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INTRODUCTION

Narrating Dreams: The Solution and Dissolution of our Desires—An Introduction

Seventeenth century Jesuit accounts tell of the First Peoples of Canada's deep belief in the importance of dreams.[1] Calling "the dream itself a narrative representation" (Campbell 141), Mary Baine Campbell has written about how the missionaries reported on various dreams the different tribes brought to them. The Wendat, for example, said that "after a dream of desire [they would hold] dream-telling feasts . . . to announce it and perhaps see the desire fulfilled" (142). Their feasts featured "rituals of dream guessing [where] the guesser must enter into the *désir secret de l'âme* [the secret desire of the soul] of the dreamer," where "even the simplest wish fulfillment dream may lead to a community event, to gift-giving and the diplomacy that gift-giving may constitute" (143).

The First People's dreamed-of wishes were direct, simple and clear, as an Algonquin shaman told a Jesuit:

> Know then, that whatever there may be in your belief, there are five things that I will not give up—the love for women, the belief in our dreams, the eat-all feasts, the desire to kill the Hiroquois, the belief in sorcerers . . . . These are the things we will not abandon. (Campbell 145-46)

And such, indeed, was the stuff of the dreams they told to the Jesuits.

Since the dawn of human life-in-common, dreams have played key roles: seen as prophetic, as symptoms of bodily and/or mental disorders, or (as with the First Peoples in the Jesuit accounts) as straightforward expressions of desire, individual and collective, with the potential to be fulfilled.

By Sigmund Freud's time, such clear-cut expressions of desires in dreams, desires completely in harmony with the aims of the culture in which the dreamer is embedded, no longer seemed so evident. Freud had to work very hard to

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[1] Mary Baine Campbell. "Telling Dreams: Oneiric Circulation in Early Modern 'New France.'" *Travel, Agency and the Circulation of Knowledge*, edited by G. Mackenthun et al., Waxmann, 2017, pp. 139-162.

discover and then interpret what he called the "navel of the dream" (Freud 528):[2] the key to a secret wish for fulfillment hidden in oneiric illusions. Given the repressive Victorian culture of his time, we can only marvel at the imaginative techniques Freud invented to find out the "secret desires of the dreamer's soul" (Campbell 143).[3]

Freud ferreted out missing words, repressed memories, and the buried situations that have led to a patient's past failures and to their present misery. The dream, told to the analyst, becomes key to helping the patient re-arrange their life *symbolically* and *imaginarily,* thus arriving at a way out of whatever situation in which they have unwittingly trapped themselves. Psychoanalysis is about finding how to open individual patients to potential change, how to assist them in forging new pathways through the blockages that have restricted their lives and have made them resistive to changing.

Freud's technique was to insist that a patient bring him a dream, making the dream into a demand for a response from the listener. Only through such a dialogical exchange is the *meaning of the dream* ultimately co-created, constructed only by the circumstance of its *telling*, of its being relayed, in language, within a specific interpersonal situation and at a particular socio-cultural moment. The dream, conceived of as a narrative and as a dialogue with its receivers, makes *the listeners to it* as crucial to its meaning as the "secret desires of the soul" embedded in it. The goal is to unpack what the dream tells us about the source or origin of our desires and where they might be redirected in future.

Freud's wizardry at reading the dream's secret desire, his formal techniques for untangling the open and hidden elements of dreams, have long inspired Western critics and philosophers of literature from Kenneth Burke to Jacques Derrida. What I myself have found most useful in Freud's interpretations of the dream, from the viewpoint of literary and cultural analysis, is that he did not confine his explorations to the individual dreamer's psyche, but always included the sociocultural context in which the dream was narrated.

[2] Sigmund Freud. "Instincts and their Vicissitudes." 1915c.

[3] In treatment, the patient's dream matters—is deemed significant—only if it has been dreamed at the request of the analyst: "Bring me a dream." The analyst then takes this dream as the patient's response to the analysis itself. The deepest meaning of the dream will ultimately emerge for both analyst and patient only in this context. While the dream expresses, in disguise, a wish hidden even from the dreamers themselves, the critical part of Freud's approach is the realization that the dream's real meaning only emerges by attending to the situation of its being told to another person who is deeply interested in discovering that meaning.

Freud saw each dream as a particular response not only to the analytic session, but also to the patient's wider sociocultural condition. Thus, while Freud made the dream and its narration the crucial response to the analyst's own sustained desire to know and to reveal the secret desire of the patient's soul, my point is that it can be a model for "reading" our own culture's desires—their *meaning*—and the literature that responds to them.

