Pieces in a jig-saw puzzle: the role of secondary characters in *Jane Eyre*

Nicole Terrien

Nicole TERRIEN est Professeur de littérature anglaise à l'Université de Rouen. Elle a écrit sa thèse sur le développement de la folie dans les romans de Jean Rhys. Elle a publié plusieurs articles sur les réécritures du roman du dix-neuvième siècle en se concentrant sur la mise en scène des personnages féminins. Elle travaille actuellement sur l'œuvre de Jenny Diski).
Université de Rouen

The staging of secondary characters, in *Jane Eyre*, underlines the careful construction of a plot that cannot be reduced to its linearity. Echoing situations, parallel stories, repetition of words and phrases invite the reader to enjoy the novel as a work of art. In a strictly codified game, the reader joins the heroine in a picturesque travel of sorts, where pain and fear weave a pattern of abstraction relying on endless cultural references. From the imaginary story emerges the story of imagination, in which the reader shares the power of combination taught by the narrator so as to create a new world of their own, a new perception of reality.

intertextualité, interculturalité, tonalité, structure symphonique

Jane Eyre can be read as an education novel or as a *Kunstlerroman*, in which case the linearity of the plot is understood to play a major role in the construction of meaning. But beneath the outer shape of the novel, one might argue that Brontë is toying with a deeper level of complexity meant to add some relief to her heroine's pilgrim's progress. Indeed, the passionate tale of a girl's romance, leading to the memorable "Reader, I married him", is not enough to explain why the book has survived not just as a best-seller but also as a book that one enjoys re-reading. Elizabeth Imlay has demonstrated how much the text relies on the traditional patterns of myths and fairy-tales bringing depth to the story of the rejected child growing into a self-reliant woman. We would like to underline how the staging of secondary characters favours the presentation of the narrative as a reflection on the process of creation, under the guise of an invitation to what one might call a picturesque travel of sorts, in the tradition of Gilpin. We will see that the presentation of the characters constantly invites the reader to enjoy the story as an aesthetic construction rather than a direct transcription of experience. Characters play parts as in a strictly codified game; theatricality underlines the artifice of the illusion of reality. The pain suffered by the heroine gives rise to the fear experienced by the reader who is made to perceive a pattern of repetition and give up their familiar perception of the world. Repetitions of situations, parallels and contrasts between characters develop the readers' capacity to venture new comparisons and to exercise their faculty of imagination. As in the tradition of the gothic novel, the readers need first to believe in the existence of characters who must seem sufficiently familiar[1] before they become elements that favour the quest for lines and patterns, creating a new perspective of abstraction.[2]

[1] Lévy (111).

[2] Imlay quoting a letter to Ellen Nussey: "We only suffer reality to *suggest*. The heroines *are abstractions*, and the heroes also" (2).

A human comedy: names and books

The heroine, as is traditional in the novel, must be presented against a social background that helps define her identity, both as a person and as a character in the plot.[3] So secondary characters are to be perceived as tools to define who Jane Eyre may be.[4] Each stage in her development corresponds to a specific social circle, thus underlining the pattern of the education novel well adapted to the theme of education developed through the plot. The heroine learns how to position herself in society but also trains her mind to become independent.

At the beginning, the gentry, represented by the Reeds, scorn her poverty and her lack of beauty. Instead of teaching her to feel at ease in society, they force her to turn to books to find a pleasing world. Echoing their masters' opinion, the servants contribute to the destruction of Jane's self-image at the same time as they encourage her to find in work the alternative means of self-assertion, which is to form the underlying ethics of the plot. Such aggressivity against a defenseless child incites the reader to side with the victim.[5] The gentleness of the hero will be perceived in contrast with this initial hostility, saving the narrator from the necessity of too obvious a panegyric. The strict economy of the text shows Rochester playing the part Jane's relations have refused to play, making the feeling of kinship between the two characters so acceptable to the reader. Because Rochester has heard of the Reeds, as he knows about Brocklehurst's administration of Lowood, the social identity of the heroine as a lady is asserted beyond doubt. Her marriage signifies the restoration of her rights and not the social usurpation Lady Ingram sees in any union between master and governess.

The reader's first encounter with the failed family relationship takes place when cousin John throws a book at her, wounds her and forbids her to touch the books, his future heritage over which he already rules despite his lack of respect for it. The reader sides with the heroine condemned to become a frustrated reader herself. Later, at school, she has accesss to few books, as the narrator tells when Jane first enters Rochester's library. Were it not for the memory of this initial scene, the detail of this repeatedly limited access to knowledge would go unnoticed, especially as the narrator seems to understate its importance: "Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one bookcase left open, containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travels, a few romances, &c. I suppose he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal; and, indeed, they contented me amply for the present, […] they seemed to offer an abundant harvest of entertainment and information" (88). The narrator overtly insists on a form of progression, but the phrasing betrays retention of information on Rochester's part and future discontent for Jane; as in each instance when she thinks herself contented, appearances are meant to prove deceptive.

