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Class Discrimination and Racial Conflict: Transporting *Wuthering Heights* to *Windward Heights*

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Abstract

Aim: *This paper aims to explore the intersections of class discrimination and racial conflict through a comparative reading of Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights and Maryse Condé's Windward Heights, with particular focus on how postcolonial rewriting reconfigures the ideological framework of a canonical Victorian text.*

Methodology and Approach: *The study adopts an intertextual and postcolonial analytical framework, drawing on the concept of intertextuality proposed by Julia Kristeva. It examines narrative strategies, characterization, and socio-cultural contexts to analyse how* Windward *Heights transforms the thematic concerns of Wuthering Heights.*

Outcome: *The analysis demonstrates that while Wuthering Heights contains latent suggestions of "otherness" and social hierarchy, Windward Heights foregrounds these issues by situating them within the historical realities of the Caribbean. Condé's reworking amplifies marginalized voices and presents race as a central determinant of social relations, thereby revealing the interconnectedness of racial and class structures.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *The paper concludes that* Windward Heights *is not merely a response to Wuthering Heights but a critical rearticulation that exposes its suppressed colonial subtext. By aligning class prejudice with racial discrimination, Condé's novel expands the scope of postcolonial literary studies and invites a re-evaluation of canonical texts through alternative cultural and historical perspectives.*

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The publication of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Caribbean rewriting of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in 1966, started a new trend in the evolution of feminist and postcolonial discourse. Rhys's novel was instrumental in making Anglo-American feminists sensitive to the issues of race and imperialism that their celebratory readings of *Jane Eyre* had precluded. Jean Rhys took an oppositional stance with relation to Bronte's portrayal of Bertha Mason and as being of Creole origins herself, set out to present an alternate narrative of alienation and victimization of the Creole woman. Emily Bronte's masterpiece, being a passionate and violent love-story, did not invite this kind of oppositional approach for a very long time. It is not that Emily Bronte's novel has not been rewritten, since, unlike *Jane Eyre*, it has given rise to not one but many novelistic sequels and revisions such as—*Heathcliff's Tale*, a postmodern revision by Emma Tennant, *Heathcliff* by Jeffery Caine which is an attempt to account for the missing years of Heathcliff's life during the period he is away from the action of *Wuthering Heights* and *Heathcliff: The Return to Wuthering Heights* by Lin Haire Sargeant that recounts in Heathcliff's own words his version of the same period—among others. It is the fact that *Wuthering Heights*'s relation to Imperialism and racial difference is not as openly stated as in Charlotte Bronte's works that has resulted in the lukewarm response to the novel by postcolonial writers and critics.

Maryse Conde's *Windward Heights*, an imaginative rewriting of the Victorian classic, highlights the hint of 'Otherness' that we find in the depiction of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and puts an end to this ambivalence towards *Wuthering Heights*'s relation with race and empire by rewriting it from a postcolonial perspective. It distinguishes itself from other postcolonial writings, especially *Wide Sargasso Sea* in that it takes its pre-text as a source of inspiration rather than a of indignation or opposition insofar as it is dedicated to Emily Bronte: "To Emily Bronte, who I hope will approve of this interpretation of her masterpiece. With honour and respect!" (Conde i). As Francois Lionet has remarked, instead of writing "back to the expected destinataire, Conde crosses borders and boundaries to find inspiration and to articulate unexpected affiliation" (Lionet 71). Instead of rewriting the canonical text as if it were some static object that needed to be decoded by its enlightening postcolonial sequel, Conde's novel presents a salutary re-enactment that rewrites not colonialism so much as postcolonialism's most enduring tenets. As a postcolonial text *Windward Heights* refuses to fulfil the expectations of the readers well-versed in postcolonial revisionism or anticolonial literary militantism. It is a revision of a European classic from a "coloured" perspective that does not attempt to correct the pre-text or to glorify "coloured-ness". *Windwards Heights*'s relation to *Wuthering Heights* is rather that of intertextuality than of 'writing back'.

Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality in the late 1960s in an attempt to synthesize Ferdinand de Saussure's *Semiotics* and Bakhtin's 'Dialogism' that suggests a continual dialogue of a text with other works of literature and authors. According to Kristeva, "the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity" (Kristeva 66) as we realize that meaning is not conveyed directly from the writer to the reader but is negotiated and coloured by the 'codes' that both receive from other writers and texts and their own experience. Thus, Jean Rhys reads *Jane Eyre* as other readers did not and similarly, Maryse Conde, as she says, reading the text at the age of fourteen, (Wolff 1999) applies her own understanding of the colonial experience in this transportation of the story of Catherine and Heathcliff from the Yorkshire Moors in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to the islands of the Antilles, Cuba, Guadeloupe and Dominica about a hundred later.

