Brontë*, 125–26, 128.
58. When Brontë was dying of tuberculosis, she refused to see a doctor until the last minute, when it was too late. This had led several critics to hypothesize that she wanted to die, or that her death was some kind of political refusal of intervention. I disagree—Brontë was notably solitary by nature and also quite possibly, by this point, delirious, making such speculation pointless. This is not to say that her intellectual curiosity about death could not have played some part, but as I will go on to show, Brontë at no point seems to decisively reject the world, prison of time or not.
59. Brown, "Absent Emily," 191.
60. Tonussi, "The Image of Chains," 277.
61. Jacobus, *Romantic Things*, 2.

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