There is Always the Other Side:
Emma Tennant's *Adèle* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*
هناك دائما الجانب الآخر:
شخصية أديل عند إيما تينانت، وجين إير عند شارلوت برونتي

* OTMANI Ilhem[1], Pr. BOUREGBI Salah[2]

إلهام عثماني 1   أ.د. صالح بورقبي

[1]Department of English, Laboratory LECUCRA, Badji Mokhtar
University, Annaba, Algeria.

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة باجي مختار بعنابة / الجزائر

ilhemotmani7@gmail.com
Salihbourg@yahoo.fr

Abstract: This paper focuses on an example of contemporary women's rewriting in postmodern British literature. It explores the foregrounding of the marginalized and forgotten voices in postmodern rewrites. Playing with intertextual references in *Adèle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* (2002)*,* the British writer Emma Tennant offers a rewriting of Charlotte Bronte's classic novel *Jane Eyre* by transforming a silent character into a central one. Taking her subject the young girl "Adèle", Tennant seems to debunk centers in the source text and privilege those who had unimportant parts.
Keywords: *Adèle*; Charlotte Bronte; Emma Tennant; *Jane Eyre*, postmodern rewriting.

مُلَخَّصُ البُحُثِ

تتناول هذه المقالة مثالا لإعادة الكتابة المعاصرة للمرأة في الأدب البريطاني ما بعد الحداثي. وتستكشف بداية الأصوات المهمشة والمنسية في إعادة الكتابة ما بعد الحداثية. وبالاتكاء على مراجع متداخلة في Adèle (قصة جين آير المخفية 2002)، تقترح الكاتبة البريطانية (إيما تينانت) إعادة كتابة الرواية الكلاسيكية لشارلوت برونتي جين آير من خلال تحويل الشخصية الصامتة إلى شخصية مركزية. وباتخاذها الفتاة الصغيرة "Adèle"موضوعًا، يبدو أنر (تينانت) تزيل الغموض عن مراكز النص المصدر وتميز تلك التي لها أدوار غير مهمة.

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* **OTMANI Ilhem.** ilhemotmani7@gmail.com

الكلمات الرئيسية : : آديل؛ شارلوت برونتي؛ إيما تينانت ؛ جين إير ، إعادة الكتابة ما

بعد الحداثة.

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Introduction

The late twentieth and the twenty-first centuries have witnessed an explosion of narratives in which "the illustrious dead"[1] are invoked, awakened, reworked and revisited in new textual forms. The Victorian novels become so tempting for postmodern British literature from the late twentieth century to the present moment. The twentieth century has indeed been characterized as one of women's emancipation, with the emergence of new horizons of possibilities for every new generation. Contemporary women writers continue to write fascinating novels whilst concurrently addressing a significant cultural critique of the Victorians and their culture. One of the principal characteristics of these rewrites is the tackling of contemporary issues through Victorian settings. Writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in contrast to their nineteenth century counterparts, could discuss overtly issues such as sexuality and child abuse. Victorian novels are re-evaluated differently, yet a common approach includes a bringing of the silenced and marginalized subcultures to the fore through the eyes of postmodern writers. Significantly, the number of texts born from Bronte's novel made it ideal for study and assessment. Emma Tennant, who has made a career of rewriting master narratives, is just a sample of contemporary fictions that rework past novels, authors and voices. Her novel *Adèle* is a rewriting of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) whose purpose is to give a voice to a character limited to the margins in Bronte's original, the character of Rochester's illegitimate daughter, Adèle Varens. Tennant takes the revision to another direction. She departs from the romance plot to favor minor figures in the postmodern "tradition" of bringing the peripheral to the center, consequently challenging the current order. Her novel seems to be an example of the postmodern mingling of intertexts insofar as it makes use of elements from *Jane Eyre* as well Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

1- Postmodernism and the Already Written:

