

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

STUDY MATERIAL FOR MA 2ND SEMESTER

MARCH 23, 2020. COURSE NAME : EMB 23 WOMEN'S WRITING

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Module name: Jane Eyre and The Wide Sargasso Sea Lecture -6

- It is impossible to read nineteenth-century British women's writings without referring to imperialism, which was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English people. The women writers and most of the women protagonists were English or at least white and the written texts applauded their growth.
- It seems particularly unfortunate when majority of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism. A basically isolationist admiration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America establishes the high feminist norm. Often racial and colonial oppressions and mis-representations are hidden beneath the feminist agendum to glorify the female protagonist, who is most often an English woman growing up into success and power. The narrative of the non-English or non-White women, who are neither the heroine nor the autobiographical "I" of the story, is either sidelined or silenced in the loudness of the female protagonist bildungsroman.
- *Jane Eyre* as a novel exemplifies a historical moment of feminism in the West in terms of female access to individualism. While Jane struggles and achieves individualism for her, the novel strips Bertha Mason of any individuality and perhaps any human voice at all.

- Let us consider the figure of Bertha Mason, a figure produced by the axiomatics of European imperialism in Jamaica. Through Bertha Mason, the Creole, Brontë renders the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate:

“In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not. . . 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.”

- In a matching passage, given in the voice of Rochester speaking *to* Jane, not only Bertha, but the entire non-English culture and the non-English space is disparaged :

"One night I had been awakened by her yells . . . it was a fiery West Indian night. . . ." "This life,' said I at last, 'is hell! -- this is the air -- those are the sounds of the bottomless pit! *I have a right* to deliver myself from it if I can. . . . Let me break away, and go home to God!'. . .

"A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure. . . . It was true Wisdom that consoled me in that hour, and showed me the right path. . . .

"The sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refleshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty. . . .

"'Go,' said Hope, 'and live again in Europe. . . . You have done all that God and Humanity require of you.'"

- It is the unquestioned ideology of imperialist axiomatics, then, that conditions the ideological foundation of the text to a large extent. Marxist critics such as Terry Eagleton have seen this only in terms of the ambiguous *class* position of the governess. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, on the other hand, have seen Bertha Mason only in psychological terms, as Jane's dark double. Both of them had missed the Racial and colonial factor as decisive.
- This is to be remembered by you: the term WOMAN does not exist in isolation. When we talk about WOMAN, we have to carefully see, which age-group, race, sexuality, class, profession, which moments of history, which region ...there is nothing called the essential or monolithic woman. Any text or person or discourse talking only of WOMAN, as if she has been plucked out and isolated from her real parameters, her goodness, her vice, her ambition, her inertia, her political position, her social facts, her brilliance, her stupidity, her race, her list of surrounding forces etcetera is regressive, selfish and finally evil. We have real WOMEN, and no ideal or hypothetical essence called WOMAN.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: FEW ideas and some phrases are influenced by or are borrowed from "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, published in *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (Autumn 1985), 235-61.