



Re-reading and re-writing the Narratives: Writing Back to the (non-) Center through Gendered Lenses

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Abstract

'The colonial ideology' is embedded in recent forms of cultural representation. They are very much here and now but coded, defamiliarized and transformed into new, disguised cultural veils and in narratives of canonical literature. As prof. Spivak says, " ---imperialist project are displaced and dispersed into modern forms." One of the convictions of Marxism is that all cultural forms seek to ensure that the dominant classes in society remain dominant. To put in the words of Edward Said 'the self' tries to exercise his/ her authority over 'the other'. The dominant group maintains the authority not by direct means but by indirect means, using discursive strategies i.e., narrative techniques.

In this paper I will attempt to analyze the case of Jane Eyre by signifying the cases of characters in Jane Eyre and how nativized gender narrative of Charlotte Bronte stifles indigenous Bertha Mason. Moreover, in brief, the paper will also touch upon discursive and subversive narratives ploy in Wide Sargasso Sea that puts the latter on pedestal with the assistance of post-colonial subversive intellectual repertoire of Prof. Spivak.

Key words: clash, ideologies, gender, writing back, re-writing

Literature is one of the possible sites of expressive narrative subjugation. The gendered narrative discourse has been seldomly questioned let alone being quartered artistically and intellectually. Off course the trained intellectuals revisit Shakespeare with new found postcolonial specs to crown Caliban as the native master or deconstruct Hamlet with post-structuralist aporia. Moreover, Shakespeare's sexual orientation fascinates alternative scholars like a prime-time story. But underprovided female voices in the ordered hierarchical hegemony of few chosen representative of same tribe, are still unheard off. This is clearly evident in Jane Eyre, a novel by Charlotte Bronte, a civilized western white woman or for that matter an author who like an imperialist presented slanted picture of Jamaican Bertha. Prof.

Spivak's reading of Jane Eyre traces hidden imperialist sub-text in Jane Eyre's narrative of bourgeois female individualism. By tracing this, she challenges Anglo-American Feminist reading of Jane Eyre which celebrates Jane's heroic narrative of self determination to the exclusion of Bertha Mason's colonial genealogy.

Bronte's novel presents a superior representation of Jane ,the western woman and Bertha's representation as subservient to Jane .This is a typical tendency of Anglo-American feminist literary criticism to privilege the individual narrative of its main protagonist ,Jane Eyre .Bronte as female represented two different women- one is British citizen ,therefore ,superior; another Jamaican Creole , Bertha, the inferior .Bertha presents Jane's monstrous double ,the mad wife of Rochester,

denied existence as human individual. Alarmingly, this representation of Bertha as unknowable other who is as Prof. Spivak says, “not yet human”. Stephan Marton, in his book on Spivak recalls Julia Kristeva’s description of unknowable stare of the peasants of Huxian Square in *About Chinese Woman*. Like Chinese woman Julia Kristeva describes, denuded of any culture or historical being operating being instead an oriental other who reflects the stability of Jane’s western female self.

Bronte presents ‘epistemic violence’ in the form of Jane and Bertha. Jane is western woman co-opting her position as a female by ‘childbearing’ and ‘childrearing’. Bronte glorified Jane at the expense of Bertha. This negative description of Bertha represents the classic case of “oppression from within”. The phrase means, the exploitation of a person by the hand of his/her fellow being. Bronte as an author presents fictive Victorian England, devotes main plot to Jane who claims as heroine or protagonist of the novel where as Bertha is introduced in the sub-plot. Bertha works as a substitute to Jane. Bronte coupled two opposite things together- the self Jane and the other Bertha. This coupling of two opposite ideas is called as ‘a violent hierarchy’ by Derrida. This violent hierarchy gets subverted in Jean Rhy’s rewriting of *Jane Eyre* in *WideSarragasso Sea* – a rewriting from Bertha’s point of view. As prof. Spivak says, “in Jean Rhy’s retelling it is the dissimulation that Bertha discerns in the word “legally not a bestiality-that prompts her violent reaction to Rochester. Bertha who died in attic of Thornfield Hall disappears from *Jane Eyre* as a subject and reappears in Rhy’s *Wide Sarrogasso Sea*. Hence, the deconstruction is at the very heart of the text.

Prof, Spivak argues that Bronte’s novel may well uphold its protagonist as a new feminist ideal but it does so at the cost of Bertha, a Rochester’s Creole bride who functions as a colonial subject of “other” to legitimate Jane’s simultaneous ascent to domestic authority. Prof. Spivak portrays such imperialism as a “worlding” process that attempts to disguise its own workings so as to naturalize and legitimize western dominance. As Prof Spivak says “----to consider the third world as distant cultures,

exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted and circularized in English translation fosters the emergence of ‘the Third world’ as signifier that allows us that “worlding” even it expands the empire of literary discipline.”

Prof. Spivak’s description of the Third World becoming signifier that allows us to forget that ‘worlding’ resembles in many ways Marx’s notion of commodity in volume one of *Das Capital*. In “Fetishism of Commodity and its Secrets” Marx suggests that commodity products become part of an obscure network of signs that went into their production. Prof. Spivak suggests that the third world like commodity fetish, becomes a sign that obscures its modes of production thus making western dominance appear somehow given or ‘natural.’

The essay presents imperialist narrativization of history in *Jane Eyre*. As I said earlier, literature is one of the potential sites of exploitation since it is a form of cultural representation. Prof. Spivak’s reading of *Jane Eyre* locates the narrative of feminist individualism in the age of imperialism. In doing so, she is able to account for the fundamental inequalities between Bertha and Jane. Whereas Jane’s narrative of female individualism is coded in domestic terms of marriage and childbearing, Bertha is defined by the “axiomatic of imperialism.”

Axioms of Imperialism are configured in the basic structure of the English narrative to subtly drive motivations of novels and uphold the established ideals of English hierarchy over the third world. For example, imperialist measures are masked in childbearing ordomestic society through sexual reproduction. One moment of “childbearing occurs, when the family/counter family dyad” that allows Jane to move from counter family to family-in-law is dependent on the ideology of imperialism.

In the translation of Mahasweta Devi’s story ‘Standayani’ as *Breast- Giver* prof. Spivak speaks off “childbearing” and “reproductivity.” The protagonist subaltern Jashoda, a poor wife of drunken Kalgali, is forced to work as a professional

mother and wet nurse in the upper-class household family of Haldar in pre-independence Bengal. If one compares her body to the text, her body is pot-boiler which she mends to earn livelihood for her family. Both, Jashoda and Bertha are forced by authority to commit uneven deeds. Formers suicidal act of reproduction and later's suicide are the result of their confinement in social codes. To use Gubar and Gilbert phrase, Bertha represents the classic case of 'the mad woman in the attic.

We often criticize Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' and Hemingway's 'The old Man and the Sea' for extreme kind of androcentric literature. But we never question Jane Eyre, which has achieved the status of a cult text of feminism. The imperialist narrative is very much the part of the text. Charlotte Bronte in a way became an oppressor of his own race by presenting distorted image of Bertha. Therefore, there is a need of rewriting gendered minus colonial narrative which will further amplify hyphenated intellectual encounter. Otherwise, the colonial ideology built in stone will prevail through the decoded discourse.

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