"Any texts is an absorption and transformation of another"[2] and "every text is an intertext"[3] write Julia Kristeva and Roland Barth

respectively to mean that art is dependent on art and may incorporate allusions to previous works. Grounding her theoretical approach of rewriting on writers such as J.M. Coetzee, Jean Rhys and Jose Saramago, Tamara Caraus claims that the impetus behind postmodern rewriting is to advocate the other, being the mad, the woman or the colonized. For her, what all of them share is "the exclusion from the cannon, the biased perspective which encapsulated them within patriarchal prejudices, stereotypical representations and marginal references"[4]. In fact, postmodernism denotes a close connection with the past. In the late twentieth and the twenty first century, literary production has become a survival of earlier texts, for "writing is the chance of continuation, of inheritance and survival"[5]. Edward Said believes that the postmodern writer is not interested in producing authentic literature instead he/she "thinks less of writing original and more of rewriting, the image of writing changes from original inscription to parallel script, from tumbled-out confidence to deliberate fathering-forth"[6]. Christian Moraru, in turn, states that postmodern authors are "memorious writers who remember (texts) in order to- or because they- represent (the world)"[7]. Aside from rewriting the Victorian in general, Andrea Kirchnopf copes with some rewritings of *Jane Eyre* and explains their endeavor to "Correct"[8] the "Implausibilities of the [novel's] Victorian ending"[9]. In fact, the rewriting of Victorian texts is a typical postmodern practice. Its development might be in 1966, when Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* (told through the eyes of Antoinette/Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife) as an obvious response to *Jane Eyre*. This novel has a lasting impact on *Jane Eyre* as well as rewriting as a literary practice. It is believed to introduce "a new literary movement whose very essence consisted in re-thinking and rewriting Victorian myths and stories"[10]. Indeed, rewriting makes use of the idea of intertextuality (though they can be used interchangeably in certain contexts) and draws attention to previously written texts but proves its original approach in reshaping them. The term emerges in the twentieth century to denote dependence of authors on a previously existing tradition. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, Julia Kristeva's representation of the text as a quotation mosaic and Roland Barthes's perception of the literary work as a citations tissue designate that intertextuality promises a plurality of meanings, which works against the authoritative, conventional approach to the text. Adrienne Rich defines rewriting as

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> The act of looking back- of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction- is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival […] We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass a tradition but to break its hold over us.[11]

The intentions behind reworking nineteenth century literature in postmodern narratives differ. Some writers choose to fill the gaps perceived in the original text or to give a voice to marginal characters previously silenced in the Victorian classics. Some other novels do not only rewrite the Victorian but also question the connection between the postmodern consciousness and the Victorian. Moreover, they interrogate the relationship between the past and the present by means of metafictional speculation on some classics. However, what most of them share is the inclination towards re-interpreting and reassessing traditions inherent from the Victorian era to address mere contemporary cultural issues. Umberto Eco claims that postmodernism is the ironical revision of the past. He asserts that "[t]he postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be retrieved: but with irony, not innocently"[12]. Nonetheless, some other writers believe that the aim behind rewriting traditional narratives "is not merely ironic" but "deeply humanistic"[13] meaning that rewriting can be used for artistic purposes to create new identities in the contemporary world, and promote a reformulation of the perceptions of those who have been neglected by the dominant majority.

For women writers (those who adopt Victorian novels), rewriting female characters becomes part of their feminist projects. By undermining "metanarratives", to borrow Jean-François Lyotard's term, postmodernism offers space for pluralism, eccentricity and difference, values also foregrounded by feminists. The focus on difference is one of the most interesting aspects of postmodernism to feminists. Why is woman the second sex? Or why have women been defined and referred to as "other" by men? Such questions can be traced in the works of feminists in the North, namely Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). She defied this definition of "women" and invited women to set themselves outside the male/female dichotomy. For her, to be second or other is not to be aspired to. Women, she maintained, must be the subject rather than the object (other) of analysis[14]. In fact, what these

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movements have in common is what Linda Hutcheon calls their shared "eccentric" position and their strong suspicion on centralizing tendencies[15]. Actually, Postmodernism approves pluralism and displays opposition towards universality and the absolute truth. Most overviews of postmodernism as well as its social, academic, and aesthetic premises maintain similar claims of postmodern pluralism. Pluralism, in Ihab Hassan's view, "becomes the irritable condition of postmodern discourse, consuming many pages of both critical and uncritical inquiry"[16]. The demand for singularity, which Elizabeth Grosz and others describe, constitutes the position of what I want to term the object of resistance, against which postmodernism (particularly in its more political manifestations) is largely oriented. Fredric Jameson argues, in an essay which is still of major significance to the debate over postmodernism, that

