

Male, Female Expressions of Heathen Love: Brontë's Heathcliff and Hawthorne's Hester

Yusur Al-Madani
University of Kuwait

Though separated by no less than the Atlantic Ocean, Emily Brontë and Nathaniel Hawthorne are indeed close intellectual neighbors. None of them is likely to have heard of, or even read the other. Their expressions of the fierce impact of nature, of the unaccessible depths of human naturalness, specially the domain of heathen love, however, prove, among other things, that they could have been nurtured in one social milieu. The issue of heathen love, however, introduces a major cross-cultural element for comparison. What looks probably paradoxical in this similitude is that an authoress has portrayed a male heathen in love, while an author has done the opposite. The condition and evolution of love in two heathen characters: Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, are respectively expressions of the masculine and feminine variants of two heathen "subordinates" determined, as this study would show, by "cultural constructions" or "cultural conceptions" (terms used by Morris) of gender differences, as well as differences between two cultures: the British and the American.

The idea of gender as "culturally constructed" is a pervasive fact which has started with the conversion from heathenism to Christianity. The "myth" of creation story of Adam and Eve is blamed by feminists to have constructed and defined women's identity for centuries to come. "Women were claimed to be predominant in prehistoric times before patriarchy and male oriented religions appeared" ("The Earth Goddess"). It is, however, the "myth" of "the bible of Judaeo-Christian male-dominated religion" that has created "unhealthy" gender differences throughout history and across societies (Weiss 5, qtd. in "The Earth Goddess"). In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, women "appear only in relation to male figures, as wife or mother" (Gorsky 3). These "conceptions" and "cultural beliefs"

have rendered women variously passive, more submissive, and less expressive than men by “what is generally called ‘biological essentialism,’ that is a belief that a woman’s ‘nature’ is an inevitable consequence of her reproductive role” (Morris 1-2). In contrast, the male is usually physically stronger, intellectually more advanced, and morally better than the woman. Christianity and civilization, therefore, have institutionalized certain gender assumptions which constitute the present social order as mainly male-oriented, or to use feminist terms, mainly patriarchal and hierarchical. They have created a social order of differences or, in other words, one of “domination” and “subordination.”

In a pre-historic era, known as heathenism, such gender polarities are looked upon as complementary opposites, coexisting on equal terms. To define gender identities by opposition and difference is to negate one of the most important tenets of heathenism: oneness that lies behind dualities in nature, and man is thought to be integrated in this vision of interconnectedness (Carpenter). “The construction of gender identity on oppositional terms—to be masculine is to be non-feminine and vice versa—is [indeed] too limiting” (Morris 5). Heathenism transcends this limitation by depicting a picture of the cosmos where the polarity of “God and Goddess,” masculine and feminine, “allows for creative resolution of any dilemma through the interplay of equal and opposite principles” (Jones & Mathew 35-36, qtd. in Carpenter).

It is appropriate at this stage, however, to define how the terms heathen and “heathenish” are to be used in this study. Lexical denotations almost completely identify a heathen with a pagan. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, for example states that a heathen is a person “whose religion is neither Christian, Jewish, nor Muslim” (7:75). Similarly, *The Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* says that a heathen is “an unconverted individual of a group that do not acknowledge the God of the Bible; one who is neither a Jew, Christian, nor a Muslim; a pagan.” Moreover, a heathen is “often distinctly applied to an unenlightened or barbaric idolaters” (WEUD 655), that is “irreligion and hedonistic” pagans (WEUD 1036).

The identification of heathen and pagan is overtly stated. Accordingly, heathenism is a state and a condition of worship, on man’s part, of a man-made objects, such as idols, or concepts of gods and goddesses, or natural phenomenon such as the sun, the moon, the rain, the forest, only to mention few among others. To my understanding, there is a decisive

difference between a pagan and a heathen. The former refers, as stated in the *WEUD*, to "one of a people or community professing polytheistic religion, as the ancient Romans or Greeks; a person who is neither a Christian, a Jew or a Muslim" (1036), whereas the latter, to my understanding, denotes a person who belongs to an era prior to paganism, prior to any form of established religions. A heathen is a person who worships in nature, a person whose experience is unsympathetic for, or rather "naked of the web" of any kind of civilization and its ways of thinking (Van Ghent 10). Man's identification with nature and natural phenomenon, at this stage of human evolution, definitely precedes that in which man starts to worship objects as symbols.

