

The Experience of Purgation and Trauma in Victorian Women:

The Great Expectations and Wuthering Heights



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Summer 2021

The Experience of Purgation and Trauma in Victorian Women:

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A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of English and Humanities

University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh

In Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

BA in English

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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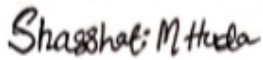
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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved mother and my beautiful younger sister, two very talented and independent women from whom I derive my inspiration from every day.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thank the Almighty for blessing me with a healthy mind and body which has allowed me to finish this task.

I would like to thank Arifa Ghani Rahman, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English & Humanities (DEH) for being an excellent mentor to me.

I would like to give my utmost thanks and express my gratitude to my supervisor Nishat Atiya Shoilee who has encouraged my research, inspired me to be bold and courageous, even when the world failed to see it. My work is the result of the excellent and brilliant guidance she has given me throughout the years.

Lastly, I'd like to thank all my friends and classmates who have always supported me through this incredible journey.

-Shasshoti M Huda

Summer 2021

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Abstract

This thesis will aim to present the metaphorical implications of purgation in the lives of Victorian female characters which is based on the primary speculations of patriarchal oppression and the women's individual personality flaws. This paper uses psychoanalysis and Christian eschatology along with trauma studies to identify the purgatorial inflictions of women in the novels, *Great Expectations*(1860) by Charles Dickens and *Wuthering Heights*(1847) by Emily Bronte. The concept of purgatory in the lives of Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw adds a newer depth to female trauma studies in the 19th century, capturing the bleak lives of women during this time. With patriarchal control dictating female lives, emotional trauma led to a rise in mental illnesses mostly diagnosed amongst the women of this era. This research aims to introduce a new concept of female mental health during the Victorian times in order to introduce a more sympathetic lens for the readers to understand these two otherwise controversial characters. Their individual purgation stories are more common in Victorian literature than we might think. Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw have been portrayed negatively due to their actions and behaviour towards other characters but the suffering of their victims rather overshadow those of their own for which this paper will bring out justice by showcasing them in the limelight.

Keywords: Trauma, Women, Purgation, Purgatory, Patriarchy, Victorian.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Victorian literature has commonly presented “mad” female characters that have erratic and uncontrolled behaviour, creating a disruptive living situation for themselves as well as for the people around them. The explanation behind an exclusive representation of these mad women lies in the social framing of what is expected of them. As Little quotes, “The ideal role of the female in nineteenth century was one of total submission, where individualism was devalued” (27). Victorian females lived under the male thumb, a quite depressing life in which the very act of breathing revolved around marriage and childbearing, and if one failed to do so, she was labelled as inapt, ill-suited or mad. This systematically ‘legal’ labelling of women allowed men to take advantage of them, especially of those who came from wealthy families and did not comply easily. Havisham and Bertha Mason are perfect examples of the victims of such Victorian patriarchy, in which they were used for their wealth. Catherine purposefully chose to marry into the rich Linton’s because she would be in a better position in her society, leading to the rise of a raging and monstrous Heathcliff. Female characters like these are a mirrored reflection of their society, a society which hides and manipulates their women who behave differently than expected.

This paper explores and explains the emotional purgation of Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw, two Victorian heroines or probably anti-heroines whose rise inevitably stems from the patriarchal oppression of their time, followed by the individual decision those very women make themselves. Based on their bleak experiences of heightened depressive states, the idea of purgation in the Bible comes in play, allowing it to present the idea of a metaphorical death before their actual demise. In this thesis, purgatory is not so much of an afterlife destination but the very psychological becoming of the characters concerned who

suffer and according to the portrayals of their respective novelists, redeem themselves from their questionable behaviour because of it.

The selection of these two characters is based on their experience of a purgatorial life evident in the novels. Their experiences are common, derived from more or less a similar ground, a lover and their unfulfilled desires. Apart from their depressing experiences on love and life, they find salvation in the end through death but before that, achieve a sense of ‘purgation,’ both in a Biblical and literary sense.

