

## Echoes of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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Biblical allusions pulse through the novels of the Brontë sisters. Some allusions, however, seem to have gone unremarked by scholars.

Consider the following passage from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

Upon learning of the death of Catherine, Heathcliff cries: "May she wake in *torment!*" He continues: "Why, she's a liar to the end! Where is she? Not there — not in heaven — not perished — where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I *pray* one prayer — and I repeat it till my *tongue* stiffens — Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you — haunt me then! The murdered do haunt their murderers. I believe — I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always — take any form — drive me mad! only do not leave me in this *abyss*, where I *cannot* find you! Oh God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!" Heathcliff then "dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, *lifting up his eyes*, howled not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears" (123-4, my emphasis).

The aforementioned italicized words can be found in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as recorded in the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament: "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he *lift up his eyes*, being in *torments*, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he *cried* and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my *tongue*; for I am *tormented* in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art *tormented*. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great *gulf* fixed: so that they which would pass

from hence to you *cannot*; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I *pray* thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of *torment*. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (16: 19-31; my emphasis).

What is of special interest is the fact that this particular parable is also interspersed in the novels of Anne and Charlotte Brontë in a rather more noticeable fashion.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Arthur says: "Yes, now, my immaculate angel; but when once you have secured your reward, and find yourself safe in Heaven, and me howling in hell-fire, catch you lifting a finger to serve me then! — No, you'll look complacently on, and not so much as *dip the tip of your finger in water to cool my tongue!*" (375-6, my emphasis).

To which Helen replies: "If so, it will be because of *the great gulf over which I cannot pass*" (376, my emphasis).

Interestingly enough, Anne Brontë also uses the verb "to howl" and the noun "Heaven". In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, St John says: "Remember the fate of Dives, who had his good things in his life" (481).

The editors Herbert Rosengarten and Stevie Davies make mention to the parable of Luke 16: 19-31 in their explanatory notes.

It is also worth pointing out that Charlotte briefly references the name "Lazarus" in *Shirley*.

Without question, more biblical allusions remain to be explored in the works of the Brontë sisters. Recognizing these allusions will further illuminate our understanding and give us a wider appreciation of their novels.

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