Books go on defining her relationships with the other characters when she reaches Moor House and first admires two unknown ladies engrossed in studying. The girls she feels so akin with, her cousins as coincidence wants it, soon give her the opportunity to share the infinite knowledge she craves for.[6] More importantly still, St. John - a great improvement on the first cousin, as the name indicates - will offer to teach her what girls are never taught. But if she acceeds to this knowledge, she must cease to be considered as a girl to become the wife of St. John the missionary, she must give up her identity and her social existence. Symbolically, St. John gives Jane a copy of *Marmion*, the story of a girl walled up alive for improper sexual behaviour.[7]

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[3] Knies 118).
[4] Rich (482).
[5] Jouve (133).
[6] Rich analyses the names of the two cousins (498).
[7] Imlay (98).

Between the two extremes represented by the two male cousins, the position of Mr Rochester becomes the qualified golden means, the position of prudence not just that of power through misinformation.

Attitude towards books proves an efficient instrument of characterisation, saving the narrator from too overt a bias in her description of secondary characters and too long explanations about the hero and heroine. The two Reed female cousins reappear as reader figures when Jane visits her dying aunt. Georgiana, the mundane puppet, pretends to read but is bored or imagines herself the heroine of romances (199). Her attitude echoes that of Blanche Ingram, keeping the latter as present in the reader's memory as she is in Jane's. The defects of the cousin amplify those of the rival, making them both unbearable to the self-satisfied reader who may miss the ironical purpose of the multiplication of mirrors. This time it is Jane who sits "between [her] two cousins" (195); the other one, Eliza, mitakes her reading for true religion : "I asked her once what was the great attraction of that volume, and she said 'the Rubric'" (200). Her fanaticism is the opposite of St. John's, but the narrator condones neither form and invites the reader to measure the danger represented by either. Male and female characters are to be judged by the same standards.[8]

The true Christian reader has been presented early in the text under the features of Helen Burns, who abstains from any comment on the reasons why she enjoys Dr Johnson's *Rasselas*. She lets Jane make an opinion for herself : "'You may look at it', replied the girl, offering me the book. I did so; a brief examination convinced me that the contents were less taking than the title: 'Rasselas' looked dull to my trifling taste; I saw nothing about fairies, nothing about genii; no bright variety seemed spead over the closely printed pages" (42). Clearly one has to be ready to understand a book properly. The negative definition given by the narrator so closely fits with the structure of Brontë's novel that the author's consciousness of purpose can hardly be doubted. The theme of *Rasselas*, the quest for happiness in relation with "the choice of life" is indeed the same as the theme of *Jane Eyre*, expressed through the pattern of fairy-tales. But the heroine must wait till she is educated by her two other cousins to be able to understand philosophy, just as the reader must wait to grasp the full meaning of the novel centered on the capacity to make the right choice. It is no coincidence if Helen, like Rochester, bears the name of a poet.[9]

The form of the education novel allows to focus on the essence of Brontë's philosophical message. "[E]nternainment and information", the two aims she evokes about Rochester's library, take up the double purpose stated by Aristotle and developed in her own narrative through open moral digressions but also in the staging of events. Nothing is left to chance, the apparent chronological order is mainly a logical order tightly controled by the narrator.

As the heroine of an autobiography, Jane is the subject of writing and its object, a character doubly delineated by verbal construction. Superposition of identities is essential to the genre of the autobiography, be it real or fictitious. The narrator plays on the theme so as to underline relativity of judgement and variation of perspectives. The reader is asked to compare and combine points of view.

From the beginning, the members of the Reed family are made to serve as tools to measure this variation, which explains why they must reappear midway through Jane's education. Their name is to be understood as one of the many allusions to "The Revelation of Saint John the Divine", in the *Bible* : "And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city" (21, 15). Rochester, when he marvels at Jane's pliability and strength, compares her to a reed,

[8] Beaty (494).

[9] The Scotish poet, Robert Burns (1759-1796), also author of songs. Imlay stresses that the name evokes a brook and fire (131).

underlining her being a Reed in spite of their rejection, her being an instrument of measure as well.[10]

From an imperfect Reed, she gradually becomes the "golden reed" by which Rochester can measure his own paradise: he symbolically gives her a pearl necklace for the wedding and keeps it under his cravat as long as she stays away from him (380). In *Revelations*, the "holy Jerusalem" is thus described : "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; and every several gate was of one pearl" (21, 21). Significantly, Miss Temple,[11] whose name speaks for itself, is the first to officialise Jane's role when she gives her the little pearl brooch the governess wears to be presented to Mr Rochester (102). The purity of this trinket stands in contrast with the glittering jewels of Blanche and the loadful of expensive jewels Rochester wants to bestow on his future bride, before he realises her identity can only be defined by a simpler albeit precious piece of jewelry, the very detail Jane first noticed on the family portrait in the staircase (84). When she can finally accept the pearl necklace she has found her true identity as a member of the Rochester family but has not renounced the other components in her identity. As Rich puts it, she resists being "romanticized".[12]

