

## The Function of Dreams and the Sociolinguistic Meaning of Silence in Fiction.

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### Abstract

*Les rêves servent à révéler nos frustrations, d'autant plus qu'ils augmentent notre liberté spatiale et temporelle. En effet certains personnages dans Jane Eyre (Charlotte Brontë) font des rêves même à l'état d'éveil. Lorsqu'ils méditent, ils sont tellement absorbés qu'il leur est parfois impossible de démarquer entre le réel et l'imaginaire. Et la voix du silence est omniprésente pour exprimer ce que le langage ne peut faire.*

*On pourrait citer comme exemple le rêve prémonitoire que faisait Jane assez souvent et qui n'était que le fruit de sa hantise face à sa condition sociale vis-à-vis de Mr. Rochester. Certes, une étude approfondie du langage utilisé lors de ce rêve ne pourrait que nous révéler quelques vérités sur la psychologie de notre condition humaine. Les rêves sont imprégnés d'événements surnaturels, de paroles logiques mais aussi illogiques qui dénotent la complexité de la structure du langage qui nous sert à nous exprimer.*

This paper is based on a study of two novels written in the Victorian Age. One may try perhaps to analyse the link between the Brontës as readers and these authors as writers i.e. how they have been influenced by Bunyan, Shakespeare, Milton, Schiller, Scott and Byron. In fact it has been said that some parts of *Wuthering Heights* might have been written by Byron or are they written about him?

On these matters we may quote Anne Holker (1983: 94) who emphasized that the 'theme of the human soul struggling to find righteousness and

eventual peace is an echo of Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* in which everyman makes his way through the world and all its troubles, encountering temptation on the way, yet managing to stick to the winding and thorny path of goodness. Even dreams have their own functions in the sociological study of writing. Hence, the use of dreams in novels, such as the ones I am trying to analyse, serves to reveal our frustrated will and also it gives us more spatial and temporal freedom. Undoubtedly, it is important to study such aspects of human behaviour or subconscious language and behaviour in dreams. Here the definition of a dream is not just one of a real dream but also the fact of having visions without evolving the state of sleep. Since, most of the time it is impossible to demarcate the actual situation we find ourselves in, from the imaginary site we are constantly visiting virtually; thus we become more absorbed and concentrated elsewhere with psychological effects interwoven with the supernatural events. One vivid example would probably be Lockwood's nightmare when he went to sleep then he began to shout. Heathcliff did not understand what was happening since he believed nobody was allowed to sleep in that deserted room. This event was followed by Heathcliff's monologue, the scene where he was shouting and crying and sobbing to the ghost of Catherine. The reason of his dream is perhaps bad tea, bad tempers or because he read the margins of the book. Hence,

absurdity of facts in dreams reflects sometimes the absurdity of life itself.

As it has been noticed, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* contain a lot of significant dreams. Moreover, Jane, the 'eponymous narrator' is a frequent day-dreamer; she has been observed in this state by her employer, Mrs. Fairfax, until the voice of a servant, , awakes her and she forces herself to remember that all that very well visions are absolutely unreal. Alan Gordon (2004) thinks that: 'this suppression of day-dreams reflects the trend of Jane learning to suppress her passions over the course of the novel.'

In fact, after a 'turbulent childhood', Jane fulfils a Victorian ideal of womanhood; she grows responsible of her life as she completes her education.

According to Adams (1985:82) Jane even pays 'inordinate attention to the details of her dream life.' That is vital for her to attempt to mask the 'raw emotions'. In order to be an ideal Victorian Lady' ( Gordon,2004:22) to dream for Jane, provides glimpses into the unconscious life. They also serve as 'presentiments' when they are premonitory; their function is that of warning of future events. This fact has been called the use of gothic form of literalizing when Charlotte Brontë makes some aspects of the dreams come true.

Jane's emotions are reflected in her dream when Mr. Rochester transmits this message mysteriously over dozens of miles: 'Jane! Jane! I am coming wait for

me ! In *Jane Eyre* one may also witness such ambiguous situation where the hero is able to differentiate distinctly between waking life and dreaming . One vivid example could be when Jane heard the 'demonic laugh'( Homans, 1997:147) of Bertha Mason and Mrs. Fairfax told her 'you must have been dreaming' . Such dreams serve ' complex functions' such as forewarning Jane of trouble or good fortune, or just serving as symbols when the presentation of the conflict between the erotic self and the committed self are transposed in the dream; following Homans, I can now assert that:

Despite their prevalence, Jane tries to separate her dreams from her waking life, and in her novel, Brontë maintains sturdy barriers between England and 'dreamland'.

Consequently, Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights* could not understand Catherine's language when she is addressing her; she did not know, as she said, whether Catherine is speaking in her dream or talking directly to her. The reason of using such a kind of language is that she is dying:

Nelly asked: 'The black press? Where is that? You are talking in your Sleep!'

