

The English Novel: Interdisciplinary Approaches
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Lecture - 24
Jane Eyre: Intertextual Connections

Hello student, I am here, Professor Smita Jha, to elaborate *Jane Eyre*, one of the most popular fictions of Victorian era with intertextual connections. And I think it is quite - it will be - interesting to know the intertextual aspects of *Jane Eyre*. Well, the relationship between literary text can be considered a new field of study in literary theory. Texts used to be studied and dealt with both separately and internally. Shaking the stability of this critical approach, the French semiotician Julia Kristeva introduced the term 'intertextuality' in the late 60s, that is 1966.

Intertextuality is the weaving of one literary text into another, forming a kind of new articulation. The core idea of intertextuality is that all texts are intertexts. Each text exists in a vast medium of texts with which it should engage in dialogue. Intertextuality is one of the bases and requirements of all communication since all texts and discourses are always built upon existing cultural codes and norms. Texts are therefore instrumental in the construction of other texts. The term intertextuality has been widely accepted by postmodern literary critics and theoreticians. According to Kristeva, readers are always influenced by other texts, especially when writers borrow from previous texts, their work acquires layers of meaning. The theory of intertextuality has been further extended by Ronald Barthes and Jonathan Culler who include the readers as constituent component of intertextuality. Barthes and Reffaterre view that intertextuality as "it replaces the challenged author-text relationship with other discourses". According to Barthes, a text is essentially concerned with its position within the work "as a methodological field" and deals with the limits and demarcations of the discursive field.

In spite of the divergent theoretical positions in which the text is held, its significance remains considerable as the text is the location for the play of multiple meanings of the elements that constitute textuality. In addition, when a text is read in the light of another text, all the assumptions and effects of other texts give a new meaning and influence the way of interpreting the original text. It shapes the text's meaning by another text. Julia Kristeva says that text is not only product of author and its environment, but it is created by using another existing text. Theorists of intertextuality problematize the status of

authorship believing that texts are constructed more by their intertextuality than by their authors. For them, texts provide context within which other texts can be created and interpreted. The term intertextuality denotes the kind of relationship that has been discussed here. J. A. Cuddon summarizes her claims that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon, but is made up of a mosaic of quotations, and that any text is the absorption and transformation of another but not connected with the study of sources. Kristeva is not merely pointing to the way texts echo each other, but the way their discourses or sign systems are transposed into one another. So, that meanings in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse. She thus employs the term to describe an inescapable property of all text and all signifying system.

Kristeva postulated a literary system which acts like a collective mind that writers unconsciously draw on. Any literary text will be related to any other, not merely through direct quotation or indirect allusion, but inescapably as a subliminal presence that is part of the very notion of literature. The term is encountered often these days in literary discussions. However, it has come to be applied to a whole range of notions from sources, influences and deliberate allusion to chance resemblance. Whatever one thinks of Kristeva's version, it should be noted that she does not differentiate between the conscious kinds of reference, allusion, etc., and her own universal intertextuality. She ignores the former and indeed cannot account for it, authorial agency, being ruled out. The nebulosity of Kristeva's concept would not lend itself easily to the semantic web.

Jane Eyre is replete with allusions to other texts. There are intertextual references to Richardson's *Pamela*, which is also a hypertext to *Jane Eyre*, plus allusions to quotations from Shakespeare, Milton, the *Bible*, Byron, Wordsworth, Scott and many others. And also to conduct guides, evangelical tracts, phrenology manuals and the chemistry treatises of Humphrey Davy. Brontë's quotes from the written text of Bewick's *Birds* would also perform trans-modal transformation, that is, between different media of the illustrations therein. This transformation is that of ekphrasis, that is, the depiction in the word of a picture. The intertextuality of *Jane Eyre* is not merely formal decoration. Jane, as narrator, is in dialogue with the Bible and Milton, re-reading these texts in order to rediscover in them original truths regarding the sanctity of authentic, companionate marriage that had been distorted by false citation. In her enforced solitariness, Jane herself is an intertextual reader, making parallels between the domestic tyranny she endures and the tyranny recounted in Goldsmith's *History of Rome*. Kristeva is the producer of the intertextual theory where Saussurean theory of signs and Bakhtinian theory of polyphonic are used to

