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Soul-Making: Nineteenth Century Spirituality, Self-Development, and Identity in Keats, Brontë, and Wilde

by

Andie Marks

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_____

Dr. Matthew VanWinkle,
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_____

Dr. Susan Goslee,
Committee Member

_____

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Thesis Abstract – Idaho State University (2022)

Currently in the field of nineteenth century British literature there are calls to further examine spiritual beliefs of the period, having recently determined that the rising secularization of the era did not in fact lead to a loss of religion but opened an active reevaluation of faith. This thesis compares John Keats, Emily Brontë, and Oscar Wilde's literary proposals and evaluations of spirituality that have a focus on literature as a means for self-development of identity. Connected by themes of the soul and suffering, I argue that these three authors value literature for its ability to provide transformative insights parallel to religion, but through an individualistic approach escaping the potentially limiting nature of orthodoxy and organized beliefs' boundaries. For them, poetry and fiction not only offer the agency to consider spirituality more broadly and individually, but even have the ability to create experiences for author and reader that develop identity.

Key Words: nineteenth century, John Keats, Emily Brontë, Oscar Wilde, religion, spirituality, identity, soul, aestheticism, art, literature

Introduction

The nineteenth century broadly has been determined by scholars to be a period of gradual secularization and reconsiderations of religion. More recent ongoing discussions in the field investigate the state of religious practices and spiritual beliefs in the period, and study how these affect or appear in nineteenth century British literature. A recurring note in these recent scholarly discussions is that despite a long-standing perception of a growing decline of spirituality due to the period losing its traditional reliance upon religion, there was instead an appreciable shift to more individual, as opposed to organized, approaches to faith. There was also the arrival of widespread new ideas such as Darwinism or political ideologies like Marxism, which contributed to the impression that large, organized thoughts like these were potentially opposing interests to that of religion and thus contributing to a growing societal push towards secularity. Scholars often wryly note how in many ways the kinds of discussions taking hold in the nineteenth century regarding these various large intellectual and belief holding structures, are very much the same as ongoing conversations in our contemporary culture. Colin Jager aptly states that "Secularization itself remains, within literary study, an analytically fuzzy category that usually tells us as much about the self-understanding of modern-day interpreters as it does about the historical period under consideration" (x). Ultimately, despite arguments that rising secularism of the period led to an effective wrestling with and putting aside of organized religion, the current trend in the field suggests strongly that changing into a more secular culture did not mean a disappearance or devaluing of religion. Research points to instances of more resurgence in faiths of longstanding tradition like Catholicism, along with continuing Protestant reevaluations of faith, and a strongly growing interest in individualistic approaches to spirituality outside of doctrinal boundaries. Likewise, the period saw examinations of spiritual practices and faiths

outside of Western thought and culture which influenced religious ideas, as well as literature. Ultimately, Sebastian Lecourt writes in *Cultivating Belief*, "Secularity is a discourse about religion, not its lack" (1).

Lecourt describes the differences in how modern scholars write about secularization, suggesting as Charles LaPorte describes in his review of Lecourt's book, that "the inquiry has gone from being 'what happened to religion' to being 'what exactly counts as religion?" (LaPorte para. 1). LaPorte continues, "In his lucid and compelling monograph, Lecourt shows how Victorian studies will profit by a clearer understanding of modern belief" (LaPorte para. 2). In a jointly written article, LaPorte and Lecourt explain that:

> The question is not really whether literature or socialism or science can legitimately be called religions, but rather how our understanding of religion has changed in a way that lets us imagine literature or socialism effectively doing its work. For instance, when Arnold suggests, in his 'Preface to *The Hundred Greatest Men*' (1879), that the Bard has taken on a kind of religious significance, he clearly does not mean that William Shakespeare offers a set of rites and practices that honor the gods (as per the Latin *religio*). Instead, he means that Shakespeare offers the individual reader a way to make sense of experience that more truly deserves the name of religion than any list of rites or dogmas. (155)

In this vein of modern scholarly questioning of what counted as religion in the nineteenth century, we can see thinkers and authors of the period also reconsidering what religion and literature mean. For if practices and beliefs unrelated to worshipping a deity can have comparable significance in practice, then literature can be a mode of such valuable experience for an individual. David Ward also examines the ideas of Matthew Arnold, explaining that

"perhaps the central idea of Arnold's voluminous religious writings," is that "the essence of Christianity is experience, not doctrine" (113). Ward asserts that for Arnold, "Scripture is to be read … not as a register of theoretical statements about the Godhead – a textbook divulging a complex theology and metaphysics – but as lofty poetry, earnest but imprecise attempts by Jews in ancient and later days to come to terms with 'that vast *not ourselves* which transcends us" (113). Thus, in the nineteenth century, as cultural perceptions of faith changed, authors like Arnold not only took part in this religious conversation, but viewed literature as being capable of containing powerful, transformative, or transcendent ideas. Literature, as Arnold explicitly suggests with scripture, is a means for humanity to work out as close an understanding as possible of the unknowable or metaphysical. It provides opportunities for discovery and even self-development. In literary circles of the nineteenth century, the very ideas and themes artfully wrought and delivered in literature was a kind of spirituality in this alternative sense that could have a powerful effect on those that participated in it.

This valuing of literature as a means for creating a potentially transformative spiritual impact coexisted with the later nineteenth century's aestheticism movement. Aestheticism is known for its intense valuing of beauty for its own sake, often viewed as incompatible with morals, and typically incongruent with conventional ideas surrounding faith. In Stephen Cheeke's *Transfiguration*, he considers aestheticism alongside Christianity. Cheeke explains that one way to view aestheticism's relationship to Christian religion is as "a form of Christian un-recognition, a failure to know Christ that is also a willed refusal or rejection" which he says is certainly how Ruskin viewed aesthetes of the period (218). However, Cheeke follows that willed refusal or rejection still "depend upon the reality of the Christian *logos*", and asserts "Aestheticism, by contrast, emerges at the moment when it becomes possible to inhabit the forms

of Christianity, even to 'identify' with its faith (to use Rossetti's word), while no longer experiencing Christ at all" (218). Yet, he continues, "the literature and art that enter this space seek to claim it as one in which occurs the miraculous transvaluation of everyday life, and so this 'new' space is conceived of as being related to the 'old', which it is constrained to recall" (218-219). Important to my assertions of the period's broad authorial valuing of literature for its transformative powers and contemplative qualities, Cheeke examines aestheticism and its use of, or crossovers with Christianity, building off analysis here on Walter Pater's "The Child in the House":

> Living life in this way, in which the supernatural element of Christianity is taken as a narcotic to relieve and transform the ordinariness of existence, may, as Pater knew, represent an immature phase of sensibility, but the mode of recognizing the 'celestial counterpart' to every circumstance and event of life, is also a serious claim for an aestheticism that refuses the terms of demoralization. What is absurd and self-parodic about aestheticism is also what is most serious and important: its surrogate and belated relationship with religion. (219)

As proponents of aestheticism valued art for its own powerful and evocative qualities without being caught up in the relative morality of a given piece, it is perhaps not surprising that its evaluations of Christianity might be unconventional. But, aestheticism uses Christianity to experience a transformative relief from the world, just as traditional believers might. Cheeke argues though, that "This is not, however, a relationship with the ethical core of religion in the Arnoldian sense, at least not primarily; rather, it is with its supernatural, fetishistic dimension, its 'magical' element. Once that power of recognition has been claimed for aesthetics, then it is presented as a great ethical good in itself, both for those who possess it and for the objects of its

attention" (219). Thus, in this thesis I push this idea a bit further and suggest that aestheticism's dwelling on aspects of religion provides a potentially more moral and humanistic effect than is perhaps typically ascribed to the movement. Aestheticism might be an aid in helping people achieve experiences and knowledge gained or sought from spirituality or religion in the nineteenth century.

Akin to current scholarly calls for examinations of approaches to faith in British nineteenth century literature, there is a growing pushback against a perceived trend of ignoring or failing to read religious impulses or beliefs, as analyzing spirituality opens more opportunity for interpretations. Micael Clarke argues that there is a need for more religious literary criticism. Clarke looks at the more recent scholarly "tendency to read Emily Brontë in ways that fail to see religious belief" and asserts that this is "characteristic of a broader shift in academic discourse" (195). Clarke explains that the long-time association with the nineteenth century as a period of secularization stems from the Victorians' own changing perceptions and active engagement with questioning faith and culture. This is not, to Clarke, a lack of faith but rather a multiplicity of forms of belief systems and options, remarking that "English literature of the long nineteenth century, a literature that is deeply engaged in religious questions, is read in ways that overlook or misinterpret this important aspect of its concerns" (196). Clarke writes that this proposal to develop modern methods of discussing religion in literature:

> is not to deplore the loss of older ways of knowing, in which religion was central, but to suggest that we account for that older world view in a way that is not naïve, that does justice to the ways in which religion is inscribed in Victorian literature, and that accounts for the debate between sacred and secular in Victorian as well as contemporary epistemology. (196)

Clarke acknowledges the various reasons why religious criticism has been left out as understandable and even commendable for respecting "the privacy and inviolability of religious belief" and even avoiding the potential "degradation of the sacred" by opening it up to "the harsh scrutiny of academic discourse" (197). Ultimately, however, ignoring religious impulses or belief in literature is leaving a gap in "our collective intellectual life" because "It should not be forgotten, however, that religion has been very often either the source, or a site for parallel development" of the very qualities that are sometimes praised as having grown out of secularism (Clarke 197-198). Stephen Prickett also writes on the absence of religion in many scholarly studies of the nineteenth century and relays a remarkable historical dip and later resurgence of religion in the Romantic period that he sees as being overlooked and even at risk of being lost to history. Prickett warns:

> Not merely are we in real danger of writing out of history the truly astonishing revival of religion in the Romantic period – relegating it, if at all, to a subsection of the humanities labelled 'religious history,' of interest only to a few scholars of religious studies – but, even more important, in doing so we miss the extraordinary corresponding changes occurring in literature at the same period. Once we begin to see the two phenomena as being interconnected, my earlier suggestion that the history of 19th-century literature might be better seen as the flowering of a new religious consciousness – and, certainly, the multiple and very varied reactions to that efflorescence – was a perfectly serious one. (322)

There is a growing argument to carefully evaluate and consider the religious and spiritual beliefs, questionings, and experimentation in literary studies of the nineteenth century. In a period of secularizing, the cultural shift allowed for a rich and widespread evaluation of faith and

development of spiritual approaches outside of organized religion. Within this context, literary figures utilized writing as a form capable of interacting with the discussions of faith surrounding them, and I argue writing poetry and fiction even as an art to achieve important discoveries and personal growth in their own right.

This thesis compares the theories and aims of three authors by analyzing Keats' vale of Soul-making in an 1819 letter alongside a selection of his odes from the 1820 volume of poetry, Brontë's "The Philosopher" and "No Coward Soul", and Wilde's *De Profundis* and "The Fisherman and His Soul", arguing that together they reveal a spiritual artistic impulse to shape and understand identity and even aspirations of extending this process onto their readers. In a period where religion was being actively evaluated alongside coexisting secular influences, new ideas and thoughtful considerations of spirituality are to be found in the literature. I argue that John Keats, Emily Brontë, and Oscar Wilde utilize literature and writing as a mode to work through their own proposals of spirituality and communicate expanding thoughts on spirituality to others. Akin to Arnold's and aestheticism's musings on literature and art possessing abilities to evoke parallel experiences to religion, I propose that these three authors put forth poetry and fiction as a way to present their own take on spirituality and transformative insights developed through writing and to be gained for others through the act of reading. I aim to demonstrate how Keats, Brontë, and Wilde find commonalities in their literary explorations of spirituality through themes of suffering and the development of the soul. This thesis argues that viewed together they reveal a continuing spiritual artistic impulse to shape and understand identity through the vehicle of literature and the imagination.

The three authors are writing from the Romantic period through the late Victorian, which allows for an examination of the trajectory of these ideas and aims. John Keats provides a solid

starting point for this paper because his work can be seen as anticipating the later movement of aestheticism, while also providing strong evidence of high aspirations for the role of literature. Keats pens a spiritual world view that justifies suffering and values poetry for its imaginative capacity for soul-making. Emily Brontë champions a faith discovered through a personal evaluation of the soul rather than by ascribing to one outside religious structure alone. Brontë, while situated more in the Victorian era, still has Romantic impulses in her works. She not only provides a useful middle placement in a chronological sense, but more importantly, although relaying connections to the other selected authors, she offers a useful balance to the potentially more related ideas of Keats and Wilde. Oscar Wilde is widely known for being a proponent of aestheticism and its amorality, but his works offer a fascinating and distinctly original evaluation of Christ and art. Despite the uniqueness of his spiritual explorations and declarations, they reveal much overlap with the ideas of Keats, particularly, but Brontë as well. Thus, my examination of Wilde presents a helpful viewing of the development of these literary spiritual aspirations.

These three authors operate in individualized senses of spirituality, and though often drawing from organized religions, provide recognizable shifts away from them. They present their spiritual musings within literature that dwell upon experiences, particularly suffering, to enact aspirations of self-development. This valuing of individuality in each author's theories links to this historical moment, continuing to uphold the impact of spirituality, but offering readers a chance to have a personal development outside of strict or regulated doctrine. I argue that they viewed organized religion as handing out a set identity from the pulpit, while individual spirituality might offer a broader vantage point or reach, and ability to create a powerfully unique identity, or soul.

Chapter One: Poet-Physician and Priest to Psyche: Keats's Soul-Making

John Keats is one of many to contemplate the meaning of a world full of suffering and sorrow. In a long letter to George and Georgiana Keats dating from February 14th to May 3rd, 1819, Keats reflects on the reason for the existence of suffering and pens a new theory: a form of spirituality akin to Christian theology and in his eyes "a grander system of salvation than the chryst<e>ain religion" (102). This proposal of "a system of Spirit-creation" which Keats names the "The vale of Soul-making" is a theory that defines the world with its many experiences, particularly the sharper, painful ones, as necessary to building identity or one's soul. In this process, suffering gains a significance beyond the perhaps more typical wisdoms of being something inevitable and to be endured. Instead, suffering is integral to growing one's identity. This idea of soul-making carries over to Keats's poetry, both thematically and in a higher sense as well. Keats refers throughout his letters to his belief in the high means or aims of poetry and I argue that viewing his poetry alongside this "Vale of Soul-making" letter, Keats strives to build identity as a poet, but also to provide artistic soul-making experiences for a reader through his poetry. I argue that Keats develops his theological framework into his artistic visions as well. As a poet-physician, the poet aims to grow in identity and use his artistic capabilities to inhabit any role to utilize poetry as an experience for the reader to also soul-make through imaginative escape or experience. This furthers the common scholarly sense of Keats as a poet-physician, while leaving room for alternative ideas placing Keats along a more aesthetic and less morally intentional poetic path.

Keats's Soul-making theory stems from his understanding that the world is full of unavoidable troubles and that "the world[l]y elements will prey upon [man's] nature" (101). He continues on that "The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious

is ‘a vale of tears’ from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven – What a little circumscribe[d] straightened notion! Call the world if you Please ‘The vale of Soul-making’ Then you will find out the use of the world” (101-102). The world with its many experiences and turmoil is precisely what is needed for making one’s soul. In Soul-making, Keats claims that the soul is different from an Intelligence. An Intelligence is a “[spark] of the divinity” but intelligences “are not Souls … till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. I[n]telligences are atoms of perception – they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God” (102). The process for an intelligence, or spark of the divinity, to take shape into a soul with an individual and unique identity necessitates experiences. Keats argues that growing through suffering is particularly effective. This occurs through the world with its unavoidable and varied experiences, pleasant or arduous. The vast differences in people’s experiences then are what leads to the unique individuality of each person. How one responds to struggle or sorrow is also key to creating identity rather than risking halting the progress of one’s soul.