The selection of these two characters was based on two factors. First, to identify two of the most fictionally accurate specimens of female madness and patriarchal control over women’s lives; secondly, to capture the process through which both the characters successfully depict the concept of purgatory present in the lives of Victorian women. The three major critical concerns this paper deals with are as followed-

1. What factors should be held responsible for the downfall of such controversial Victorian heroines?
2. What are the evidences of a purgatorial infliction that this paper claims to exist in the lives of these women?
3. Should postmodern readers sympathise with such seemingly “conniving” females responsible for ruining lives not only of their own but also those of their supporting characters, or could there be larger phallogentric causes behind it all?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The concept of purgatorial existence in the lives of Victorian women is a topic less discussed, but if viewed closely, the experience of it has been presented in one way or another, in the characters of Catherine and Miss Havisham. Etymologically speaking, to understand exactly what it means by purgation in a Biblical sense, this research used the 1993 book *On the Soul and the Resurrection* by Saint Gregory of Nyssa. The thesis uses a simple summary of the main concepts which relate to Christian eschatology in order to explain the definition of purgatory and the causes and effects of experiencing it. An online blog written by Syriac Christian Heritage summarizes Saint Gregory and his sister, Macrina's belief of Purgatory in this book. Both the siblings seem to separate purgatory from hell, establishing the idea of eliminating one's inner sinful desires that might disrupt the balanced state of their ego. They further explain how one must come to realization, attain redemption and gain closure with their own selves in order to attain peace and salvation.

Then, to understand purgatory more as a psychoanalytical affair of going through various modes of sufferings and inflictions in order to complete the process of identity formation which is a hypothetical consideration of the current author, the paper slightly takes its inspiration from Eugene Mahon's 2016 essay, "The Invention of Purgatory: A Note on the Historical Pedigree of the Superego" which recognizes purgatory as the psychological undertaking of a character as an inevitable outcome of their confrontation of the social conduct, its knowledge of what is ethically right and wrong.

To analyze the concept of purgatory as presented in the novels which emphasized on the importance of confronting own errors made by the women themselves along with those that were done to them by the system, this paper had to bring in the personal experiences of the characters which ultimately introduce Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw to their

redeeming selves. The journey towards redemption here is not an easy process, and to explain the many causes, factors and aspects that ultimately led them into purgation, *The Literary Theory Handbook* (2013) by Gregory Castle was used. Castle's theory of trauma here assists the current author with an in-depth look into the mental health of these two women from the beginning of their lives till the end, playing a synonymous role in the creation of what Coleridge called 'life-in-death,' in other words, the purgatory of unavoidable dilemmas and sufferings. This particular study establishes the fact that emotional purgation originates from chronic trauma and trauma itself derives from the personal and the historical which perfectly explains the history of patriarchal oppression over the lives of Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw was their "individual identity" and on a broader end mental illnesses directly result from the stress-inducing situations designed by the overpowering phalluses of their time. Furthermore, Castle establishes the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which play a central role into leading these women to an unhealthy obsession with their eventful past, their reality distorted and psyche interrupted in the most complicated yet systematic of ways, as portrayed in the novels chosen for this thesis.

With these two crucial books creating the base of this thesis, more secondary research papers have been used to identify: the claims of madness and other psychological instabilities that are inextricable linked to the experience of purgation in the 19th century women, and how them being labelled 'mad' during this time was more of a patriarchal effort than an existing medical issue. Julianna Little, for instance, in her thesis, "Frailty, thy name is woman": Depictions of Female Madness" (2015) spoke of the portrayal of female madness in literature over the centuries, its creation of a weak image of a womanhood that needed immediate psychological guidance. She further explains the rise of the common mental illnesses diagnosed exclusively in the women of the century, such as melancholia and lovesickness, hysteria or malady and monomania. In her paper, Little successfully provides us with

substantial medical and historical background to explain the causes of these rising mental illnesses and how they were treated back in those days, holding both the patriarchal community and women themselves accountable for suffering intense trauma and identity crises.

Keeping up with the same concept of mental illnesses in relation to Victorian women's purgatory, another critic Emily Rasch presents the history and ideas of 'female madness' in her 2019 paper "Madwomen and Resistance: Gender and Self-Harm in Romantic and Victorian Literature," addressing the ways in which women of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries escaped patriarchal control. She states that the element of suicide and self-harm found within the women of English literature from these centuries are common which explains why ending their life was the easiest way to escape a patriarchal domain. Her paper gives voice to the females confined within the shackles of patriarchy as she explains the less-explored causes and effects of patriarchy from a woman's point of view by using examples of female characters from English literature. This thesis helps readers to understand the female psyche of this era, allowing us to create more diverse outlooks on their trauma and purgation rather than only sticking to the basic answers orchestrated before regarding women's mental health.