The danger is that she may retain too much of her original being and remain weak. Both Rochester and St. John try to make use of her pliability till the heroine becomes aware of it and the revelation works as a protection: "I could resist St. John's wrath: I grew pliant as a reed under his kindness. Yet I knew all the time, if I yielded now, I should not the less be made to repent, some day, of my former rebellion" (357). The exact parallel between this scene, where Jane is submitted to St. John's intellectual force of attraction, and the scene in which she fears she might yield to Rochester's physical seduction,[13] illustrates the complexity of characterisation. Rochester and St. John are not just two opposites, they share many characteristics. Their kinship is hinted at when the narrator enumerates the facets of St. John's personality in terms that evoke John Wilmot Rochester, the poet: "Besides, he could not bound all he had in his nature - the rover, the aspirant, the poet, the priest - in the limits of a single passion" (313). Wilmot Rochester's mother was Anne St. John, daughter of John St. John. Besides the hero's full name, Edward Fairfax Rochester also points at a combined identity between that of the libertine Earl of Rochester and Edward Fairfax, the translater of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

St. John brings Jane's attention to this complexity: "You are not, perhaps, aware that I am your namesake? – that I was christened St. John Eyre Rivers?" (327) Imlay stresses the role of this similarity: "The real threat comes not from the 'hardness and despotism' of Rivers's moral bullying, but from his ability to present ideas to her. His middle name is Eyre, and he has some of Jane's imaginative gift".[14] Jane's identity must be deciphered as a combination of elements presented through the novel, and brought together through the incident remarks of the secondary characters. Another significant hint is Adèle's difficulty in pronouncing her name: "'Ah!' cried she in French, 'you speak my language as well as Mr Rochester does: I can talk to you as I can to him […] And Mademoiselle – what is your name?'

'Eyre – Jane Eyre.'

'Aire? Bah! I cannot say it.' (86) In this passage, Adèle expresses herself in French and insists on Jane's capacity to express herself in that language which makes her akin to Rochester; so "Aire" is to be understood - among other possibilities[15] - as the pronunciation of the letter R in French. The letter that brings together the main phases of Jane's education, the

[10] Imlay argues that the name also suggests a flute (129). See our reading of the text as a piece of music.
[11] Imlay proposes other meanings (84 and 135).
[12] Rich (478).
[13] Imlay (59).
[14] Imlay (64).
[15] Imlay (17 and 129), Beaty (500) and Sternlieb (507).

three parts of her family identity: the Reeds, the Rivers and finally the Rochesters. Her identity reads as a combined heritage.[16]

Characters in a charade

The opposition between these three facets is repeatedly exploited through the narrative so as to underline that the narrative itself is the ultimate expression of its completion. Rochester, disguised as a gipsy, gives a clue as to the necessity to combine information. Unlike the reader, Jane remains puzzled: “If you knew it, you are peculiarly situated: very near happiness; yes; within reach of it. The materials are all prepared; there only wants a movement to combine them. Chance laid them somewhat apart; let them be once approached and bliss results”(168). Beneath the obvious meaning within the plot, the reader may well miss the real irony of the statement that concerns the narrative itself: the elements to be combined lead to the richness of texture but cannot all be perceived at once. The intervention of secondary characters is crucial in the intertwining of references that bring together the heroine and the hero as but two faces of the same being.

The heroine’s family also provides the template by which Rochester may be better understood; the answer he gives Blanche, when she enquires about Adèle (“‘Where did you pick her up?’ ‘I did not pick her up, she was left on my hands’ (150)), takes its full meaning when echoed by the complaint of the dying Mrs Reed: “Such a burden to be left on my hands […]” (197). The behaviour of Rochester towards his ward is to be judged in contrast with the reaction of Mrs Reed. This is one of the reasons why Rochester asks Jane to express her approval of his sense of duty, to side with the Rochesters against the Reeds of this world. It is no coincidence if, in this same passage, the heroine wonders at Rochester’s strange way of telling his story. The reader who understands that, as a narrator, Rochester is as emotionally involved as Jane in her autobiography, should probably pay attention to the implications of comparing one tale with an incomplete and therefore deceptive narrative.[17]

Rochester protecting Adèle characterises himself as a reliable gentleman and comes in as a significant element in both Jane’s and the reader’s trust in his version of his story with Bertha. Thus secondary characters, who have no relation with one another, offer the opportunity to perceive the parallels between seemingly unconnected scenes. Construction is brought to the fore beyond the appearance of spontaneity, accidental juxtaposition and linearity. The text gradually provides the scales by which to judge its moral dimension and its full meaning.