In *Windward Heights* Conde transplants the plot of the original Bronte text from the harsh windblown "wuthering" Yorkshire moors of England to the Caribbean not just to illuminate the earlier text and its context but the contemporary racial and neo-colonial relations. Wuthering Heights is now located in La Guadeloupe towards the end of the nineteenth century and is renamed L'Engoulvent. The novel introduces the character of Razye whose name indicates that he is Heathcliff's counterpart from the original text: "I was found in Guadeloupe as naked as the day I was born, on the heath and cliffs—the razyes—hence my name" (Conde 9). The novel begins with Razye's return from Cuba after a three-year exile and relates the story of his revenge on his rival and his descendants:

> I must take my revenge. On the man who took the woman I loved and the man who made me unworthy of her love. My plan is all worked out. I have toiled three years in Cuba to have enough money to put it into effect. I'll bring the second man to his knees and if I have to kill the first with both hands, I will. (Conde 15)

Whereas in Bronte's text this rivalry is predominantly in terms of class conflict with merely a hint of "otherness" in the mysterious antecedents of Heathcliff, in *Windward Heights* it is overlaid with a racial dimension that forcefully illustrates the intertwined racial and class hierarchies of Caribbean society. As Lionet points out, Conde "foregrounds the racial scripts that are barely hinted at in Bronte's tale of guilty passion" (Lionet 71). She displaces geographical and historical frames of Bronte's canonical text to a late nineteenth century Caribbean context in order to reconceptualise the complex issues of racial and cultural identity. Razye, a black Creole of unmixed African ancestry is a member of the lowest class, while at the other end of the social spectrum is his rival, the white planter or *beke*, Aymeric de Linsseuil representing Edgar Linton who owns twenty per cent of Grand Terre lands. Cathy Gangneur, the counterpart of Catherine Earnshaw, who is the object of both men's obsessive passion, belongs to the mulatto, or coloured class who gained their freedom before the abolition of slavery and often aspire to the same status as the *bekes*. Throughout the novel, what remains consistent with the original is Razye's unchanging passion for his childhood love Cathy and his unrelenting cruelty towards everyone else. What is radically different is the second generation's fate since *Windward Heights*'s second-generation lovers do not get to experience the domestic bliss that concludes *Wuthering Heights.* The second Catherine also dies in childbirth like her mother after realising that Razye junior, the man whose child she is giving birth to, is her own half-brother.

In another deviation from the original, Conde fragments the double narration of *Wuthering Heights* into a kind of Bakhtin's 'Polyphony', multitude of narrators whose first-person accounts alternate with the third person narration. Most of her narrators are black Creoles who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, servants, ex-slaves, nannies, housekeepers, fishermen, obeah men or helpers. Significantly, they give their own version of events without subordinating their own experience to that of the protagonists as is the case in *Wuthering Heights*. Conde thus ensures that her most marginalised characters have a narrative voice, thus ‘giving a voice’ to the silent oppressed. These characters not only present an account of the events of the novel but first they tell about themselves and how they came to be present at that particular time and place.

Conde turns to a Victorian classic to represent contemporary concerns, because she recognised in *Wuthering Heights* elements that mirror the issues of racialism and hybridity in the 19th century Caribbean. In her own words, she took what was “a sketch in the original and went further in relation to the culture to which I belong” (Interview with Haubruge 18). While Conde does not specify the nature of this sketch in her interview, her rewriting makes it clear that she is referring to the racial and class hybridity embedded in Emily Bronte’s narrative. Heathcliff is positioned as an outsider from the very start; Lockwood describes him as “a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect” (Bronte 5) and Mr Earnshaw as “dark almost as if it came from the devil” (Bronte 29). Mr Earnshaw has found him wandering in the streets of Liverpool, a major port of slavery in the late 18th Century and so it has been theorized that Heathcliff might have been a child off one of the slaving ships, a castaway or a run-off, who attached himself to Mr Earnshaw and was brought home to Wuthering Heights by him.