combine a literary text to various interpretations and voices. Kristeva believes that any text is a rewriting of another text. She states it by saying that there are no texts but intertexts. She considers the text as a surface with many intersections with other surfaces from another text. Let us take the comparative analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* by the author Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre* by the author Charlotte Brontë to argue the concept of intertextuality.

Wide Sargasso Sea is written as a prequel to *Jane Eyre* and narrates the back story of the character Bertha from *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a hypertext of *Jane Eyre*. It is written in a different era and is a kind of response to Brontë's novel. The *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a much celebrated novel of Rhys published in 1966. This text marks the re-entry of her into the limelight of literary fame. For her, it was an attempt at bridging "two cultures and two genders". The title denotes the gap, the wide expanse of ideological conflict that separates the world of women from that of men, the sea of convention that cannot be crossed easily. It also denotes the expanse of unresolved conflict of the colonial and the post-colonial conditions. It won the Royal Society of Literature Award and the W.H. Smith Award for that year. Jeann Rhys was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1966 and CBE in 1978. *Smile Please*, her unfinished autobiography was published after her death in 1979. The opening of Rhys's novel is set a short while after the 1834 emancipation of the slaves in British-owned Jamaica. Antoniette conveys the story of her life from childhood to her arranged marriage to an unnamed Englishman that refers to Mr. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*. As the novel and their relationship progress, Antoniette, whom her husband renames Bertha, descends into madness. It tells the story of Antoinette Cosway, a white girl who grows up in the Caribbean and who has a disastrous arranged marriage and goes mad, imprisoned in an English countryhouse. This novel is the previously untold story of Bertha Mason, the first Mrs. Rochester in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, although she is given a different name. The *Wide Sargasso Sea* sets out to answer the question of why Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway might have gone mad in the first place. The novel uses *Jane Eyre* as an imaginative starting-point, but the point of view is changed from the first-person narrative of Jane to that of Bertha Mason. Rhys emphasises the omission and corrects the exploitative context. She writes the story of Bertha's life as she is not satisfied with the ending of *Jane Eyre*. Rhys enhances the common elements in both novels such as dreams, the Gothic style and irony through the characters Bertha and Antoniette. Just like Jane of Brontë, Rhys takes the character of Bertha from *Jane Eyre* and narrates her life story with another name.

To begin with, the character Bertha, the first wife of Mr. Rochester is a character from *Jane Eyre* and is a minor character. Although the background of Antoinette is narrated in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is important to keep in mind that some characters call Antoinette, Bertha. Here, the postmodern device intertextuality paves the way to uncover the meaning in the text. Rhys begins to narrate the story of Bertha just like *Jane Eyre*, from childhood to maturity. This genre is called Bildungsroman. Rhys narrates the life story of Antoinette from the childhood and emphasizes her rejection by other people. Antoinette is an ignored child and is devoid of love. But the end of the story is different. Jane gets stronger in time, but Antoinette is very weak in the end. Rhys challenges the conventions and makes Antoinette defeated by the problems in her life, unlike Jane. She lives isolated, hopelessly with her cultural identity and is not matured in time. Therefore, *Wide Sargasso Sea* cannot be called a Bildungsroman like *Jane Eyre*. The norms are shaken and meanings are scattered. The character in such a condition makes the reader think in a new and different way. It seems absurd to the reader. Although in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha gains her freedom by committing suicide she cannot gain anything but lose her sanity. Another common element in connecting both the characters, that is, Jane and Antoinette is dreams. We all know that dreams reveal our future hopes and repressed feelings and desires. The dreams reveal the suppressed feelings, fears, desires of the two characters. We get the chance to know their unconscious mind and understand them better. The difference is that Rhys does not reveal Antoinette's fate by a dream but leaves it open. She remains as innocent, unlike violent in *Jane Eyre* and only dreams of doing such a violent thing. Thus, by using the dream concept, Rhys preserves the main structure of the novel and enhances it in her own way. Rochester, husband of Bertha, in *Jane Eyre*, plays the miserable role in both the works, while Bertha has been given minor place in Charlotte's novel in comparison to Antoinette's place in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Through the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is many times called Bertha. For instance, "Then I said sharply. Bertha, are you asleep, are you ill, why don't you answer me? Certainly I will, my dear Bertha, not Bertha tonight. She said. of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha." In addition, Gothicism creates a mysterious atmosphere for both characters. Gothic genre was famous in 19th century when *Jane Eyre* was written. Brontë uses a ghost and supernatural events to create a spooky atmosphere with a dark gloomy setting, Thornfield. By not giving so much detail about Rochester's marriage to Bertha, Brontë leaves some mystery to the reader. Rhys also borrows this element for her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The novel is full of supernatural and magical Caribbean beliefs, such as the love poison that Antoinette wants. Both of the protagonists' mothers suffer from