I am fully aware that psychoanalytic professional practice insists it be restricted to working in private sessions "one by one by one." But Freud's principles for *dream*-as-*narrative exchange* can have much broader application, and consequences that transcend a single individual. For example, the dream of a better life that is *shared* with those who also desire the same thing has long had the power to impact our lives—and can continue to do so in the future. To view dreaming-as-narrative brings us to something essential for the life of *culture* itself. If Martin Luther King Jr. had not told his personal dream to millions of people, would the critical changes in United States civil rights laws have ever taken place? Would our cultural evolution towards greater racial equality, which is growing more and more evident (albeit still resisted), have ever come about? In parallel fashion, we could say that Freud realized that for human culture to remain culture, to be fully shared and not become stagnant or blocked, it also needs to be receptive to change.

To tell your dream is to demand a response from a listener (or reader). At stake is both the personal history of a psyche and its cultural becoming. *Culture*, as a collective defense of a society's communal vitality depends upon the sharing of our dreams. I have recently theorized that *culture itself* must have sprung up prehistorically as a response to new or urgent needs, say, a terrible natural catastrophe that brought people together to face and overcome it (MacCannell 77-89).[4] To meet those needs, there had to be a collective response by the group under threat or in danger. But we must also acknowledge that threats to our communal life come not only from Nature but also from within culture itself. To remain a living culture, shared among its people, it must also respond to the dangers that can come from the awesome powers would-be Masters will always strive to exert over group life. This can happen overtly via commandments or propaganda and in more subtle ways, by "selling" you on their dream for you, thereby depriving you of your power to dream for yourself.

[4] Juliet Flower MacCannell. "Why Culture? A Psychoanalytic Speculation." *Reibung und Reizung. Psychoanalyse, Kultur und deren Wissenschaft*, edited by Insa Härtel, Textem Verlag, 2021.

We can ponder the outcomes evident today in our internet mediascapes, where people are urged to follow influencers: they may constitute a lethal threat to our shared cultural and social life.

I. The Dreamscape of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Let us turn now to the narration of dreams that appears in Emily Brontë's 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights.* Not the opening dreams that come to the slumbering visitor Lockwood, but the later one that young Catherine Earnshaw relates to the servant girl Nelly Dean—who was also her childhood playmate. Cathy tells Nelly that in her delightful dream she has giddily agreed to marry Edgar Linton, whose civilized and polished life at Thrushcross Grange contrasts with the harshness and cultural barrenness of life at her home, Wuthering Heights. Cathy declares to Nelly how exceptionally happy she is at the prospect. However, the ultimate *addressee* of Cathy's dream is not really Nelly herself, but the person to whom Cathy obviously hopes Nelly will relay her entire dream: Heathcliff.

Meanwhile Heathcliff, unknown to the two women, is quietly overhearing Cathy's words. To his and Cathy's great misfortune, Heathcliff is so agitated at the thought of Cathy marrying Linton that he leaves the house before Cathy appends the real point to her narrative—"the real navel" of her dream: that she does not ultimately feel she can marry Linton because of her lifelong closeness to Heathcliff, her playmate throughout their childhood. Cathy's request for Nelly's advice ends with the words we can only imagine she expects Nelly to share with Heathcliff, conveying to him how she could never really exist apart from him: "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff" (Brontë 122).[5] Cathy has, in other words, "let Heathcliff in" to be an integral part of herself (67).

Having overheard only the first part of this dream exchange, Heathcliff is henceforward prevented by his wounded ego from ever again letting Cathy in to *his* life or *his* heart. From the moment of the truncated dream narrative, he begins scheming about how to torment her: he elopes with her sister-in-law, Isabella Linton, while working systematically at ruining Cathy's husband Edgar Linton financially by gaining possession of Linton's land.

What most readers accept as Heathcliff's undying "romantic passion" for Cathy has for too long been a stumbling block to our understanding of his

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[5] Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*. Penguin Classics, 1985.

character, not as a tragic romantic hero, but as an absolute monster of egotism. He finally emerges as an antisocial hermitic horror who refuses steadfastly to let *any* other people in. Brontë shows him becoming progressively less and less human, in keeping with his name, which is composed of two natural topographical features, *heath* and *cliff*. The novel becomes the very story of his dissolution as a human being and his transformation into an egocentric, stony creature. His self-obsessed refusal to open a dialogue with Catherine—which is what she intended the narration of the dream to cause—seals his fate and determines the course of the rest of his life as no longer motivated by love for her, but by his burning desire for revenge against the Lintons. He remains forever rigid, unable to change. Thus, it is his own driven ego that is at fault for his failure to find happiness, to live fully.

