

The Dreams in *Wuthering Heights*

[This discussion is a slightly altered section from John P. Farrell, "Reading the Text of Community in *Wuthering Heights*," *ELH* 56 (1989), 173-208. The essay argues that Brontë's novel deals with the complex layering in human identity of a private self, a social self (largely a construction of the social system), and an intersubjective self whose actions locate an alternative social realm that the nineteenth-century theorized as "community." The essay thus borrows the familiar terms of Ferdinand Tönnies who distinguished the alienating and programmatic social sphere of *Gesellschaft* from the sense of interdependence upon which the communal (the *Gemeinschaft*) depends. The co-existence of these selves is explained in the essay as an instance Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. In Brontë's novel, the dialogic enactment of identity so conceived is instanced in the figure of the reader. The essay contends that the reader reads (1) as an indecipherable private self, (2) an alienated social self, and (3) an intersubjective communal self simultaneously. In the passage printed here, the dreams—and their crucial aftermath, the "script in the snow"—are interpreted as a preliminary sorting out of the distinctions among these three figures of identity.]

Lockwood dreams at the site of textual stimulus and production. Taken by chance to the inner sanctum of the novel, he immediately finds himself dealing with books, diaries, carved writing, and fearful dreams that come to him from his idle reading. His very first experience, his reading of the carved initials, confers on the whole scene a provocative correspondence between the interior of the paneled bed and the interior of a text. The initials Lockwood reads return to him, in his semiconscious state, as a "glare of white letters" that stare from the dark "as vivid as spectres." Frank Kermode has shown that the sequence of letters encodes the novel's double plot structure so that Lockwood has, in effect, already read the tale Nelly will tell him.²⁷ It is as though Lockwood has passed like a microbe into the brain of the text and is shown, in eerie disguise, the primitive formation of signifiers that will "plot" the passions and actions of Nelly's story. The enigmatic quality of the story is also suggested by Lockwood's hallucination. The staring white letters, aligned across a black page of psychic space, produce a maximum of narrative gaps and missing pieces. And yet it is also the case that Lockwood's presence in the "penetralium" hints at the text's desire to captivate its reader. In a novel that concentrates on the building and breaking of barriers, what we see in the ensuing dreams of Lockwood is the naked action of the text's massed energies breaking across the hopelessly anomic and emotionally pallid being of the intruder. The dreams signal the flickering trace of responsive life that even Mr. Lockwood harbors within him and, in doing so, the dreams become equipment for reading.

The key to the dreams is their instigating source in a commercially printed text whose margins are overwritten by a secret manuscript diary. Lockwood's hallucination has led him to knock his candle over and singe one of "the antique volumes" that rests on the ledge. As he examines "the injured tome" and the other pious books, he discovers Catherine Earnshaw's personal memoir. The dominant symbol in the paneled bed episode thus becomes the doubled text that juxtaposes a discourse in print with a discourse in manuscript: the printed text is culturally based and rhetorically directed to a public, socially coded world; the manuscript text is based in the secrecy of selfhood and is directed only to the undisclosable identity of its own author. Lockwood's two dreams plumb the nature of each kind of discourse and the problem of reading that each kind inherently possesses. His instinct with the printed book is to attach himself to the forward thrust of the discourse; his instinct with the diary is to backtrack from the handwriting to its originating subject. With both texts situated for him within the same margins, his "eye wander[s] from manuscript to print" (64). As this happens, the dreams descend, each engaging him at a substrate of consciousness and each making profound the instinctive and casual orientations he had adopted in his waking state. In the process, the dreams penetrate Lockwood and turn his reading into a performative action in spite of all his ordinary preferences for reading as a dilatory habit.

The first dream ushers Lockwood to a local house of worship that, we have already learned, is down on its institutional luck because of the congregation's parsimony. But this condition is exactly reversed in the dream, for it is the profligacy of discourse by Jabes Branderham rather than the parsimony of the audience that wrecks the chapel's public function. The Croesian profusion of utterance that Jabes invests in his sermon on forgiveness makes discourse intolerable; all solicitude for the audience is missing. Jabes founds his text on the authority of another text (Matt. 18:22). Textual authority then becomes for him a gateway to discursive license at both the thematic and performative levels of his sermon. The charity of the Word is thematized as a hounding moral quantum, while the quantitative limits of discourse are shattered by a moralistic tyrant. Throughout the sermon we follow not Jabes' utterance but its punishing effect on Lockwood.