Implied in the lexical definition of "a heathen", moreover, are two no less important assumptions: first that a heathen is defined with what it is not and not by what it is formed; second, that "a heathen" is explained by terms with negative connotations ("irreligious," "unconverted," "unenlightened", "barbaric"), which render "heathen" to mean "heathenish" in the sense of being godless, immoral, barbarous and, by association, satanic. These connotations, however, have given the term its current usage not only in reference to all the "primitives" and "savages" of the world who still live in tribal groups, but also to any social individual whose conduct does not comply with established laws of state and church. It is in this latter sense that Heathcliff's and Hester's expressions of heathen love, when judged by socially constructed conventions, become respectively demonic and sinfully hellish, in other words, "heathenish."

This paper, therefore, takes a measure of variance with the lexical meanings of heathenism and its acquired connotations. Essentially referring to a natural province, a "heath," the word is taken to mean a state or a condition of human life prior to any sort of conceptual religion, whether pagan or otherwise. In this sense, heathenism signifies a period of life when man could not or/and would not disassociate himself from nature, when male/female relationships are free from the culturally proposed conceptions of womanhood and manhood. Heathens, consequently, are men whose existence precedes the emergence of social formations and religious dogmas, both Christian and otherwise. They are infinitely and stubbornly free from moral or social strictures. Their moral code is the fulfillment of naturalness. In other words, they are areligious, asocial, amoral, acultural persons, whose lives possess neither traditions

nor codes of conduct except those of their own impulses and drives. They believe that both the self, which constitutes supreme reality, and experience, which is justified by its truth and force, comprise the essence of spirituality. Purport to this, religious feelings do not necessarily concern the sacred or the divine as defined by Judaeo-Christian traditions, but rather represent the sanctification of "a person's ultimate values and commitments, regardless of content" (Griffith 2, qtd. in Carpenter).

Seen from this perspective, both protagonists, Heathcliff and Hester, are indeed true heathens. Their intense experience of love and their unshakable longing for union with the other constitute their religion and ultimate code of ethics, which, in turn, confer meaning and substance to their existence. However different as male and female they may appear to be, both possess striking similarities. Not only are their names allied with heathen nature, but also their love is congenial and unpretentious.

The heath and the cliff, which together form Heathcliff's name, emphatically place him as "a dweller on the heath,"¹ a heathen in a true sense. Like the heath, which is "an uncultivated land" (WEUD 655), and the Cliff, which is the "highest steep face of a rock mass" (WEUD 277), Heathcliff is also an "unreclaimed creature, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone" (WH 90), a "vulgar young ruffian" (WH 64), who is "worse than a brute" (WH 64). Like the rocky Cliff, he is a "fierce, pitiless, wolfishman" (WH 90), rough "as a saw-edge and hard as a whinstone" (WH 37). The love of Heathcliff and Catherine, likewise, is described by Catherine as resembling "the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (WH 74).

Unlike the Lintons and the Earnshaws, Heathcliff, however, does not belong to a social home, though he, at one stage in his life, becomes master and owner of both family houses: Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. As he is "in and out of the Earnshaw family simultaneously; servant and child of the family" (Kermode 52), he is, similarly, out and betwixt the Linton family, concurrently rival lover to Edgar's wife, Catherine, and husband to Edgar's sister, Isabella. "His origins are equally betwixt and between: the gutter or royal origin imagined for him by Nelly; prince or pauper, American or Lascar, child of God or devil." He is "domestic yet savage like the dogs, bleak yet full of fire like the house" (Kermode 52). The position he occupies between these opposite states, thus summed up by Kermode, makes him indeed a true heathen. His nature, incomprehensible though as it is to the narrator

and other characters, contains these contradictory traits as polarities coexisting with and complimenting each other. They depict for us, at the end, the Heathcliff, whose name hints not “at an almost inhuman consistency” (Williams 115-116), but rather indicates a human “consistency” pertaining to another kind of reality, that of the heath.

Akin to Heathcliff, Hester Prynne belongs neither to the old world where she was born, nor to the new world where she chooses to live. She is neither attached to the Puritan community at Salem nor to either of the two men with whom her destiny is wrought: her husband Roger Chillingworth, and her “fellow-sufferer and fellow-lover” (SCL 53), Arthur Dimmersdale. She is outside and inside society, simultaneously wanderer in nature and sojourner in society. “In all her intercourse with society, however,” Hawthorne writes, “there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it [...]. She stood apart from mortal interests, yet close beside them” (SCL 64).