Similarly, the description of Jane’s occupation as an artist provides significant details about the process of creation that can be directly linked to the structure of the novel itself. To while-off time at Gateshead, Jane draws “fancy vignettes, representing any scene that happened momentarily to shape itself in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination: a glimpse of sea between two rocks; the rising moon, and a ship crossing its disk; a group of reeds and water-flags, and a naiad’s head crowned with lotus-flowers, rising out of them; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow’s nest, under a wreath of hawthorn-bloom” (198-199). The various elements here pictured recall the details noticed by Rochester when he first acknowledges Jane’s talent as an artist of imagination, expanding on myths and legends. The notion of inspiration, reminiscent of the romantic movement, corresponds to many of the images used in Rochester’s speech, especially to qualify Jane’s magical identity. In the center, we must notice the reeds that link her stories with reality.

Within this context of mixed inspiration, Rochester’s features appear to the eyes of the artist and of the reader simultaneously. Art leads to the revelation of hidden feelings and serves as a form of surrogate pleasure: “One morning I fell to sketching a face: what sort of a face it was to be, I did not care or know. I took a soft black pencil, gave it a broad point, and

[16] Rich (470) and Imlay (34).
[17] Gilbert and Gubar (484).

worked away. Soon I had traced on the paper a broad prominent forehead, and a square lower outline of visage: that contour gave me pleasure; my fingers proceeded actively to fill it with features.[…] There, I had a friend's face under my gaze; and what did it signify that those young ladies turned their backs on me? I looked at it; I smiled at the speaking likeness: I was absorbed and content" (199). The attention given to technical details, to the adequacy between tools and purpose, to the coming to life of the inanimate object should serve as guidelines to the reader of the novel. The art of the narrator is to be understood as akin to the art of the sketcher. Once more the use of the notion of contentment announces future developments: a phase has just been completed, a new one must follow based on the information gathered here.

The assertion of Jane's love for Rochester is no revelation; the passage reads as a reference to the first serious discussion between Jane and her master, acting the maestro teaching his pupil how to look at art. The question he asks concerns her happiness while thus occupied with her painting. Later in the story, St. John shares this perception of the function of art: "while you draw you will not feel lonely" (315). The power of the unconscious brings to the fore the complexity of the composition. Early in the novel, the reader is warned of the impossibility to grasp the whole meaning of a picture all at once: "Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings […]" (6-7). The piece of information missing is the existence of St. John Rivers in the sentimental education of the heroine. The underlying text that brings together the disconnected vignettes is once more *Revelations*: "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb./ In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life […]" (22, 1-2) Rochester, consistently characterised as the tree of life, can only be confirmed as such in relation to St. John. Even his true love is tested by the very standard of jealousy he sets for Jane's, when he fears Jane feels attracted to her bright cousin. St. John is used as Miss Ingram has been used. As in the *Bible*, the prophecy can be understood only at the end of the book.

In the plot itself, the capacity to combine disconnected elements is exercised, as a game, by secondary characters, the guests of Mr Rochester. The master of the house provides all the materials necessary to the performance of charades, playing more than one part: manager, stage director and actor. But to Jane, the spectator, and his fellow actors, he is mainly the object of the charade.

The episode stands as the epitome of the construction of the novel. The narrator insists on the novelty of the game for her. The theatrical dimension sets off the heroine's favourite position as an observer, the position adopted by the narrator throughout the novel so as to give an illusion of distance between herself and the events and characters she depicts. But as soon as Rochester leaves the stage, she stops paying attention to the performance.[18] She is not interested in charades, only in what they tell her about the hero. This gives the narrator an opportunity to stress the importance of the choice of point of view.[19] She is the one who decides what the reader must see and how he must see it. The keen interest with which she watches the development of the riddle reveals the conflict of emotions as still acute. Her apparent objectivity in the relation of the scene misleads the reader into thinking he is more perceptive than the heroine in deciphering the reference to Rochester's love for Jane and scorn for Blanche's greed. Only once the existence of Bertha has been revealed, does the riddle don a high degree of bitter self-irony on Rochester's part, a bitterness that can be connected to what Brontë may have felt in transposing elements of her life into fiction. The stage director/author of the charade has however managed to increase Jane's jealousy. Blanche has

[18] Knies (116).
[19] Knies (116).

played a part in a scene she is not aware of and the other socialites have played the part of the deceived spectators, along with the heroine.

The scene takes place just after Jane has experienced an excruciating pang of jealousy while listening to the duet sang by Rochester and Blanche. Rochester's ability to sing love songs may be traced to the reputation of the poet John Wilmot Rochester, famous for his duets with his wife.[20] While Blanche and Jane are here affected by Rochester's song, Jane remains impervious when he tries to seduce her during the courting season. The use of the Italian names, "Signor Eduardo" and "Donna Bianca" (153), underlines the contrived nature of the episode as a combination of clichés that include references to Walter Scott or Byron, to the opera, or to the life of Mary of Scots.[21] Jane, the heroine, does not realise she is the victim of the libertine who knows how to excite jealousy to make himself loved, as he admits once they become engaged.