> postmodernisms [...] emerge as specific reactions against the established forms of high modernism, against this or that high modernism which conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery network and the foundations.[17]

While Jameson goes to some lengths to stress the ultimate inadequacy of a crudely historicist periodization of cultural 'movements', the argument remains that postmodernism constitutes some kind of reaction against unitary, homologizing cultural forces. In this regard, postmodernism shows similarity with feminist principles. Feminist discourse is pluralistic and multifaceted in its accounts in the way that there is no dominant texts or fixed techniques. It does not communicate from the "other" perspective; rather it speaks as the other and in many voices[18]. Today there are many feminist perceptions, but contemporary feminist in particular remains a varied and pluralist enterprise. Hutcheon explained her use of the plural "feminisms" by saying:

> there are almost as many feminisms as there are feminists", she goes on arguing that "as a verbal sign of difference and plurality, 'feminisms' would appear to be the best term to use to designate, not a consensus, but a multiplicity of points of view which nevertheless do possess at least some common denominators[19].

Postmodernism gives voice to those who do not spring from dominant center as being "other". Its very function is to legitimize all forms of cultural expressions and deconstruct all the absolute conventions and hierarchies. It is in this sense that Teresa L. Ebert said

that postmodernism "has become an unavoidable issue for feminist activist and theorists alike"[20]. Sharing the same perspective with Ebert, Dina Sherzer claims "[f]eminism is an essential part of postmodernism"[21]. Then, Ihab Hassan attests: "We deconstruct, displace, demystify, the logocentric, ethnocentric, phallocentric, order of things"[22].

At this level we can say that although many writers rework the literature of precursors, contemporary writers seem to be different in the way that they display a self-conscious attitude in rewriting, imitating, parodying the classics. Although she was not a prominent figure in women's movements, her rewriting and defending the image of women, and her reworking of classic texts illustrate a similar scepticism of the feminist project. For her, revising these narratives, gives previously silenced female characters a voice. In fact, much has been said about this political intertextuality, in which Tennant's post-modernism and feminism unite.[23]

2- *Adèle*: The Other Side of *Jane Eyre*:

In Emma Tennant's *Adèle,* the intertextual relationship with   *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is clear. Tennant retells the story of Adèle Varens, who is Rochester's illegitimate daughter by Céline Varens (a Parisian actress and dancer) in Bronte's original. In the opening of the narrative, Adèle immediately recalls both the heroines in Bronte's novel (Jane) and its Caribbean adaptation. Indeed, the intertextual allusions to *Wide Sargasso Sea* is so obvious: the Bertha character is now reshaped as a parroting woman who repeats only expressions.[24]   Another reference to Rhys's novel is the name 'Antoinette': "for I can see that poor Antoinette, as she [Antoinette] tells le I can call her, is as much stranger in this place as I am".[25]

In fact *Adèle* is the story of a title character who, before coming to England, was left with an Italian musician. This Francophone girl (who had spent most of her childhood with well-known artists in France) disliked her life in Rochester's unbearable house[26] and feels incapable of adapting herself in a cold, foreign England. She shows how hostile Thornfield is for strangers in many occasions saying that "It is cold here as Jenny said it would be"[27] then "I sit alone in the room where one darkness succeeds another"[28]. In the preface, Tennant first quotes Jane's summary in *Jane Eyre* of what becomes of the mature Adèle, then remarking, "but perhaps, as is often found in the lives of girls as they grow into women, it was all a little more complicated than that.