Catherine replied: 'It's against the wall, as it always is. It does appear odd

-I see a face in it!'

Nelly, resuming her seat, and looping up the curtain that she might watch her: 'There is no press in the room, and never was.'

Catherine enquired: ' Don't you see that face?'

And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl.

It is behind there still! She pursued anxiously.

This disturbing language that anyone would produce when one confront the end of life has been evoked many times by psychologists. They believe that the axis of the lived world shifts, and everything is altered. Shortly, what once seemed familiar becomes strange.

Moreover, dreams are used as a literary device in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Thanks to the insertion of dream episodes, the writer - and perhaps also the reader - is able to analyse the psychological state of the characters during their personal development. One can cite a lot of examples if one just considers the different speech situations involved in both novels. For example, of their characters was the popular painter John Martin, the prime minister of England Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington and the eminent physician John Robert Hume.

The moorland, for instance, is seen as romantically inspirited or as uncouth or impractical. Even the Brontës are considered as a myth. Myth, of course, is a Protean word. It can mean a traditional story, passed down through a culture and available for endless re-working, such as the Greek myths or the legend of King Arthur. This is the sense in which

Patsy Stoneman ( 2005) hopes to consider 'the Brontë's myth'. There is, however, a difference between mythical figure who had no historical existence, like the Greek gods, or whose origins are lost in time; like King Arthur, and relatively recent figures whose history can be defined by documentary evidence. In fact there are social and psychological reasons why such 'myths' do not die. The 'myth of the Brontës' sad, silent childhood was fed, in an age where orphans were commonplace, by contemporary readers' knowledge of other sad, silent children. So, although the precise stories told about the Brontës may have been falsehoods, these 'myths' often prove to have a historical validity.

Other myths are compounded by material from the Brontës' novels. Consequently very few readers of *Jane Eyre* are able to distinguish between Jane's experiences at Lowood and those of the young Brontës at Cowan Bridge, or even see the point of doing so. Moreover, the distinction between the very landscape in Haworth with its cemetery, hills and moors and that of the setting of *Wuthering Heights*. Here, again, a 'fictionalised' version of the Brontë childhood takes on a generalised truth.

The situation is rather one of asphyxia and enclosure thus of imprisonment as well as a longing for a liberation. All these images of space and silence are combined throughout the novel and serve to enhance the characters' thoughts and in this case to broaden the surrounding and contexts. Thus peace cannot be

there since ideas cannot be the same in different places.; how determinant the contexts are for the choice of our words! Not to mention part of our whole behaviour i.e. laughter or smile. In fact Heathcliff smiled when Mr. Lockwood asked if Hareton was his son:

“ And this young man is \_\_\_\_Not my son, assuredly!” The function of this smile can replace a whole complete reply. Moreover he interrupted him and finished himself the question but this time with a negation, ‘not my son’ and the adverb ‘assuredly’ is added to denote the strength of the impossibility to attribute such a paternity to him. The behaviour of this pleasant family circle involved Lockwood’ feeling of being out of space there. He tried to explain that he just wanted someone to tell him his way, not to show it. Here Heathcliff’s statement is clear because he already knew he cannot demand more ; the paradigm ‘ show’ instead of ‘tell’ will definitely change the meaning of the whole structure. Hence I want you to tell me my way’, is totally different from ‘ to show it’. Here the ear had to function not the eye and the feet. The message had to be transmitted from mouth to ear and not in motion .

Moreover, silence in both novels should be considered as an invitation to interactive reading and Cage (1961:7) makes the analogy between musical ‘silences’ and ‘empty’ spaces of modern sculpture and architecture. ‘The concept of silence or openness of meaning-structures’ has also invaded the ‘study of avant-garde music’. Consequently, one may assert that

the 'speaking silence' or the narrative silence of Nelly Dean or Mr. Lockwood or Mrs. Fairfax, serve as a moral index if not ethical criterion in writing. In fact, sometimes Nelly Dean 'casts herself as a purveyor of wise and saws' like in 'Proud people breed sad sorrows for themselves' or a good heart will help you to a bonny face.'

Other times she speaks and then she keeps silent just after, in order to transmit meanings conveyed by concise allusions. When it occurs in writing, it may also serve as a strategy for avoiding presentation of the problem or the conflict stated just before. Cage added that silences may be placed for effect; they 'may represent very conscious manipulation of the expressive medium'; silences are sometimes imposed by social constraints of various sorts. Besides what should or should not be said and by whom and who to keep reticent is but a matter of morality, valid in one culture and not in the other, if not in one situation and not in the other. As Heathcliff says to Nelly about Catherine 'I guess by her silence, as much as anything what she feels'. Here silence is expressing more than words can do.

McGuire (1985:95) examines specific moments in several of Shakespeare's plays at which the printed text allows the reader or director or actor such great latitude of interpretation that the result is not simply a nuanced version of a text but a distinct collaborative recreation, perhaps at great variance from what custom has dictated or led us to assume as 'the' meaning.