Scholarly discussions place Keats on two opposing lines of ascribed poetic intention or effects: Keats as striving for status as a poet-physician and Keats as a poet anticipating the aesthetic movement later in the century. These differing tracks can be viewed through a perspective of relative moral purpose, the former having strongly moral aims with a desire to heal and soothe through poetry, while the latter is often best associated with the likes of Oscar Wilde and the concept of “art for art’s sake” rather than any other ethical aims. I suggest, however, that these two seemingly disparate potential descriptions of Keats’s work perhaps don’t have to be so separated or impossible to mix after all. Forest Pyle argues for the existence of a “radical aestheticism” in the works of Keats and Shelley that moves beyond an “autonomous

domain of pure sensuous perception" (431). Thus, though Pyle suggests that "we may follow those Victorian aesthetes who in one form or another attribute the birth of aestheticism to the poems of Keats," Keats's aestheticism counters the typical beliefs of aesthetic works. Pyle explains:

> At certain decisive moments throughout the brief poetic careers of Shelley as well as Keats we encounter a radical aestheticism, one that undoes the claims made in the name of the aesthetic – as redemptive, restorative, liberating, compensatory, humanizing, healing – claims which are not only an irreducible aspect of the legacy of romanticism but are often spelled out in their most compelling forms by the poets themselves. Indeed, each of these poets resists the radical aestheticism he encounters in and through his poetry, Shelley by recourse to the twin projects of political liberation and utopian poetics, Keats by way of a tortured commitment to a humanizing, ethical dimension of poetry. (432)

Thus, though aestheticism appears in Keats's works, Pyle is suggesting that this doesn't eliminate the humanistic and healing nature of his writings but actually supports it, as he resists full release into artistic filling of the senses to cling to an ethical capability of poetry.

On the poet-physician side of Keatsian scholarly debate, Brittany Pladek asserts that similar to the Romantic era medical practice of withholding the truth of fatal illnesses from patients in an attempt to reduce fear and therefore suffering or worsening conditions, Keats, who had medical training himself, initially hoped to become a sort of poet-physician and alleviate suffering through poetry (401-402). Pladek suggests that just as doctors of the period debated the ethics of alleviating suffering vs. remaining committed to the truth, "Keats the poet debated whether poetry could provide relief for readers even while acknowledging, as he had once

quipped, that 'Sorrow is Wisdom'" (403). Pladek ultimately argues that Keats abandons the ideal of poet-physician, healing and soothing, to move instead into transmitting suffering in poems as he develops his soul-making concept and thus comes to the revelation that suffering is central to building identity. Therefore, suffering can't be avoided for it shapes, expands knowledge, and creates empathy. While Pladek suggests that Keats drops his aims of healing readers by becoming a poet-physician, to instead transmit suffering for its painful, but necessary benefits, I add that this empathetic sharing of soul-making is his addition to the religious questioning of the time. Soul-making offers a route that is parallel to various religious and spiritual paths available, but one that is accomplished through a distinctly personal and individual means.

As soul-making's varied experiences help to create empathy, another of Keats's artistic theories relates to the poet's need for empathetic and creative understanding of others. Keats conceived of the concept of Negative Capability in which the poet has loose, morphing, flexible identity and therefore can take on limitless perspectives or portray any number of experiences through poetry. William A. Ulmer explains, "As a poet, [Keats] suspended personal identity through a self-othering power of empathy that extended into dispossession" (169). Negative Capability for Keats was an ability to dive into experiencing uncertainties, without necessarily carrying the concern of seeking truth, rather the experience itself was true. This "camelion poet's" ability to momentarily lose self-identity within outside identities and Negative Capability's seeming lack of concern for demanding concrete explanation from experiences might push Keats into the less moralistic and more aesthetic camp, as many scholars have argued. Ulmer, however, suggests that this morphing of identity is founded on a deeply felt sense of empathy. I argue that this empathetic ability of the poet to imagine himself into anyone else's position, Keats's humanistic aims, and his theory of soul-making heavily grounded in the

necessity of experience point to the poet's use of Negative Capability and chameleon identity as a way to not only continually add to his soul-making experiences through artistic disappearance into others, but also to provide these endless experiences to readers through writing poetry. Thus, the poet-physician adjusts from earlier desires to alleviate and soothe suffering to transmitting it along with countless other possible experiences or identities through poetic rendering to aid in artistic soul-making for all who touch his poetry. Rather than relinquishing the high aspirations of utilizing poetry for comforting humanistic effects as a poet-physician, Keats provides poetry as an artistic path for developing spiritual transformation, unique identity building, and even the reassurance sought from other systems of faith by justifying the experiences to be lived through on earth. By presenting literature as an art capable of such meaning and depth of personal experiences in interacting with it, Keats becomes a figure who arguably helps to lay the groundwork for the later aestheticism movement, just as Pyle notes, but I argue particularly for aesthetic considerations of spiritual effects from art. This use of aestheticism relates to that which Stephen Cheeke considers with regards to Pater – an aestheticism that uses Christianity for its own purposes, but with at times surprisingly comparable effects. I claim that Keats's use of the aesthetic in his poet-physician spiritual aims, develops and transforms into the kind of artistic spirituality to be found in the works of Oscar Wilde.

Identity is incredibly important to Keats and something to be continually built and improved through suffering and experience. Ulmer notes that in his poems, Keats points to the loss of identity as traumatic (174) which not only supports the importance of building identity, but suggests that losing hard-won identity would be tragic. In this case, the loss of identity constituting Negative Capability could be argued to be painful, but a sacrifice that the poet makes which ultimately grows his identity through the momentary suffering loss of self. Identity

is also helped through the transcendent experience of vicariously becoming something or someone else before returning to his own self. Magdalena Ostas considers Keats's voice in his poetry, picking up on his assertions that "the poetical character has 'no identity'" (335) and ultimately arguing that Keats's voice is "never comfortably his own, and it can therefore be more than his own, an impersonal voice that speaks out beyond the contours of its own discrete identity and pushes our understanding of what it means to or have or represent a self more than any other Romantic poet" (348). Ostas further asserts that:

> Whether they emerge as rich and full or come forward as hollow and empty vessels, the selves in Keats's poetry always reach beyond their own identities. They stand for or are more than themselves. Keats's speakers, characters, and figures find that their 'selves' are the openings to a precisely social, shared, and common experience. They find that their very souls (as Stanley Cavell might put it) are essentially impersonal. (336)

From this impersonal voice and characters, Ostas declares that Keats's poetry encourages considerations of political selfhood and agency, and to "think selfhood – in its simultaneous being as ours and not ours, speaking as and speaking for – precisely as a political entity, one through which a common world of experience comes into view" (348). While I agree that Keats's belief in the poet's ability to slip into a limitless number of identities produces the opportunity to grow in understanding of the common world of experience and strengthening of empathy with fellow man through the poetic effect of offering understanding of the common world of experience, I think she potentially overstates Keats and his characters' impersonality. Viewing Keats's poetry as an enaction of soul-making, the fluidity of the poet's voice and any sense of identity in flux is instead demonstrative of identity being formed. Keats's concept of soul-making aims to build unique identities but avows that doing so requires functioning and

bearing through suffering. This need for experiences is shared by all, and the broad categories of experience are had by all, but each individual is presented with their own unique set of circumstances through life. Understanding the necessity of experience and acknowledgement of experiences gradually creates each unique soul. Offering soul-making as a spiritual reckoning of the world and presenting it in literature gives his readers the potential to separate themselves from the various structures in life – political, social, religious – and find agency in creating their own self-development.

In the letter discussing the vale of Soul-making, Keats specifies two other materials in addition to the Intelligence for the process of shaping souls: the human heart, and the world "or *Elemental space* suited for the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity*" (102). To simplify this process, one which he admits he can "scarcely express," Keats compares the world to a school which teaches children to read, the human heart to the horn book which is used in the school or world, and the eventual soul to the child who has learned how to read after time spent in the school (102). If the heart, which is what suffers most under sorrow or adverse circumstances, is the horn book to the world's education, then Keats exclaims "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!" (102). Thus, experiences of all kinds are necessary in order to shape identity, and suffering, which is something we typically seek to avoid, is actually an experience that is required and now justified within this spiritual process.

In the soul-making letter, as Keats works up to his envisioning of the world being a means for building one's identity or soul, he meditates on the impermanency of happiness and the inevitability of sorrow. Keats declares

> This is the world – thus we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure – Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting – while we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into <he> the wide arable land of events – while we are laughing it sprouts [it] grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck – Even so we have leisure to reason on the misfortunes of our friends; our own touch us too nearly for words. (79)

This passage from the letter builds into his later explanation of soul-making and justification for the pain and needless suffering throughout the world. Though it is easier to postulate on misfortunes of others from a relative distance of sensation, misery and sorrow grow far more difficult to rationalize when experienced in the sheer intensity of personal immediacy. Keats portrays the inescapable negativity throughout existence being planted in life's events. Even as we are laughing and happy, it grows and sprouts into a "poison fruit which we must pluck." This depicts happiness as always rather fleeting while suffering or trouble is the steady constant. No matter the joy one moment may bring, sorrow is rapidly infiltrating and cannot be avoided. Such a dismal outlook provokes the need for an explanation of the use or reason for such constant suffering and tragedy in human existence. Thus, soul-making's claims on suffering's identity building powers provides Keats's answers for the reason for suffering. The necessity of experiences for shaping a soul lays the groundwork for my claims that Keats believes, or at least hopes, that poetry itself can be a replacement or addition to real-world experiences in identity formation.

As he paints the idea of inescapable misfortune, Keats also considers how a very great many people fail to struggle out of animalistic simplicity of existence and therefore also never

manage to release all selfish concerns for a truly empathetic and selfless existence. Keats observes in the letter that

> Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind; very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others – in the greater part of the Benefactors <of> & to Humanity some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness – some melodramatic scenery has fascinated them – From the manner in which I feel Haslam's misfortune I perceive how far I am from any humble standard of disinterestedness – Yet this feeling ought to be carried to its highest pitch, as there is no fear of its ever injuring society – which it would do I fear pushed to an extremity. (79)

Though true and complete selflessness is an ideal rarely achieved, and one in which he admits having fallen short of himself, Keats defends the idea that some attention paid to one's own problems and feelings isn't entirely wrong. This innate imperfection of mankind can yet still be harnessed to work towards bettering oneself and even provides the conditions from which greatness springs. The acute sensation of sorrow or suffering allows through a degree of selfish focus on the self, the means to actually spur growth of identity by looking inward or even by developing stronger empathy for the plight of others through self-experience. Keats envisions how this extreme of complete disinterestedness, which he worries could be harmful in excess, would in nature produce predators that no longer consumed their prey to the detriment of their own survival, noting "The greater part of men make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk" going on to compare how both man and hawk set their sights on food or a mate and make a way to procure it, or take time to enjoy simple pleasures (79). Therefore, Keats argues that though caring for others

is a noble goal, taking this too far potentially prevents self-care and could risk the survival of individual identity.

The inability for the majority of mankind to achieve true disinterestedness and release the basic animalistic instinctiveness of thinking about the benefit of the individual alone is what allows for the comparatively rare moments of human greatness to be truly heroic and admirable. Thus, Keats paints a picture of the need for humanity to live fighting to balance their own instinctual self needs with the aims for human greatness born of kindness and valuing of others. "But as Wordsworth says," Keats explains, "'we have all one human heart' – there is an ellectric fire in human nature tending to purify – so that among these human creature[s] there is continually some birth of new heroism – The pity is that we must wonder at it: as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish" (80). The relative rarity of these moments is yet what causes them to be so great. Keats goes on to establish that though he is certain there have been many people we haven't heard of who had "hearts comp[l]etely disinterested: I can remember but two – Socrates and Jesus" (80). Thus, although the "greater part of Men make their way with the same [animal] instinctiveness" (79) that does not mean that people cannot or do not reach higher standards of empathy, kindness, and heroism. Perfect disinterestedness is a lofty, nearly impossible goal for imperfect animal man to achieve, as the only two figures of such that Keats supplies are great figures of philosophy and religion: Socrates and Jesus. It is a pity, Keats writes, that though we have accounts of their sayings and teachings, these are passed through the writings and interpretations of other people. Specifically in the case of Jesus, "It is to be lamented that the history of the latter was written and revised by Men interested in the pious frauds of Religion" (80). However, "Yet through all this I see his splendour" (80). Keats's Soul-making theory is an attempt to maintain what is powerful and true to him from sources like religion but finding a

pathway to such illuminating knowledge in a unique and individual approach outside of regulated and formal religion.

Despite the lofty goal of reaching true, pure transcendence from human flaws and selfishness, Keats argues that there is still something to be admired in the instinctive nature and actions of common animal-like man. He writes that he is pursuing in the same course as any other "human animal" yet "I am however young writing at random – straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness – without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin?" (80). He goes on to suggest that might not higher beings be amused in watching the faulty, though earnest and spirited, attempts of man, just as we are entertained by watching the animals going about their simple pursuits? As creatures on the earth who aren't privy to the secrets of the universe or the actualized reality of morals, is it a sin for mankind to reach for knowledge or truth about them in good conscience, and miss? To explain his point, Keats writes that "Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel" (80). The energy of the action is a thing of grace to be admired, even if the outcome or consequences aren't desirable or perhaps just. Therefore, he suggests that "By a superior being our reasoning[s] may take the same tone – though erroneous they may be fine – This is the very thing in which consists poetry" (80-81).

If nothing is real until it has been experienced – the multiple layers of meaning and implications coming alive from having been experienced – then poetry in its ability to capture the grace of man or the grace of a moment, action, thought, intention offers itself as a vehicle for experience. Poetry, as I argue, then becomes for Keats its own enterprise for spiritual discovery about truths in the world. Poetry's ability to capture the grace of anything and working out of

theories is also fundamental evidence for the merging of the humanistic goals of a spirituality proposal with an early aestheticism appeal to the energies of matters without holding back for fear of them being morally and cosmically right or wrong. Keats points to the idea that Man perhaps shouldn't and may not be faulted for failures when earnestly seeking truth, as humanity is functioning and moving through life in the dark, "straining at particles of light." This framework is fundamental for his theory of soul-making, in which experience drives the formation of identity, or soul. If mankind is merely striving to grow and understand the depths of meaning in the world and beyond, then we are left only to experience and aim to build ourselves into better, more knowledgeable versions of ourselves. Shaping our identity and creating our individual souls, then, requires experiences both good and bad. Poetry can be a method for carrying out this important experiencing with its ability to capture the grace or beauty of anything and I argue that Keats views it as even being capable of substituting for real world experiences, or at least adding to them, in shaping the soul. Poetry's limitless representations having real intellectual and spiritual effects is where the more aesthetic interpretations of Keats's work can fit within the typically opposing poet-physician framework. Drawing upon the beauty and energy of anything, good or bad, can produce an experience of the thing in question through its poetic rendering. This leads to imaginative experience, which is what the poet-physician aims to produce. And this imaginative experience offers a means to safely learn and develop knowledge. In other words, Keats uses the aesthetic to fit his individualistic moral approach, much like Pyle argues about his "radical aestheticism," creating a version of aestheticism that is moral and meaningful, an alternative I suggest is holding value parallel or equal to spirituality.

Later in the letter, Keats reflects upon readings that "appears to resolve into this – that Man is originally 'a poor forked creature' subject to the same mischances as the beasts of the

forest, destined to hardships and disquietude of some kind or other" (101). Keats goes on to describe the sheer inescapability of troubles and sorrow and questions how much happiness humanity can truly aspire to, even if living by the high standards and "persevering endeavors of a seldom appearing Socrates" (101). Ultimately, he claims that he doesn't believe in the possibility of "perfectibility" as "the nature of the world will not admit of it" (101). Just as the animals will never be able to philosophize away the natural elements or fixtures that take away from their continuous safety and pleasure, just as a rose might bloom and if able to feel, enjoys its moment of beauty, it cannot escape a "cold wind" or "a hot sun," for destroying or harmful forces are "as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the world[l]y elements will prey upon his nature" (101). As imperfect creatures, without the gift of all-encompassing immortal knowledge, Keats's theological viewpoint suggests a forgiving understanding of suffering and human failure. Humanity cannot be perfect, thus striving to achieve knowledge and aiming for improving oneself accepts the possibility of not getting it quite right. Thus, too, the existence of suffering to challenge and shape the growth of identity, tempering extreme passions through sorrow.

The idea of forgiveness for human error in seeking understanding reveals his sense of rejecting the idea of a singular path to the truth, like organized religion. Everyone following the same exact framework of belief would potentially confine souls to all undergo very similar experiences and therefore create all nearly matching identities. So long as the aim is looking for the truth and maintaining that desire to work towards moral greatness, then the openness of spirituality provides a less limiting approach that allows for a greater variety in developing true uniqueness of identity and self-development. If, as Keats wrote, we can't ever be sure of the correct answers to the big mysteries of life, and thus surely mustn't be faulted for doing our best

to try to grapple at understanding, then the act of searching provides the opportunity for unique soul building from following an individual path of experiences chasing the truth. Applied to his artistic framework, his imperfection of the world, need for all types of experiences, and importance of simply striving to experience play out in the poet's Negative Capability. The poet takes on and floats through an uncountable number of identities to simply experience. Soul-making and Negative Capability show that art, in this case poetry, is a prime means for toying with experiences through imagination. These experiences that poetry provides, offer unlimited ability to build identity and grow knowledge. Negative Capability's lack of concern for judging which experiences are worthy, instead seeking experiences for their own truth aligns with this theological idea of Keats that man cannot be faulted for trying to discover understanding and knowledge, but that the effort to find truth is worthy on its own and even reaps important benefits for the soul's growth.