To get a more specific analysis of Miss Havisham's abnormality, Akiko Takei writes his 2002 paper "Miss Havisham and Victorian Psychiatry," strictly focusing on how she was portrayed, along with the multifaceted causes that caused her trauma and consequential purgation. He gives us an insightful glimpse into the symptoms of PTSD, allowing his readers an easy access towards recognizing any person who is suspected to have it. He states that Havisham was symptomatic to hysterical insanity and offers more critical explanations of the symptoms with direct references from *The Great Expectations* to further prove his cause.

Finally, in order to develop a better understanding of Catherine Earnshaw's character, this thesis used Anny Bolívar Brito's paper on "Estella Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw: Two Women's Depictions in Victorian Literature"(2020). Her paper aimed to understand the presentation of these two iconic female characters through the lens of a feminist theory where she explains how Catherine was a victim of a male-oriented system for which she went through immense punishment, both physically and mentally in the form of physical and mental illnesses. Her paper helps this thesis to derive its idea of how Catherine's patriarchal surrounding influenced and shaped the woman's personality by forcing her into suppressing a free and passionate nature that she owned before, thereby becoming a victim of self-destructive indecisiveness and purgatorial infliction. Her paper also allows Catherine to have a voice, which Nelly Dean, the narrator in her imaginary space to recreate a description of Catherine didn't allow. This strengthens my argument of how it is both the patriarchy and the characters themselves that can be held responsible for bringing Miss Havisham and Cathy to their purgation and ultimate death.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The main purpose of this paper is to establish the concept of women's purgation, the psychological becoming of selected Victorian women of fiction in a purgatorial world that advocates antagonism, bigotry and self-harm. Additionally, the thesis will demonstrate how the "experience" of their purgatory comes from their past unresolved traumas which lead to various forms of psychogenic disorders found in both the characters chosen for this thesis. In order to combine these two concepts, this paper uses two Victorian novels, *The Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens along with *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. Apart from only identifying the element of purgatory in the lives of the central characters- Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw, the thesis aims to explore the parallel representative roles they play of the 'mad' women of their era including the insufferable purgatorial lives they lived.

Therefore, this thesis will use a qualitative method in which the above-mentioned novels will be used with a view to investigating the thematic concept of female suffering and their experience of purgation due to male domination and also poor personal choices. To collect its primary data, the thesis focused on an analytical exploration of the novels along with similar observations made by eight other researchers as secondary resources. All in all, an intricate and detailed observation of dialogues and similar relevant details from both the novels are used to further recognize the psychological experiences of trauma and purgation primarily derived from a patriarchal standpoint through the critical lenses of Christian eschatology and trauma studies.

The paper further aims to scrutinize the labelling of these characters as "mad" or "vindictive." One of the chief motifs of the paper is to establish that even though we are audiences of the Postmodern era, traces of phallogentric manipulation of women's lives are

still very strong today, for which it is important that we critically observe these issues by recognizing the psychological traumas for what they are and advocate feminist ideas that support equal distribution of rights so that we may never in reality allow another woman to drown in emotional and mental sufferings.

Chapter 4

Trauma and Madness

One of the prime reasons behind the rise of trauma in Victorian women was the factor of unfulfilled societal expectations, unrequited interpersonal relationships or desires for which psychological conditions such as hysteria, malady and melancholy were commonly diagnosed within women by male doctors. The slightest sign of a psychiatric complication within women were not sympathised or treated, rather the Victorian society medicalized them as the dangerous “others,” in other words, not-so-ideal women (Little21). Hence female patients suspected to have psychological disorders stayed shut between the walls of asylums or their houses, away from an abusive society that has already systematically crippled them off their basic human rights.