madness and the worries and fears they suffer from also create a very gloomy atmosphere. Moreover, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys has references from the events, feelings, experiences and locations from her own life story and reflects it with Antoinette, which is called a structural irony. She wants to tell this reader that being an outcast is a very difficult experience. She creates another ironical tone with situational irony by developing unexpected experiences. Brontë must have had among strong feelings about the West Indies because she brings the West Indies into a lot of her books like *Villette*. The West Indies were rich and very much more talked about than they are now. So, Jean Rhys takes the character of Mr. Rochester's first wife, Bertha, who has a secondary role and a minor character in the novel and makes a major character in the *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She creates a backstory for this major character named Antoinette, who is sometimes called Bertha by other characters in the novel. Antoinette and her husband are the same characters in *Jane Eyre*, who are known as Bertha and Rochester. In the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is called Bertha, several times without any pre-information about this name. Rhys also changes the setting from England to Jamaica. She did her job well by using *Jane Eyre* as an intertext of her novel, which becomes a major source of significance for her, the *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Victorian writers also confronted issues like poverty and depression. Charles Dickens introduced the life of poor and depressed people to public in his works like *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. He sketched the pictures of hunger and thirst. Charlotte did it in *Jane Eyre*, while Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*. Rhys created such type of atmosphere in Antoinette's family, she shows, then financially damaged and mentally disturbed. Naipaul finds the sense of disorder and says, that an order has collapsed and Antoinette's imprisonment by her husband diseased her life. The novel's setting reminds the previous setting of *Jane Eyre* where Bertha Mason had set fire in the house of Thornfield Hall. Indicating contemporary patriarchal convention, Howells remarks, "Rhys shows her heroine trying to construct an identity in radically unstable situations where tradition and social convention prescribe certain rituals but are emptied of meaning." So, Rhys, by giving voice to the women characters who occupy subhuman levels of existence in the hegemonic narratives in *Jane Eyre*, has tried to challenge the contemporary cultural conception. Jane overcomes the difficulties and achieves her goal while Antoinette cannot surmount the problems. Although both of them always longed for freedom and independence. Antoinette never achieves her freedom. She lives in isolation with fragile sense and cultural identity. The difficulties of life defeat her. Jane gets some kind of

maturity from her childhood to adulthood, but Antoinette does not get any maturity as she grows up. Rhys has given her own identity and voice to identically lost character.