One poem from the 1820 volume of poetry, "Ode to a Nightingale," serves both as an example of the poet's ability to inhabit identities, in this case momentarily imaginatively becoming the bird, and as a soul-making poem. The poem is both escapist and healing, while also ultimately pointing to the unsustainability of escape and illuminating the necessity of pain and sorrow for building souls. The speaker's "heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk" (lines 1-2). The speaker, weighed down and weary with deep melancholy, wants to forget his troubles as "Lethe-wards had sunk" (2) and he becomes captivated by the nightingale "too happy in thy happiness" (6) which triggers a stanza of wishful desire for escape that he might:

> leave the world unseen,
>
> And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known,

The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despairs;

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. (lines 19-30)

The speaker captures the desire to escape the pain and deep suffering pervading human existence. Here, through the Negative Capability of the poet, the speaker leaves behind his identity to blend identities with the nightingale: "Away! away! for I will fly to thee, / Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy" (31-33). It is poetry that offers imaginative transformation. This experience is artfully and vividly rendered, and the tone shifts from heavy darkness to a light and peaceful beauty. Darkness still pervades as the speaker cannot see the sights below him, but nonetheless his senses are filled with the flowers he flies over, shifting the darkness into something beautiful and safe. The speaker muses after the idea of permanent escape into quiet peace, saying "I have been half in love with easeful Death" (52) and contemplating ceasing "upon the midnight with no pain" (56). But after these thoughts, the speaker realizes that the nightingale would continue "pouring forth thy soul abroad / in such an ecstasy!" (57-58) in the living world which, should the speaker reach eternal escape, he would no longer be able to hear and enjoy the beauty. For the speaker reflects, "Still wouldst thou sing,

and I have ears in vain / To thy high requiem become a sod" (lines 59-60). This escape without feeling pain, escaping suffering forever, would lead to ultimate loss and dissolution of identity. To experience beauty, one must also experience the suffering of the world that the speaker has been desperately trying to put aside.

The realization of the necessary balance between the two extremes of sensation, that to enjoy beauty one must also have pain and trouble as its stark contrast, leads the speaker back to himself more fully developed with his knowledge. "Forlorn!" is the sorrowful word that is "like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self" (71-72). Thus, the speaker returns from beautiful imaginative escape, having grown from the experience and it is the inescapability of sorrow that pulls him back. For, even in his imaginative escape, the moment he begins to feel "forlorn" it sharply returns him to his own self. The final lines of the poem read "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: - do I wake or sleep?" (79-80). The blurriness between these two potentials for the speaker show poetry's immense capability for Keats. As dreamlike, the imaginative escape betokens a restful soothing quality – the healing poet-physician at work. Yet, as also a vision, the message or result of the experience is prophetic or profound. Soul-making growth of understanding about oneself and the nature of the world has also taken place. Here is an example of Keats developing his theological framework into his poetic visions as well. As a poet-physician, the poet aims to grow in identity by imaginatively escaping into the nightingale and uses his artistic capabilities to create a poetic experience for the reader to also soul-make through imaginative escape. They too can join the poet/speaker in the healing dive into beauty, while still receiving a message of the necessity of sorrow. Just as the speaker temporarily relieves the pain of earthly troubles through imagination with the bird, the reader can follow the same process through imaginatively joining the speaker and the nightingale through

reading the poem. Through experiencing the poem, Keats's soul-making messages and ideas are shared for the reader to ponder over and individually grow and learn from their interpretation of them. Imaginative escape in Keats's poem is a reprieve from suffering that hopes to aid in bearing the misery or misfortune upon return from imagination through a message of suffering's soul-making qualities. The poem shows understanding of the real agony that sorrow can be, while insisting one stays the course and learns from the experience to build one's soul.

"Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced – Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it" (81), Keats pens in the letter. This concept of experience is central to the theories of soul-making that Keats proposes in this letter and applies throughout his poetry. For Keats, as I have been arguing, his proposed soul-making concept of spirituality isn't merely sequestered to the realms of theology but is linked to poetry. Poetry is a means of expressing these themes, a means for the poet to develop through writing, and even a means for the poet to aspire to aid his readers in their own soul-making through their imaginative and intellectual experience of the poem. Poetry is an artistic method of capturing experiences, creating endless opportunities to dabble in various identities, even sometimes to escape the very difficult experiences we must yet endure.

The idea of truth being a world of both sorrow and happiness, and of truth's beauty carries into another important soul-making poem: "Ode on Melancholy." This poem argues the necessity of sorrow and suffering. Sorrow is unavoidable yet beautiful as it is truth, and it shapes the soul. The first stanza begs readers not to escape suffering and forget troubles, while also urging not to seek out sorrow obsessively either:

No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist

Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;

Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd

By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;

Make not your rosary of yew-berries,

Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be

Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl

A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;

For shade to shade will come too drowsily,

And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul. (1-10)

The repeated elements of darkness, poison, and forgetfulness create the sense of heavy melancholy, evoking a pervading feeling of desolate emotion. The speaker cries not to disappear from negative feelings into "Lethe" or through various means of poison to be dragged into the underworld like "Proserpine." Yet, one must not bury oneself in one's troubles or seek only sorrow for that is also not the answer. The speaker orders "Make not your rosary of yew-berries" suggesting that meditating upon and dwelling heavily within death and sorrow, by searching for permanent removal from suffering or by worshipping suffering itself alone, is not the proper course. By wallowing only in the need to escape and forget troubles or burying oneself in darkness by failing to ever seek happiness, the speaker explains that "shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul" (9-10). By making "Your mournful Psyche", which is emphasized by beginning its line, a negative image through the stanza's described methods of wallowing in darkness, the soul is no longer in "wakeful anguish" necessary to grow and develop from the suffering. If souls are shaped by their experiences, as Keats argues, then a soul which has only been fed sorrow, either by perpetually grieving sorrow itself in desperately seeking removal, or by an extreme, one-track search for sorrow alone,

becomes a mournful Psyche. “Wakeful anguish”, counter to the sleepy dark ideas presented in the opening of the poem, is neither the shrugging off of working through sorrow by becoming crushed under the negative emotion’s weight, nor the failure to work through it by only devouring more and more darkness. One must live through suffering in order to grow one’s soul and to move on from it. Becoming trapped in the sorrow doesn’t allow for further experiences, which stifles the development of identity. This is strongly evidenced in the desire for death or forgetfulness which is the dissolving of identity, the tragic outcome the speaker warns against.

To further this idea, the second stanza offers what one ought to do when faced with suffering instead: “But when the melancholy fit shall fall … Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose, / Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave, / Or on the wealth of globed peonies” (11, 15-17). The speaker suggests that when deep in sorrow, one should turn to beauty to cope. The poet-physician at work again, offering a means to survive the brutal experiences of life. By turning to what is beautiful in life, perhaps poetry, one can find the strength to push through the ordeal of actually living the sorrowful, painful experience. Interestingly, the “melancholy fit shall fall / Sudden from heaven” which seems to argue that suffering comes from the world, Keats’s school in the vale of Soul-making, and as “heaven” perhaps even from God. This supports the soul-making theory that suffering is integral to building one’s soul and to be able to fully appreciate the experience of joy and beautiful, positive feelings or events. The melancholy fit falls “Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud, / That fosters the droop-headed flowers all, / And hides the green hill in an April shroud” (11-14). This shows that suffering actually brings about better things, for the weeping cloud of melancholy waters and “fosters the droop-headed flowers all.” And despite the sense that nothing good will ever come again, as the foggy “April shroud” “hides the green hill”, greenness and prospering growth is merely hidden within the fog, but not

gone. Beauty and happiness are not forever lost, rather temporarily hidden in the fog of sorrow. Thus, the need to search for beauty to pull yourself through the arduousness of suffering without disregarding the lived experience of strife, is necessary to fully appreciate beauty and grow the soul. One must "glut thy sorrow" upon beautiful things. One must find what is beautiful in powerful negativity. Not only does the poem make a case for the need to turn to beauty to bear the pain of truly experiencing and moving through suffering, but the poem ultimately equates sorrow to beauty.

"Ode on Melancholy" states that Melancholy "dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die" (21). Suffering is intertwined with beauty, as neither can exist without the other. Just as sorrow brings about beauty, sorrow also kills beauty: "Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh, / Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips" (22-24). Keats relays again his lament that pleasure and joy are fleeting and must eventually be overcome by some form of sorrow: "Ay, in the very temple of Delight / Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine" (25-26). Sorrow is everywhere. Yet, this fact is exactly what creates beauty and makes joy and pleasure so good in contrast to melancholy and suffering. Melancholy is hidden in the temple of Delight, right there, ever-present in moments of happiness, "Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine: / His soul shall taste the sadness of her might, / And be among her cloudy trophies hung." (26-30). Those who really live and experience happiness, bursting "Joy's grape upon a palate fine," are the ones who are subject to feel or find sorrow because they have something to lose, which allows for the intensity of feelings on both extremes. This leads to soul-making. One must experience joy in life fully in order to have something that would be a loss, so that suffering is made potent, and the experience of intense happiness and intense suffering beget a more fully developed soul. Thus, the circular

nature of suffering and beauty or joy. He who has a "palate fine" experiences Joy but is also become Melancholy's cloudy trophy, tasting "the sadness of her might." These final lines might also be interpreted as a warning against an extreme, like the opening stanza. Perhaps, the fellow who "Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" is someone who seeks only the taste of good, pleasurable experiences. If he seeks only joy fiercely, then he becomes Melancholy's trophy, stuck, "hung." Hanging amongst Melancholy's trophies, one is again back to the opening stanza, stuck in gloom and grieving desire for oblivion. This is a stage of no development for the soul as it cannot grow identity trapped in stasis. This is a caution for balance in experiences, not to stay trapped in melancholy, but also not to avoid it entirely – an impossibility. Melancholy is a paradox in that one must look to her, perhaps not with eager anticipation, but to find the self-development and knowledge gained from the difficult experience, thus becoming her trophy in a winning sense. However, by avoiding too strongly, seeking only joy and then becoming crushed by severe strife, one becomes Melancholy's trophy in that one is trapped and identity stifled as one more of her won possessions, an object of Melancholy. So, "Ode on Melancholy" becomes a poem entirely devoted to the theory of soul-making. The necessity of experience, good and bad, and the inextricability of sorrow and joy, both beautiful.

"Ode to Psyche" is another important soul-making, poet-physician poem, one in which the poet-physician becomes priest to the soul and commits himself to soul-making through poetry. Towards the end of Keats's 1819 letter, he includes a few poems directly following the section on soul-making. One of these is "Ode to Psyche" which is the only one he writes at the time with "which I have taken even moderate pains – I have for the most part dash'd of my lines in a hurry – This I have done leisurely – I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other thing[s] in even a more peacable and healthy spirit" (105-106). "Ode

to Psyche" has a healing and hopefully generative effect upon the poet, Keats expresses - fitting for the symbolic commitment to soul-making poetic aims that I contend it contains. In the letter Keats continues, "You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apulieus the Platonist who lived afteir the Agustan age, and consequently the Goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour – and perhaps never thought of in the old religion – I am more orthodox [than] to let a hethen Goddess be so neglected – " (106). Though there is a playful nature to his description of the neglected ancient goddess chosen to dedicate the ode to, the selection of "psyche" takes on deeper, soul-making meaning beyond the immortal figure. The Oxford English Dictionary provides useful definitions of "psyche": the foremost, spanning from 1648 to the present, being "The mind, soul, or spirit, as distinguished from the body" (OED) which covers Intelligences and Souls and some of the materials needed to shape their journey of development laid out by Keats's soul-making proposal. Another interesting archaic and obsolete definition of psyche that appears to have fallen out of use even before Keats's time is "The animating principle of the universe" (OED). Quoted examples of this definition from the mid to late 1600s are "Such is the entrance of Psyche into the body of the Vniverse, kindling and exciting the dead mist" from H. More's *Philos. Poems,* and from R. Cudworth's *True Intellect. Syst. Universe* "this is taken by Plotinus to be the Eternal Psyche, that actively produceth All Things, in this Lower World, according to those Divine Ideas" (OED). If this meaning of "psyche" had any influence on Keats, then connections might be made between its creative essence and intelligences being sparks of divinity, as well as Negative Capability's generative nature. In the nineteenth century, there was also a less common definition of psyche as "A butterfly, a moth" (OED) which is associated with the goddess Psyche and a token of psyche's beauty and aesthetic qualities as well as the idea of transformation. "Ode to Psyche" as

a poem devoted to praising and worshipping the forgotten and underappreciated goddess Psyche, becomes symbolically an artistic commitment to the soul, the intelligence, the process of creating identity, and even beauty.

In "Ode to Psyche" the poem opens as the speaker describes wandering in "a forest thoughtlessly" (7) before stumbling upon two "fair creatures" (9) which in the following stanza he accounts for as the lovers Cupid or Eros, and Psyche:

> They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
>
> Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
>
> Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu
>
> As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
>
> And ready still past kisses to outnumber
>
> At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:
>
> The winged boy I knew;
>
> But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
>
> His Psyche true! (15-23)

The blissful union of Cupid and Psyche might be seen as the union of love and the soul. If the heart is "a Hornbook" and "the Minds Bible", the "Minds experience" and the world a place where "the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways" (102-103) then love becomes an emotion central to soul-making. For is not love a driving force behind many emotions, passions, and experiences? A cause of great joy or the reason for great pain and loss?

The poem goes on to exalt Psyche as "latest-born and loveliest vision far / Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!" (24-25). If soul-making is also Keats's theological interpretation of the world, then Psyche as soul is not only gloriously beautiful, but is greater than the god figures

of mythology, being true. Psyche, however, unlike the gods in ancient times is "Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none" (28). Psyche has no official, recognized temple or worship,

Nor altar heap'd with flowers;

Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan

Upon the midnight hours;

No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet

From chain-swung censer teeming;

No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat

Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming (29-35)

Psyche as goddess figure has no place of official worship, nor a vast number of worshippers and followers. She came too late into mythology to be able to experience such rites or devotion. Psyche as the soul, has no place or form of worship that a god figure does, though is included in most religious concerns. The speaker in the poem goes on to express his inspiration received from Psyche and his intentions to pay respects to Psyche as she has missed:

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,

Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,

When holy were the haunted forest boughs,

Holy the air, the water, and the fire;

Yet even in these days so far retired

From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,

Fluttering among the faint Olympians

I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.

So let me be thy choir, and make a moan

Upon the midnight hours!

Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet

From swinged censer teeming:

Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat

Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming (36-49)

The repetition of all that Psyche has lacked as those things which the speaker will become drives home the weight of his devotion and intentions. As artist, the speaker is still inspired by the elemental and natural, once thought holy. As poet, he dedicates himself to the soul by becoming her voice, her lute, her oracle, her shrine, harkening to Negative Capability. Specifically looking towards what he proposes to become through Negative Capability for Psyche, supports the idea that poetry can contain or help create soul-making. The poet-speaker speaks for the soul, becomes the soul's music. He is her oracle and her prophet, suggesting that he can deliver profound messages of soul-making for Psyche. As shrine, Psyche dwells within the poet.

"Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane / In some untrodden region of my mind, / Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain, / Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind" (50-53), the following and final stanza begins. The poet sets forth to proclaim himself a priest to Psyche, where he upholds her in his mind. Here "branched thoughts" are, as under soul-making's principles, "new grown with pleasant pain." Pain is pleasant, because as established in the readings of the preceding poems it is intrinsically linked with beauty and it is necessary for building identity and growing knowledge. The mind of the poet-priest is filled with imagination: "Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees", which are his branched thoughts, "Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep; / And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees, / The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep" (54-57). All of this wonder and beauty is conjured up

by the creative mind of the poet through effort and pain to form a lovely place to hold and cherish the soul or Psyche: "And in the midst of this wide quietness / A rosy sanctuary will I dress / With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain" (58-59). With the use of his mind, "with buds, and bells, and stars without a name. / With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign, / Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same" the poet draws inspiration from Psyche to create soul-making in poetry (61-63). Using his mind, beautiful elements, and Fancy, the artist can produce or "breed" beautiful things but is shaped by the experience and "will never breed the same." Through this imaginative creation characterized by struggle in the poem, soul-making breeds original flowers, or helps to make beautiful, unique souls. In his poetic devotion to Psyche:

> And there shall be for thee all soft delight
> That shadowy thought can win,
> A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
> To let the warm Love in! (64-67)

Peace and delight, which is part of the strong opening thematic sense at the start of the poem finding sleeping Psyche locked in erotic embrace with Cupid, are happy emotions which are won from "shadowy thought." Shadowy thought is the "branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain" of the poet become Psyche's priest where his imagination is developed. It shapes his artistic production. Shadows elicit a feeling of darkness too, sorrow and pain necessary to soul-making. But suffering feeds the imagination and aids in rendering "soft delight." The poet provides "a bright torch, and a casement ope at night" which drive away the shadows surrounding thoughts "to let the warm Love in!" The soul needs love to shape identity just as it needs sorrow, and love helps the soul to bear the suffering that it must endure. Here, "Ode to

Psyche" offers a strong support for the idea of Keats as poet-physician. The speaker does not entirely banish the shadows, but rather carves through them as a torch's light or the light of window opened to the night both flood light that pierce the darkness but aren't the sun and don't shift the night into day. The poet-physician understands the necessity of suffering but also aims to help the journey through dark times, providing light in the darkness.