Women like Havisham and Catherine died of intense depression and grief due to an unsatisfied romance along with their failure of being the ideal patriarchal seed. Throughout the novels, their lives seem to be a long period of drowning in their own agony and depression which consequently feed their mental illnesses. As Castle describes, “In trauma studies, the personal and the historical come together in a cleavage that is both the sign of an unhealable rift and of a suture that knits together the survivor-witness and the discourse of the traumatic event” (209). Therefore, in the Victorian novels chosen for this thesis, the “personal” could be considered as the characters’ individual emotional sufferings and trauma. The history of this trauma could possibly stem from the suppression of the patriarchal mind-set which has reigned over societies for the longest period of time imaginable, engendering an unhealthy imbalance between opposite genders and their so-called “distribution of duties.” Little quotes, “The mad woman does not exist alone; she influences and is a reflection of society. And because of this, theatre has always found great fascination in portraying madness” (Little 2). Perhaps the primary cause of women being devastated over their broken

or incomplete love stories, suffering from what has been popularly labelled as ‘lovesickness,’ is the fact that in this reality of the Victorian times a woman’s life centred around a man’s and without a man, there was nothing else to live for. This dependence on men to justify the very existence of these women ultimately captures the dangerous lack of female agency one can identify in the time, ultimately resulting in the birth of a “mad woman” in the eyes of a male dominated society.

Analysis of Miss Havisham’s Trauma and Symptomatic Mental Illnesses:

In Havisham’s case, the primary force behind her trauma and purgation is her memories. By stopping all the clocks in her house and choosing a space exclusively gothic and dark in its architectural premise, she loses track of time which depicts how completely and decidedly detached she is from her surroundings. As Castle quotes,

“In the discourse of trauma, temporality varies between the ecstatic and epiphanic re-enactment of the primordial event that occurs in a flash ... This experience of timelessness can erase the present and foreclose the future, overtaking one’s world view” (211).

Her obsession with her past makes the woman wilfully live in it, suggesting that she never forgot the betrayal which led her into this miserable condition in the first place, “imprisoned in the confusion of reality and unreality, the “most perplexing part” of hysterical insanity” (Takei 4).

On this note, Castle understands the concept of trauma in relation to PTSD, “the unconscious memories and traces of desires that have not been satisfied and that which return again and again, inscribing their repetition as a separate reality” (4). This definition perfectly fits Miss Havisham’s plight as expressed through her obsession with the past. She lives a life obsessively dedicated to her past in which her trust in people, especially men is demolished after Compeyson and Arthur rob her off her wealth and leave her at the altar. The most

effective evidence of this decided refuge in self-hate and paranoia lies in her desperate attempts to stop time which includes spending the rest of her life in a yellowed and tattered wedding dress while hovering around Sati's house and her decayed wedding feast.

Throughout the novel she is seen to wail and cry by herself at the recurring thoughts of her desperate isolation. We find her describing what love is to Pip in a morose expression, "It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against you and against the whole world" (Dickens 276).

Here, the mental state of Miss Havisham identifies with the many complications that were commonly diagnosed within Victorian women based on two major assumptions:¹⁾ either because they were rather methodically "prone to madness," a Nineteenth-century coping mechanism for suppressed women to release the conscious rage they held against the society which controlled them (Little 30) or,²⁾ because they genuinely developed severe psychological conditions due to the extreme patriarchal codes of conduct which created frustrations, stress, chronic anxiety or paranoia in them as an inevitable end-product of the year-long battles they had been fighting against those same men-made standards (Little 30). Therefore, unmarried, rejected women such as Miss Havisham herself were not welcome in her society-a situation somewhat forcing her to seek refuge in isolation and a series of emotional and mental traumas.

Mrs.Havisham's frequent outbursts of "depression, crying, or nervousness" (Little 18)coincide with Connolly's definition of hysteria where "agitated by every trifle and every feeling in excess," an individual seeks constant "sympathy with a morbid eagerness" (as cited in Takei, 3), making them "incapable of steady friendships or affection, and by degrees [more focused] on their own feelings and morbid sensations" (3).Therefore, it is no wonder that Havisham cannot commit to the aforementioned relationships as these are based on love which to her, is a "self-humiliating and a blind devotion" (Dickens 276). Her idea of love has

been duly problematized here once Compeyson decides to walk out of her life from which particular day on, she miserably fails in maintaining old relationships, let alone creating new ones. Her morbid fixation with reliving her traumas and altogether rejecting the mere possibility of starting anew is expressed through her utter hatred for the male gender and her own malicious manipulation of Estella in order to seduce more men and break their hearts. In doing so, not only she proves herself to be a direct victim of the phallogentric community, but also rather a product of it as she unknowingly steals Estella and Pip's childhood and ruins family relations such as that of Mr. Pocket. Paradoxically, she incorporates the very questionable principles her society upholds and then she uses her lack of fortune with men and marriage to justify her self-destructive behaviour as well as the exploitation of others.