The effect of jealousy foretells the effect of the dreadful yell uttered in the dead of night shortly afterwards and is an invitation to pay attention to tonality: "[B]ut the tones that then severed the air arrested me […] finding a way through the ear to the heart, and there waking sensation strangely" (154). The violence of the effect is partly caused by Jane's misinterpretation as to who the addressee of this love should be. When Rochester follows her out of the room to contemplate her defeat, the reader is aware of intention and understands more than the heroine does. But the phrasing chosen by the narrator turns this feeling of superiority into a mistake as no one can imagine the real obstacle to their union will be the unknown and unseen laughing creature who attacks Mason: "What a cry! The night – its silence – its rest, was rent in twain, by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall. My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralysed"(175). Blanche in singing the duet, Mason in being attacked or Bertha in committing a crime, help the heroine understand where she stands by first puzzling her.

That two incidents so distinct in tonality should be conveyed in such a similar manner shows that the narration closes up onto the unexpected relationships that define the identity of the heroine. Just as the characters in the plot take part in a charade they are not aware of, the reader is asked to decipher a charade of which he still has to identify the elements.

The arrival of a new character, Richard Mason, helps cement together, so to speak, the disconnected elements in the plot but also the contrasting tonalities of the narration. As a mysterious handsome character he is to be compared and contrasted with Rochester. Accepted as a romantic figure by the trusting Eshton sisters, he is condemned by the scrutinising Jane, in a moment when the identity of the narrator overlaps that of the heroine, and suggests that of the reader: "As I sat in my usual nook, and looked at him with the light of the girandoles on the mantelpiece beaming full over him – for he occupied an arm-chair, drawn close to the fire, and kept shrinking still nearer, as if he were cold – I compared him with Mr Rochester. I think (with deference be it spoken) the contrast could not be much greater between a sleek gander and a fierce falcon: between a meek sheep and the rough-coated keen-eyed dog, its guardian" (162). The art of caricature, so specific of Brontë's descriptions, encompasses the characterisation of Mason in the tradition of the fable – Adèle's first performance to impress her governess is to recite a fable by La Fontaine. The animal features anticipate on the true relationship between the hero and the newcomer and reveal more than a realistic portrait would.

The play on lights attracts the attention to the details of his physiognomy that must be deciphered. He is not so much what he seems to be as what he inspires to the heroine : "His eye wandered, and had no meaning in its wandering; this gave him an odd look, such as I never remembered to have seen. For a handsome and not unamiable-looking man, he repelled

[20] See Vieth.

[21] Imlay (76). Bianca is also the figure of the harlot.

me exceedingly; there was no power in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape; no firmness in that aquiline nose, and small cherry mouth; there was no thought on the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye" (162). The separate details composing this short portrait may be contrasted with the scattered elements of Rochester's portrayal through the novel. His position, reminiscent of Rochester's in his library, suggests scenes in the gothic novel where the fire is to play some develish part. Suspense is mainly conveyed through the heroine's fascination for what does not strike anybody else.

In that respect, the characterisation of Mason is similar to the presentation of Grace Poole[22], linked to presentiment: "The strangest thing of all was, that not a soul in the house, except me, noticed her habits, or seemed to marvel at them; no one discussed her position or employment; no one pitied her solitude or isolation" (140). Both characters are remarkable for what cannot be defined about them: what is left out of the narration is what matters. The repetition of the device should draw the reader's attention to its purpose.

Just as Mason acts as a fold to Rochester, Grace Poole becomes the unexpected mirror – pool – into which Jane – Psyche[23] – contemplates her own beauty. "Had Grace been young and handsome, I should have been tempted to think that tenderer feelings than prudence and fear influenced Mr. Rochester in her behalf; but, hard-favoured and matronly as she was, the idea could not be admitted. […] Mr. Rochester is an amateur of the decided and eccentric – Grace is eccentric at least […] I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady; and she spoke the truth: I was a lady" (133). Pondering on Grace's power of attraction, the heroine lets herself think about love and her own involvement in a love story. As a result she asserts with certitude her social position as a lady that her own family would deny her.[24] The notion of eccentricity suggests that truth is not to be found in the center.

Since "an apparition less romantic or less ghostly could scarcely be conceived" (91), Grace offers the possibility to transgress the cliché of romantic love, and though she conveys a power of intimidation that relates to the role of servants in the gothic novel, this does not quite fit either. What Mason and Grace have in common is that they share Rochester's secret as will finally come out. Any interrogation about either is a way to divert the attention from the case of Rochester, as the recurrent insistance on Jane's puzzlement states. Rochester tells Jane as much, hinting at what they have in common: "You look very much puzzled, Miss Eyre; and though you are not pretty any more than I am handsome, yet a puzzled air becomes you; besides, it is convenient, for it keeps those searching eyes of yours away from my physiognomy, and busies them with the worsted flowers of the rug; so puzzle on""(113). The multiple function of puzzlement comes into full view as Jane ponders about love and her newly found sense of worth and, forgetting to question Rochester's potential guilt, seems engrossed in the contemplation of what Henry James would call the figure in the carpet, that is to say indulging her imagination as the master wants her to.