This is Adèle's story"[29]. By the twentieth century, literary critics discussed how Bronte's novel reveals that "a conflict between British and continental, especially French, values dominates Bronte's fiction"[30]. Informed by postcolonial theory, most critics have also emphasized the clash between national identities as well as Anglocentricm that needs to be revisited in Bronte's novel. While *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* present post-colonialism issues, Tennant gives much importance to the image of France as a post-revolution county. Actually, the English/ French divide is so obvious in *Jane Eyre*. This rings true when we consider Jane's dissatisfaction with Adèle's French manners commenting that "a sound, English education corrected in a great measure her French defects"[31] and that under Jane's influence "she soon forgot her little freaks, and became obedient and teachable"[32]. Moreover, the English/ French duality reveals itself not only through the characters of Jane, Céline Varens, and Adèle but also through the combination of Adela/Adèle and Miss/Mademoiselle[33]. The English, as Hanna More mentioned, fear the importation of French manners into the English house. In fact, Bronte attributes to Adèle so many treats of her Parisian mother, the thing that reflects the nineteenth century English opinion about French women. These latter were accused of sobriety and chastity[34]. Being the daughter of a French dancer, Adèle is believed to be worthless of a full education in the way that "there is no need for higher education or professional training"[35] for she has "no great talents, no marked traits of character […] which raised her one inch above the ordinary"[36]. Another scene when the English/ French division can be perceived is when Rochester described Adèle's birthplace as "the slime and mud of Paris"[37] contrary to England's pure "wholesome soil"[38]. Even more than Bertha who was pictured as a monster and a madwoman in *Jane Eyre,* Adèle the child, the young girl, the foreigner and the bastard is marginalized in so many ways. Quite similar to Rhys, Tennant gives a story to a considerably minor character who was neglected and mostly absent from Bronte's original. In *Adèle*, the focus is put on other characters while Jane was left marginal in the background. Aside from Mrs. Fairfax, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar considered Adèle as one of the three 'negative' "Role-models" for *Jane Eyre* along with Blanche Ingram and Grace Pool.[39]

The final romantic union between Jane and Rochester's is subordinated in Tennant's novel to the story of the latter's ward, the little French girl Adèle. Besides, this novel has a more intricate

narrative structure than their nineteenth century hypotext. Five narrators are employed, out of which Adèle features the most, Edward Rochester is in the second place, and Grace, Mrs. Fairfax and a third person narrator have minor roles.[40] Hence, while all earlier adaptations have ignored both Adèle and Mrs. Fairfax, Tennant's polyphonic novel involves many secondary women characters such as Grace Poole and the English housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax, but in which Adèle's voice is the most dominant. Nevertheless, Claire Bazin argues, despite Adèle's centrality introduced in the title of the novel, she depends just like all the other women in the novel, on "Rochester's good or ill will"[41]. By moving Adèle to the center stage, Tennant not only defends the young girl but also her mother whom Bronte regarded as improper for British Society. Moreover, while the original version of Bronte accused the "eccentric" Bertha for being the source of problems, Tennant corrects her image by presenting her as a more harmless and amiable woman, who befriends Adèle. Besides, in this novel it is not the French or the Creole woman who are the wrongdoers, but the demonized English housekeeper, who becomes an arsonist of Antoinette (Bertha), Grace and almost Jane.

Conclusion

All that can be said is that the postmodernist novel promotes the making dialogues between the modern and classical texts. Postmodern rewrites allow critics and readers to observe an age that still echoes in contemporary society. We are well aware that postmodern adaptations of Victorian literature are inherently different from the original works, and should be treated as such. Tennant's *Adèle,* which is not a parody nor a pastiche, presents an absolutely new and astonishing twist to well-known intertexts. The fact that postmodern rewrites explore everything that was absent from canonical texts reveals that literary postmodernism sets itself as a dialogue of the peripheral and marginalized. By creating a new independent woman image, postmodern writers have opened a space for the female experience and voiced the unknown and the muted. Hence, a feminine text should "work on the beginning but not on the origin" and that should be "always endless, without ending"[42]. Indeed, these writers achieve the bodily writing in voicing the female experience both through their writing and through their female characters who write and rewrite themselves, transgressing histories, spatial and temporal linearities, gender roles, becoming and coming

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their existences. Therefore, "In order to critique, re-vise, respond, or pay homage, one must inevitably imitate"[43].

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