Her life, thus, reflects the toxic process of remembering and recreating an irreality of her own, a purgatorial mechanism of some sort, "a mind-forged manacle," (as dubbed Blake in his poem "London"):

Sensing that memory was at the core of psychological illness, that hysterics were sick because of reminiscences ... [it is] to *purge* the mind of its constipated memory blockages. If this is the language of intestinal enemas, it is also the language of *purgation*, the dead language of hope. (Mahon 337).

Analysis of Catherine's Trauma and Symptomatic Mental Illnesses:

Young Cathy can be described as a child: passionate, free-spirited as well as mean-spirited. Her biggest personality flaws would be her indecisiveness, self-cantered behaviour, a complete lack of awareness about other people's feelings, and a conniving manipulation of whomsoever she deems unworthy. An example of her manipulation would be when she slaps Edgar across the face and upon him leaving, victimizes herself by retorting, "Edgar Linton-sit down, you shall not leave me in that temper. I should be miserable all night and I won't be miserable for you" (Bronte 87). It is important to note that Catherine's character has been

depicted through Nelly Dean's narration which portrays Cathy as a young mischievous antagonistic lady, and hence it is easy to blame Cathy's end on nobody but her own self. Yet, if we are to understand the antagonism within Cathy, we must understand that she is yet another victim of the strict male-oriented environment that somewhat inculcated this negativity bias in her mindset in the first place.

A huge part of the trauma Cathy faces as an adult stems from the patriarchal dominance that surrounds her. Cathy's diary reveals quite a bit of such ill practices of homogenous authority that once took place in her house, "Hindley threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders"(Bronte 25). Even, in her conversation with Nelly, she claims, "I'll tell you what I thought, and what has kept recurring and recurring till I feared my reason. I was a child; my father was just buried, and my misery arose from the separation that Hindley had ordered between me and Heathcliff" (Bronte 153). Thus, she describes the root to her becoming, pointing to the men in her life who have shaped her ideological position as she further talks about her brother convincing her to never pursue a servant: "Hindley calls him a vagabond and won't let him sit with us, nor eat with us and he says, he and I must not play together" (Bronte 25).

A prime cause for the trauma that Cathy faces as an adult, therefore, stems from her decision to marry Edgar over whom her brother finds to be a Moorish peasant. She marries Edgar because, "He will be rich and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband" (Bronte 95). Her marriage is strictly to please the social conditions expected of a Victorian woman to oblige. It happens despite Cathy's knowledge of the fact that Edgar will prove to be too domesticated and docile of a man as we see especially during the confrontation between Heathcliff and Edgar. Brito, therefore, rightly quotes, "The relationship Catherine had with these men brought out her melancholic and destructive being in her adulthood" (33). Cathy, too mentions herself, " ...

Supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, [...] the wife of a stranger; an exile and outcast, thenceforth what had been my world!” (Bronte 154). From this remark, it can be concluded that these three men have influenced and up to a certain point dictated Cathy’s life for which in the end, she has unresolved feelings towards both home and marriage.

The fictional scenario helps us realize how marriage and childbearing seem to be the only roles to keep a Victorian woman motivated, reiterating the fact that Cathy grows up quickly and steps into adult affairs like marriages and childbearing especially when her inner self is still childlike, still reminiscing the wild moors, “I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free ... and laughing at injuries not maddening under them” (Bronte 154). Bronte’s choice of words is interesting as it truly encapsulates the catastrophic condition of women’s mental health during this time due to societal pressure. The word “maddening” reflects how helpless women were in the Victorian era. It is no wonder that later on in life Cathy suffers from an intense identity crisis and conflicted priorities.