Even in her looks, Hester stands in contrast to the “hard-featured” (SCL 41), “autumnal,” “most pitiless” (SCL 42) matrons at the market-place. She is endowed with a “wild and picturesque peculiarity,” (SCL 64), and she “had in her nature a rich, voluptuous oriental characteristics,—a state for the gorgeously beautiful” (SCL 64). She resembles, moreover, both the Virgin Mary, “image of Divine maternity [...] of sinful motherhood, whose infant was to redeem the world,” (SCL 45), and the fallen Eve, feminine in her submissive tenderness, and masculine in her boldness and affrontness. She is also neither a widow nor a separated/divorced wife but one who lives “at the edge of marital law as she lives literally on the edge of the town in her seaside cottage” (Elbert 250).

Drawn on much the same lines as Heathcliff, therefore, Hester too is powerfully associated with the heath. Her name could be taken as a variation on “heather,” a word lexically pertains to “any of the various heaths,” specially “those of England and Scotland, having small, pinkish-purple flowers” (WEUD 655). The correlation of heath and flowers is significant, for Hester and her “badge of shame” (SCL 82), within the context of the novel, are linked with two “immortal” flowers: “the black flower of civilized society” (SCL 39), a token of cultural, ethical, and religious assumptions which Hester, in her act of love, challenges and defies, and the “wild rose-bush” (SCL 39), a token of the sympathetic, “deep heart of nature” (SCL 40), and a symbol of her elemental nature, and her primordial, heathen love. Significantly enough, the adjective describing the “rose-bush” is “wild”; hence wild natural beauty and

fertility, which are characteristics of Hester, are contrasted with the sober, dark sinfulness of civilization, symbolized in the black flower.

Hester's name, as well, is a variation on the Biblical Esther, who profaned her body to save her people from Babylon. Hester Prynne can be viewed in this context as a heathen Esther in Salem whose apparent sin is meant to shock dogmatic and patriarchal society into a realization of the vitality and the sublimity of love. In choosing their protagonists' names as Heathcliff and Hester, Brontë and Hawthorne meant to stress their characters' equivocal status as individuals who refuse to conform to any cultural, ethical or religious conceptions except those of the primary laws of their heathen natures and, therefore, they become, from the point of view of their societies, representatives of the "heathenish" other.

"Cultural constructions" of gender differences, however, is stated in the images describing the heaths to which Heathcliff and Hester belong. Heathcliff's heath and Moor are wild and untamed, reflecting his virile, masculine character and, therefore, his heedless, aggressive, and torrential expressions of love; Hester's heath is tamed with flowers, reflecting her self-effaced, deep-rooted, docile, and tacit expression of womanly love. Heathcliff's love is accompanied by a strong and, in a sense, masculine natural phenomenon, the storm and the rain, whereas Hester's love grows in the hidden corners of the self, natural but, isolated from nature. Its passive evolution is a passionate outcome of both a severely restrictive puritanic culture and of the responses of a fundamentally assertive "manly woman" (Herbert 88). This development, however, diverts from Heathcliff's forceful and no less feminine passion, distorted by cultural conceptions of class differences. The two protagonists, therefore, enact their dramas in a world whose ethical ideas are alien to them. Soon they are confronted with violent and powerful dogmatic realities, completely at odds with their idea of heathen love as a code of ethics, and therein begins the tragedy of their lives. Their responses to their world, and the evolution of their love not only are diametrically opposed but also determined by the protagonists' gender and culture.

In the context of both novels, the love of Heathcliff to Catherine and Hester to Dimmesdale is justified by its potency and legitimacy. The absoluteness of their love is most fully and superbly expressed by Catherine, who describes Heathcliff as "more myself than I am" (WH 72). Confiding in Nelly Catherine states:

“I cannot express it, but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watch and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished and he remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter changes the trees—My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure to myself—but as my own being [...].” (WH 73-74, emphasis is added)

In his furious lament over Catherine’s death, Heathcliff makes a similar affirmation: “I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!” (WH 139). Each of the lovers contains and completes the other. Without Heathcliff, Catherine describes herself as “an exile and outcast, henceforth, from what had been” her world (WH 107); without Catherine, Heathcliff states, his existence would “writhe in the torments of hell” (WH 133).

In here expressed is a paradigm of heathen love and passion, clearly mystical and spiritual in its stress on the self’s belief in the other, and in its yearning for unmitigated identification with the lover, which is the essence of heathenism. In its ingenuousness, this passion creates a world or state irrelevant to patriarchal doctrines of state and church in both cultures: the British and the American.