Most importantly, Brontë's fiction links the dreamwork directly to the matter of the lifeblood of *culture* itself, culture as shared desires, shared values. Heathcliff retreats from all ordinary human contact that does not instrumentally advance his goal of ruining the Lintons by absolutely refusing to share anything with others—the way Cathy had hoped he could share her presence with Edgar. Brontë literally portrays him as the absolute enemy of *culture* itself—a peculiar perversity in his character that has rarely been highlighted. Note that he halts the education of his nephew Hareton in order to turn him into an illiterate dumb animal. Once he becomes sole Master of the Heights, he traps everyone else under his despotic control, especially those linked to the target of his hatred, the Lintons: his sickly son by Isabella Linton; Catherine's nephew Hareton; Catharine's grown daughter Young Cathy; and finally, even the servant Nelly Dean. Like Freud's Primal Father, he keeps them all under his tyrannical rule, torturing and mocking them at every moment of their lives.

Together with Lockwood's egocentric dream at the beginning of the novel, I believe that what we are finding here is Brontë's response to a new and pernicious direction in her own mid-century Victorian culture: the growing idolization of the unfeeling, hard-hearted person, deaf to the desires and dreams of others. Her novel examines the real human cost incurred when we make the cold and ruthless egotist, say the celebrated image of a hard-nosed capitalist

Captain of Industry, into our highest cultural ideal.[6] Brontë is illustrating the monstrous, culture-destroying egotism of the era's new paradigm for manhood.

This is so even for her portrayal of the humble Lockwood who, we should recall, is admittedly following the new fad for being a solitary as he arrives at Wuthering Heights to which he has travelled in order to get away from other people. Lockwood has bought into the egocentric dream of living a life without others, of leaving society altogether, as if this dream really expresses his own deepest desire.[7] But this is a patently false "dream," promoted by economic interests that require people not to get together: recall Britain's laws against "combinations" promulgated in 1799 that forbade societies or amalgamations of persons for the purpose of political reform and where interference with commerce and trade was illegal. (The law was a reaction against the French Revolution and was rescinded in the 1820s.) This is why Lockwood is clearly more disturbed by Cathy's ghostly plea, "Let me *in*!" than by his being singled out in the dream sermon's, "Thou art the man!" (Brontë 66-67).

II. Ego Drives and Sex Drives

In "Instincts and their Vicissitudes,"[8] Freud wrote that the "conflict between the claims of sexuality and those of the ego" are at the root of all psychoneurotic disorders (124).[9] Only two unconscious drives impel the psyche in his theory: the ego drive (which is self-preservative and does not require relations with others; its satisfaction is what Lacan called *la jouissance de l'idiot*); and the sex drive (which is preservative of the group, through erotic unions). The "sex drive" makes links to someone other than yourself necessary

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[6] Capitalism, Jacques Lacan said, begins by doing away with sex: "*Autant donc pour le sexe, puisqu'en effet le capitalisme, c'est de là qu'il est parti, de le mettre au rancart*" (*Télévision*. Éditions du Seuil, 1974, p. 51).

[7] When he returns later in the novel hoping to court young Cathy we see that his supposed dream of solitude has not lasted long.

[8] Sigmund Freud. "Instincts and their Vicissitudes." 1915c. I re-translate the static-seeming "instinct" as "drive," just as the French translate it as the dynamic "*pulsion.*"

[9] Freud proposed that "two groups of . . . primal drives should be distinguished: the *ego* or *self-preservative* drives and the *sexual* drives" ("Instincts" 124). Likewise, in "Why War?" (1933b), he wrote that "human instincts are of only two kinds: those which seek to preserve and unite—which we call 'erotic,' exactly in the sense in which Plato used the word 'Eros' in his *Symposium*, or 'sexual' with a deliberate extension of the popular conception of 'sexuality'—and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we group together as the aggressive or destructive instinct" (209). Lacan incorporated Freud's two drives into his view of the ego as the site of aggressivity and added that all drives are part of death drive.

for satisfying your desire.[10] The sex drive not only links you to others, forebears and progeny, through a long reproductive chain; it also means that you need to be connected to another, to a partner, for fulfillment. I propose that something similar to this linkage is at the very foundation of culture, whereas the ego drive, which needs no such external relationships, fuels the counterforce to culture that I noted earlier.

Have we today completed the early project of elevating egotism that Brontë revealed? Have we set aside the sex or erotic/unifying drive ("letting others in") in favor of the ego drives—both culturally and in much psychoanalytic practice? These days we are bombarded with "new," even "revolutionary" media-based forms for ostensibly connecting or perhaps over-sharing with others. Yet they leave me to wonder if they are advancing or halting the evolution of human *culture*, defined as the quintessence of sharing with others. Consider this *New York Times* article titled, "What Are Young People Doing? Don't Ask,"[11] regarding what young people are "doing with technology" today. The reporter tells us that she subscribes to various "platforms" to gain access to the "memes," the "user behaviors," "the celebrities," and the "influencers" of today's cultural trends: "I spend a lot of time on Twitter pretty consistently throughout the day to keep up with breaking news and what people are talking about" (Lorenz).