The first mention of Cathy’s illness after three days of suffering from hysteric fits and severe fever takes place as Nelly believes that she has the common symptoms of “Malady” (Bronte 159). Nelly’s narration further claims, “Mrs Linton encountered and conquered the worst shock of what was denominated a brain fever” (Bronte 164). The ready diagnosis of this “neurological condition” in Cathy echoes what Colburn thought to “represent what politicians perceived to be the threat of the disorder posed by the emergence of [the] individual’s actions” (as cited in Rasch³). Cathy, a woman with extreme agencies thus, can be said to possess the symptoms of what Nelly labels as “madness,” “Tossing about, she increased her feverish bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth then rising up all burning, desired that I would open the window” (Bronte 149). Quite similar to Miss Havisham who needs frequent diversions to distract herself from her ongoing trauma, “I’m

tired, I want a diversion” (Dickens 67), Catherine’s plight is best described by the recurring hallucinations she experiences which often haunt her and confuse her mind. According to Juliana Little, it is a “death like trance followed with hallucinations” (22), which resembles Cathy’s condition. An example of her hallucination would be the time she hangs half of her body out her bedroom window looking towards Wuthering Heights, which isn’t visible according to Nelly, but visible to her, “Look! That’s my room with the candle in it, and the trees swaying before it” (Bronte 155).

Here, Catherine’s melancholia is inextricably associated with her incomplete feelings towards Heathcliff and the Heights. As a young girl, Catherine, just like any other Victorian individual had been trained about class difference and a woman’s place in the society. Cathy’s love for her home and Heathcliff was snatched away from her not only by herself, but also her surroundings, the patriarchal infrastructure of a society that regulated her to become what she is at the end. In her blind pursuit of wealth and a favourable social position, she practices whatever she has of her agency in a wrong direction and betrays her own heart. For Catherine, it is the conscious knowledge of choosing the wrong route of comfort and easy life that comes back in the form of guilt namely, the hysteric fits of high fever and incoherent behaviour, suggesting that she never truly got over Heathcliff or her carefree life in which she and the man she loved run across the moors and laugh together.

Chapter 5

Experience of Female Purgation and Purgatory in Victorian Literature

In this part of the analysis, it can be found that the many external trauma-inducing factors which make the women establish questionable choices and decisions on their end, ultimately lead them into a lifetime of purgation. Here, it is important to mention that Biblically speaking, purgatory is not to be confused with hell as it is not a place of perpetual punishment, rather of probable redemption in which a soul abandons all earthly pleasures and eliminates any quality which might have brought it close to any form of impurity (Heritage para 4). Macrina describes this mostly as a “process” using the example of refining gold (as cited in Heritage para.8). Although the soul may find itself in a desert of agony, its situation is not permanent. Therefore, the concept of the purgatory can be stated to heavily rely on the process of purgation itself than an actual place- an otherwise theological concept that coincides with modern psychoanalysis as well where the very experience of emotional purgation can potentially produce a purgatory on earth, “as one communal mind in the process of discovery and development, the psychological advance from splitting (Heaven and Hell) to a redemptive Purgatory, and from Purgatory to a psychoanalytic vision [of existence]” (Mahon 337).

Following this definition of purgatory more like a psychological metamorphosis as provided by Mahon, it can be stated that in Victorian Literature, we have seen various characters living in their own miniature versions of purgatory. While Havisham dies through literal fire which also purifies her in a metaphorical sense, Cathy dies through sickness. In both cases, death takes place only after the characters suffer and demonstrate significant signs of change. Their emotional sufferings for most of their lives can be considered as their own respective versions of purgation. Macrina, in her theological analysis, compared this process of purgation with “gold refining and a rope passing through a small hole” (para 8), which is a

metaphor for a fire that implies “the exhaustive annihilation of evil”(para 9). Similarly, for Mahon, “it is the unconscious force that not only determines the theories of original sin and damnation but also informs its capacity to regulate guilt ... using the power of insight”(337). Both these statements together, confirm the existence of purgation in the lives of Catherine Earnshaw and Miss Havisham who face purgation or intense emotional catharses while they are alive and once their purgation is successful, they die finally ridding themselves off all the qualities which had ‘corrupted’ them.

Catherine Earnshaw’s Purgation:

St. Gregory describes one theological reason for experiencing purgation as “a misuse of free will and reason” (para. 6), which means those with strong natural instincts and agencies tend to prefer their own desires over what is expected of them by others. Interestingly, Mahon illustrates the same idea rather as a conflict between an individual “and the social ego” (334). In Catherine Earnshaw’s case, for instance, her wild nature, free will and intense passion seem to encourage her temper tantrums, impulsive decisions, social ambitions, conflicted loyalties between Heathcliff and Edgar, her mean and vindictive attitude towards Nelly, Isabella, Edgar and even Heathcliff- evidences from which it can be concluded that she has her fair share of mistakes and errors, both minor and major. The first example of Cathy’s foreshadowed purgation would be her conversation with Nelly, “If I were in heaven Nelly, I should be extremely miserable,” (Bronte 97) followed by, “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” (Bronte 97).

