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The Conversion of Paul the Apostle: The Narrative Arc of Sin and Redemption in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, 'Miracle' by Seamus Heaney, and 'Adam's Dream' by Edwin Muir.

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'One drear word comprised my intolerable duty – "Depart!"' (Bronte 279).

Paul, previously named Saul of Tarsus, also known as Paul the Apostle and Saint Paul, was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. His letters are the earliest dated texts of the *New Testament*. However, his role did not always align with apostolic beliefs. Prior to his conversion, Paul was a pharisee and was known to hate any departure from the pharisaical code. This consisted of specific Jewish laws, one of which was to prohibit the worship of false idols. Discovering the rising worship of a man named Jesus of Nazareth, sent Paul into action. He chased and persecuted Christians with a passion, journeying house to house to find, jail and execute them (Acts 8:3, 26:10-11). This eventually led him to Damascus, in the Biblical account, this is where Paul is written to have experienced a life-changing miracle, witnessing the light of Christ after days of blindness (Acts 9:1-19). Following this event, Paul undergoes a distinct change of character, marked by his change of name. He begins to follow the teachings of Christ, and becomes one of the first apostles.

To begin comparing literature with Paul's narrative arc, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* presents significant parallels to Paul's religious experience of blindness in the biblical book of Acts. Through an account beginning with blindness as a punishment, Paul and Jane reach spiritual anagnorises and resolve to put faith in God. Seamus Heaney's interpretation of a 'Miracle' moves my essay forward in exposing the suffering that faith withholds, evidenced in Paul's letters. The turmoil that accompanies trust in God is followed by the reflection of humankind's sins, portrayed in both Edwin Muir's poem 'Adam's Dream' and Paul's letter to the Romans.

It is first important to outline Paul's religious experience of temporary blindness, the main event of his conversion. The miracle is described by both Luke as a historian in Acts, chapter nine and by Paul himself in quotes from chapters 22 and 26 (Prokulski 461). The

rising action of blindness resulting from sin, the climax of receiving sight, and the resolution of accepting faith are all echoed in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

Bronte's protagonist suffers from a blindness to God in favour of a passion for Mr. Rochester. During Jane's romance, when Jane repeats that the idea of their love is only a dream rather than reality, Bronte uses language that is suggestive of deception. She describes their relationship as 'a day-dream' and calls her beloved 'the most phantom-like of all … a mere dream' (227, 246). This reflection forebodes what readers later understand as blindness to the truth of Mr. Rochester's marriage along with a blindness of God. Thus, in her dream of romance, Jane lacked sight. Bronte explicitly demonstrates this when Jane narrates: 'he stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun' (242). This analogy is utilised to expose Jane's sin of idolatry in placing her relationship before God. The diction of the sun and light as a symbol of God is seen identically in Acts when Paul saw 'a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining' and 'could not see because of the brightness' for three days (Acts, 26.13, 22.11, 9.9). In both cases, the 'eclipses' of sin were eventually removed to expose the light of God. This occurs for Jane later when she emotively exclaims 'how blind had been my eyes! How weak my conduct!' and accepts that her sin of idolatry is what metaphorically blinded her (Bronte 261). Paul's story differs, for he is made physically blind yet the reasons for both Jane and Paul's blindness centre around their sins.

Upon understanding their blind attitudes toward God, both Jane and Paul are written to have experienced a time of spiritual awakening. Peter Grudin argues that Bronte prioritises Christian principles to convey a victory in Jane's battle between love and conscience (146). The protagonist 'subordinates the values of passion to those of restraint' and as a result seeks faith (Grudin 145). This proves convincing in the event of Jane's realisation that Mr. Rochester is already married. Bronte employs a simile when describing that Jane's nerves

vibrated ‘as they have never vibrated to thunder …’ (Bronte 255). Storm imagery can also be understood side by side with Paul’s exposure to light. Walenty Prokulski explains that the word used for ‘light’ in the text is often used as a synonym for lightning (462). After receiving light and being blind, Paul is blessed by God when ‘scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight.’ (Acts 9:18). When read metaphorically, the same blessing can be seen in Bronte’s narrator. Following her battle with conscience, since receiving the light of truth, ‘one idea only’ prevailed for Jane, ‘a remembrance of God’ (Bronte 261). This mental and spiritual awareness can reflect her version of Paul’s scales falling. Regardless of physical scales unveiling sight, in both cases there is an intrinsic unveiling of faith. In making her choice to leave Mr. Rochester, Bronte writes of ‘an inward power; a sense of influence which supported’ Jane (267). Similarly, Prokulski is correct in asserting that if Paul was blinded physically, Jesus could only have appeared to him ‘inwardly, in his soul’ (462). The intertextual comparison becomes most evident, however, in the use of the imperative ‘depart.’ Bronte places a strong emphasis on this word when Jane summarises ‘one drear word comprised my intolerable duty – “Depart!”’ (279). This same duty originates from Paul when God commands him in Acts to ‘depart’ from the sins he committed and sends him ‘to the Gentiles’ (Acts 22:21).