The fair language of complexity

Moving forward and backward in the narrative, one perceives how rich a texture emerges from the entanglement of allusions. Beyond the facts of the plot, cultural references bring a subtlety to the construction, not always easy to define. Like Rochester, Mason is a name that evokes the literay scene.[25] William Mason is the author of *Elfrida*, a tragedy taking up the

[22] Imlay (118). Brontë had read the review of a book, *The English Woman in Egypt*, published by a Mrs Poole.

[23] Imlay chapter 2.

[24] For the association with Bertha see Gilbert and Gubar (485).

[25] For other implications in the use of the name Mason, see Imlay (115) and for Masonic rituals (124).

story of Aelfthryth, the mother of Ethelred the Unready.[26] The form appears somewhat stilted today, but the purpose, as William Mason states it, has much in common with Brontë's: "Characters too were drawn as nearly approaching to privateness as tragic dignity would permit […] for the sake of natural embellishment, and to reconcile mere modern readers to that simplicity of fable, in which I thought it necessary to copy the ancients […] I was enabled to enliven the poem by various touches of pastoral descriptions; not affectedly brought in from the store-house of a picturesque imagination, but necessarily resulting from the scenery of the place itself". The intertwining of references to the Greek tragedy with elements from the most modern forms of the picturesque sound an echo in *Jane Eyre*. The adaptation of models is more elaborate and subtle in Brontë's text.

Mason is pictured as weak even if he is the one who finally provokes the catastrophe that precipitates the completion of Jane's pilgrimage, giving the novel its full value. He appears twice in the story: first, he falls victim to Bertha's attack, which forces Rochester to ask for Jane's help. This episode, the most gothic in the novel, brings no clue as to what is the matter; the heroine can only witness the consequence of the attack and listen to the sketchy account given by Mason. Jane's misgivings were justified, but the reader must wait for the second appearance to realise that the physical description of Mason suggests that madness runs in the family, therefore that Rochester's explanation has been anticipated by Jane's feelings. This time he comes to testify that his sister is still alive so as to stop the wedding; but he only talks when urged by the lawyer. The fortuitous connection between the uncle and Mason belongs to the world of literary coincidences: but, because it links the two families through the theme of colonial trade, it does not strike the reader as too outrageous. Divine providence saves Rochester and Jane from a deadly sin, in answer to the appeal Jane sends her uncle when she thinks Rochester is trying to turn her into a Céline Varens.

The seeming paradox is that Mason is such a weak character that he can be swept off-stage directly, twice, although he serves to bring about a major revelation, as a messenger of the gods rather than a real actor in a tragic plot. The first episode belongs to the tradition of the gothic novel, the second one is much more realistic. So, Mason's part is also to reconcile these two aspects of the novel just as Mason's poetry joins literary and realistic inspiration.

He is the passive counterpart of Bertha whose actions shape the development of the plot; they both stand for the impossibility to erase the past. They open up the limits[27] of the plot, no longer restricted to provincial society. Among the first features noticed by Jane, is Mason's strange way of articulating English: " His manner was polite; his accent, in speaking, struck me as somewhat unusual, - not precisely foreign, but still not altogether English […]" (162). The difficulty to place him is amplified by the effect the announcement of his presence has on Rochester's own elocution: "'Mason! – the West Indies!' he said, in the tone one might fancy a speaking automaton to enounce its single words; 'Mason! – the West Indies!' he reiterated; and he went over the syllables three times […]" (173) A specific kind of attention to enunciation seems necessary when it comes to the relationship between the two characters. Language thus deconstructed suggests an abyss of fear, the contemplation of a well-known horror that cannot be named but is already hinted at when, reacting to Adèle's question about the similitude between her dancing and her mother's, Rochester utters "Pre-cise-ly!" before he dismisses everybody.

This difficulty for language to express the full scope of experience characterises the staging of Bertha.[28] The language she used in her younger days with Rochester cannot even be reproduced. Bertha's presence in Thornfield Hall embodies the impossibility for Rochester to

[26] In Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, De Winter says that his family gave Ethelred his nickname; one that would suit Jane till she hears the voice at the end of the novel.

[27] Imlay (49). The West Indies also refer to the supposed origin of syphilis, the possible cause of Bertha's madness, and they are associated to slavery (51).