Here, she acknowledges how her passions and whims have produced a series of her .vindictive, selfish and manipulative actions, connoting qualities that have contributed in the .making and remaking of the central antitheses of good and evil, the ideas of spiritual pollution .which pervade the novel. Her purgation slowly begins as she re-evaluates her

actions and decisions before eventually death takes over the woman, “I’ve been tormented, I’ve been haunted” (Bronte 149). While St. Gregory explains this phenomenon as the “consciousness of sinfulness” (para 3), Mahon considers it as the individual’s ultimate pang of consciousness for choosing itself over the prevalent and more influential “super-ego figures,” (339) be it a parent, a sibling, a spouse, the society or the entire system of humanity itself.

While it is true that Cathy herself is responsible for her clouded judgement, limited or inadequate points of view, a generic judgmental behaviour-which all seem to originate from years of feeding her impulsiveness and constant denial of others, it is also true that these are the common charges that every other character of the novel is more or less guilty of as well. With her lover married to her sister-in-law and a husband she doesn’t truly love, she asks for forgiveness before death, “If I’ve done wrong, I’m dying for it. I forgive you, forgive me” (Bronte 198) and also mentions before Heathcliff how he “and Edgar have broken my heart, and you have killed me” (Bronte 194). Nelly, too uses interesting choice of words to describe Catherine during her sick phase, such as “fiery Cathy, (Bronte 152) or “burning madness” (Bronte 149), words that are synonymous to fire. Even though Catherine does not die in a literal fire like Miss Havisham, her emotional anguish and her intense high fever may create the sense of burning in her own misdoings, quite similar to the idea of witnessing the purifying fire of her own purgatory. Mahon, in his paper identifies this negotiation with the self as a “purgatorial dialogue,” “a consulting room ... to study itself,” where feelings of “guilt, anger and sorrow” (339) are met with either “aggression, punishment” or “retribution and forgiveness” (340), denoting one of the final developmental stages of the self and its psyche.

Cathy passes away in the end, finally acknowledging her wrongdoings, justifying Nelly’s description of her death, “quietly as a lamb, she drew a sigh, stretched herself like a

child reviving and sinking again to sleep” (Bronte 205). It is interesting that Bronte chose the word “child” to describe a troubled character like Cathy, perhaps to initiate the idea of innocence and peace which is synonymous to the end of purgation (Heritage), the much arduous “self-study” (Mahon 340).

Havisham’s Purgation:

Miss Havisham’s confrontation with her purgatory begins from the betrayal she faces on her wedding day. The heartbreak is too extreme for her to endure which creates the ghostlike, despaired image of a woman permeating throughout the plot. We see her as a cold-hearted old spinster, plotting revenge towards the men in the novel by manipulating her adopted daughter and using her as a puppet in her game. She can easily be considered as a self-centred soul who adopts manipulation, purposefully breaks hearts, acts as a selfish mother and an unkind woman to the people around her and so much more. According to St. Gregory’s description, she seems to choose “vice over virtue” (Heritage para 4).

With no proper chance to heal her wounded heart, she dedicates her life to hate and revenge, spewing her ego with wicked habits and thoughts. The best evidence of her purgation begins from the time when Estella reveals her feelings towards Havisham, “Who taught me to be hard? Who taught me to be proud?” (Dickens 351). The conversation works as an icebreaker between the robotic “servant-master” relationship this mother and daughter share, giving Havisham a hard reality check, allowing her to reflect back on her mistakes, her “self-study,” (Mahon 340). Pip too bravely points out her wrongdoings to the people around them, “You deeply wronged Mr Matthew Pocket and his son Herbert” (Dickens 414). This whole scene presents various emotions, all targeting Miss Havisham: Pip’s grief and hopelessness, Estella’s numb resistance, and Havisham’s own feeling of realization.