Consequently, one may also quote Steiner ( 1967:49) who remembers hearing someone say, after a performance of ' *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*', by Cristof Penderecki that:

The reason he did not applaud was not dislike of its experimental style but a sense that the only way to receive such music as the 'Threnody' is in silence. A silent reception, presumably, would express the hearer's grief for the victims and perhaps a moral judgment on the atrocity itself.

The 'absoluteness of silence' amid our noisy modernity exists. As Picard (1952:22) said so eloquently:

Still like some old, forgotten animal from the beginning of time, silence towers above all the puny world of noise; but as a living animal, not an extinct species, it lies in wait, and we can see its broad back sinking ever deeper among the briers and bushes of the world of noise.

Back again to the Victorian society who sees the supposed ideal woman as someone 'passive, docile, and above all selfless' (Moi,1985:58). Her language is expected to be 'more restrained, less loud, less public, and less abandoned than men's'( Borker,1980:38). As soon as she is defined as someone who 'has a story to tell' she becomes 'monster woman'. That Victorian repression and its associated qualities are empowering. It actually heightens interior life energetically and thus the phenomenon of the silencing of women - more general than the specific culture in which it is demonstrated - is interpreted as something other than an 'unmitigated ill, because women have been able to

react adaptively and to make creative use of an unjust social situation. The best example would be Jane's confession to Mr. Rochester:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creature to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or to laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

On the other hand, throughout Emily Brontë's novel there is a combination of light and darkness, storm and tranquillity which pervades the atmosphere and is sometimes expressed with an exceptional silence such as in the following passage in chapter 11; the narrator is Nelly Dean: I came to a stone where the highway branches off on to the moor at your left hand; a rough sand pillar, with the letters W.H. cut on its north side,

on the east G., and on the southwest T.G. It serves as guide-post to the

Grange, the Heights and village. The sun shone yellow on its grey head, reminding me of summer; and I cannot say why, but all at once, a gush of child's sensations flowed into my heart. Hindley and I held it a favourite spot twenty years before. I gazed long at the weather-worn block, and, stooping down,

perceived a hole near the bottom still full of snail-shells and pebbles, which we were fond of storing there with more perishable things; and, as fresh as reality, it appeared that I beheld my early playmate seated on the withered turf: his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hand scooping out the earth with a piece of slate.

Although Hindley's son, Hareton is walking hand in hand with Nelly, he is far away from the events taking place in her mind. This kind of silence where no utterance is produced, is capable of speaking volumes of the passing of time. Hence, the shells and pebbles are still there and they function as a 'homely reminder of lost childhood' when one cannot forget the crucial fact that Hindley was Nelly's playmate twenty years before.

Furthermore, Nelly Dean's style is intimate and she takes the listener into confidence and sometimes discusses strengths and weaknesses with incredible understanding. Even the thoughts and the feelings of the other characters of the novel are known to the reader. Moreover, the authors being themselves natives of the moors had 'their lot been cast in a town', doubtless their writings, If they had written at all, 'would have possessed another character'.<sup>47</sup> Garrod manages to summarize everything in this short passage:

The wild moors of the north of England..., the language, the manners, the very dwellings and the household the scattered inhabitants of those districts,

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<sup>47</sup> Garrod in Brontë, 1972: viii.

must be to such readers in a great measure unintelligible, and- where intelligible- repulsive – Men and women who, perhaps, naturally very calm, and with feelings moderate in degree.... will hardly know what to make of the rough, strongutterance....<sup>48</sup>

As it has been said, we can hear, taste, smell, and we can even feel 'a gentle pressure of the hand'. In both novels the majority of the characters overacted in sensational behaviour; their language is denoting that they have been released from the constraints of the society in the Victorian period. The reader believes even abnormality without querying the possibility of such a fact, or such a life and he accepts the numerous coincidences, realising that they are part of the novel. For example the coincidence of the dream about Mr Rochester and Jane's trip to the manor to save him or as many critics noticed, when Heathcliff left for three years and returned back to become the owner of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

It is important to study such aspects of human behaviour or subconscious behaviour. Dreams exhibit a combination of psychological effects interwoven with the supernatural events. They may serve as speech acts within a specific situation. They also denote the complexity of the structure of language. Since two narrators are telling the story, in the first person narrative everything is heard, experienced and seen through the eyes and the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

senses of both. Consequently, we are made to hear distinctly the voice of the narrator, Mr. Lockwood or Nelly Dean and the vitality of the language is apparent in the character's imagination. Sometimes, we feel the contribution of Tabitha Ackroyd, the local woman who gave faithful domestic service to the Brontës for many years; she knew stories of Grimshaw's dramatic dealings with sinners.<sup>49</sup> She retailed them to the children who remembered and reflected some traits in their writing.

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<sup>49</sup> David Daiches in Brontë, 1975: 7.