Keats argues the necessity of all experiences, including suffering, as integral for shaping the soul and "As various as the Lives of Men are – so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence – This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity" (103). He speaks of the heart in his letter as "the teat from which the Mind or Intelligence sucks its Identity" (103). Thus, he concludes the section on soul-making by reflecting upon and summing up his theory:

> I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances – and what are circumstances? – but touchstones of his heart – ? and what are touch stones? – but proovings of his heart? – and what are proovings of his heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? and what is his altered nature but his soul? – and what was his soul before it came into the world and had These provings and alterations and perfectionings? – An intelligence<s> - without Identity – and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances? – There now I think what with Poetry and Theology you may thank your Stars that my pen is not very long winded-" (103-104)

As I have shown, this theory is transmitted into an artistic endeavor as well – even suggested perhaps by his linking together of "Poetry and Theology" in the tongue in cheek apology for a

letter that is actually quite long. Immediately following this section, Keats includes a few poems in the letter: two on Fame, one on Sleep, and "Ode to Psyche." One could argue that this selection directly following his theory of soul-making might speak to poetic aims and hopes. That as a poet he could find fame, and reach many, while pondering on the self-harming nature of mankind, and wittily describing Fame's whimsy and tendency to flee from those who seek her too strenuously. That as poet-physician poetry could soothe in times of trouble, and quiet the mind to rest when driven to anxiety. That as poet, one partakes in soul-making and devotes oneself to Psyche. More importantly, viewed in the context of the period's avid reevaluation of faith, Keats offers his theory of soul-making as a potential form of spirituality while also presenting literature, specifically poetry, as a method for achieving deep self-reflection, momentary respite from troubles, and a provider of messages to be gained in each reader's unique response. In effect, Keats's poems hoped to provide soul-making, both for the poet in creating and for the reader in imaginatively experiencing and contemplating.

Chapter Two: "No coward soul is mine": Emily Brontë's Inward Faith

While we can find John Keats's written proposal of spirituality to account for the existence of suffering and explore the makings of the soul's development, Emily Brontë doesn't provide any clear document explicitly delineating her own beliefs or spiritual thought experiments. Charlotte Brontë destroyed many of her sister Emily's letters and manuscripts, leaving us to speculate what might have been written in them that Charlotte didn't want to risk the public seeing. While we know Emily Brontë's background in Christianity as the daughter of a clergyman, this lack of a concrete statement about her spiritual beliefs or exploration of spiritual theories, along with some of her more morally ambiguous works such as *Wuthering Heights*, has led to much scholarly debate about what her beliefs were and what religious arguments she may or may not have been making in her works. She has been labeled more traditionally and conventionally Christian, a mystic, and even in more recent feminist readings actually anti-religion. Brontë has been read many ways, Micael Clarke explains: "Not only was Brontë widely viewed as a religious writer, she was frequently described as a mystic, and compared to John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. Today, however, even the best Brontë scholars such as Stevie Davies, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, are more likely to refer to Brontë as a 'heretic' than as a mystic, and to describe *Wuthering Heights* as her 'Bible of Hell' than as a 'scrap of history torn from the communion of saints" (195). Clarke analyzes Emily Brontë's works, particularly "No Coward Soul," arguing that critics misread "a religious spirit that overflows doctrinal boundaries as hostility to religion itself" or in the case of *Wuthering Heights* of conflating "as Bronte might say, the creature with the creator" (212).

Marianne Thormälen responds to the ongoing debates over Brontë's moral and spiritual sympathies, writing that "Responding affectively to a literary work, admitting it to that inner

sphere where we attempt to grasp the meaning of human existence, is one thing; extracting a paraphrasable ethical significance from it is quite another. *Wuthering Heights* has always resisted such efforts" (638). Thormälen, however, takes a stand against the grain of many influential readings that view Brontë as turning away from Christianity. Thormälen asserts that there are "indeed ethical dimensions in *Wuthering Heights*" and that these dimensions are rooted in "core tenets of Christian morality" (638). She goes on to make a case for Brontë's novel as conveying familiar religious precepts of "Christian orthodoxy"; despite its "tyranny of violence" it contains moral dimensions pertaining to "selfless love in combination with the ability to forgive inflicted wrongs – or, at least, the ability to accept that these wrongs happened, but that they must be consigned to the past where they belong while the mature human being strives to lead a life unencumbered by hatred" (652). Ultimately, Thormälen conveys that her reading "certainly does not require adherence to Christianity: belief in, and the ability to recognize, compassion, endurance and forgiveness are human qualities which exist independently of faiths and denominations" (652). Though Thormälen offers a strong case for Christian influence in Brontë's work, this by itself doesn't firmly pull Brontë out from the scholarly debates trying to label her beliefs. Making an argument that literary studies' tendency to ignore or misinterpret religious impulses or influences is missing valuable insight and context for interpretations of literary works, Clarke asserts: "The inability to distinguish between a powerful critique of religious institutions and a lack of faith has prevented many critics 'from appreciating the breathtaking freedom from prejudice and dogmatic restraint with which all three [Brontës] examined their Christian doctrine and ethics" (200). Clarke acknowledges that Emily Brontë has been seen as a mystic, though notes that potentially problematic to this idea is mysticism's tendency to be "associated with submission to religious institutions, whereas Emily Brontë is

thought of as a resister of convention" (201). However, Clarke continues, the mystic Teresa of Avila, "to whom Emily Brontë is so often compared, provides an example of the liberating effects of faith" and of a figure of "spiritual radicalism" (202). With just this brief overview, one can see the difficulty scholars have had tucking Emily Brontë's beliefs into a neat, tidy box.

Within this context, and by exploring two of Brontë's poems, "The Philosopher" and "No coward soul," I suggest that Brontë's poetry reveals a spirituality that upholds the necessity of faith in one's personal connection to their creator, rather than trapped within the rigid boundaries of conventional organized doctrines – though perhaps informed by them. Brontë promotes making peace with the unknowns of the universe, enduring and passing through that which one cannot control or fully understand. Brontë's approach favors an identity or soul that is secure within itself, gaining identity through carefully developing self-understanding and simultaneously creating a stronger connection with the creator, as Brontë maintains the idea that the soul is at once part of God and yet one's own unique identity. I argue that "The Philosopher" and "No coward soul" reveal important reflections upon the soul and fit within potential aims akin to Keats and Wilde of literature to be used as a vessel for taking the reader or poet into a space to grapple with and experience the unknown. Literature is a tool to experience that which we can't entirely understand. Clarke writes that in Brontë's earlier poetry, "the imagination had resided within," but that in later poems the imagination increasingly came from without and that "In their totality they represent a 'profound spiritual experience' that culminates in the last [in] one of her poems, 'No Coward Soul,' the only poem that directly addresses God" (208). "When read as the culmination of a continuously evolving spiritual journey that may be traced though Brontë's works … 'No Coward Soul' is Brontë's crowning achievement, as both poem and as statement of faith," Clarke asserts (211). I second Clarke's thoughtful analysis here and add that

much like Keats, Brontë focuses on literature's role in catalyzing spiritual experiences and considers the poet's role in generating such transformative emprises. While Clarke and Thormälen are correct in countering the common scholarly impression of Brontë's rejection of religion, as a strong sense of spirituality pervades her poetry, I suggest that they might read Brontë as rather more orthodox in faith than her works reveal. Though her poems offer a grounding in Christian tradition and even point to various faiths as worth drawing from, ultimately Brontë proposes a spirituality that is distinctly and adamantly separate from any singular denomination of structured religion. Like Keats, she values unique identity and also finds organized structures of belief limiting to the development of individuality. Though both evaluate the soul to near veneration, and both value the imagination and a shaking loose of structural constraints on ideas, Brontë favors a secure and stable sense of inward spiritual identity. Keats writes on searching for experiences from the world and empathy expanding negative capability shifts into temporary affiliation with others. Brontë's sense of understanding one's identity, however, comes more from within and even warns against blindly seeking answers and validation from outside sources in excess for fear of losing one's understanding with one's innermost self. In effect, she offers a take on the soul and identity that balances where she might feel that Keats's interpretation could potentially go too far.

Emily Brontë's poem, "The Philosopher," is a representation of humankind's everlasting attempts to understand the religious or spiritual truth of the universe, and wrestling with faith or lack thereof. The poem features two central figures, the philosopher of the title and the poet. The philosopher struggles with the fact that as mere mortals, we'll never fully know in this life the nature - or even existence - of God, the afterlife, and the meanings of the world. The philosopher in the poem is never directly named or described and thus can be seen as representing a broad

character type: the thinker who questions too unceasingly about metaphysical truths, the answers of which we probably won't ever concretely know for sure. He might also become a philosophical type who studies himself out of belief and into meaninglessness looking too hard for concrete truths that can't be found. In "The Philosopher," the poet opens the poem:

> 'Enough of thought, philosopher!
>
> Too long has thou been dreaming
>
> Unenlightened, in this chamber drear,
>
> While summer's sun is beaming!
>
> Space-sweeping soul, what sad refrain
>
> Concludes thy musings once again? (lines 1-6)

The poet cries, "Enough of thought, philosopher!" These opening lines warn against becoming too lost in this sort of deep, expansive pondering about the universe, for the risk of losing grip on one's own solid identity. The philosopher is a "space-sweeping soul" conjuring the image of a quest for spiritual answers with an intense search that has swept all of space, every available nook and cranny of philosophical thought to try to find religious truths. In an effort of this scale and relentlessness to understand his soul's belonging in the grand scheme of the universe, his identity has become "space-sweeping" and actually lacking its own concrete form. In the philosopher's all-consuming and vain search, he has been "dreaming unenlightened" for "too long." The poet points out the futility of ever discovering the kinds of truths and ideals which the philosopher seeks, as humanity will forever be "unenlightened." The poet states that the philosopher has been "dreaming," which emphasizes the hazy, conjecturing quality of the spiritual realms of thought, inside dreary chambers while "summer's sun is beaming" suggesting that the philosopher is whiling away life and missing out on enjoyments to be found in the world

while determined to discover that which he will never truly know, only speculate. This rings familiar to John Keats's descriptions of the need for worldly experiences in order to grow, learn, and shape identity, along with the poet's ability to live in the space of intellectual and spiritual unknowns, everything and nothing at once, offering advice to others through this capability. Brontë's philosopher is thinking in his chambers rather than outside in the world experiencing what it has offer. He may be drawing from the many proposals of thought created by people of the world, but they fail to bring him answers in part because he doesn't live enough in the experiential sense to test them out or illuminate them. As Keats quipped, nothing is real until experienced. Therefore, the poet speaker warns the philosopher that by never pausing his studies and leaving his chambers, he is losing crucial opportunities that hold the potential of actually inching closer to the truth he's seeking, or at least missing the point of what life is about.

The philosopher's unrelenting quest has left his musings to be of no terribly joyful quality, as the poet asks "Space-sweeping soul, what sad refrain / Concludes thy musings once again?" (5-6) which supports the implication that the philosopher has been desperately and overzealously extreme in his work and has had "enough of thought." The poet then quotes the philosopher's previously articulated, tentative answer to the question just posed, as if to see if these thoughts still hold true for him:

'"Oh, for the time when I shall sleep

Without identity,

And never care how rain may steep,

Or snow may cover me!

No promised heaven, these wild desires,

Could all or half-fulfil;

No threatened hell, with quenchless fires,

Subdue this quenchless will!'" (lines 7-14)

The third stanza switches to the philosopher's voice and he affirms unwaveringly, "So said I, and still say the same; / Still, to my death, will say" (lines 15-16). Distraught at his inability to find what he has been seeking, his musings repeatedly take on a depressed, hopeless tone and he wishes "for the time when I shall sleep, / Without identity." He proclaims to long for an escape from his very self, into nameless death where he would no longer have to worry about the troubles of the world or how and why they exist. The philosopher's thinking and working has not been one of Keatsian soul-making, but unbalanced with other experiences or Brontë's spiritual self-sufficiency the philosopher has perhaps inadvertently been on a path of soul undoing. Though he can't rid himself of his identity, rather than developing it and growing within himself he wishes to be rid of his existence. For the philosopher, this quest has become suffering but handled in a way against what Keats would have encouraged; the philosopher doesn't bear up and move through his strife but begins to wallow in it. Brontë's poem also condemns becoming lost in one's troubles, for though the philosopher might be seeking something commendable, he lacks faith which is critical to Brontë's spirituality – an idea that will become more apparent in evaluating "No coward soul." The whole point of faith, indeed, is to believe despite the lack of concrete evidence or firsthand proof which the philosopher cannot bring himself to accept.

The philosopher's quest for knowledge is driven by the fact that conventional religious answers don't seem to be quite enough: "No promised heaven, these wild desires, / Could all, or half fulfil;" (11-12). The philosopher suspects, and indeed the poet's vision described later in the poem seems to confirm, that the truth of what comes after death and lies outside of our earthly perception is not adequately accounted for in the "promised heavens" of religions. Thus, the

heaven described by religion, perhaps particularly the common descriptions of heaven in Christianity which Brontë would have been well acquainted with, cannot come close to fulfilling the version that the philosopher seeks, and believes could be out there. Likewise, conventional depictions of fire and brimstone, hellish punishment for unbelievers and sinners, is not a great enough threat to persuade the philosopher to refrain from searching outside of churches' teachings and doctrine: "No threatened hell, with quenchless fires, / Subdue this quenchless will" (13-14). The potential risk from stepping outside of the traditional lines is not powerful enough to stop his "quenchless will" and reinforces the image of the tireless, eternally wondering, searching, thinking philosopher. It creates tension between his repeated desire for the oblivion of his identity in contrast with his quenchless will, his wild desires, and his space-sweeping soul from this angle renders an image of powerful and even timeless, not easily gotten rid of.

To further elaborate on his undying sentiments, the philosopher explains "Three gods, within this little frame, / Are warring night and day; / Heaven could not hold them all, and yet / They all are held in me; / And must be mine till I forget / My present entity!" (lines 17-22). The confounding fact of Heaven's inability to contain all three gods, yet their existence all within him serve to demonstrate the frustrating nature of his philosophizing and struggle to work out what he is questioning and finding. It also suggests that the metaphysical cannot be explained or understood in human perception and earthly laws. The three gods are representative of the different paths to the truth, or varying belief systems about the world that the philosopher is considering. Each god, or structure of belief, feels separate to the philosopher as disparate options to choose from because "Heaven could not hold them all." In other words, if heaven is representative of the truth, whatever that may be, then theoretically each potential belief of the truth couldn't fit, just one. Yet, as beliefs or philosophies, they can all be held and entertained

within the philosopher. They war within his frame because he cannot manage to discover which is the correct version of the ways of the world. This leads the philosopher to lament "Oh, for the time, when in my breast / Their struggles will be o'er! / Oh, for the day, when I shall rest, / And never suffer more!" (lines 23-26). This impulse of Brontë's character is another failure of Keats's soul-making, as the philosopher does not value suffering though Keats views it as essential to building an identity. Correspondingly, the philosopher wishes increasingly to lose his identity. His ceaseless work to understand and find what he seeks, continually being met with no fruition has brought him to the despairing wish to die, bringing with it the promise of rest and forgetting his "present entity." Perhaps this passing would give him the answers he hopes for by finding out the truth through experiencing it, but the philosopher also seems to suspect that even if it would, he wouldn't be the same as he is now, and might not even possess his identity at all anymore.