The fact that she is never quite an antagonist is proven when Pip’s and Estella’s words fill her with a sense of regret. Pip states, “Miss Havisham, her hand still covering her heart,

seemed all resolved into a ghastly stare of pity and remorse”(Dickens 419). It could be that she pities the lives she spoiled, along with a sense of self-pity because her anger and brokenness had blinded her sight of the real world. Her remorse here plays a necessary role for her to seek forgiveness and redeem the innocence she has then lost, perhaps finally be able to forgive and forget her past, as well as her own mistakes. And that is exactly what happens as she gets down on her knees in front of Pip, and begs for his forgiveness, “O! what have I done!” (Dickens 457). Pip stated, “I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was ...” (Dickens 458).

This moment of Havisham agrees with Mahon’s understanding of redeeming oneself from their psychological purgation, “a reflection of living guilt and loss and mourning trying to work out its affects, not in silence, but in a dialogue with the self and the other” (342). Her redemption begins firstly by paying Mr Matthew Pocket his deserved money (Dickens 455) and later trying to make up for Pip’s trauma, “Can I only serve you Pip, by serving your friend?” (Dickens 456). VOL III depicts Miss Havisham’s purgation process very clearly in which she comes to terms with her issues, and seeks forgiveness, trying to make amends, as Pip states, “She dropped to her knees at my feet, with her hands folded raised to me.” (Dickens 457) This chapter also portrays Havisham as the victim that she is, instead of the stereotypical “antagonist” we see throughout the novel. We see a battered woman seeking sympathy from her victim, “If you knew my story, you would have some compassion for me and a better understanding of me” (Dickens 459).

As it has been mentioned already in the previous sub-section, fire plays an important role both in Christian eschatology and literary imagination especially when it involves the ideas of punishment and purification. While hell fire is for the damned, purgatory allows a purification fire through which a soul eliminates all its flaws. There are foreshadows of Havisham’s purgation through fire in the setting of Estella, Havisham and Pip speaking

beside the fireplace, “We were seated by the fire,” (Dickens 349). After Pip’s confrontation with Havisham, further suggestions on the importance of fire are made, “She gradually withdrew her eyes from me and turned them on the fire. She was roused by the collapse of some of the red coals” (Bronte 415), gradually leading up to the fire which ultimately takes her life. It would seem that finally, Miss Havisham achieves closure with her past trauma, forgiveness for her sins and flaws, and final acceptance of her fate.

Therefore, Miss Havisham and Catherine Earnshaw’s purgations are quite apparent in the novels. Though commonly dubbed as wrongdoers, both prove to be more human than they are as women, making human errors. Cathy betrayed her own heart and will by choosing wealth over love whereas Havisham forced herself to become a manipulator and a conspirator against the male gender. Despite their portrayal in the novels, it is important to look into their characters beyond the description of them presented by the narrators in the novels, meaning Nelly Dean and Pip. For both Havisham and Catherine, their systematic suppression by the society and later their very adaptation of that very society’s ideals and norms ultimately lead them towards a sense of awakening, where an “eventual purgatorial process of aggression and guilt modulation can wean itself from initial primitive harshness in which “crime” leads to dire punishment and can embrace instead a less dire, more reasoned and reasonable attitude toward psychological reality” (Mahon 343).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The element of purgation is another step to understanding the hollow lives of Victorian females, and emphasizing on the importance of feminist ideology. Without equal rights, human kind will perish because humans are not meant to live in such brutal economic and social systems, rather they are meant to live in harmony. Patriarchy was and is a toxic oppressive system on not just women, but also men. Patriarchy forces men to be in charge of everyone and everything in an economy and when one must strive to achieve the best, they lose their personal happiness in the process. Heathcliff was also a perfect victim of patriarchy in which he had to choose a life he did not wish to live only to take revenge on Catherine. And in the process of living in such a pitiless structure, women have also taken part in abusing other women, just the way Havisham uses Estella as a pawn in her deranged game of revenge. Hence, if the male gaze is responsible for creating a female's image, then the female gaze is equally responsible for the downfall of women in a society. Therefore, in such a society that brings poison into the lives of its women, it is no wonder that Victorian literature often depicted female "mad" characters. These seemingly "mad" characters are the perfect portrayal of the bleak patriarchal system which brings nothing but purgatorial inflictions along with a blatant violation of human rights and justice.

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