While it is debatable whether Emily Bronte’s representation of Heathcliff’s darkness is a metaphorical or literal reference to racial ambiguity, Conde unequivocally represents Razye and Cathy as black and mulatto respectively. Unlike his gypsy-like Victorian counterpart, Razye’s physical attributes unequivocally link him with the Negro race in the nineteenth century. His skin is described as “black, that shiny black they call *Ashanti* and his hair hung in loose curls like those of an Indian half caste” (Conde 7). Similarly, Cathy’s darker skin is explicitly and repeatedly ascribed to her African ancestry, while the appearance of the second Cathy puts an end to the speculations regarding her parentage by confirming the assumption that Bronte critics could not substantiate in the original text. Conde’s younger Cathy is undoubtedly identified as Cathy and Razye’s child and she herself enters into an incestuous union with her half-brother Premier-Ne, the son of Razye. If there are identity crises in the novel they do not originate from any ambiguity of origins since even the minor characters begin their narratives with a detailed account of their own personal history. Lineages are minutely traced in the novel and racial difference is visibly and unambiguously established.

Windward Heights's Cathy is the daughter of a "tallow-coloured" mulatto in late nineteenth century Guadeloupe, whose changing status in the Caribbean society translates into remarkably physical transformations. When she makes her first appearance she is described as "the colour of hot syrup left to cool in the open air, with black hair like threads of night and green eyes" (Conde 19). She is so dark skinned that unlike her light skinned brother Justin she cannot pass for a white Creole. She has to choose between the "black" and "white" sides of her identity, two terms whose opposition her very existence has already undermined:

> It is as if there were two Cathys inside me and there always have been, ever since I was little. One Cathy who's come straight from Africa, vices and all. The other Cathy who is the very image of her white ancestor, pure, dutiful, fond of order. (*Conde* 40)

And later, when she receives a proposal of marriage from Aymeric, she is in a dilemma as she is in love with Razye but cannot marry him as:

> If Justin hadn't done what he did to Razye, I wouldn't even be thinking of this marriage. But the way Razye is now, I could never marry him. It would be too degrading. It would be as if only Cathy the reprobate existed, stepping straight off the slave-ship. Living with him would be like starting over as savages from Africa. (*Conde* 41)

She lives in a world that demands that she should either repress her African ancestry completely or totally reclaim it despite the mixing of cultures that defines her experience. It is this forced choice imposed on her that ultimately signifies the disintegration of her personality and generates her dementia and death. Years later when Razye returns to Guadeloupe and Cathy accuses him of being the cause of her imminent death, he replies:

> It's not me. It's you. You were ashamed of all the happiness we had together when as little heathens we roamed wild and free. You began to despise me. To prefer those with white skin, who read books and spoke

> fancy French. You didn't realise it was yourself that you were despising, that you were repudiating. And in the end it was your ruin, because you can't lie to your own blood. (*Conde* 82)

Cathy chooses to affiliate with the white part of her ancestry and marries into the upper echelons of the white Creole class despite her skin colour. In a symbolic device used by Conde, the colour of her skin reflects her social status rather than determines it. On the day of her wedding, she is so pale as to draw an exclamation of surprise from her own brother ("as pale as a corpse"). Years later, her dead body undergoes a striking transformation—her black features literally eclipse her white blood:

> First of all, the colour of her skin was not white. It was as if her black blood could no longer be contained and was taking its revenge. Victorious, it was flooding through her. It thickened her facial features, distended her mouth, giving a mauve touch to her lips, and with the stroke of a pencil redefined the arch of her eyebrows. (Conde 84)

This description of the retransformation can be interpreted as the inescapability of racial origins that one can only vainly attempt to evade and as the reestablishment of the heroine's racial identity as "black". Cathy's victorious "blackness" of origin recasts her earlier passing into the high sections of White society as wishful thinking into a society where racial hierarchy overlaps with class inequality. As her dramatic and posthumous change in skin colour reveals, a model of identification and rootedness that foregrounds race as an immutable category of social existence is bound to fail.