This theme of three is repeated in the poem, first with the three gods the philosopher says are warring and held within him, and then again with three rivers that the poet witnesses in his vision. Because the poet provides the vision to the philosopher as an answer or guidance in response to his despairing inability to work out the warring possibilities, the three rivers seem to retain the same symbolic meaning as the three gods: various human understandings of belief. The poet relays, "I saw a spirit, standing, man, / Where thou doth stand – an hour ago, / And round his feet three rivers ran" (lines 27-29). If the three symbols, rivers and gods, arguably represent different human belief systems with differing values or figures, then the rivers reinforce this by becoming flowing paths towards the truth. Running round the spirit, they suggest that the spirit is the source of truth, God if you will, or at least a figure connected to and from that metaphysical realm and able to offer a hint at clarity for a question of such scale.

Considering the multiplicity of beliefs and ideas both spiritual and secular of the period and of Brontë's beliefs evading scholarly pinning down, these varying belief systems the philosopher considers, and the poet's vision aims to help answer, might be any number of possibilities. The poet describes the three rivers in the vision as: "a golden stream – and one like blood; / And one like sapphire seemed to be" (31-32). They might represent conventional, traditional, organized religion of varying denominations. They might represent more humanistic and philosophical approaches, or scientific and political ideas that are potentially godless. They might be new spiritualities. They are possibilities considering set doctrines, ethics and morals, and laws of nature. What is important about the poet's spiritual vision, shared to hopefully soothe and help the philosopher is this: if, as I have posited, the spirit represents "The Truth" of the metaphysical realm revealed for just a moment in the poet's vision, the three rivers running round the spirit's feet are all connected to the spirit, suggesting credibility in all three approaches. Likewise, the rivers are all "Of equal depth, and equal flow" (30) meaning each path or belief system, whatever they might be, is an equally powerful, equally valid method of reaching the spirit, or at least drawing near to it. Brontë refuses to highlight one particular branch of beliefs as the correct one, in keeping with her adherence to an individual spirituality rather than a specific religion but seems to suggest that all faiths might have merit to inform one's own spirituality. Most importantly, the varied pathways to the spirit demonstrate Brontë's insistence upon everyone finding their own individual connection or pathway to the creator or one's spirituality.

The poet continues describing the three rivers by explaining "But, where they joined their triple flood / It tumbled in an inky sea" (33-34). For the philosopher or anyone considering which path to the afterlife is the most valid or is the truth, they all tumble together into inky,

indecipherable confusion. There are no clear answers or proof to support unquestionably, and undeniably which choice is correct, if any. However, in the vision:

The spirit sent his dazzling gaze

Down through that ocean's gloomy night

Then, kindling all, with sudden blaze,

The glad deep sparkled wide and bright –

White as the sun, far, far more fair

Than its divided sources were! (35-40)

Notably, the vision provides clarity to the inky confusion of human understanding, and the one from whom the vision is provided, the seer of the vision, is the poet who is skilled at working through the medium of "ink" to utilize literary works to craft ideas and bring about these transformational experiences. Brontë is another author who sees literature as capable of working out complex spiritual ideas through imaginative rendering and even offering those who interact with it a chance to explore these ideas too. Within the poem, this vision is ultimately profound for the philosopher; he later explains that it is this spirit for which he has "watched and sought my life-time long; / Sought him in heaven, hell, earth, and air - / An endless search, and always wrong!" (lines 41-44). The philosopher exclaims that:

Had I but seen his glorious eye

Once light the clouds that wilder me,

I ne'er had raised this coward cry

To cease to think, and cease to be;

I ne'er had called oblivion blest,

Nor, stretching eager hands to death,

Implored to change for senseless rest

This sentient soul, this living breath – (45-51)

This spirit then represents the metaphysical, spiritual, religious truth for which the philosopher has been searching so tirelessly and it is the poet who is not only capable of receiving or creating the vision through imagination, but is in a position to share its potentially revelatory effects, akin to Keats's poet-physician, priest to Psyche. In the poet's vision, the spirit brings light and clarity to the inky, gloom of human uncertainty and reveals that all together, combined, the three rivers are "far, far more fair" than they were separate and divided. Brontë's poem suggests that there is truth to the varying beliefs and approaches, but alone each is missing something important. Altogether, the three paths finally seem to create the truth that the philosopher has been so desperately chasing. This concept also seems to reveal Brontë's deep appreciation for personal exploration outside of rigid boundaries of a particular belief structure, or possible distrust of those handing down guidelines to follow, preferring to use one's own judgement. It reinforces the importance to Brontë of discovering one's own path to understanding.

But though this is a revelatory experience shared by the poet, the vision still only gives a glimpse of the metaphysical truth that is pictured as a deep ocean, sparkling wide and bright – a vast amount of knowledge to try to attain in order to completely comprehend. And thus, though the poet offers this vision in an effort to soothe the philosopher's distress and aid in his fixated ponderings, the philosopher responds by claiming that had he been able to find this spirit just once it would've solved everything. He fails to recognize that in order to do so, he must have faith in turning within to self-discover like the poet has and tried to show him. However, certain that he is unable to find the spirit with his truth, the philosopher raises his "coward cry" to exchange his "sentient soul" for "senseless rest" (47, 51-52). The philosopher ultimately doesn't

grasp Brontë's poet's attempt at being a sort of poet-physician. Brontë's poet argues the value of many paths of belief and aims to soothe by pointing out the impossibility of complete knowledge for this question, shifting to Brontë's deep avowal of the need for one's individual unearthing of spiritual connection and maintaining faith. This would build identity through a process of self-discovery and trust in faith despite the vast unknowns. The philosopher, however, fails to follow this process and his grasp on his identity slips. The poem ends in the philosopher's voice with his continued despairing desire: "Oh, let me die – that power and will / Their cruel strife may close; / And conquered good, and conquering ill / Be lost in one repose!" (53-56). The philosopher admits that having found the answers he would never have raised his "coward cry." But the philosopher seeks too strongly from outside sources for truth and neglects to look inward, as Brontë upholds, which pushes him into weakened identity, moving towards the state of complete dissolution of identity that he regretfully desires. In the final lines he claims that this state will have "conquered good" and leave ill as the victorious conqueror. Yet, all of his struggle and even this apparent battle of good and ill would all "be lost in one repose!" Brontë seems to present identity as something so valuable that desiring to cast it away and dissolve his soul entirely is cowardly and presented as ill conquering good.

"The Philosopher" serves as a warning against becoming trapped in a manic, unceasing search for truth, proof, and certainty as the philosopher does. The poet shares a vision with the despairing philosopher, and thereby reader too, that reveals the necessity of making peace with one's place in the universe and encountering personal connection to a higher power through accepting that there are many interconnecting paths to the truth, and one simply cannot know all. Brontë's poet is akin to Keats's poet of negative capability and finder of knowledge through experience and empathetic, flexible identity, in that both poets are concerned with the individual

soul. Keats aims to improve the soul and build its individual identity through experiencing and through seeking to discover truths via the experimentation of negative capability. Keats writes of how people can't be flawed for missing the mark in conceptualizing about the realties beyond our plane, and that this acceptance of never necessarily knowing all leads to the aim of at least attempting to try to gain as much knowledge as one can. But while Keats's poet seeks this self-growth through learning from one's experiences and from empathetic consideration of other identities, Brontë's poet balances this approach and cautions against losing oneself, losing stability within one's own identity, by directing one's energies too constantly outside oneself. Ultimately, the philosopher represents the risks in looking too strenuously for aid, comfort, and security from elsewhere, from other decided versions of answers. The philosopher crumbles under the weight he has placed on attaining something he'll never reach: full and complete understanding of cosmic truth. By simultaneously locking himself away from living through experiences in the world, which Keats would argue is necessary to developing one's identity, and by entirely devoting himself to trying to understand the mysteries of the universe via organized systems, the philosopher neglects to also seek self-understanding and look within, which Brontë highlights as necessary, and ultimately he loses himself. Lacking identity, he wishes for the dissolution of his soul, desiring not to exist. "The Philosopher" contains a literary message that connects to similar themes in "No coward soul" with its statements of personal connection to God and reliance upon faith and self, which reveals Brontë's own literary stamp on spirituality. Through revealing crossovers with what has been discussed in Keats's works, Brontë's offers an important addition.

This "coward cry" of the philosopher is connected to Brontë's "No coward soul." While the philosopher shrinking from his soul is set in "The Philosopher" as a warning, "No coward

soul" can be read as Brontë's response or example of how one's interaction with the world and soul should be. Juliet Barker notes that Charlotte "was happy to believe that these were the last lines Emily ever wrote," though one of her later works it wasn't her last (483). Barker describes "No coward soul" as "Emily's last great poem which, though a defiant rejection of conventional organized religion, is also a triumphant declaration of faith" (483). The poem opens:

> No coward soul is mine
>
> No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere
>
> I see Heaven's glories shine
>
> And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear (1-4)

The speaker declares that her soul doesn't fear the suffering and troubles of the world, nor quake at the unknowns of the world to follow this one but stands strong in faith and a certainty of the goodness and power of Heaven. So far, this first stanza might be a typical Christian message, and the following stanza isn't turning far away from conventional ideas about the soul either:

> O God within my breast
>
> Almighty ever-present Deity
>
> Life, that in me hast rest
>
> As I Undying Life, have power in thee (lines 5-8)

Brontë's speaker describes the soul as part of God, like Keats's intelligences, emphasizing more than Keats, however, the continuing relationship with God as "ever-present" within her. The line break between "Deity" and "Life" emphasizes each concept as separate, while still linking the words together as well, emphasizing an important theme in the poem: that all life and creation are of God, yet simultaneously their own individual souls or objects. Thus, the speaker states that her soul takes its power and animation from God and as "Undying Life" will return to the

creator. The speaker provides a more conventional description of a loving God, creator of all and in control of the universe providing the sustaining life force of everything: "With wide-embracing love / Thy spirit animates eternal years / Pervades and broods above, / Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears" (lines 17-20). The speaker goes on to explain that should every aspect of everything in existence disappear, "Though Earth and moon were gone / And suns and universes ceased to be" though "thou wert left alone" the speaker states that yet "Every Existence would exist in thee" (lines 21-24).

Though none of these depictions of the speaker's testament of faith stray outlandishly from a background in organized religions, the third stanza unequivocally dismisses the many faiths and beliefs followed and used by mankind:

> Vain are the thousand creeds
> That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
> Worthless as withered weeds
> Or idlest froth amid the boundless main (lines 9-12)

Indeed, the existence of so many "creeds" and the reality of the ways that many people practice them or their filtering through human authority to the believer, even serve "To waken doubt" in God (line 13). The multiplicity of faiths can have the effect of making God inaccessible or feel nonexistent. Despite this, the "one" in whom the worthless creeds can create doubt is "Holding so fast by thy infinity / So surely anchored on / The steadfast rock of Immortality" (lines 13-16). She holds tightly to faith in the creator, who is solidly existing in immortality. This harkens back to the cautionary tale of the philosopher, too caught up in discovering the intricacies of truth and working through the various creeds, weighing their values and effects. Having searched too single mindedly for the single, straight answer, the philosopher begins to lose faith in whatever

higher power is out there and crucially also in himself. Brontë's speaker, and possibly Brontë herself, seems to suggest that all that really matters is maintaining faith in the creator, and because of the interconnectedness of God and each individual soul, faith in one's own self too. The "vain creeds" actually threaten faith through their multiplicity, their follies, and ultimately humans' flaws. They prove "worthless" compared to a concerted effort to look within to one's soul and aim to hold onto its connection to the creator "that in me rest." The philosopher turns only to these imperfect creeds, and through a lack of faith, he loses his strong identity. If the soul is also God, then lack of faith means a weakened understanding of self and one becomes lost. By failing to work through suffering as he agonizes over his lack of answers and wants to dissolve identity, he also fails the soul-making method of Keats's that would help him build his identity. The speaker in Brontë's "No coward soul" on the other hand steps outside of limiting structured choices and through strong faith has a soul that is "No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere / I see Heaven's glories shine / And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear" (lines 1-4). Brontë's speaker moves through suffering by relying upon faith.

By emphasizing throughout the poem the interconnectedness of all existences to God, the speaker claims:

> There is not room for Death
>
> Nor atom that his might could render void
>
> Since thou are Being and Breath
>
> And what thou art may never be destroyed (lines 25-28)

This conclusion to the poem supports the speaker's priority of faith, for through such faith her soul need not fear death or the mysteries of what follows this life, for her identity and existence won't be destroyed, instead, her soul may find comfort in rejoining the creating force that

animated it. An alternate reading could view this moment in the poem as weakening my claim that the poem values unique, individual identities as regardless of preserving such individualism or dissolution of individualism, all souls return to God. However, as I have argued, Brontë depicts the necessity of holding tight to faith and discovering an individual spiritual connection to God. This belief then paints the philosopher's desire to dissolve identity as "ill conquering good" and as an erroneous belief developed by the philosopher's lack of faith and failure to grow self-understanding. If the soul is also God, as Brontë's speaker declares, then failure to understand one's soul is failure to recognize God. The philosopher seems to believe that in dissolving his identity, he will fall into "oblivion" and "senseless rest" where he will "cease to think, and cease to be" which potentially means that he will truly lose his connection to the divine and fall into what I suggest might even be Brontë's version of hell. This is perhaps building off of a conventional idea of hell as a separation from God, but for Brontë heavily steeped in identity, or rather lack thereof. Brontë's poems then argue for the importance of discovering one's unique approach to spiritual understanding by developing one's identity.

While Keats's poetry urges someone suffering to find beauty, and even the beauty of the painful experience for what growth it brings in enduring and moving through it, Brontë's poetry sees troubles as endurable through strong faith though of an individualized experience coming from the self's connection to God. Brontë's poet offers a counterbalancing wisdom to that of Keats's. Keats's poet looks to the world and other identities for as many experiences as possible, to help develop self-understanding and identity and to build empathy. But Brontë's poet cautions against the potential for looking so much outside of oneself for knowledge, that one loses oneself along the way. The philosopher loses identity and wallows, trapped in despair because he fails both poets' advice. He doesn't succeed in finding his own individual path, as each value above

limiting, defined rules of structured beliefs. He doesn't succeed in conscious experiencing by truly living out in the world, like soul-making requires, and he fails most potently in developing a strong sense of identity by seeking to understand himself and his own unique connection to the creator like Brontë's speakers urge.

Barker describes Emily Brontë's death as quicker than either she or her family expected, but that she bore up under her suffering even shrugging off help to maintain a sense of normalcy, fighting off the "poisoning doctor" until she reached the level of severity towards the end (575-576). Charlotte paints this picture of her sister Emily's passing:

> She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. Yet, while physically she perished, mentally, she grew stronger than we had yet known her. Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was, that, while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the faded eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render. (Barker 574-576)

One might say that this description of Emily Brontë's noble endurance of suffering draws from and supports my argument for her inward facing spirituality as a comfort in suffering, helping to endure the unchangeable with faith.

Emily Brontë, like John Keats, offers a literary exploration of spirituality to escape the boundaries of organized religion or philosophies and find individual paths to develop the soul and manage inevitable suffering in this world. Keats's soul-making proposes actively utilizing

the world and its many experiences to grow one's identity and justify suffering by viewing it as something that is integral to self-development and gaining knowledge. Though Brontë's spirituality doesn't seem to outright discount or disagree with these ideas, it instead values transcending the troubles of the world by turning within to grow your soul's connection to the divine. Both spiritualities condemn, or at least strongly caution against, remaining stuck in suffering. Both use suffering as a means to catalyze the soul's development. Keats by actively living through sorrow to learn from it and turning to beauty, and Brontë by aiming for a transcendent self-connection to the creator discovered through individual faith. The philosopher tells the poet that had he been able to work out for himself the metaphysical lesson provided by the poet, he would never have "Implored to change for senseless rest / This sentient soul, this living breath" (lines 51-52). The poet delivers a message of faith in the unknowable that ultimately values the soul as the singular most important concern for maintaining and developing. For if the soul is simultaneously your own individual identity and God, as the speaker in "No coward soul" affirms, then studying and growing your soul is your ticket to gaining as much of the understanding that the philosopher desires as is possible. If the philosopher had recognized this, he claims he'd never have devalued his "sentient soul, this living breath." But, not having turned inward himself to discover this, nor following the poet's advice to release the need to prove one worthless creed of the world correct which would allow such a journey of learning oneself to begin, the philosopher has not developed his soul in Brontë's fashion and thus wishes for the ultimate dissolution of his identity. Which, if the "sentient soul" is also God as Brontë's speakers argue then the philosopher's movement towards complete destruction of identity means losing his connection to the divine entirely too. A fate that Brontë views as terrible and the conquering by ill over good. For Brontë, literature provides

an imaginary escape or shrugging off of the immediate world to provide a space where spirituality can be processed and shared with others. Like Keats, Brontë uses literature in an endeavor to create space for individual exploration of spirituality and a venue to aid in self-development and discovery, for author in creation, as well as reader in experiencing.