Similarly, Hester states that her love for Dimmesdale “has a consecration of its own. We felt it! We said so to each other!” (SCL 140). Believing this, Hester has no grounds for penance in as much as Heathcliff has a need for a minister to repent his “selfish unchristian life” (WH 262). “The scarlet letter had not done its office” (SCL 120) because Hester has done

nothing of which to repent. Her act is consecrated and beyond the province of ordinary law, "the world's law," Hawthorne states, "was no law to her mind" (SCL 119). She has lived throughout these years of ignominy "with unshaken faith in the passion which won her—in the eyes of the community—a badge of dishonor" (Terrence 123), but which, to my understanding, has won her in the eyes of nature a badge "so artistically done and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy" (SCL 43) that, if it stands for anything, it must have been no other than a token of Hester's belief in herself and in the supremacy of heathen passion. Even though she wears the scarlet letter on her breast until her death, she in no way acknowledges her act of love as an act of sin, in as much as Heathcliff considers Catherine's marriage an obstacle to their attachment. Hester, therefore, does not have "to learn," as scavan Bercovitch argues, "that her love requires more than the consecration of its own, the consecration of history and the community" (1). On the contrary, throughout her seven years of "outlaw and ignominy," (SCL 144), Hester considers her "badge of Shame" (SCL 82) and herself "the people's victim and life-long bond-slave" (SCL 161). Until her death, Hester remains "little accustomed, in her long seclusion from society, to measure her hidden ideas of right and wrong by any standards external to herself" (SCL 116). In ethics, she remains, a heathen, "for whom 'sin,' in its Judeo-Christian codification, had been a name or a convention" (Warren 29).

Heathen or otherwise, "whatever we are to call the mutual passion of Catherine and Heathcliff," and also of Hester and Dimmesdale, "it has no societal aspect and neither seeks societal sanction. [...]. They are simply one another" (Bloom, "Introduction" 6-7). Their love so profoundly baffles and confounds ethical and religious laws because it is not informed with that sense at all, it is profoundly informed with the primordial laws of human naturalness in which male/female polarities are represented as complementary opposites.

The difference, however, between Heathcliff's love and Hester's is a difference in their author's visions defined by their cultures and backgrounds. Hawthorne is saturated with religious thoughts of his age, while for Brontë the church is of no importance as if to say that the only place of worship, symbolically speaking, is the Heights, reflected in the storm, which is the prayer of nature. In Hawthorne's novel, love is against moral and canonical concepts, in Brontë's against Victorian social conceptions which consider wealth and social decorum the shaping

factors of social class structure. These differences, however, are emphasized in the descriptive details of locale at the beginning of both Novels. In Brontë's novel, "heathen" nature is reflected in the description of the Earnshaw's house, the central locale for action. The rest of the places assume their imaginative positions round or near this center. In Hawthorne's novel, the scaffold and the pillory, the central places to which the narrative recurs, are evidently at the city center, at one side of which is the prison, at the other one is the Governorate house. The "heathen" forest, the contrasting abode of natural beings, is conceivably rather far from the center as the moors are far from the city. Accordingly, Heathcliff's activities in the city take place outside the narrative, as Hester's act of love in the forest is past the point of climax before the beginning of the novel. In *Wuthering Heights*, considerable detail is given as to how Heathcliff and Catherine love. In the *Scarlet Letter*, love is only alluded to and is kept behind curtains of secrecy.

The setting of the first phase of Heathcliff's love to Catherine is definitely *Wuthering Heights*, "the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling" (WH 14), described as a "strong" building that withstands the "atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather," and also "defended with large jutting stones." It is a place exposed to the "power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs [...] and by a range of gaunt thorns" (WH 14, emphasis is added). Rod Menghan insightfully points out that the "fabric and layout of the building is described in terms of attack and defence" (23). Each detail of the Heights, in some way, corresponds to Heathcliff's state of love at this stage, one of attack and defence. Like the Heights, Heathcliff's expression of love is excessively wild like the firs and thorns, preposterously strong like the building, and rapaciously stormy like the wind, yet it is expressively defensive and righteously firm. Degraded by Hindley to the level of a servant, and made aware of his inferior social rank, Heathcliff, naturally, has no other means of expressing his love except by exerting whatever manly power he has, yet appear to be humble and submissive as would be a culturally defined servant or woman. It is in this sense that in expressing his love, Heathcliff at this stage uses the tactics of someone who is culturally constructed as a "subordinate."