Please note that the "people" she lurks among are not conversing *with* her; she is a mere spectator of their "talk," not a participant in an exchange of thoughts. Moreover, the people posting are mainly talking "about," not "with," anyone else in particular. Is this not more a nightmare than a dream of shared communication come true? The reporter can only presume she is embedded in a group of actual people who are unaware of her eavesdropping and who never intend to be responsive to her. With current advances in AI, such "people" may no longer actually need to exist. Indeed, technological innovations afford people virtual spaces in which they can talk without ever being in the presence of anyone else. The "talk" the reporter follows is probably the emptiest speech that we have ever experienced culturally, and has virtually nothing in common with what Ferdinand de Saussure and Jean-Jacques Rousseau understood *speech* to be: the principal means of *responding* to whatever happens around us,

[10] Freud demonstrated that, even in sadomasochism, scopophilia, exhibitionism, and taking oneself as another ("turning round upon the subject's own self"), the link to someone else is key to the definition of the erotic drives, the preservative and uniting drive ("Instincts" 127).

[11] Taylor Lorenz. "What Are Young People Doing? Don't Ask." *The New York Times*, 12 Dec. 2019.

of sharing that response with others, and responding to those others' own responses (MacCannell 27-45).[12]

III. In this issue

In the articles in this issue, we see similar engagement with dreams that are spontaneous and communicate with others opposed to what I could call "pseudo dreams" most often manufactured by those in political power that are intended to block our own imaginations and the potential for concerted actions. We find David Dennen writing about Ralph Ellison's unfinished novel, *Three Days Before the Shooting* . . . and its "Dream of the Iron Groom," that features a highly demeaning but widespread American artifact, a cast iron "lawn jockey," painted in lurid colors and featuring the exaggerated caricature of an African-American boy's face, once used for hitching horses but now become a fad lawn decoration. The "iron groom" in "McIntyre's" dream functions as an impossible obstacle to his entering a house. Not only is it too heavy to lift away, it also begins to speak to the would-be mover in highly sassy ways, ways known as "signifying" in Black American lingo, i.e., a "ritualized verbal art in which the speaker puts down, needles, talks about (signifies on) someone" (qtd. in Dennen 18). Ellison seems to be fictionally alluding to the "Great American dream" (of home ownership) that is supposed to be shared by all Americans but is not so in reality: Black Americans have been barred in myriad ways from participating in this "dream." Using McIntyre's "dream" to dissolve the specious "Great American Dream," Ellison aims for a new solution to American divisions and separations by pointing toward a potential new "ideal American character" that could emerge from this dissolution.

In the second article, Giang Hoang's "Escaping from Dreamscapes: On the Politics of Space in Films by Young Independent Vietnamese Directors," we find a refreshingly clear framing of the manufacture of "utopian" dreams promoted by national scale political (state-sponsored "Revolution cinema") and economic (commercial capitalist) interests in cinematic productions in Vietnam. These are the antithesis of the kind of dreaming we have been delineating throughout this introduction: a dreaming that aims to be shared with others. In

[12] Juliet Flower MacCannell. "The Echo of the Signifier in the Body: How Drive Works (Or Not) Today." *Analyzing the Cultural Unconscious: Science of the Signifier*, edited by Lilian Munk-Rösing and Ida Nissen, Bloomsbury, 2020.

contrast, dreams that come to us from within present us, both individually and culturally, with new solutions and new horizons. The value of dreaming, for both us and our culture, can never be externally mandated with the aim of coercively "unifying" us by fitting us into a one-size-fits-all fantasy. The author shows the alternative to such concocted "unities" in the resistance to them from young Vietnamese filmmakers.

IV. Coda

A nightmare scenario for our future life, similar to the world our *New York Times* reporter has shown us, comes to us from Jacques Derrida. In *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud*,[13] Derrida said that everything we have considered the very heart of what language and shared culture have created—literature, philosophy, love letters, psychoanalysis—is about to vanish under the weight of technology's replacement of *language* (responsiveness to others) by *code* (giving a name and address to everything in the universe). And with their loss, the "human" in our history will vanish as well. We might all become Heathcliffs . . . .

However, my colleague J. Hillis Miller had this response:

> The comment Derrida makes through his protagonist in *The Post Card* . . . is truly frightening, at least to a lover of literature like me . . . . [It] arouses in me . . . the passions of anxiety, fear, disgust, disbelief, and perhaps a little secret desire to see what it would be like to live beyond the end of literature, love letters, philosophy and psychoanalysis. It would be like living beyond the end of the world. (155-56)[14]

Dream on, regardless!

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[13] Jacques Derrida. *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud*. Flammarion, 1980.
[14] J. Hillis Miller. *Speech Acts in Literature*. Stanford UP, 2001.

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