



# A Postmodern Approach of Rewriting the Canon and its Global Appeal through the novels of Patricia Park and D.M. Thomas.

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## Abstract:

The very first aspect of rewriting is to deconstruct the fixity of an existing social order and express the perspective of the marginalised or to address the unexplored. As defined by the Merriam Webster's Learner's Dictionary, rewriting means to write something again especially in a different way in order to improve it or to add new twist to it. Adrienne Rich in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: writing as Re-vision" (1971) wrote that revision is "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction." According to Andrea Kirchknopf, rewriting has emerged as a new trend starting from the 1960s up to the present day with the publication of two classic works: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). These rewritten texts have not simply been interested in retrieving the past, but have instead challenged the ideas and notions existing in the Victorian period. Concepts of self-reflexivity and intertextuality are covered well in each rewritten novel along with its involvement with the contemporary issues. Talking about the Victorian era, society at that time made it impossible for woman to make any advancement. As Gallagher pointed out, "Whatever their social rank, in the eyes of the law women were second-class citizens." Women were expected to marry, have children and keep a nice household. Even Barbara Welter in "Dimity Conviction: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century" introduces the notion – 'cult of true womanhood' that illustrates the existing situation of woman during that era. "Piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" were thought to be natural to woman. And, the purpose of rewriting the canon is to break this fixity of categories. Also, postmodernism asserts that the idea of universal is problematic. The contemporary writers put emphasis on the differences and so do the postmodern feminists. They also put emphasis on the flaws and quirks that a woman possess. According to them, it is necessary to specify the woman about whom they are talking.

## Keywords:

Postmodernism, Deconstruction, Universality, Rewriting, Postmodern feminism, Self-reflexivity, Intertextuality, Submissive identity, Subversion.

## Introduction:

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of rewriting is to deconstruct the fixity of an existing social order. In other words, it intends to subvert the binary pairs where one has the authority over the other. *Jane Eyre* as a classic has given the possibility to showcase the hidden aspects associated with each woman. And, the intention behind this study is to analyse, understand and represent them in order to subvert the idea of 'universality' associated with women's oppression. Most importantly, rewriting the canon also holds an important place to display its involvement with the contemporary issues. It essentially connects the Victorian as well as the contemporary perspectives to create a global appeal amongst the readers and in the fictional world. The two specific texts chosen for this study include *Re Jane* (2015) by Patricia Park and *Charlotte* (2001) by D.M. Thomas. These two texts are the rewritings of *Jane Eyre*, but each one is critically self-aware of its own time, thus, supporting a multi-cultural perspective, multiple discourses and a perspective of the marginalised. The purpose is to keep the contemporary audience engaged with its unique modern take of the parent text and at the same time by critically raising the young modern minds. The study will be based on a detail analysis of the texts and the writers of these texts have deliberately explored the issues associated with women in both Victorian as well as in modern-day era. Through their portrayals of women characters, they have challenged the Victorian norms of an ideal woman and that of a marriage. A fresh postmodern take will be implied in each text with its exploration of concepts like self-reflexivity, intertextuality, intersectionality etc. D.M. Thomas in his novel has addressed double plots while rewriting the classic. There is a modern-day heroine who writes a fictional autobiography, ultimately to bring forth her own suppressed emotions. This can be related with the ideas given by Helen Cixous that women's bodies and their writings are closely associated. On the other hand, Patricia Parks's *Re Jane* is such a novel where Jane Re as a woman has to find a balance between living in two cultures. It is basically a Korean-American retelling of *Jane Eyre* and it throws a light on the concept of intersectionality as well. There are many contemporary critical studies done on the aspect of rewriting Victorian novels which explore the issues of women giving new critical direction to it. In "Introduction to Adapting the Nineteenth Century: Revisiting, Revising, and Rewriting the Past", Alexa L. Bowler and Jessica Cox discuss how nineteenth century is being recycled and deployed in present-day context of the twentieth and twenty-first century. They also discuss about how different writers of twentieth and twenty-first centuries have rewritten the Victorian novels putting their own critical insights into it. For example, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. If we take a dig at the content of *Jane Eyre*, we get to know the basic plot where