In her study of "Domination and Subordination," Jean B. Miller states that "since dominants determine what is normal for culture, it is much more difficult to understand subordinates" and, consequently, "they are usually rejected as atypical" (24). Accordingly, Heathcliff is indeed

“atypical,” and his expressions of heathen love would indeed be labelled “heathenish” and demonic by the “dominant” genteel society. His violent directness and submissiveness in expressing his passion, at this stage, not only reflects the injustice of his position as a culturally defined “subordinate,” but also, his struggle against the constructions of his identity, by the opposite group, as a cultural outcast with no fortune.

Hester Prynne, on the other hand, is the heathen female variant of “a subordinate,” whose expressions of heathen love stand in opposition to the cultural constructions of her as a sexually fallen women defined by her restrictively dominant New England patriarchal and puritanic society. As a female transgressor, Hester has been sentenced to wear the scarlet letter the rest of her life. This is so because an adulteress, Tony Tanner writes, represents in her act of love, “a possible breakdown of all the mediations on which society itself depends, and demonstrates the latent impossibility of participating in the interrelated patterns that comprise its structure” (17). The female act of sexual transgression, in other words, is a social violation that demolishes socially defined gender roles as Heathcliff’s love for Catherine demolishes socially defined class structure. Hester, therefore, must be severely punished and banished out of the community as Heathcliff is to be ruthlessly barred behind the doors of the civilized genteel society.

Hester’s unprotesting acceptance of public disgrace and social humiliation at this initial stage, therefore, becomes her distinctive expression of love. This is reflected in her refusal to publicly speak the name of Dimmesdale, and in her oath, secretly vowed, not to tell the identity of her husband. This silent submissiveness, paradoxically enough, bespeak Hester’s dignity and purity of her inner self, her perservance, and her faith in her act of love. On the other hand, Heathcliff’s abandonment of the constructive flux of heathen love and, consequently, his adoption of the destructive power of his culture’s dominant social class, which characterizes the second stage in the evolution of his love, express the defiant unacceptance of a male subordinate to be defined as “atypical”.

Having acquired the “cultural capital” (Eagleton 404) of the genteel class, Heathcliff knows no other code of behaviour, thus unjustly separated from his “soul”, from his own being, except to express his love heathenishly (savagely). His degradation of Hindley, his old tormentor, his abduction of Isabella, subjecting her to all kinds of physical and verbal abuse, his offences against Hareton and the other members of the young generation

are simply the most obvious acts of justifiable aggression, reflecting the past injustice practiced against him as a subordinate. Moreover, one cannot but recall the frenzied violent statements Heathcliff and Catherine exchange. The most memorable of all, however, is Catherine's cry at her deathbed, "I shouldn't care what you suffered. I care nothing for your suffering. Why shouldn't you suffer? I do!" (WH 133). Even Heathcliff at her death screams with "frightful vehemence," "may she wake up in torment," and "Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living!" (WH 139). Though violent in nature, this heathenish (elementally savage) expression of love, however, indicates that to the end of his life Heathcliff has been true to his nature as heathen. It is a natural act, an expression of natural impulses, elementally and primordially demonic as they are in nature. Heathcliff's dignity, his faith in his love, and his vital energy are truly comparable to Hester's self-integrity, autonomy, and radical energy which, at this stage in Hester's development, express themselves in her art.

In Hester, we have the impulse of a female "subordinate" trying to struggle free from social confinement through a redefinition of what has already been defined by her patriarchal society. As a female in love, Hester is stigmatized as an adulteress, and her act of love as sin, as heathenish (dark) in nature. It is through art, however, that Hester succeeds to deconstruct in order to reconstruct the distorted meanings of herself as a fallen woman, of the scarlet letter as a token of shame, and of pearl as a bastard child. This imposed distortion is indeed symbolically expressed in the "gigantic" but slant reflection of herself, her badge, and her child in the convex mirror at the Governor's house (SCL 79).

Art, therefore, becomes Hester's language, her "disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting" (Miller 24), by which she reveals her passionate and radical energy, which the community ironically believe to have successfully curbed and controlled. Like all female artists, Hester tries to battle "against her (male) precursor's reading of the world" and "his reading of" her as a female (Gilbert and Gubar 49). In order to express themselves, Gilbert and Gubar state, "women writers have long used a wide range of tactics to obscure but not to obliterate their most subversive impulses" (74). One of these tactics is to express through "evasion and concealment" (75). This is exactly what Hester achieves through art. As an artist, she powerfully presents in public an "acceptable façade" (Gilbert and Gubar 74), her embroidery, that interestingly indeed expresses her private, subversive heathen impulses. Needlework to

“Hester Prynne might have been a mode of expressing, and therefore soothing, the passion of her life” (SCL 64). It is “so artistically done and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy” (SCL 43) that it mirrors Hester’s fertile, “impulsive and passionate nature.”