Chapter Three: "Pleasure for the Beautiful Body, but Pain for the Beautiful Soul": Oscar Wilde's Artistic Spirituality

In Oscar Wilde's poem, "The House of Judgement" God looks into the "Book of the Life of the Man" to pass judgement on the Man standing before him, determining whether he has earned the destiny of heaven or hell. He works through the many sins and transgressions that the Man has committed through his life, and the Man doesn't attempt to deny or defend but merely acknowledges, "Even so did I" to each reading out of his offences. Unsurprisingly, God eventually states "Surely I will send thee into Hell. Even into Hell will I send thee" (lines 43-44). To this, the Man cries "Thou canst not" and when questioned for what reason he answers, "Because in Hell have I always lived" (lines 45-48). When after a pause it is determined that he should be sent to Heaven, the Man then again cries "Thou canst not" to which God asks him again "for what reason?" (lines 53-55). The answer lies in the poem's conclusion: "Because never, and in no place, have I been able to imagine it,' answered the Man. / And there was silence in the House of Judgement" (lines 56-58). This treatment of religious themes is distinctly Wildean and raises the value he places on the necessity of the imagination. Without being able to imagine the beauty of Heaven, the Man lived a life of darkness and cruelty which in blemishing his soul was in fact Hell. This also leaves him unfit or unable to ascend from his soul's judgement into Heaven. Oscar Wilde as a late nineteenth-century figure demonstrates the progression of this project's literary exploration of spirituality and demonstrates the most explicit call for art with its use of the imagination, as a spiritual endeavor on par, if not greater than religion. Throughout Wilde's work, there is a repeated theme of amoral reliance on experiences of all kinds, a potential extension of soul-making's proposition. Wilde reveals a sympathy for the sinner even acknowledging the potential necessity for sin as a sort of soul-making type endeavor

if learned from. So, though Wilde's spiritual version of aestheticism does not necessarily smoothly fit into common conventional religious understandings of how to practice morality, it still shuns cruelty and values love as a force of truth and beauty. Wilde's *De Profundis*, written from his time incarcerated, provides a distinct working out of a version of spirituality that values art as its mode of self-development. These prominent themes can also be examined in one of his short stories, "The Fisherman and His Soul" in which the soul, good and evil, and love are all weighed. Wilde's proposal of spirituality holds interesting crossovers with those of Keats and Brontë, and he too, perhaps most explicitly, shows literature to be a means for the writer, and even the reader, experiencing literary works to develop the self.

Wilde may have been influenced directly by Keats, referencing his work at times, and even follows a similar ardent advocation of experiences as a means to truly understand and develop one's soul, also ultimately regarding suffering as extremely important to this process. Wilde holds a distinct valuing of the true individual, separate from and not bound to the thoughtless, reflexive, repeated customs of people merely part of the group that is society. In this way, he joins Keats, Brontë, and others of the period in seeking a unique spiritual understanding outside of organized social structures. Though Keats and Brontë draw from Christianity to a degree, I suggest that Wilde, surprisingly perhaps, is initially the most interested in retaining some features of traditional religious systems. In *De Profundis*, Wilde presents Christ in an extremely unique and unorthodox fashion, but still as a powerful figure to follow or admire. Unlike the Christian faith he does so by equating Christ to the ultimate artist, an embodiment of an ideal an artist should aim to learn from. In this lengthy consideration of Christ as artist, Wilde states that Christ was against an infatuation with worldly riches and "vulgar success" because there is nothing to be gained from these (182). But while that might be a conventional message to

provide from a reading of Christ, Wilde also argues that Christ stood against "tedious orthodoxy" as "forms and ceremonies were made for man, not man for forms and ceremonies" (182). Likewise, "The cold philanthropies, the ostentatious public charities, the tedious formalisms so dear to the middle-class mind, [Christ] exposed with utter and relentless scorn" (182). Wilde writes of following societal and religious rules by contemporaries of his and Christ's time: "To us what is termed orthodoxy is merely a facile unintelligent acquiescence; but to them, and in their hands, it was a terrible and paralysing tyranny" (182). But, as to what should be valued instead of bending to orthodoxy, he argues that Christ "showed that the spirit alone was of value" (182). Wilde's spiritual considerations in this matter of the soul's high value, along with his frequent espousals of the virtues of individualism and breaking free from the structures of society, align with the ideas portrayed in Brontë's poetry as well. Oscar Wilde's ideas related to the soul resonate with these two tracks of identity building or strengthening discussed in examining Keats and Brontë, but perhaps unsurprising for such a key figure of aestheticism, his spirituality relies upon art as a means for gaining this understanding. For Wilde, art is inextricably linked with spirituality. One might even say art is his religion. Art does spiritual work upon the soul as Wilde views art as a powerful endeavor for reaching truth. Though I have suggested that Keats and Brontë's work exhibited the practice of utilizing literature to work out spiritual truths and self-development (or growth of identity), Wilde is the author that most explicitly presents art in all of its forms, not just literature (though he mentions in *De Profundis* its potential superiority at representation), as a tool for independent spiritual thinking and self-development.

Oscar Wilde has a long scholarly history of being linked to aestheticism, and writes prolifically upon art, art's means, artists, and criticism. Moments in Wilde's work are often taken

as evidence for his adherence to aestheticism due to their exclamation of valuing Beauty above any potential meaning or moral, and even suggesting that there isn't any use or meaning for art beyond the art itself. This would seem to run counter to works with a spiritual and/or moral purpose. Jing Hou writes of aestheticism in Wilde's *A House of Pomegranates* but offers further explanation: "In stating that art is immoral, Wilde is against the hypocrisy of the society, against those who preach right and wrong; because there is indeed injustice in the world and the evil is not necessarily punished" (2171). This relates to Wilde's belief in art reflecting the truths of life back to those interpreting it, and his spirituality's shunning of organized social structures for their human faults in judgement. Art and an individual approach to bettering or further understanding one's soul is a more truthful option to Wilde. Molly Robinson Kelly acknowledges this broad scholarly understanding of Wilde's aestheticism and amorality while discussing the spirituality in Wilde's *De Profundis*:

> Despite the many commentators *De Profundis* has had in the 119 years since it was written, its stunningly original and complex spiritual center has not received the attentive textual analysis needed to elucidate what Wilde is saying here about his spiritual views. Most often, studies of *De Profundis* have participated in what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus call 'symptomatic reading' (1), mining the prison letter for material that can shed light on the Wilde we already know: aesthetic theorist, ardent *devoté* of self-fashioning and refashioning, martyr, Catholic wannabe, and deathbed convert. (211)

Robinson Kelly surveys some scholarly attempts at deciphering the spiritual aspects in *De Profundis*, ultimately claiming that "Thus, Wilde's spiritual writing in *De Profundis* has not been ignored; rather, it has been enlisted to illuminate the more familiar aesthetic and literary terrain of Wilde's work and life" (211). She notes the integral nature of Wilde's work questioning the

role of suffering and argues that *De Profundis* offers a re-conceptualizing of his Art and proposes tasks for building a unique approach to spirituality, concluding with the statement that "Of all his works, *De Profundis* speaks best to the complex, multifaceted spirituality that was part of Oscar Wilde, along the way offering, arguably, a felicitous expression of the spiritual diversity of his time" (225). Thus, as Robinson Kelly's article points out, there is an opening in the field for discussion about the unique spirituality proposed by Wilde, and here I seek to add to critical work on Wilde's theories of spirituality proposed in *De Profundis*, equating artistic impulses with spiritual ones, and considering the use of art to achieve identity centered transcendences, soul development, and self-understanding. These themes are present in his fiction as well, thus I will also examine one of the stories in *A House of Pomegranates*, "The Fisherman and His Soul," which has been acknowledged as being morally ambiguous and paradoxical. Viewed as an example of his later proposal of spirituality in *De Profundis*, and as a broader track of literary thinking that is building off of previous works like Keats, the paradoxical moral of the tale begins to unravel and proves a point of Wilde's that morality and reality of the nature of the world are far more complex than the often simple explanations granted by organized religions or philosophies. However, as I argue that Keats, Brontë, and Wilde propose individualized spiritualities, standing outside structures of faith, I also posit that in studying Wilde's earlier portrayal of Christianity and the soul in "The Fisherman and His Soul" connected to his more final proposal of spirituality in *De Profundis*, one can see a possibly more forgiving view of the potential for organized religion in its ideal sense that seems ultimately strongly discarded as not usually occurring in reality. Though Wilde sees organized religion as having the elements to become the idealistic concept of artistic unity he describes in *De Profundis*, Wilde seems to find it lacking or unlikely to reach this status in the real world. Likewise, while Robinson Kelly sees

De Profundis as his grand re-conceptualizing of Art alongside his delineation of spirituality, I argue that instead it builds off of themes of suffering and art already under his consideration in "The Fisherman and His Soul" which he then confirms and substantiates in *De Profundis*.

De Profundis is an evocative work full of characteristic grandiose extremes and self-aggrandizement, of biting social critique, reconsiderations of familiarly Wildean aesthetic impulses and ideals, unconventional but no less sincere considerations of morals and spirituality, and vivid rendering of Wilde's immense suffering and treatment, both cruel and sympathetic, in his sentencing and time in jail. Its complexity provides rich grounds for examination. Wilde presents himself as having carried unusually high and important standing as a public figure in the realms of art and marvels at being recognized as genius during his lifetime. He "made art a philosophy and philosophy an art" and "Whatever I touched, I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me" (162-163). Despite this aesthetic sentiment of paradox and no adherence to more typical standards of right and wrong, Wilde does paint what some could read as a more morally conventional picture of his fall, noting that he had lived for pleasure, always seeking new sensations, growing "careless of the lives of others" and "I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character", ultimately stating "I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace" (163). This draws parallels to the Fisherman in "The Fisherman and His Soul" in which falling into one extreme of sensation without actively considering one's soul and the effects upon it, brings about suffering. And

suffering for Wilde has the same corrective and teaching power that Keats ascribes to it. Although perhaps unlike his unshakeable character the Fisherman, Wilde claims himself as willing, welcoming even, of this monumental change in circumstances for its ability to allow him opportunity for "fresh development" (163). He writes that these kinds of self-discovery and growth must come from within oneself brought about by one's experiences, for otherwise the opportunity would have been rejected should it have been suggested by another (163). Wilde doesn't regret letting himself "be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease" rather, that was one path of experiences and now, though he details the awful rage, pain, humiliation, and sorrow his unfair situation has wrought, this suffering is a chance for discovering "self-realisation" (163-164). By searching for some kind of purpose or way to endure his painful situation, he discovers an enlightening justification of suffering firsthand. Though one could argue that he is just making the best of a terrible situation, suffering as an illuminating and soul building experience is a theme to be found in earlier works before his trial which I will demonstrate in analyzing "The Fisherman and His Soul." Just as Keats argues for the need to experience in order to truly understand something, Wilde also argues in *De Profundis* that he requires experience in order to believe in something. Thus, he explores suffering's use for identity in this short story, but by the time he is jailed and writing *De Profundis*, he has firsthand experienced and now pens his more fully developed spirituality.

Wilde renounces in *De Profundis* any methods to survive his ordeal beyond love and turning to within himself, for "Neither religion, morality, nor reason can help me at all" (164). These ideals, love and self-awareness allowing for self-development, become tenets of his spirituality. Morality he claims he rejects because he is one "made for exceptions, not for laws" and "while I see that there is nothing wrong in what one does, I see that there is something wrong

in what one becomes. It is well to have learned that" (165). Here is displayed the merging of art and spirituality in Wilde's proclaimed interpretation of the world. Art, as Wilde had emphasized throughout his written works, is not guided by morals, seeking truth and beauty instead. Art is not restricted to only representing what is pleasant or deemed right; it explores all aspects of the world and only aims to present pleasingly to the viewer or reader the sum of its whole and reflect back truths of the world. Likewise, morality in real spiritual matters for Wilde is concerned with the final product of what one becomes, not necessarily the journey that takes one there. Or rather, the actions themselves are not right or wrong per se, but one's individual soul becomes good or bad by the unique combination of choices one makes, and this is something that each individual should watch carefully. This is experiencing in a soul-making type respect, though perhaps taking Keats's negative capability just another step further by refusing to automatically categorize anything as right or wrong in a limited moral dichotomy.

Wilde, much like Brontë, argues in *De Profundis* that religion of all creeds, even those that might not ordinarily represent themselves directly as religion like agnosticism, are all varying structured approaches to truth (165). Wilde claims not to have much faith for anything outside of that which he can experience, going on to write that "But whether it be faith or agnosticism, it must be nothing external to me. Its symbols must be of my own creating. Only that is spiritual which makes its own form. If I may not find its secret within myself, I shall never find it: if I have not got it already, it will never come to me" (165). Thus, Wilde claims a preference for individual discovery of spirituality and the progression from his earlier short story's renderings of similar themes, perhaps even inadvertently existing there, have been worked into a full understanding in *De Profundis.* Like Brontë, Wilde also posits that everything one needs for developing identity is already within oneself but provides an explicit means of

discovering such internal truths and seems to rely less intensely on faith alone. Art is necessarily a form of creation, so for Wilde, who describes only being able to discover spiritual matters through experience, art provides a method to experience things not always easily witnessed. Experience is the catalyst for developing understanding within oneself. And thus, returning to *De Profundis*'s speculations on what cannot provide him aid or understanding in his plight, religion with its heavy reliance upon faith and its boundaries to think and work within cannot help him. Rather, he must turn within to develop his own spiritual understanding.

Reason doesn't aid Wilde in his plight either, for it only affirms that he is suffering under "wrong and unjust" laws and systems (165). As Keats aimed to justify suffering, Wilde also seeks a purpose for, and proclaims to gain from having to endure suffering. He rejects advice of trying to forget who he was or to forget his time in prison and here Wilde strongly proposes a distinctly soul-making type of argument: "to regret one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development … It is no less than a denial of the soul" (166). He goes on to exclaim that he only cares to keep company with artists who understand beauty, and people who have suffered and therefore understand sorrow (167-168). As beauty has been his main attention, under his present circumstances sorrow is now his great focus and teacher; he describes how he had avoided suffering, but "I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art. What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward: in which form reveals" (170). Sorrow, he explains is truer than pleasure. Pleasure wears a mask and can hide things that aren't pleasant, being not always truthful on the surface, but sorrow doesn't hide the painful experience that it is. If "Truth in art is the unity of a thing

with itself" (170), and sorrow is a truthful sensation, then experiencing suffering brings one's body and soul close together making it an artistic and spiritual opportunity for self-development.

Wilde proposes in *De Profundis* that "the secret of life is suffering" and that it is hidden behind everything. When one seeks out only that which is pleasurable hoping to never have to suffer, they are "ignorant all the while that we may really be starving the soul" (170). He draws this conclusion in working out what seemed to him the impossibility of God's love for man due to the vast suffering in the world:

> Now it seems to me that love of some kind is the only possible explanation of the extraordinary amount of suffering that there is in the world. I cannot conceive of any other explanation. I am convinced that there is no other, and that if the world has indeed, as I have said, been built of sorrow, it has been built by the hands of love, because in no other way could the soul of man, for whom the world was made, reach the full stature of perfection. Pleasure for the beautiful body, but pain for the beautiful soul. (171)

This is strikingly similar to the soul-making theories of John Keats and blended insistently with aesthetic idealizing of beauty. It, too, is an explanation for the horrors of sorrow, pain, and degradation brought down from fellow man. If suffering is a force of truth and beauty, which Wilde expresses throughout *De Profundis*, then it is not itself an evil thing to be avoided but integral to developing the soul into the beautiful aims which he had always held for other more material things in life. It doesn't take away from the reality of actually living through sorrow however, and immediately following this shared epiphany, he again describes that it is hard to maintain the transcendent height of the soul, and once again the cold realities of his prison cell surrounds him and drags him back into body.

