PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY CRITICISM OF JANE EYRE

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Abstract. In literature Psychoanalysis deals with the psychological and the unconscious instinctual tendencies (id) of both writers and their characters, the recognition of the repressed desires, the dreams, and the uncanny relating to them, and the use of the language of nature to symbolise these emotive traits. Marxism is concerned with the socio-economic backgrounds and references, and the ideological influences on the writers and their characters within the texts. Both theories are concerned with the relevant experiences of the readers through which they interpret the texts.

Introduction. The concept of subject is not as straightforward as one would expect. The subject syntactically is that which acts upon the object, while in literature is the topic/matter at the heart of the text. The idea, 'I think therefore I am', "proposes a zero-degree picture of the subject: completely independent, completely unified." (Saunders (1993) p. 99) However, the completely unified subject can be seen to be environmentally and politically determined, while the notion of complete unity is undermined by the psychologically internal complexity of the subject. According to Selden Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism began with Sigmund Freud's view that: *the relationship between author and text analogous to dreamers and their 'text' (literature = 'fantasy') modified by Post-Freudians.* Selden psychoanalysis acts as a nature/culture binary – 'nature' representing metaphorically the subconscious desires, the socially repressed elements of the characters' natures – 'culture' comprising the social class structure, with its historical time-frame, and the revolutionary changes occurring as a result of the power relationships between the classes.

Psychological analysis:

The subject is understood to be constituted by both conscious and unconscious desires and intentions: if you like, there is more to 'I am' than the controlled rationality of 'I think'. The result is a self which is not unified, but made up of competing factions . Freud's own techniques of analysis of the subject's dreams goes beyond intention and unity, and looks instead at the fractured, the repressed, the displaced, and the unconsciously symbolic.

Literature Review.

The concept of 'subject' can be seen not only in terms of 'other and 'gaps/silences' (that which is not explained), but also in terms of the psychoanalytical

and the socio-economic/ideological. The 'subject' of JANE EYRE is Jane herself, and, as she is the narrator, we are able to see her life unfolding with the socio-economic influences, conscious thoughts, and unconscious desires contributing to her character development.

Step 1. ***Position of characters.***

In the first chapter the distinction between Jane's position and John Reed's position in the household is graphically drawn – John is wealthy, arrogant, cruel, and selfish (the latter three being a result of the first), while Jane is poor, dependent (on the Reed family), 'habitually obedient' yet stirred to rebellion by the injustice of her treatment. The Reed sisters are selfish indulged, and indifferent to Jane's situation while resentful of her presence. Mrs Reed is tyrannical, unfeeling, jealous (of Jane's place in her late husband's affections), and resentful of the burden of caring for Jane.

The upper class or Bourgeoisie, which the Reeds represent, are paradoxically shown to be uncharitable, unkind and unpleasant, yet because of the power they possess as a result of having affluence, as a desirable class to belong to and/or attain. Jane's portrayal of others of the same privileged class is on the whole equally unflattering. Brocklehurst is depicted as hypocritical (has a puritanical expectation of how POOR young girls should behave and dress, while his own daughters are permitted to dress frivolously and behave ill-manneredly), stern, cold and uncharitable (witness the burnt porridge episode). The Ingram family are haughty, overbearing, caught up in their own esteem, and once again ill-mannered. Even Rochester Jane shows to be selfish, overbearing, arrogant and oblivious to those beneath him unless directly affected by them.

Jane, however, has virtually no status – she is 'less than a servant' in the eyes of all, including the servants. By birth she is the Reeds' social equal, yet her impecunious state dis-empowers her. Ideologically she must learn to conform, to control her passionate nature (repress the id), in order to attain her economic independence and subsequent rise through the class system, while refusing to allow her own victimisation. By learning to say no to John Reed she learns the power "of resistance against oppression and . . . of self-confirmation, asserting the right to value her well-being above the demands made by others." (Nestor, p. 51).

Various levels of class are portrayed by Jane – from the moneyed Bourgeoisie (property owners) like the Reeds, Brocklehurst, Rochester, Mr Oliver "the proprietor of a needle-factory and iron-foundry" (Bronte, (1976) p. 381); to the poor 'gentry' who needed to earn a living like Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax, and Diana Mary and St. John Rivers; to the servant/working class people like Bessie, Abbot, Hannah, Grace Poole; and finally to the peasant class children in the Moreton School, whom Jane describes as "heavy-looking, gaping rustics", "farmers' daughters", "rustic Scholars", and at the end of her time there of "some half-dozen of my best scholars: as decent, respectable,

modest, and well-informed young women as could be found in the ranks of the British peasantry." (Bronte, (1976) pp. 392 & 416)

Step 2. ***Positions of Secondary characters.***

As well as these there are coachmen, inn-keepers, shop-keepers, gardeners, maids, doctors, teachers, clergymen and others, all adding to the fabric of the narrative. There are a few historical references to the Industrial Revolution time-slot – to the potato-famine of Ireland. As mentioned above to the fact the Mr Oliver owned a needle factory and iron foundry.

There was also mention of another kind of class system – that of the older girls at Lowood dominating over the smaller younger girls: "whenever the famished great girls had an opportunity, they would coax or menace the little ones out of their portion." (ibid, p. 77)

Step 3. ***The psychological references.***

The psychological references and influences are abundant in JANE EYRE. In first chapters the red and white pattern is established by "folds of scarlet drapery . . . to the rightThis pattern is repeated in the red-room, with "its red drapery and carpet and contrasting white bed and easy chair embodying two separate threats to Jane – a prison of passion and a chill, 'pale throne' of repression. Thus red is symbolic of passion which Jane must learn to suppress if she is to mature, while the white is symbolic of a cold, sterile life void of that passion.

This idea of imprisonment is thus hinted at in the opening pages to be followed by the actual imprisonment in the red-room. On escaping the confines of this room, then her nursery, and finally Gateshead itself, she finds herself in another confining, regimented location – Lowood school. Having worked herself up to the semi-independent position of teacher, she leaves the institution to venture into the wider world – only to find that at Thornfield she is surrounded by signs of enclosure.

As Jane enters its gates they 'clash' behind her, Mrs Fairfax locks the hall door and takes the key before showing Jane to her room, just as she later securely fastens the trapdoor from the attic, and in the library Jane discovers that most of the books are 'locked up behind glass doors'

The fact that Jane sought e sense of freedom on the third floor of Thornfield is ironic – it was the site of Bertha's imprisonment. Even when Jane runs away and enters the Rivers' household she is bound by another form of entrapment – that of St John Rivers' uncompromising expectations of and plans for her. Her ultimate release is seen to be when she returns to Rochester as an equal, financially independent, and releases him from his confining restraints of blindness.

Step 4. ***Psychological interpretation of dreams.***

The dreams that Jane has throughout the book are also psychological windows to her mind, and premonitions of her future. The carrying of the child, in the dream

Jane had prior to her wedding day, is symbolic of the weight of domesticity which hung around the necks of Victorian women, tying them down and preventing them from being independent. Her ally, nature, had taken over the 'prison' of Thornfield which was reduced to rubble – it could no longer contain her – and through its agent the wind, was blowing away the restricting child, leaving her free to fall into freedom. The use of dreams as premonition devices in the narrative were also an indication of Bronte's awareness of the uncanny.

Her: *figurative language is profoundly suggestive, privileging the imaginative and intuitive ahead of the rational. Similarly her use of the supernatural reinforces the sense of knowledge beyond logic, of truths that are felt as much as thought.*

With this language she is able to suggest psychological links – hunger indicating deprivation, confinement signalling oppression and elements of nature offering a nurturing safety.

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