Through art, Hester rewardingly redefines herself, her relation to Dimmesdale, to Chillingworth, and to her community. “In this manner, Hester,” we are told, “came to have a part to perform in the world” (SCL 64), not as a fallen woman, nor as a goddess of charity and human love, but rather as a woman who has rights for self-integrity and self-expression. In her art, she tactically expresses her disapproval to be labelled ethically “good” only because she conforms, and “bad” only because she defies the norm. She wants to be expressed independently of social and ethical paradigms and, therefore, be redefined according to her nature as a true heathen.

“One of the most persistent plot patterns” in literature, Morris claims, “is that suffering and death are the inevitable fate of sexually transgressive heroines [...]. Once their sexual innocence is lost, their path leads inevitably towards death” (31). Conforming with this plot pattern, suffering and death should, therefore, constitute the last phase in Hester’s expression of heathen love. Interestingly indeed, Hester, a “sexually transgressive heroine,” does not die, neither does Heathcliff, until old age. For Heathcliff, however there is still regeneration to be done; for Hester there is none except mute rebellion in taking up a frustrating intellectual quest.

Regeneration for Heathcliff comes not in realizing that he has lived an “unchristian life” and therefore, must repent for his “ghoulish” acts, as Nelly narrates. His road to salvation is rather to unite with the spirit of Catherine, his “ministering angel” (WH 20), not on earth, but in the grave on top of the hill in the middle of the moors. It is, however, only days before his death that Heathcliff reaches tranquility, dreaming that he ““was sleeping the last sleep, by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheeks frozen against her”” and, therefore, ““dissolving with her, and being more happy still!”” (WH 229, emphasis is added).

At this moment of ecstatic reunion with Catherine’s spirit and body in the grave, Heathcliff realizes that his apocalyptic expression of heathen love would be to die out of his material body, ““this shattered prison”” (WH 134), as Catherine has achieved by willing her death. Her determination to die, therefore, neither expresses a female “sentimentally weak”

(Gorsky 47) nor one selfishly loving and immature (Williams 119). In seeking union with Heathcliff in death, she indeed tactically defies the cultural vision of women as submissive, as “subordinates,” as Hester does in her needlework, and Heathcliff, their male variant, in his overt challenge of the social laws of love, marriage, and death. In dying, as a female subordinate, she is indeed silenced. Nevertheless, this silence of death, like Hester’s silent expression of herself in art, becomes a strong assertion of a defiant masculine expression of heathen love, as daring indeed as Heathcliff’s torrential feminine passion.

Unlike Heathcliff, there is no regeneration for Hester with the passage of time. There is, however, only a reaffirmation of the sublimity of love. During the past seven years, Hester shows an unshakable belief in her act of love. She is strongly convinced that she has indeed lost her sexual innocence not by committing an illegitimate act of love but rather by marrying out of love, as Catherine comparably does in marrying Edgar. In one of her daring intellectual ramblings, Hester bitterly states:

Let men tremble to win the hand of woman, unless they win along with it the utmost passion of her heart. Else it may be their miserable fortune, as it was Roger Chillingworth’s, when some mightier touch than their own may have awakened sensibilities [...]. (SCL 127)

Hester elemental “sensibilities” are indeed awakened to this call of true heathen love, to the misfortune, however, of Roger Chillingworth, that old and “misshapen” scholar, who has indeed betrayed Hester’s innocent youth. Hester boldly considers her marriage to be undeniable adultery which ironically has the consecration of law and church. This is not self-recognition as much as it is the awakening of a female “subordinate” to a “consideration” which has been unjustly repressed for a long time (SCL 139). Not only does she become “fully sensible of the deep injury for which she was responsible to this unhappy man [Dimmesdale]” (SCL 138), but also she realizes “that there lay a responsibility upon her, in reference to the clergyman” (SCL 116), and she has been betraying it by pledging herself to the counsel of her husband (SCL 123). The “whole seven years of outlaw, and ignominy,” therefore, “had been little other than a preparation for this very hour” (SCL 144).