Oh, how weary I grew. How I writhed, and yawned, and nodded, and revived! How I pinched and pricked myself, and rubbed my eyes, and stood up, and sat down again, and nudged Joseph to inform me if he would ever have done! (65)

Then, in a "sudden inspiration," Lockwood attempts condign retribution by exposing the extravagance of Jabes' polemic as, intrinsically, a social crime. " 'Sir ... I have endured and forgiven the four hundred and ninety heads of your discourse.... The four hundred and ninety first is too much. Fellow martyrs, have at him!'" But Jabes climaxes his sermon, maddeningly, by fusing his theme and his performance: Lockwood's harrowed reception of Jabes' discourse becomes itself the unforgivable sin:

Thou art the man! ... Seventy times seven didst thou gapingly contort thy visage seventy times seven did I take counsel with my soul.... The First of the Seventy-First is come. Brethren, execute upon him the judgment written! (66)

With this final appeal to the text as autocrat Jabes turns Lockwood's parallel appeal to the congregation against him. Anarchy breaks loose: "the whole chapel resounded with rappings and counterrappings. Every man's hand was against his neighbor" (66). The first dream thus discloses a condition of public strife and moral confusion when discourse mounts to power by abrogating the social contract on which communication depends. The little chapel beyond Gimmerton becomes a parable of life in *Gesellschaft* where divisiveness is contagious. With dense and deliberate irony Brontë uses a printed book as the symbol of connection between contaminated discourse and *Gesellschaft* power-mongering. The printed book, the very artifact she has produced, is always to some degree an official tool of *Gesellschaft* life and an instance of its homogenizations of human expression.²⁸

In the second dream, Lockwood is prompted by "hieroglyphics" (62) rather than public writing, and instead of journeying abroad in public space, where he had encountered a savage surplus of text, he now remains in the secret recess of the paneled bed where he encounters a bewildering barrenness of text-a ghost. Catherine is an illegible mystery. She is not threateningly behind her text, like Jabes, but threateningly beyond her text. She appears as the radical realization of the living Catherine's desire to reach her private, impenetrable essence.

It is this figure of imponderable mystery, devoid of any other's etching, who asks Lockwood to carry out the deed of admission. Instead, Lockwood's terror rouses in him the still flickering core of his own presocial self:

finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down. (67)

What Lockwood has encountered in this dream is what Carlyle called "the world out of clothes," and Lockwood's reaction duplicates Carlyle's: "Imagination, choked as in mephitic air, recoils on itself, and will not forward with the picture".²⁹ The panicked Lockwood must retreat to the world-in-clothes, the textualized world, that links our sense of identity to the presence of signs:

The fingers relaxed, I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it, and stopped my ears to exclude its lamentable prayer. (67)

The pyramid of books restores, at a crude level, the textualized world in which Lockwood, or any social being, must function.

The dreams do for Lockwood what the novel does for us. They outline the cognitive and performative boundaries within which discourse must fit its hazardous project. The text is always obstruction. It can be read only if the reader is neither bullied by the text nor left choking in mephitic air. The reverse is also true: the reader can neither bully the text nor disappear, like a wayward mist, from its reach. What the dreams manifest about reading, the story of the novel extends to social being. Social being can flourish neither in the power structures of *Gesellschaft* relations nor in the wild moors of Romantic subjectivity. The remorseless harangue and the remote hieroglyph are both of them the enemies of solidarity and significance.

There is a third space. It is the space of narrative or, rather, of what might be called "novelness." *Wuthering Heights* is dominated by a patterned circuit of human actions laid out between the structural poles of the Heights and the Grange. It is the physical equivalent of this space that Lockwood traverses after his night of dreams. The journey in that space, which is the journey of the narrative itself, is ritualized as the potential communion of subjects across a text.

I had remarked on one side of the road, at intervals of six or seven yards, a line of upright stones, continued through the whole length of the barren: these were erected, and daubed

with lime on purpose to serve as guides in the dark, and also, when a fall, like the present, confounded the deep swamps on either hand with the firmer path: but, excepting a dirty dot pointed up, here and there, all traces of their existence had vanished; *and my companion found it necessary to warn me frequently to steer to the right, or left, when I imagined I was following, correctly, the windings of the road.* (73; italics added)

While the dreams educate us to the barriers between author and audience, the script in the snow images the sort of partnership required by the layered, archaeological, and smudged nature of all human discourse. The script identifies the always inadequate mimesis that language offers and it emphasizes our consequent need for the dialogic imagination. Toward the end of the novel the same space is re-described by Lockwood. The second passage registers what an ideal reading and authoring of the narrative would have accomplished. Lockwood, for whom the path is simply scenery, is traveling now in the opposite direction.

with the glow of a sinking sun behind, and the mild glory of a rising moon in front, one fading, and the other brightening ... *I quitted the park and climbed the stony by-road ... to Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling. Before I arrived in sight of it, all that remained of day was a beamless, amber light along the west; but I could see every pebble on the path and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon.* (337-38; italics added)

Here the image of the text's deceptive mimesis is dissolved and replaced by an image of pure epiphany. Even the most dedicated solidarity cannot arrive at this luminous state, but the passage, nonetheless, comprehends the aim of the narrative discourse. Brontë is conceiving her narrative as *logos* which is established jointly by her guidance and the reader's travelings. The difficult road located by *Wuthering Heights* winds its way between the text as tyrant and the text as enigma. Ultimately, as Cathy and Hareton will show, the text must be a gift, an exchange of presences, an inscription of *Gemeinschaft*.