Like Keats, Wilde values all of his experiences, arguing that one should do everything to the full, but that since he had already lived pleasure to the fullest extent, it would have been limiting to continue on in that manner (172). By achieving full acceptance of his pleasurable and sorrowful experiences, Wilde writes: "It is, if I can fully attain to it, the ultimate realisation of the artistic life. For the artistic life is simply self-development. Humility in the artist is his frank acceptance of all experiences, just as love in the artist is simply the sense of beauty that reveals to the world its body and its soul" (173). Wilde's artistic spirituality views art as ultimately a means to develop one's soul. Wilde explains that

> In *Marius the Epicurean* Pater seeks to reconcile the artistic life with the life of religion, in the deep, sweet, and austere sense of the word. But Marius is little more than a spectator: an ideal spectator indeed, and one to whom it is given 'to contemplate the spectacle of life with appropriate emotions,' which Wordsworth defines as the poet's true aim: yet a spectator merely, and perhaps a little too much occupied with the comeliness of the benches of the sanctuary to notice that it is the sanctuary of sorrow that he is gazing at. (173)

Here, Wilde suggests that others have mistaken or simply haven't realized the importance and cold beauty of sorrow, looking instead to things that are pleasant and appealing. Most importantly, Marius is only a spectator and it is crucial to actually experience not just witness to be able to really understand and achieve the artistic unity that Wilde has proposed is worth aspiring to. While Pater's thought experiment has occurred within literature and is therefore limited by the author's missing the importance of sorrow, instead, Wilde finds artistic inspiration from a real-world source: "I see a far more intimate and immediate connection between the true

life of Christ and the true life of the artist" (173). What follows is a fascinating and unconventional depiction of Christ.

Wilde sees in Christ the same nature of the artist, which is "an intense and flamelike imagination" and that "He realised in the entire sphere of human relations that imaginative sympathy which in the sphere of Art is the sole secret of creation. He understood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich" (173). This effusion of art and Christ's ability to create wonders stemming from a true and empathetic understanding of human nature and the paradoxes within it, rings similarly to Keats's empathetic negative capability for the poet to not only build his soul, but further to offer insight to the reader. If literature can be a tool with high aims for the transformative experiences of both writing and reading, then the author must be able to connect to the plight of humanity, which is best understood when suffered oneself. In Wilde's considerations imagination is key to being able to self-develop (thus the Man's inability to reach Heaven in the opening poem) and imagination is a fundamental skill of negative capability. Wilde makes this connection to Christ, writing "Christ's place indeed is with the poets. His whole conception of Humanity sprang right out of the imagination and can only be realised by it" (174). For Wilde, Christ's representation of himself as both the son of man and of God, along with his willingness to take on the burdens of the entire world, come from his immense ability to imagine the sufferings of others. Ultimately Christ moves from "not merely imagining it but achieving it, so that at the present moment all who come in contact with his personality, even though they may neither bow to his altar nor kneel before his priest, in some way find that the ugliness of their sin is taken away and the beauty of their sorrow revealed to them" (174). As art for Wilde has no sense of needing to cling or conform to morals, neither does the religious or

human nature of Christ matter. Instead, pictured as an ideal which artists should strive towards, Christ's imagination or ability to understand the world and those within it, and the immense impact he created by taking on such grand suffering allow him to transmit the revelatory power of seeing the beauty in people's sorrow by coming close to him - whatever their beliefs might be about him on a religious level. This power to have a spiritual impact regardless of held beliefs, is the spiritual power that if attained Wilde argues art can hold. Christ manages this feat through his whole life, "so entirely may sorrow and beauty be made one in their meaning and manifestation" (175).

The other important aspect to Christ's art is love. "If his place is among the poets, he is the leader of all the lovers," Wilde writes, "He saw that love was the first secret of the world for which the wise men had been looking, and that it was only through love that one could approach either the heart of the leper or the feet of God" (175-176). He explains that

> To the artist, expression is the only mode under which he can conceive life at all. To him what is dumb is dead. But to Christ it was not so. With a width and wonder of imagination that fills one almost with awe, he took the entire world of the inarticulate, the voiceless world of pain, as his kingdom, and made himself its external mouthpiece … His desire was to be to the myriads who had found no utterance a very trumpet through which they might call to heaven. And feeling with the artistic nature of one to whom suffering and sorrow were modes through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful, that an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image, he made himself the image of the Man of Sorrows, and as such has fascinated and dominated art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing. (177-178)

Wilde's Christ is an artist for his ability to transform himself with suffering, but an ideal figure of artist like no other has really been before or since, to actually transmit this idea on such a far-reaching scale. Wilde's incredibly unorthodox portrait of Christ still holds a similar effect as conventional depictions or beliefs, but from a much freer and more individualistic approach. Those who look to Christ, find purpose or strength through their suffering and become closer to their souls, allowing for improvement and growth of identity in pursuing their own unique experiences.

One other important aspect of the ideal artist, demonstrated by Christ is that Wilde describes Christ as "the most supreme of individualists" (176). Through immense suffering and love with a following transformation, and importantly through the vast exposure of this to others over centuries, Christ becomes a model of the potential for artist and individual identity. Wilde laments "how few people ever 'possess their souls' before they die" claiming that "Most people are other people. Their thoughts are some one else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation" (176). Wilde, like Keats and Brontë, strongly values the uniqueness of one's own identity. Experiences and self-development are important because you are aiming to craft your own soul, shape who you are, and as an artist, leave things of beauty behind. To coax yourself into self-discovery and thereby break away from the mold of status quo or long inhabited version of identity, Wilde explains "one realises one's soul only by getting rid of all alien passions, all acquired culture, and all external possessions, be they good or evil" (176). He affirms this by explaining that it wasn't until he was stripped of everything, wealth, freedom, happiness, reputation, and eventually his children which was the ultimate blow, that he came to realize the only thing he had left was the ability to find acceptance. This treatment of suffering rings more similarly to Brontë's arguing for the necessity to let go of what cannot be controlled,

turning within to one's very soul to find a transcendent endurance through strife. Bereft of everything, Wilde moves into acceptance as the only choice left and he says he was actually able to find his spirits a little lifted because "It was of course my soul in its ultimate essence that I had reached" (176). This is another rendition of the sort of internal forbearance that Brontë wrote of, by accepting that which is outside of one's control or understanding and looking inwards to find company with one's soul to endure. This discovery of intimacy with the soul isn't possible until one is given the opportunity to find the inner strength and grace to move through unfair, painful, sorrowful events.

These important ideas about the soul play out in Wilde's fairy tale "The Fisherman and His Soul." Kate Pendlebury writes on the essential moral paradoxes in *A House of Pomegranates*: "the moral world of the tales is difficult to get a handle on, contradicts conventional Christian codes, and cannot be accommodated within any sort of simple dichotomy (125). Indeed, "The Fisherman and His Soul" as one of the *House of Pomegranate* tales, follows the structure of a moralistic fairy tale, but doesn't present the reader with any clear cut, expected moral resolution. The Fisherman falls in love with a mermaid, but in order to be with her he must contrive of a way to get rid of his soul as the sea-folk don't have souls. He manages to cast off his soul, which then prompts a plot that feels familiarly situated within the form of fairy tale but manages to subvert expectations as to the expected resolutions.

Throughout the entire tale, the Fisherman never relinquishes his belief of love being the most important value. Love is something that Wilde goes on to describe as important to Christ as artist and is one of the only values that he holds as something that can help him in his suffering. He even writes that suffering comes from a loving divine intention to offer a chance to self-develop. This short story becomes a comparison of love versus the soul, as well as a

consideration of spirituality alongside an orthodox structure of religion. In order to be with the mermaid he loves, the Fisherman sees no issue with removing his soul as he doesn't believe he needs one: "Of what value is my soul to me? I cannot see it. I may not touch it. I do not know it" (143). The Fisherman initially tries to ask the Priest for answers on how someone might remove their soul but is immediately admonished for even thinking of such a thing: "There is no thing more precious than a human soul, nor any earthly thing that can be weighed against it" (143). The Priest of this tale reveals himself to be a man of religion who doesn't live up to his supposed Christian ideals of kindness, love, and patience, for he is quick to pronounce the sea-folk and the fauns of the forest "lost" and not to be consorted with, and later in the story shows no mercy or sympathy for the Fisherman and Mermaid's plight. The Priest considers the lost sea-folk and fauns as "vile and evil … pagan things that God suffers to wander through His world" (144). The Priest has no tolerance for anything outside of his rigid sense of his religion. A. R. Mashilker argues that "The Christianity of the Priest against which Wilde sets his hero is the religion of 'superficialities and disastrous misunderstandings,' which Jung finds stems from 'the general psychological education of the European'" (174). Mashilker relays that Jung says this ultimately leads to a lack of "reaching down into the depths of psyche" and prevents attaining the ideal which religions intend to actually stand for (174). Therefore, Mashilker writes, "The Priest, in his imitation of the Christian ideal, is himself fragmentary and in turn cannot help the Fisherman envision his 'wholeness' as an internal experience" (174). The Priest lacks love, which is demonstrated most explicitly by the ending of the tale and thus cannot fully comprehend his soul or reach the Christian ideal and is unable to convince the Fisherman of the value of his soul. So, the Fisherman pushes back and claims, "For her body I would give my soul, and for her love I would surrender heaven" (144). The Fisherman has placed higher values on things that the priest

cannot condone, but as the priest has also strayed too far from values such as love and compassion into the rigidity of his closed and lacking faith, he casts the Fisherman out: "And he gave him no blessing, but drove him from his door" (145). Wilde seems to point to the failure of structured religion, as embodied by the Priest in this story, as rigid, unsympathetic to those it purports to be most in need of its assistance, and not in actuality a complete version of its ideal – thus failing Wilde's concept of artistic unity being truth.

Though the Priest is correct in his valuing of the Soul as the tale ultimately shows, he pushes the Fisherman out to the merchants because he is a character type of the overzealous believer and falls into an extreme of orthodoxy, something in *De Profundis* that Wilde looks down on. The Fisherman tries again with merchants, but they won't buy his soul seeing it as useless when they might buy his body for labor as a slave instead. The merchants here are too removed from spirituality of any kind, instead falling too much into worldliness. They cannot help the Fisherman either because they don't value or understand the soul. The third person he asks for help, despite having been told by men that she is evil, is a beautiful witch. She makes a deal with the Fisherman to join her for a dance in exchange for the means to remove his soul. The dance turns out to be a notorious witches' sabbath to worship the devil, whereupon recognizing the devil he reflexively makes the sign of the cross and immediately disrupts everything into chaos. The Fisherman is in need of the suffering experiences ultimately outlined in *De Profundis* that provide understanding of the soul. The Fisherman is lost because he doesn't have an understanding of the value of his soul. He's at a crossroads at the witch's sabbath: The Fisherman isn't evil, despite not fitting into an orthodox Christian box, as he reflexively signs away the devil and at this moment, he hasn't entirely forsaken his belief in, or adherence to God yet, as he halfway turns to religion to protect himself from the devil.

Before the witch flees, the Fisherman forces her to hold up her end of the deal. She reluctantly tells him the magic procedure and provides a little knife with a "handle of green viper's skin" (153). The Soul begs the Fisherman not to cut him free but the Fisherman chooses his love for the Mermaid over his soul and any implications that it may hold to remove it. As Mashilker notes, "The Fisherman's actions invert the Christian ascetic formula: he will not give up his body for his soul, nor worldly love for the love of God in heaven" thus as he tells the Priest "For her body I would give my soul … for her love I would surrender heaven" (175). The Soul pleads for his heart, but the Fisherman refuses as he needs his heart to love the mermaid. "Should I not love also?" (154) the Soul asks him, foreshadowing the impact that this decision will have both on the plot and on the ultimate symbolic meaning. The Soul goes off on adventures to exotic lands and returns each year to attempt to bribe the Fisherman into taking it back with newly acquired values from each of its travels. Because, however, the Fisherman had cut the Soul's access off from his heart, the Soul grows more and more cruel.

The Soul first tries to bribe the Fisherman back by acquiring Wisdom, telling him that he will be "wiser than all the wise men, and Wisdom shall be thine" (160). The Fisherman declines, "Love is better" (160). The Soul then tries again with a magic Ring of Riches to become wealthier than the richest men in the world, but again "Love is better than Riches … and the little Mermaid loves me" (164). The Soul goes away weeping but on the third try, manages to tempt him with a girl gifted at dancing. The Mermaid cannot dance so he agrees to quickly go and then return. Once the Soul tempts the Fisherman into journeying with him, thereby tricking him into being reattached to his Soul, the Soul never actually takes him to the dancer but instead convinces the Fisherman to commit increasingly evil deeds. When the Fisherman demands to know why he was made to sin, the Soul each time simply says, "Be at peace, be at peace."

Eventually, the Fisherman breaks the Soul's bad influence after he's convinced to strike down and steal from a kind stranger who had offered him food and board. The action of "return[ing] evil for good, and pay[ing] with the shedding of blood for the kindness" shown him causes the Fisherman to confront his Soul: "I may not be at peace, for all that thou hast made me do I hate. Thee I also hate, and I bid thee tell me wherefore thou hast wrought me in this wise" (167). It is because he left his soul so long without a heart:

> 'Thou knowest,' answered his Soul, 'thou knowest it well. Hast thou forgotten that thou gavest me no heart? I trow not. And so trouble not thyself nor me, but be at peace, for there is no pain that thou shalt not give away, nor any pleasure that thou shalt not receive.'
>
> And when the young Fisherman heard these words he trembled and said to his Soul, 'Nay but thou art evil, and hast made me forget my love, and hast tempted me with temptations, and hast set my feet in the ways of sin.'
>
> And his Soul answered him, 'Thou hast not forgotten that when thou didst send me forth into the world thou gavest me no heart. (168)

The Fisherman then tries to discard his Soul again but cannot for the witch's spell won't work a second time. His Soul tells him, "Once in his life may a man send his Soul away, but he who receiveth back his Soul must keep it with him for ever, and this is his punishment and his reward" (168). By sending away his Soul, this fairy tale symbolizes the process of sinning and of the risk of being out of touch with one's identity. It also shows the necessity of love. He is punished by being in possession of a warped soul from continuous sinning, and yet by having this darkened soul returned to him and in his awareness once more he is offered a chance at redemption and improvement.

Simultaneously, by separating his Soul from love it no longer was hindered from doing wrong, but because his Soul is growing darker, still being part of him as his identity just separated from his body and therefore immediate sense, it tempts him away from his love the Mermaid to begin to partake in sins. As Wilde writes in *De Profundis*, what one becomes is of importance and the artist's true aim is to unify body and soul, and build love and empathy through Christ-like imagination. But by cutting off his Soul from his heart, the Fisherman represents one who does not become the artistic unity that Wilde speaks of and he cannot become this unity because he doesn't know himself, his soul, his identity.

The Fisherman doesn't seem to be punished by Wilde for revoking Christianity, or organized faith, and turning to passionate love instead. Rather, he's sent down a dark path for failing to understand the value of his Soul and building a powerful and better identity. This is similar to Brontë's philosopher who suffers for not valuing his soul to a sufficient degree and is also willing to be rid of his identity. Wilde doesn't present the choice of organized religion or of common worldly society as welcoming or helpful options for the Fisherman. However, he also presents the third option of turning towards evil as not beneficial either. This choice to turn towards darkness, symbolized by the witch and her status here as servant to the devil, leads the Fisherman astray by losing connection with his Soul, which is intrinsically himself, his very identity. In Wilde's later proposed sense of artistic spirituality, self-identity is extremely important and something to always be developing. Yet, the Fisherman ultimately faces hefty consequences when in losing his Soul, his identity has lost connection to love and thus gradually becomes corrupted. Though Wilde espouses that one should do everything to the fullest, and thus doesn't seem to punish the Fisherman for his intense, all-consuming love for the Mermaid, this option sees no chastening suffering instead it is full submission to pleasure. Though not offering

a simple binary moral, as in life matters are more complex than they may seem, this lack of suffering means he ultimately loses touch with his Soul.

In *De Profundis*, Wilde goes on to write "Of course the sinner must repent. But why? Simply because otherwise he would be unable to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of initiation. More than that: it is the means by which one alters one's past" (183). In order to grow from his experiences, the sinner must recognize what he has done through suffering and feeling sorrow for whatever wrongdoing has been committed. This allows the sinner to change and better his identity. This moment begins to occur for the Fisherman when he realizes his Soul is corrupt and evil from his mistake of cutting away his Soul from his heart. Wilde shows that the true sin of casting away his identity so that it was able to be corrupted gradually pulls you away from your true sense of self. Sinning, for Wilde might seem to offer a more conventional religious understanding of harming the soul, but he articulates that sinning is an action that signifies and produces a removal from one's identity. Rather than being concerned with wrongdoings in a simple moral dichotomy of right and wrong, Wilde ascribes to his aesthetic idea later proposed in *De Profundis* that what one does is of no consequence, rather what one becomes is what is important. Rules can't capture the complex reality of morals, so sinning, as displayed by the Fisherman, isn't wrong for breaking rules but rather for betraying yourself. Sinning removes one from one's soul and through this distance from self-understanding, prevents a transformation into a better version of self. The moment of recognizing that one has sinned, and being of sorrowful repentance, is a returning awareness of identity and a recognition of what one has become which spurs the continual Wildean desire to self-develop and improve. Though the Fisherman begins to have a moment of recognizing his sins and what his identity has become which prepares him for a potential transformation, when

he attempts to return to his Mermaid love, to be tempted no more by his darkened Soul, he finds that with his soul reattached and unable to be removed a second time, she's gone.