a long-suffering heroine and the hero who brought suffering to himself, are finally reunited and married. Contemporary writers attempt to break this traditional aspect of seeing a text from single reality. The main objective of this study is to focus on the multiplicity and diversity that postmodern feminism tries to address with special reference to the texts chosen. It will specifically look on how the notions associated with women are exposed and challenged in rewritten novels and how women attempt to discover their own identities in conflict with the social conventions. The study will also put emphasis on the shift from universal women to a particular woman by completely subverting the Victorian assumption of women having the common problem. For instance, the domestic confinement of a woman. It will also bring forth the existing issues of identity, race and culture from global and historical perspectives. If we see through the lens of postmodern feminism, women's oppression cannot be categorised under single reality. They put emphasis on the differences and make it necessary to specify the woman about whom they are talking. Though Bronte has brought the aspects of feminism and the social norms practiced in Victorian period, the novel has gone through many re-readings in terms of the treatment and social roles assigned to women. Critics have shown their interest in highlighting the issues in order to develop a larger awareness. Most importantly, Bronte's depiction of Bertha Mason, the 'mad' Jamaican creole woman whom Rochester marries and subsequently imprisons in the attic of his English manor home, has drawn criticism from numerous postcolonial and feminist scholars, including Gayatri Spivak. In "Three Women's Texts and Critique of Imperialism" (1985), Spivak argues that "Jane Eyre's imperialist subtext complicates straightforward feminist readings of the novel because Jane Eyre's movement from the margins to the centre of Victorian society happens at Bertha Mason's expense" (259). What holds everybody's attention is the representation of 'racial otherness' and *Wide Sargasso Sea* calls forth a re-reading of *Jane Eyre* where it showcases the possibility of the other side. A mouthpiece is given to Bertha in the novel who narrates the first and the third part of the novel. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is characterized as an inhumanly figure:

In the deepshade, at the farther end of the room a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, 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 man, hid its head and face. (Bronte 559)

Jean Rhys restores Bertha as Antoinette and defined her in multiple forms of expressions through the use of both voice and silence. She questions the nature of her madness by writing her a life which was conditioned by isolation. As Spivak states, "In Rhys retelling, it is the dissimulation that Bertha discerns in the word 'legally'-not an innate bestiality-that prompts her violent reaction" (242). Spivak speculates that what Rhys accomplishes with *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the humanization of the madwoman. She "keeps Bertha's humanity, indeed her sanity as critique of imperialism, intact" (Spivak 242). Antoinette's actions in the novel are all reactions, she does nothing without reason. For instance, when Rochester refuses to acknowledge Antoinette by her name, she constantly voices her displeasure at Rochester's ignorance- "My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha" (Rhys 111). In reply to which Rochester would say, "Because it's a name I am particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha" (Rhys 111). In Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's essence is just her mad silence. Antoinette's life is defined by a constant struggle between voice and silence. She spent her entire life trying to be understood. The battles with her environment and her own demons lead to her constant shifting between different forms of expressions in order to make herself heard. Moving towards other versions of re-reading *Jane Eyre* include Thomas's *Charlotte* and Patricia Park's *Re Jane*. *Charlotte* can be said as a complex rewriting where intertextuality holds a major part and Thomas in his novel uses various references from both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It is a rewriting in the sense that it interweaves a fictional sequel of *Jane Eyre* with the story of its author Miranda, who is a feminist and Victorian scholar. *Charlotte*, thus, involves a Victorian plot and a contemporary plot. The Victorian part carries on where *Jane Eyre* concluded, while the contemporary section centres on Miranda's life in 1999. Park in her novel combines Jane's story with more modern elements. She rewrites the classic from the perspective of a contemporary half-Korean, half-American young woman in New York City, which amalgamates her living in two different cultures. Although the novel has its ties with the Victorian classic, Park has taken a truly fresh and modern take. The character Bertha has beautifully been recreated by Park as 'Beth Mazer'- a fantastically clever and intellectual woman.

### Conclusion:

*Jane Eyre* witnesses different variations, be it in terms of adaptation, revision, re-reading or rewriting. This is due to as Cora Kaplan has suggested: "its themes and rhetoric, which have summoned up the powerful politics of affect at the heart of gender and modernity" (Victoriana 7). In other words, if we take a dig at the content of *Jane Eyre*, we get to know the basic plot where a long-suffering heroine and the hero who brought suffering to himself, are finally reunited and married. But it fails to showcase many possible details associated with other characters of the novel, especially the women characters like Bertha Mason. As a result, the novel has been re-read by many contemporary writers, especially in light of the women characters. Charlotte Bronte, thus, portrays female figures which set a good example for women facing difficulties. Through her text a greater consciousness among people has risen. Writers are re-reading the text through different perspectives and have drawn a feminine consciousness, in order to re-examine women's values, roles and functions in a society where gender inequality still exists.

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