In Brontë's text as Sandra Gilbert and Sushant Gubar in their critical work *The Madwoman In The Attic: The Woman Author And The 19th Century Literary Imagination* speak about an inside story in the apparently confirming narratives of women authors. These texts present a woman's story on close analysis but a very different one from what is apparently stated. They mention the presence in the 19th century woman authors' works of an untold story. Authors like Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, display a recurrent character pattern in their works, where one could perceive vaguely developed, complex, subhuman women characters, powerful enough to destroy the conventional edifices and magnificent structures like Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre* and threaten the authoritative representations of male characters whom patriarchy has been relentlessly nourishing and cherishing. These extraordinary women characters with shady levels of existence are represented as mad women hovering on the attics of magnificent mansions far from the world of ordinary men and women beyond the rational realm of masculine logic. Gilbert and Gubar state, as we explore 19th century literature, we will find that this mad woman emerges over and over again from the mirrors women authors hold up to both their own natures and to their own visions of nature. Even the most apparently conservative and decorous woman author obsessively create independent characters who seek to destroy all patriarchal structures, which both their authors and their author's submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable. Here, Gilbert and Gubar mean that the misrepresentation of women in literature brings in the need for re-reading of the great canonical works. They express also the male version of truth and reality, though the deviant representation of women in literary text is not restricted to male authored ones. Rhys in her *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents a paradoxical mix of dependence on a pretext and aesthetic originality and independence. At the same time, it fills the gap within *Jane Eyre* by employing intertextual strategies that point out to a particular process of reading. Edward Said states, "In reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and what is another author excluded."

Rhys has said in a letter that when she read about Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, she thought, "that's only one side, the English side." She expanded this in an interview, "The mad first wife in *Jane Eyre* has always interested me. I was convinced Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it." Otherwise, "why did she take a West Indian for the horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature?" In this way, it became clear that Rhys parodies Brontë's novel-dominated perspective of female and

colonial writing. Spivak contends that Rhys's work, rather than giving a voice to other, actually reinforces the notion of the supremacy of Western tradition and criticises Rhys's view of Western supremacy. She claims, "We can read this as having been brought into the England of Brontë's novel: this cardboard house - a book between cardboard covers where I walk at night is not England."

This lecture discusses the *Wide Sargasso Sea's* intertextual relationship to *Jane Eyre* as a revision/rewriting and examines the post-colonial/racial foundation. Rhys's novel is a parodic intertext for Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Her novel shares a fascinating intertextual influence of the character's source and so on with Brontë's text, *Jane Eyre*. Both of these novels stand in opposition for the purpose and depiction of theme, style and motives for the writing. The present study is based on the same shared issues and interconnectedness with both of them. One might also look at post-colonial theory, discussing intertextuality and dealing with works like *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Post-colonial studies are in-depth examination of the various relationships between dominant and subjugated cultures, races and ethnic groups. It means post-colonial writing investigates microscopic issues of consideration of other margins like race, religion, economic status resulting in counter-discursive narratives. Brontë's novel reflects history from a colonial perspective, whereas Rhys's novel reframes that history from a post-colonial perspective. While the colonial text endeavors to suppress those belonging to a different class and race by excluding and marginalizing them, the post-colonial text emerges from the voices of those who were originally deprived and silenced. In the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys gives voice to the Creole woman and provides the perspective of the other by telling Jane's story in different racial contexts by translating the Victorian women's feminist struggle to a West Indian context. Thus, this study discusses Rhys's novel's intertextual relationship to Brontë's novel as a revision/rewriting, and examines the post-colonial/racial foundation which prompts the rewriting of Brontë's novel.

To sum up, we stated the intertextual elements in the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The intertextual elements are the subjects of the two novels: the concept of dreams, Gothic atmosphere and irony. Rhys writes as a response to *Jane Eyre* by uncovering the story of Bertha and giving her a voice. The author sheds light on the unspoken with borrowing several aspects from *Jane Eyre* to create such an atmosphere. The use of these aspects are crucial to the postmodern characteristics and make readers think. In the end, we accept Kristeva's theory that there is no originality in literature, that there are no texts but

intertext. With this, I wrap up the discussion. Thank you very much. Let us meet in another discussion with another novel.