The Fisherman's love is so strong, he refuses to be tempted to leave though his Soul repeatedly tries to get him to do more evil, instead he continues waiting on and calling for the mermaid. Eventually, as he steadfastly remains and commits no more wrongs, his Soul begins to improve and tries to tempt him with good deeds. Love, along with suffering the loss of his love and remorse for his bad deeds, are forces for improving himself as Wilde describes in *De Profundis*. Good deeds are also not enough to get the Fisherman to leave his post. At this, the Soul says to him "I have tempted thee with evil, and I have tempted thee with good, and thy love is stronger than I am. Wherefore will I tempt thee no longer, but I pray thee to suffer me to enter thy heart, that I may be one with thee even as before" (171). Love brings the Soul and Fisherman closer together, but while his Soul is still without a heart even good deeds don't outweigh waiting for the Mermaid for the Fisherman. The Fisherman finally agrees: "Surely thou mayest enter, … for in the days when with no heart thou didst go through the world thou must have much suffered" (171). Suffering without love paradoxically corrupted the Soul, but also offered this identity its chance to improve itself through experiencing the loss of connection with the Fisherman and recovering from its spree of sinning. The Fisherman and his Soul are ready to reunite. However, his heart is "so compassed about with love" that the Soul can't make his way back to the heart.

At this moment the climax of the fairy tale arrives, the Mermaid's dead body is being carried on the waves, announced by the mournful cries of the sea-folk. The Fisherman rushes to her lifeless body, "weeping as one smitten with pain" and "to the dead thing he made confession. Into the shells of its ears he poured the harsh wine of his tale" (172). He refuses to leave her side

even when warned that the tide is coming in and will drown him. His Soul cannot break through to join his heart since it has been so singularly closed off by his intense love for the Mermaid, and the Soul is panicking as to what the consequences will be of the Fisherman dying and leaving his soul permanently outside of his heart. However, in this moment the Fisherman makes a full confession which is the pivotal recognition moment Wilde describes in the sinner's repentance. The Fisherman completes his recognition of what he has done and from there in a moment of intense loss he is in the prime position for the kind of self-discovery Wilde values as spiritually important in *De Profundis*. The Fisherman has lost everything – his love, his Soul – just as Wilde wrote that one must strip away everything that one has in order to be able to realize and reach your Soul in its "ultimate essence." Likewise, suffering is key to discovering truth, and in this moment the Fisherman is grieving and bereft of everything which provides the opportunity needed for him to move close to his Soul and for it to rejoin him. In this pivotal moment, and because of his intense love (another value of redemption Wilde states) the Fisherman's heart breaks and at the last moment, his Soul finds an entrance into his heart. His heart breaks "as through the fulness of his love" (173) staying true to the Fisherman's unwavering strength of love and ultimately making love what saves him from being doomed to be soulless forever despite being the impulse that also drove him to cast his soul away in the first place. However, this also rings true to the valuing of love that Wilde ascribes to Christ's artistic virtue. Indeed, "I see also that to Christ imagination was simply a form of love, and that to him love was lord in the fullest meaning of the phrase" (*De Profundis* 180). The Fisherman dies with his Mermaid love, but passes finally reconnected to his Soul and still retaining love as his highest order, saying to the Mermaid in his final moments that love is the highest value in the world, and "Yet ever did thy love abide with me, and ever was it strong, nor did aught prevail against it,

though I have looked upon evil and looked upon good. And now that thou art dead, surely I will die with thee also" (172). The Fisherman needed suffering to develop an understanding of his Soul, his identity, so love alone without this self-understanding wasn't enough. But once he suffers from sinning and losing his love, then love is a force powerful enough to save him from sorrow and return his Soul, in the sense that Wilde ascribes to Christ: "What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward: in which form reveals" (*De Profundis* 170). Once in this pivotal scene the Fisherman and his Soul both have access to the heart and therefore love, they achieve this artistic unity of body and soul, expressing outwardly the love which is holding them together inwardly.

Though one might expect the tale to end with this seeming resolution with the reuniting of Fisherman, Soul, and heart, the story isn't finished yet as Wilde hasn't completed his evaluation of organized faith. He returns to the Priest who going out to bless the sea discovers the bodies of the Fisherman and the Mermaid. This spurs him to cry out that he will not bless the sea for the sea-folk are "accursed" and because the Fisherman is one, the Priest exclaims, "who for love's sake forsook God, and so lieth here with his leman slain by God's judgement, take up his body and the body of his leman, and bury them in the corner of the Field of the Fullers, and set no mark above them, nor sign of any kind, that none may know the place of their resting. For accursed were they in their lives, and accursed shall they be in their deaths also" (173). This is an act devoid of love or mercy. Three years later when the Priest prepares to preach "about the wrath of God" he discovers that the altar is "covered with strange flowers that never had been seen before. Strange they were to look at, and of curious beauty, and their beauty troubled him, and their odour was sweet in his nostrils. And he felt glad, and understood not why he was glad"

(173). He goes about his service and as he once more desires to speak on the wrath of God, the flowers fill his senses again "and there came another word into his lips, and he spake not of the wrath of God, but of the God whose name is Love. And why he so spake, he knew not" (174). When the priest is told that these wonderous flowers are coming from the burial spot of the Fisherman and Mermaid who he had damned, he "trembled, and returned to his own house and prayed" (174). The flowers send the Priest to return to his own home and self-reflect. This internal moment outside of his cruel and rigid understandings of organized faith leads the Priest to a change of heart. Now he seemingly follows the newly revealed God of Love, rather than of wrath, and he blesses the sea, the Fauns, and all the wild things he once scorned as lost.

Wilde rejects unforgiving forms of orthodoxy as the Priest is finally fully redeemed through an internal, personal exploration. He leaves his church to consider the meaning of the flowers in his own house to begin to understand the implications of his previous way of being and faith. In *De Profundis*, Wilde asserts "Indeed, that is the charm about Christ, when all is said: he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once at least in his life each man walks with Christ to Emmaus" (184). If Christ is representative of what an ideal work of art can do, then interacting with and experiencing art is transformative but through a distinctly personal growth as Wilde claims "He does not really teach one anything" but one "becomes something" through experiencing Christ. Dying for love and achieving a degree of, if not full, redemption through love, the Fisherman and Mermaid enact a message of love to reach the Priest. Mashilker asserts that "Until nearly the close of the tale, the Priest would argue that the mind and earthly body corrupt the divine soul, yet Wilde suggests it is the Soul without heart that corrupts the body" and that the Priest having never experienced his religion internally

until this moment, has been suffering from what Jung claims is "Man's worst sin" which is "unconsciousness" (183). The Priest too, from lack of love, has not been truly in touch with himself or his understanding of religion, falling into a similar trap as the Fisherman though in an extreme of religion whereas the Fisherman strayed away from structured faith.

Viewing the reunion of Fisherman, Soul, and heart as the type of artistic unity Wilde values in *De Profundis,* art has outpowered a form of conventional religion, or at least shown it a weakness it was carrying in this instance. More broadly, the short story as art itself – literature – has offered a tale of the spirituality conveyed later in *De Profundis* and offering no explicit, clear moral answers, it leaves room for each individual reader to think through their own responses to the tale and to spirituality, while providing at least a strong warning against losing touch with one's soul. The progression from "The Fisherman and His Soul" to *De Profundis* reveals a further development for Wilde of spiritual and artistic themes present in his fiction into an actualized proposal of spirituality. Likewise, we can see Wilde's considerations of systems of belief ultimately set aside as influential but not equal to individualized spirituality. The Priest shows that in this case organized religion is not a system of artistic unity. The Priest is out of touch with his identity and until being pushed to self-reflect and transform by interacting with the Fisherman's redemptive unification of soul and love, his faith is limiting and ultimately unforgiving and cruel - a form of tyranny Wilde fears from religion in extreme orthodoxy. Yet, Wilde does value aspects of traditional faiths and perhaps sees orthodoxy as potentially capable of achieving artistic unity, should it ever achieve in reality the ideals which he sees it claiming to be but failing. He takes aspects such as Christ and sin but reworks them into artistic means of gaining an individual unity between soul and body – turning one's identity into a unique work of beauty in itself.

Conclusion

John Keats, Emily Brontë, and Oscar Wilde all value the power of literature as a means for producing insights related to the self and spirituality on par with other structures of religion or philosophy that were open to vibrant evaluations in the century. They all offer unique proposals of spirituality to be considered and developed through their works and leave room for readers to take up and examine for themselves. Through the transformative experience of the imagination, their works justify suffering or offer a means to survive it, and treasure individual identity or the soul. As the nineteenth century has for a long while been debated as being a period of rising secularization and effectively a gradual decreasing of adherence to faith, Micael Clarke has this to say about secularization:

> Secularism, as Charles Taylor describes it, relies on an interpretation of human life in immanent terms – "evil" for example becomes "illness" and therapy replaces spiritual forms of healing. In addition, secularism has altered our social imaginary; belief in an enclosed, purposeful, benevolent cosmos is confronted by a different epistemology that envisions not a cosmos but a universe governed by the laws of physics, bordered by infinite space and darkness, and very possibly meaninglessness. Another characteristic of increasing secularism is that our values tend to be more anthropomorphic, that is, human flourishing is seen as the highest good, and we are far less likely to subscribe to the idea that suffering and sacrifice are justified on transcendental grounds. (217)

Keats, Brontë, and Wilde provide proposals of spirituality offering an individualized approach to understanding the meaning of the world and the soul within it counter to the narrative that secularism slowly destroyed religion, though responding to the questions raised by secular

thoughts. They also provide views that value suffering and sacrifice for, perhaps counterintuitively, aiding in human flourishing in a spiritual sense of identity building.

Stephen Prickett demonstrates that "religion itself was changing its shape and meaning in quite radical ways" and that revival of religion in the Romantic period specifically was "no revival of 17th-century piety, even though it claimed similar biblical inspiration. This was as much aesthetic as devotional" (316). Continuing, Prickett explains that many Romantics "considered art not just vital to religion, but actually indispensable to our sense of reality itself" and that "In this view, only the artist, the one who enters into the soul of things by actually creating (or, as Schleiermacher sometimes has it, 'self-creating') is worthy of the title of Christian. Religious belief is a highly personal thing; it cannot by acquired second hand, or through imitation of others" (317-318). Keats, Brontë, and Wilde all respond to this impulse, as their paths of spirituality value literature as an artform that provides this opportunity for unique individual growth of spiritual understanding. Their spiritualities also highly appreciate identity and seeking to build a soul that is fully one's own and developed through personal experience and exploration, drawing from many sources to help this process.

The progression of this idea of art and religion by the Romantics that Prickett relays transforms or shifts into the aestheticism movement at the end of the period. In Pater's last and unfinished essays, "Art and Religion" and "The Aesthetic Life", the idea of art and religion is taken up in an aesthetic framing according to Stephen Cheeke. Cheeke writes that in these works "The first, barely more than rough notes, suggests that the difference between religious believers and non-believers would always be a 'rough' one, and 'question-begging' – something that would be as true of religion of art as of Christianity" (212). The second "adumbrates an argument made before in *Marius the Epicurean,* proposing that the aesthetic attitude is able to

offer an ethical guide to living, and that the 'life of sensation suggests its own moral code, has its own conscience, clear and near, and with no problematic assumptions'" (Cheeke 212). In *De Profundis*, Wilde challenges this argument made in *Marius the Epicurean* by suggesting it is missing the beauty and importance of suffering, turning too fully to pleasure and sensation. Cheeke asserts that Pater's late fragmented essays explain that while aesthetic life might seem to be a rival of Christianity, "the essay suggests that in fact artworks provide the 'very figures' of the two central tenets of Christian morality: temperance and charity" (212). He continues by explaining that "Aesthetic indifference" has the possibility of offering "a 'figure' for ethical forms of rigour, temperance, and self-control" which occurs throughout Pater's writings but "it cannot offer a corresponding 'figure' for charity, or for love, and very often it will manifest itself as the opposite" (212). Cheeke ultimately states that "Pater has sometimes been held responsible in some way for the heartlessness that is one of the figures struck by Aestheticism in relation to the facts of the world" but Cheeke argues that "Pater had perfectly understood the danger of the philosophical vision he had been credited with, and he wrote his protest, his perpetual afterthought, over and above, and over and against it" (215). In my analysis of Wilde, *De Profundis* and "The Fisherman and His Soul" suggest love as a value of high degree, thus perhaps revealing a response to Pater's concerns for the aesthetic movement's lack of ethics such as love and charity as Cheeke argues. Wilde's spirituality is one steeped and indebted to aestheticism, indeed still part of aestheticism, but with a focus that aims to possibly correct its shortcomings by turning the perspective from merely beauty to inward soul development and improvement.

All three authors of this study, Keats, Brontë, and Wilde, display an earnest attempt at discovering spiritual meaning through literary explorations but all reject conventional organized

religions and philosophies, preferring the freedom and agency of individual approaches. This doesn't mean total refusal of the existing structures of thought and faith but a desire not to be limited to one movement. Kate Pendlebury quotes Richard Ellmann, a biographer of Wilde, who claims that Wilde "writes his works out of a debate between doctrine rather than out of doctrine" to which Pendlebury adds "and in doing so illustrates the fact that different traditions need not be exclusive – far from it" (128). In this vein of exploring all available traditions to develop one's own personal approach to spirituality, we can see a similar refusal to submit to one set of orthodox or conventional beliefs in all three authors. Keats laments having to read of Jesus filtered through the "pious frauds of religion." Brontë unequivocally revokes the "worthless creeds" of mankind, favoring turning to one's unique relationship with God, though she seems to value all faiths or structured ideas as useful for mining towards the truth. Wilde describes orthodoxy as at best impersonal, un-individualistic copying of identity or "acquiescence" and at worst "tyranny."

Both Wilde and Keats look to Jesus Christ in unconventional manners, particularly in the case of Wilde, as an idealized figure of love. For Keats, Christ represents a figure of true disinterestedness and powerful empathy, while later Wilde develops Christ into an ideal artist with powerful imagination and understanding of human nature and suffering that allows him to profoundly touch those who come into contact with him. This concept of love and the heart is a common theme across the authors. In Keats's poetry we see Psyche and Eros, the union of love and the soul, and in Soul-making the heart is the hornbook in the world's school. Love and empathy are key to surviving suffering and building identity; if one stays kind and earnestly trying despite circumstances that will wear one down, this allows one's soul to grow. Brontë's poetry upholds faith as the way through suffering and releasing of earthly concerns to turn

inward, relying upon an inextricable connection to the divine, a loving God of creation. She finds strength in the divine which she describes "With wide-embracing love / Thy spirit animates eternal years" (lines 17-18). In Wilde's works, the heart is key to connecting the body to the soul in the perfect artistic union that he argues for, and it is love that allows the Fisherman at last to rejoin his Soul to his heart to achieve this kind of artistic unity. Suffering is the catalyst that aids one in moving close enough to the soul to beget the deep insights needed for transformation.

Prickett argues that "the idea that literature might actually consist of scattered flowerings in the much greater history of human religious consciousness is never even considered" (314). I hope to have shown how three nineteenth century authors contributed to the period's wide-ranging reevaluations of religion, contributing ideas and forms of spirituality in a secularizing world that didn't lose faith but rather opened more possibilities. In this setting, I argue that they view literature as a parallel means to organized religions and philosophies for creating deeply felt spiritual considerations and readerly opportunity to partake in individual explorations through literature as well, finding agency in developing unique and powerful understanding of self-identity. I argue that in this reevaluation of belief in the nineteenth century, Keats, Brontë, and Wilde offer individualized proposals of spirituality separate from, though often drawing from, organized traditions of religion. Keats offers a justification of suffering by seeing it as a means for the soul to develop and in doing so provides a unique opportunity for self-development and potential comfort for those who read his works. Brontë upholds faith, but in a manner that is apart from traditional structured belief and places value upon finding strength and understanding by turning to one's own soul and its intrinsic connection to God. Wilde dances with orthodoxy, but ultimately in an aesthetic utilizing of organized traditions in order to render an individual and unique approach to spirituality that values self-development. Keats, Brontë, and Wilde attempt to

use literature to convey and provide experiences of the soul, and hope for positive growth of traits like empathy, self-development, and love. Looking at the vibrant religious context of my arguments, I suggest that such aims might be found in other works of the period as well.

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