In her study of *The Scarlet Letter*, Jordan states that the “prerequisite to rebirth is the reawakening of the instinctual precivilized nature in man” (76). If we read “precivilized” here to mean “heathen,” Hester indeed is a regenerated woman since her first encounter with Dimmesdale, presumably in the forest. This “original encounter” with the minister has been, as Nina Baym claims, “an act of neither deliberate nor conscious social rebellion.” It has been “an expression of natural human impulses in a pure moment of passion” (“The Major Phase” 136, 131). Hester’s second encounter with the minister, is indeed a deliberate and premeditated act to be consecrated by the “unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless” forest (SCL 144).

All descriptive details of the scene conclusively point to a second sexual encounter between Hester and the minister in the forest.² We are told that the two lovers sit on the mossy ground under a “solemn old tree” which “groaned dolefully to another, as if telling the sad story of the pair that sat beneath it, or constrained to forebode evil to come” (SCL 140, emphasis is added). The brook is still telling “its unintelligible secret of some very mournful mystery that had happened,” presumably their past love act, “or making a prophetic lamentation about something that was yet to happen—within the verge of the dismal forest,” apparently their present encounter (SCL 135, emphasis is added). We are told as well that this meeting has left the two lovers physically and spiritually invigorated, “there played around” Hester’s mouth “and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood.” (SCL 145). Free from the bonds of his canonical robe, the minister likewise is filled with “a glow of strange enjoyment” (SCL 144), a feeling of fulfillment, of an “unaccustomed physical energy” (SCL 154). With the union of these two lovers, “all at once, as with a sudden smile of heaven, forth, burst the sunshine,” indicating “the sympathy of Nature—that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law” (SCL 145-46). “love, whether newly born, or aroused from the deathlike slumber, must always create a sunshine” (SCL 146) The failure of dominant and repressive human law to bring a subordinate female under control is indeed dramatically presented in the forest scene.

In analyzing plot structure in literary texts, Morris states that “central female characters are invariably structured in a passive relation to events. Things happen to the heroine,” whereas if the main character is a male, “the plot is often structured as a quest which traces the hero’s active engagement with the world” (32). As a male character, Heathcliff indeed

structures his union with Catherine. He is allowed, in spite of being a subordinate and on the account of his gender, to transgress and override social and religious constrictions even to the point of bribing the sexton to the manner of his burial. He is certain of achieving in death what the civilized "dominant" genteel society has denied him. For such a consummation of heathen love, there is certainly no need for a minister to consecrate it. Heathcliff's heathen love, finally finds immortal self-affirmation and self-expression by returning to its primordial state in nature through death. In dying Heathcliff truly achieves his heaven. (WH 263).

Defeated by the only person she trusts and loves, for Hester, as a female subordinate, there is only "noble resignation" through an acceptance of social "restrictions and disappointments with stoicism" (Morris 31). This is mainly emphasized in resuming the scarlet letter after returning to Boston. Though her feminist contemplations on the relationship between man and woman "tended" to bring her, as Nina Baym claims, "immediately to the idea of apocalypse—the need for a new Revelation" ("Hawthorne's women" 272), she nevertheless frustratingly believes that neither is her time ripe enough for this revelation, nor is she fit, with her ignominy and shame, for this divine mission (SCL 185). She forgets, however, that in her life, which has been in "no sense selfish, nor lived in any measure for her own profit and enjoyment" (SCL 185), she has in truth been the "destined prophetess" (SCL 185) of heathen love. When she dies, we are told, her grave "was delved" near an "old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle" (SCL 186 emphasis is added). Hester's heathen love, which starts with an unshameful expression of self-assertiveness and self-articulation, is finally subverted and muted forever by a restrictively male-dominated culture.

Both Brontë and Hawthorne, though belong to two different cultures, seem to advocate that differences, whether based on class or gender, intersect and mutually determine the reality of their protagonists' lives. Moreover, in portraying male/female variants of the heathen, both writers expose inequality into question and make inherent conflict a public one. Brought up by her unconventional Victorian clergyman father to scorn conventionality, Brontë, however, bridges differences in her novel. The history of both Hawthorne's family and district, on the other hand, defines his disposition with sin and the wages of sin, especially when it involves a woman and a clergyman. To Hawthorne, therefore, bridging differences is

impossible and conflict is inevitable. In studying the two novels from this cross-cultural perspective, however, one cannot but notice more forcefully how any attempt at conceptualizing gender and class differences regardless of locale, results in the creation of the "other" as "atypical".