[28] For the meaning of the name Bertha see Imlay (46).

forget his mistakes and sins. It actualises not just the past but any form of otherness,[29] including the reduction of Rochester to a stereotyped male character.[30] The critics have abundantly commented on the psychoanalytical implications of her characterisation as a wild beast, unable to speak. She is at the same time Rochester's and Jane's double, which reinforces the identity between hero and heroine while making their union impossible. As long as she exists, Jane cannot be Mrs Rochester, and her premonitions about the impossibility of finding complete happiness seem realised. Paradoxically, Bertha also ensures that when this happiness comes about it can last and that the name Rochester remains untainted.[31] Her laugh that resonates again and again in the house, in the novel and through English literature, "the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha!" (93) is decomposed so as to evoke the sunk fence that protects the grounds of an estate from the wild beasts but cannot be seen.[32]

At the same time, she is the beast within, "the clothed hyena" (250), a puzzle to the spectator "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (250). The description consists more of impressions than of visual details except for the wild mane, one characteristic she shares with the depressed Rochester Jane wishes to "rehumanise" (371) at the end of the plot. Madness is the ultimate form of puzzle neither reason nor language can grasp. The narrator resorts to visual vignettes from the stock of representations her nineteenth century limited knowledge can provide.

Through the intertwining of characterisation, the text of *Jane Eyre*, displays the proximity between madness and reason.[33] The haunting presence of Bertha - a constant absence from the stage itself - signifies danger. Most of the female characters, however harmless, are presented in relation to her. At Gateshead, the tantrums of little Jane foreshadow the mad woman's fury. The persecussion by the aunt is not devoid of its own touch of madness. Rochester offers to consider Lowood as a stage for sadistic and masochistic acts. As soon as the Thornfield episode opens, the connections become obvious. Blanche, in spite of her name, is pictured as a dark lady. Her strength and beauty remind Rochester of his wife's past attractions. Since Blanche's eyes are similar to Rochester's, as Mrs Fairfax points out, the reader perceives another element in the portrait of the hero. The battling between husband and wife, when Rochester introduces Bertha, reinforces the notion of unwanted kinship. The text demonstrates there is no clear-cut distinction between good and evil; it all seems a matter of circumstances.

Even Rosamond can be indirectly traced to the mad woman: her laugh is to be heard again and again, but it is a pure, innocent, pleasing laughter just as her beauty is that of an angel. Although the delightful object of the heroine's painting, she cannot be idealised since she turns into an ordinary woman who craves domestic love and can marry within a year of her failed idyll; the simplicity of her needs enhances the array of possibilities displayed within the plot. She can no more be considered as a heroine than Blanche, whose portrait was sketched when Jane wanted to prove to herself the vanity of her love: the novel is not meant as a romance. Fair Rosamond is also a character borrowed from tradition, the heroine of an opera written by Addison and the heroine of an older legend according to which King Henry II would have kept his mistress in a maze-like house where only he could find her.

The comparison between the various secondary characters brings to light the elements necessary to compose a major part. Too smooth a character cannot retain the attention of the

[29] Gilbert and Gubar (484).
[30] Gilbert and Gubar (486-487).
[31] Imlay mentions the purification by fire (51).
[32] Little can be added to the analysis of Bertha by Gilbert and Gubar.
[33] Rich (476).

narrator for long. Each traces a feature of the heroine or the hero, either directly or as a sort of photographic negative. Each appears mainly as an element in a wider story, setting off the process of composition. Even the simple Mrs Fairfax illustrates the attention paid to the spinning of the tale; she is unwittingly responsible for triggering the jealousy of Jane against Blanche. Her partial account of the fascinating performance of the "lady of fashion" leads the heroine to the disparaging assessment of her own attractiveness. Because she watches without analysing, her bland accounts can neither satisfy nor appease. The parallel with Jane is set as a system of reference: Mrs Fairfax takes her knitting with her wherever she goes, as Jane takes her portfolio (107). Jane is not the dull Mrs Fairfax although she belongs to her world. She is socially her equal as is stressed when the heroine discovers that Mrs Fairfax is but the housekeeper. Like Jane she occupies an in-between position in the hierarchy of the household, above the servants but beneath the family, although she is to some extent allied to the family. As such, she is responsible for the good name of the family and has to keep Rochester's secret even if she cannot fully understand its scope. She knows something of the master's past distress, as she tells Jane, but not all and is not willing to say much. She participates in the mystery and suspense, hinting that the father and brother played an important part in ruining the hero of his happiness, which corroborates Rochester's version of the story: he is not a villain, his attitude can be explained partly by his nature, partly by circumstances. Mrs Fairfax's self-evident philosophy is shared by the narrator.

Answering a question asked by Jane, she is the first to use the adjective "peculiar" in relation to Rochester, an adjective that reappears at least thirteen times in the novel, underlining the mysterious identity of the "just and liberal landlord" (89). Mrs Fairfax cannot satisfy the curiosity of the heroine who acts as a reader wanting more clues to read beneath the surface: "There are people who seem to have no notion of sketching a character, or observing and describing salient points, either in persons or things: the good lady evidently belonged to this class; my queries puzzled, but did not draw her out. Mr. Rochester was Mr. Rochester in her eyes; a gentleman, a landed proprietor – nothing more: she inquired and searched no further, and evidently wondered at my wish to gain a more definite notion of his identity" (89). Characterising Mrs Fairfax as simple, honest and easily satisfied by social status, the narrator efficiently shows her limits while suggesting her own superiority. Within the plot Mrs Fairfax is perceived by Jane and Rochester as a very simple character. When she fears for Jane's disappointment in Rochester's love,[34] she acts as a figure of the reader who cannot believe in the outcome of the story as a romance.