The falling action of the two narratives comprises an acceptance of faith in God. Paul and Jane suffer guilt from their sins and belittle themselves. In Romans, Paul writes ‘Wretched man that I am!’ and rhetorically asks ‘Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ (Rom. 7:24). Bronte mirrors a rhetorical question in Jane asking ‘What was I? ... I abhorred myself.’ However, the paragraph concludes with hope for ‘God must have led me on’ (Bronte 284). Paul also follows his repentance with hope in God for he explains ‘Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8:2). The diction of law is paralleled by Bronte in Jane’s promise to keep God’s law. She declares that laws ‘are not for the times

when there is no temptation' but for times when temptation makes the 'body and soul rise in mutiny' (Bronte 280). This dramatic anagnorisis may have been inspired by Paul explaining 'the law brings wrath' (Rom. 4:15). Furthermore, God provides temptation so 'that you may be able to endure it' (1 Cor. 10:13). Thus, to Paul, the keeping of the law indeed relies on temptation as Jane announces. Obedience to God is consolidated in the resolution of both Jane and Paul's narratives.

From Paul's experience of a miracle, I turn to Seamus Heaney's poem 'Miracle' which shifts the focus away from one event of divine intervention and instead underscores a brutal turmoil in faith. This same suffering, I believe, Paul forebodes in his letters. He implicitly shares his own internal struggles once he establishes his belief in Jesus. The internal struggle is made carnal and visual in this poem.

In a more secular reading, Anne Thurston notes how Heaney highlights human struggle from the beginning (473). In media res, the poem starts by deflecting attention away from 'the one who takes up his bed and walks' (Heaney 1). Alluding to the Bible, this refers to someone who received a miracle as seen in John, chapter five (Jn. 5:8). The second line then turns our attention with 'But' and fixates on 'the ones who have known him all along.' The poem then breaks, mirroring the breath of those who have known him (Thurston 473). The line 'the ones who have known him all along' holds a double meaning (Heaney 2). One interpretation reads the mentioned 'him' as the one who has just been healed. Alternatively, 'him' can mean the one who performed the miracle (healer). In this second interpretation, the assertion of attention on those who have known him all along reflect those who are faithful in the healer. Therefore, it is the passion and struggle of those that are faithful which is articulated both by Paul and Heaney.

The faithful who have known him (God) all along are encouraged to keep their struggle in the name of who they are faithful to. In Paul's letter to the Romans this becomes

most evident as he rhetorically asks ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution …?’ He then continues ‘No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us’ (Rom. 8:35,37). Thus, by writing this, Paul reinforces the beatitudes of Jesus as he praises and encourages followers to suffer for righteousness and for God (Matt. 5:3-11). The people who carry the weight of what they understand about God, in His complexity, are those who Heaney focuses on. Thurston is therefore convincing in arguing ‘the concern this time is not with the faith of the one coming for healing, but with that of his minders’ (474). Heaney reflects that it is in the faith and perseverance of those who ‘carry him in’ seen in ‘slippery sweat’ and 'stooped backs’ that there is a true ‘miracle’ (Thurston 474).

The necessity of suffering in faith continues to be a tenor as the poem develops with the asyndetic list of the carriers’ bodily descriptions. The sensory imaging of ‘their shoulders numb … the stretcher handles slippery with sweat’ contains sibilance to invoke agony (Heaney 4). This is followed by the plosive repetition of ‘tight’, ‘tiltable’ and ‘tiles’ expressing the arduous task at hand (Heaney 7-8). In his letter to Corinthians, Paul also utilises bodily imagery in a description of accepting suffering. He explains a thorn was given me in the flesh’ and he pleads three times for God to remove it (2 Cor. 12:7, 8). Paul writes that God responds ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness’ (12:9). From this he teaches ‘when I am weak, then I am strong’ meaning that stoicism and a perseverance in struggle as the carriers of the poem represent is encouraged for God (12:10).

If the verses are taken literally, Paul draws on his own physical turmoil to demonstrate his understanding of turmoil in faith. If taken metaphorically, Paul still draws on his own experience as he promotes the Hellenic value of stoicism. This would have influenced Paul as a part of his culture growing up (Gardner 141). One can examine the same process in Heaney’s work. Four years before the publishing of the poem, Heaney suffered a stroke and

woke unable to move his left leg or arm. It is then that he put his faith in friends as he depended on them whether physically or emotionally (Heaney and O'Driscoll 461-3). Therefore, it is possible that the bodily struggle in his poem mirrors his own. Though Paul's thorn is often understood as purely metaphorical, Paul chooses a physical portrayal for his didactic intention. Through the plosive and sibilant sounds of the poem and the carnal image of the letter, both Heaney and Paul illustrate a bodily manifestation of spiritual suffering.