Notes

¹In tracing the development of the use of the word heathen, Anshütz and Hunt state that literally the word heathen means a "dweller on the heath." It refers to those rural people, who during the era of conversion, used to practice Christianity under threat but return "to their wild pagan ways as soon as missionaries were out of sight. Thus, the term heathen took on the meaning of 'one who practices the old pre-Christian, religion.'" Call us Heathens." *Pagan Dawn* (Samhain, issue 1977). 22 December 1999 <<http://www.anglo-saxon.demon.co.uk/Skvala/Heathen.htm>>.

¹In her feminist study of *The Scarlet Letter*, Shari Benstock refers to the forest scene as a sexual encounter between the two lovers. "The Scarlet Letter (a) dorée, or the Female body Embroidered," rept. in *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin, 1991), 289.

Works Cited

- Anshütz, Arlea and Steven Hunt. "Call us Heathens!" *Pagan Dawn* (Samhain issue 1977). 22 December 1999 <<http://www.anglo-saxon.demon.co.uk/Skvala/Heathen.html>>
- Baym, Nina. (1850). "[The Major Phase I: *The Scarlet Letter*]." Bloom 132- 150.
- _____. (1971). Hawthorne's Women: The Tyranny of Social Myths." *Centennial Review* 15: 250-272.
- Benstock, Shari. (1991). "The Scarlet Letter (a) dorée, or the Female Body Embroidered." Ed. Ross Murfin 288-303.
- Bercovitch, Scavan. (1988). "Hawthorne's A-Morality of Compromise." *Representative* 24: 1-27.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. (1987). *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers,
- Brontë, Emily. (1972). *Wuthering Heights*. Ed. William N. Sale, Jr. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. References to the novel are to this edition and are parenthetically included in the text after the abbreviation WH.

- Carpenter, Dennis D. (1999). "Spiritual Contours of the Contemporary Pagan World View."
<<http://www.circlesanctuary.org/aboutpagar/ContemPagan.html>>.
- Eagleton, Terry (1992). "Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of *Wuthering Heights*." Peterson (ed).
- "The Earth Goddess (1999). The Lure of Paganism, Part 2." *Critical Issues Commentary* 33 (March/April 1996).
<<http://www.twincityfellowship.com/cic/articles/issues33.htm>>.
- Elbert, Monika. (1989). "Hester on the Scaffold, Dimmesdale in the Closet: Hawthorne's Seven-Year Itch." *Essays in Literature* 16.2: 234-255.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. (1984). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 1979. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Gorsky, Susan Rubinow. (1992). *Femininity to Feminism*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. (1978). *The Scarlet Letter*. Ed. Scully Bradley and etal. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company. References are parenthetically included in the text after the abbreviation SCL.
- "Heathen." (1991). Def. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Vol. VII.
- "Heathen." (1986). Def. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. Delux Edition. References are parenthetically included in the text after the abbreviations WEUD.
- Jacobs, N. M. (1986). "Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 16.3: 204-219.
- Jordan, Gretchen Graf. (1981). "Adultery and its Fruit in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Power of Glory*: The Relation of Meaning to Form." *The Yale Review* 71.1: 72-87.
- Kermode, Frank. "A Modern Way in the Classics." Bloom 47-60.
- Kesterson, David B., ed. (1988). *Critical Essays on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co.
- Martin, Terence. "Dimmesdale's Ultimate Sermon." Kesterson 121-129.
- Mengham, Rod. (1989). *Wuthering Heights*. London: Penguin Books.
- Miller, Jean Baker. (1992). "Domination and Subordination." *Race, Class, & Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: St. Martin's Press, 20-26.

- Morris, Pam. (1993). *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Murfin, Ross, ed. (1991). *The Scarlet Letter*. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. Boston: Bedford Book of St. Martin.
- Peterson, Linda H., ed. (1992). *Wuthering Heights*. By Emily Brontë: Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press.
- Sale, M. Jr. and Richard J. Dunn, eds. (1990). *Wuthering Heights*. By Emily Brontë. 3rd ed. New York W.W. Norton and Company.
- Tanner, Tonny. (1979) *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP.
- Van Ghent, , Dorothy. "On *Wuthering Heights*." Bloom 9-25.
- Walter, Herbert T. Jr. (1988). "Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*: Interactive Self-hood and the Cultural Construction of Gender." *PMLA* 10-3: 285-297
- Warren, Austin. (1965). "*The Scarlet Letter*: A Literary Exercise in Moral Theology." *The Southern Review* 1:1 22-45.