Windward Heights sets out to prove that the differences and social complexities of New World societies cannot be defined on the basis of race only. Race is not the only indicator of difference in the Caribbean. Racial categories are not challenged, however, in the light of the mixed racial origins that undermine dominant conceptions of national identity. Married to a de Linsseuil, the white *béké* Jean boasts, the only white you see in me is the colour of my skin. I eat like a nigger; I swig my rum like a nigger; I swear and I fight like a nigger (Conde 182). Cathy's daughter is born with a skin colour much darker than her brothers who are almost blond as, it is later confirmed, she is Razye's daughter and not Aymeric's. Lucinda, the maid who is looking after the baby reflects:

> Unlike her brothers, her skin had already darkened, as if she had gone back in time in search of a lost family-tree. This forbade a fine future for her! They would make faces and comparisons and declare: "how dark she is!" How pitiful a society where qualities are defined according to skin colour! (Conde 88)

Even Justin-Marie, the extremely fair son of the white skinned Justin and the white and blonde Marie-France La Rinardiere, does not escape being racialised in the narrative. The Indian character Sanjita insists that the presence of black blood in his veins is immediately detectable in his physiognomy. "He may be as white as a sheet, but he is no white Creole. You can see that straightaway: his mouth is too big and there is something about the shape of his cheekbones" (Conde 167). He adopts the rhetoric of black revolutionaries and socialists yet treats black Creoles like slaves. The reworking of the crossed familial and racial genealogies of *Wuthering Heights*'s Hareton, Linton and the second Catherine through those of Justin-Marie, Razye II and Cathy in *Windward Heights* is another way in which the novel powerfully dramatizes the subjectivity of cultural constituents. As a mulatto who calls Irmine mother and looks forward to the day his 'father' Razye will kill all the whites, Justin-Marie acts as a foil to the 'black' Cathy who has completely assimilated the values and norms of her 'father' Aymeric. Despite Razye II's attempts at making her aware of an alternative black history and culture, she never reclaims her African heritage and remains a de Linsseuil till the end.

In turn of the century Guadeloupe, blood-mixing is not, as in Victorian England, the vestige of a repressed past whose unearthing threatens naturalised rigid binary identities but a staple of the present and of its reconfigured hierarchical structure. In Carine Mardorossian's words, "Conde does not challenge racist and colonial ideologies by evoking the biological 'errancies of hybridity' to expose the falsity of a pure and static identity. She represents a world where the dominant ideology does not repress the truth of miscegenation but reappropriates it in service of its own imperialist agenda" (Mardorossian 36).

Windward Heights's challenges anti-colonialism's use of race as the basis of unified concepts of identity and resistance. Conde demonstrates that ethnicity and race are not fixed constructs or measurable entities and that the cross-fertilisation of races or cultures is a process that does not occur outside of its relationship with other categories of identity. Conde's rewriting of race emphasises both the contingent configurations of race, class, gender and nationality and the determining logic through which these identities are deployed to keep social hierarchies in place.

Windward Heights is then not so much a "writing back" to *Wuthering Heights* but an appropriation of the inherent racial and class conflicts in the pre-text to depict the racial and social hierarchies prevalent in the 19th century Caribbean. The undercurrent of racial tension in Bronte's text is unequivocally played out through the interaction of the various races—White Creole, Negroid, Antillanite and mulatto. In turning Emily Bronte's only novel into the same kind of postcolonial rewrite as *Wide Sargasso Sea* Conde has put an end to the idea that *Wuthering Heights*'s involvement with race and Empire is negligible, prevalent among the postcolonial writers and critics. It gives a new dimension to the postcolonial rereading of *Wuthering Heights*. By underlining the class prejudice in the text as a kind of caste prejudice comparable to the racial prejudice and segregation prevalent in the colonies, *Windward Heights* holds an important position in postcolonial studies.

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Prof. Huma Javed Subzposh

Born on 28 January 1966, Dr. Huma Javed Subzposh is a senior academic in English literature with long teaching and research experience. She completed her graduation in 1983 and post-graduation in 1985 from Kanpur University, and qualified for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) in 1986. She joined Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University in April 1987 and has continued her association with the institution ever since, moving through the ranks from Lecturer to Professor, a position she has held since 2009. She was awarded her

Ph.D. in 2001 and later the D.Litt. degree in 2015 from Lucknow University under the supervision of Prof. S.Z.H. Abidi. Her academic interests include postcolonialism, feminism, and the rewriting of classical texts, areas in which she has consistently worked through teaching, research, and publication. Dr. Subzposh is the author of The Disintegrating Psyche (2003), a study of Jean Rhys's marginalised heroines, and has edited Literatures of South Asia (2016). In addition, she has published several research papers in journals and edited volumes, dealing with themes such as diaspora, postcolonial discourse, and feminist readings of literature. Over the years, she has supervised doctoral research and participated in a number of national and international seminars, where she has presented papers on contemporary literary issues. She has also contributed to university life through her involvement in academic and administrative bodies and by organising academic programmes and seminars. Her work reflects a steady engagement with literary studies, particularly in relation to South Asian writing and postcolonial criticism.