Considering the weight of sin on one's soul, Paul reflects on how it has affected humans universally. In the genesis of Paul's faith, sin surrounded him and many comparisons can be made to Edwin Muir's poem, 'Adam's Dream.' This poem centres around the story of the Fall in Genesis and through this focus, Muir extracts the Pauline idea in Romans, that sin is a part of humanity. This is symbolised by both writers in the first biblical man, Adam. Paul and Muir introduce three themes in their works that can be read intertextually. The first revolves around human slavery to sin and the event of a fall from grace. The second marks a character, namely Adam, as the father of this fall. The third outlines a universality of humankind in sin and humility.

Once establishing Adam's subconscious dream, Muir implements an image that 'The gates shut fast behind him' referring to the gates of heaven that closed when Adam sinned (Gen. 3-6; Muir 9, 210). He then styles his poem with religious diction in describing Adam's stance as 'Fallen in Eve's fallen arms' (Muir 10, 210). The capitalisation demonstrates his intention of a double entendre. He explains both the metaphorically fallen state from grace to sin and the physically fallen placement of Eve's arms. In this introduction to the poem, readers already witness a didactic purpose in Muir's work. Joseph Summers explains that Muir emphasises the superior importance of 'those things in which the religious man recognizes the immediate work of God' (260). The punishment of sin can be seen here as one of these things considering Muir's repetition of 'fallen.' The same language is used in the

account of Paul's conversion where it is written 'we had all fallen to the ground' before Jesus asks '"Saul, why do you persecute me?"' (Acts 26:14). Although the use of 'fallen' here has historically been interpreted as a physical fall, there is a strong implication that the fall is a punishment of Paul's sin (persecution). This is seen perhaps more clearly in the King James translation which instead reads 'fallen to the earth' instead of 'the ground' (KJV Acts 26:14). This includes a more cosmic and material semantic field. Such a depiction suggests a far heavier tenor than a physical fall, linking to Adam's fall from grace.

Once Paul established an understanding of sin, he developed it to centre around Christ as the second Adam (Purcell 5). To Paul, before Christ there was only sin. Sean Purcell acknowledges in Romans a message that humankind before Jesus' coming 'was in a hopeless situation' and we were all 'the slaves of sin' (Purcell 3). Paul himself declares 'I am carnal, sold under sin' (Rom. 7:14). All of this is explained by the writer in chapter five 'as by one man sin entered into the world… and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned' (Rom 5:12). Paul's interpretation of Genesis thus views Adam as the first man who introduced sin to all humankind. From this, a sense of paternity is created as the concept of original sin is inherited by all descendants of Adam.

This paternity is addressed by Muir in the very first line of the poem as he names Adam 'our father' (1, 210). A contrast is then made by how the writers follow this. Paul goes on to focus on Christ as a solution while Muir imagines Adam's offspring (ourselves.) He succeeds in presenting images of chaotic children as he repeats a cycle of how 'they ran, / And fell, and rose again, and ran, and fell …' as if incapable of existing in peace (18-19, 210). The visuals conveyed are of a physical incompatibility that these bodies have with one another, similar to Paul's 'carnal' description of sin. The slavery that Paul warns of is then seen in Muir's image of Adam's children as 'mechanical' and 'without meaning … in no mode or order,' invoking a sense of powerlessness in the chaos (26-27, 211).

Both writers reinforce the universality of sin. Paul affirms in ‘all have sinned’ that the original sin applies not only to a first ancestor but to everyone (Purcell 6). John Holloway notes the same in Muir’s writing (567). He explains that Muir’s readers require ‘only to be a [hu]man’ meaning that the poet intends to unify humans in his work through their humility (of sin or otherwise) (Summers 260). This becomes vividly evident in Adam’s recognition that ‘each face / Was like his face’ (Muir 67-8). Muir then writes of a reluctance in Adam to deem them as ‘sons of God’ for ‘something restrained him’ (69, 212). The unnamed ‘something’ leads to an inference of how sin distances humankind from God. The same concept is understood in Paul’s writing as Purcell remarks how all humans ratify Adam’s sin and thus enter into it (Purcell 7). The ‘something’ of sin therefore belongs to all.

Paul’s story commences with a punishment of blindness that Jane too suffers in her love for Mr. Rochester. The deficiency of sight leads to an exposure to God where Paul and Jane find their faith. From this exposure, Paul learns of his sins and conceives of its carnal and painful nature that one must understand to follow God. This burdened image we see is reflected in Heaney’s ‘Miracle.’ The consequences of sin continue to be demonstrated in Muir’s imagination of Genesis. Here, Paul’s work of uniting humankind in their errors is seen most creatively in ‘Adam’s Dream.’ Conclusively, *Jane Eyre*, ‘Miracle’ and ‘Adam’s Dream’ are each a reflection of the story of Paul’s conception of God.

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