Her name also draws the attention to Rochester's combined identity. As long as the heroine feels awed by her master, the narrator uses his full name Edward Fairfax Rochester, or shortens it to Fairfax Rochester. So whenever Mrs Fairfax is mentioned, the reader is entitled to consider that some aspect of the hero is at stake. Because he easily acknowledges the alliance, Rochester is perceived as deprived of the excessive pride that characterises the Reeds or the Ingrams. His attitude towards the old lady makes his acceptance of Jane as an equal a mere evidence. The Fairfax identity underlines how consistent the characterisation of the hero is and multiplies the reference to Edward Fairfax, the translator of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

The use of her Christian name, Alice, when she tells Jane of the dreams in which she fancies her dead husband is still alive, connects her to Scott's *Lady of the Lake* and foreshadows the discovery of Jane's cousins as an echo of the discovery of a lost brother by Alice Brand who delivers a Christian kidnapped by the Elfin king, or the transformation of Rochester back to his human state. Rochester points at the unexpected family connection when he declares "he supposed the old lady was all right now that she had got her adopted daughter back again, and added that he saw Adèle was 'prête à croquer sa petite maman

[34] Imlay (85). Mrs Fairfax's role is taken up by the moon telling Jane to flee.

anglaise'" (210). Domestic bliss perceived by Rochester is pictured as a sort of ideal dream whereas the previous scenes of simple pleasure are introduced as literary clichés: the first time she enters Thornfield, "a cozy and agreable picture presented itself to [her] view […] nothing in short was wanting to complete the beau ideal of domestic comfort" (81). When she furnishes Moor House with the money from her inheritance, Jane aims at a similar aesthetic effect: "to give them a beau-ideal of a welcome" (322).

In her quiet way, Alice Fairfax helps Jane and the reader in the transformation process because she understands Jane's reticences. She knows what torture it may be for a girl to sit in the drawing room with the guests, she advises Jane on how to avoid too much scrutiny. She stands between Rochester and his intended prey so as to ease the passage.[35] As a mother figure, she is to be dismissed like Miss Temple when she has transmitted all her experience. Her last service is, indirectly, to provide the information about Jane's identity and allow St. John to present her with her inheritance and a family.

Behind the simple characterisation of Mrs Fairfax, hides the reflexion on point of view that crops up here and there in the first-person narrative:[36] she escapes from Jane's narrative to become part of St. John's story, through reported speech. The ultimate function of the secondary characters is indeed to point at the necessity to vary the approach to a story. St. John insists on the danger for his tale to sound stale to Jane, but his version changes the outcome of the story.[37] Similarly, the inn-keeper who tells Jane about the destruction of Thornfield puts into perspective what has been told so far: the "clothed hyena" becomes the " mad lady", Grace Poole "an able woman in her line, and very trustworthy" (364). For Jane to become a character in a story told by some stranger is to be deprived of her identity and to be shaped by alien perception; she tries to stop the inn-keeper whenever he mentions the governess. But the new story-teller sums up what the reader had perceived about Rochester's love when the heroine was still unaware of it, the story thus condensed threatens to become banal[38]. The introspection of a first person narrator and her stage managing of the secondary characters save the narrative from being a mere romance. As the rehearsals with Lloyd, Helen and Miss Temple showed, the story is also trimmed to become acceptable.

Conclusion

Tonality is all important, the novel is indeed about how to write a novel. The multiplication of secondary characters who play the part of story-tellers or of readers suggests that the first-person narrative is a combination of points of view. The intertwining of voices orchestrated in a symphonic structure[39] carries the book beyond the limits of a mere fictitious autobiography, to give a vivid insight into the workings of imagination. The constant tension between the linearity of the plot and the reorganisation of sensations, through the staging of varied characters, bears testimony to the power of the mind as evoked by Burke: "the mind of man possesses a sort of power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order. This power is called Imagination […]" (68).[40] And this power becomes the reader's as well. The superposition of scenes induced by the repetition of circumstances, attitudes, or more subtly, by the repetition of phrases and words, reveals the narrator's capacity to organise her tale. Variation on the tonalities which entraps the reader in a web of illusion, also invites him to stand out and to

[35] Rich (479).
[36] Knies (184).
[37] Beaty (483).
[38] Knies (64).
[39] Knies (137).
[40] Burke (68).

look at the novel as at a work of art. Just as the narrator, we may enjoy the effects without losing our reason.[41] Intertextuality gives back the original texts their initial power. The novel does not offer an escape so much as an opportunity to deconstruct reality and thereby assert control over it.

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[41] Lévy (292).