

Original Article

Rewriting the Canon: Gender, Race, and Power in the Modern Reinterpretation of Classical Texts

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Received Date: 03rd September 2024

Revised Date: 20th September 2024

Accepted Date: 16th October 2024

Published Date: 05th November 2024

Abstract - This paper investigates the contemporary reinterpretation of classical texts through the intersecting lenses of gender, race, and power. By analyzing modern adaptations and retellings of canonical works from Greek tragedies to Shakespearean plays this study explores how historically marginalized voices are reclaiming narrative authority. These reinterpretations not only challenge the traditional literary canon but also reflect broader cultural shifts toward inclusivity and decolonization. Drawing on feminist theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial critique, the paper examines how reimagining the canon allows for new dialogues between past and present, revealing the enduring relevance of these texts while critiquing the structures they once upheld.

Keywords - Canon, Reinterpretation, Classical Literature, Gender Studies, Critical Race Theory, Postcolonialism, Adaptation, Power Structures, Feminist Critique, Literary Revisionism.

1. Introduction

1.1. Definition of the Literary Canon

The literary canon refers to a body of works typically deemed "classics" that are considered to have significant artistic, cultural, or intellectual value. These texts are often used as foundational material in educational curricula, literary studies, and cultural discourse. The idea of the canon implies not only quality but also authority, suggesting that these works represent a kind of universal or timeless truth about the human experience. However, the canon is not neutral; it reflects the values and ideologies of the institutions and individuals who constructed it. Traditionally, the Western literary canon has been shaped by Eurocentric, patriarchal, and elitist assumptions, privileging the voices of white, male, Western authors while marginalizing or excluding others. Works such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, Shakespeare's plays, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are commonly included, while the voices of women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and writers from colonized regions have historically been silenced or ignored. Thus, the canon is not only a list of "great" works but a reflection of power—of who has been allowed to speak and whose stories have been deemed worthy of preservation.

1.2. Brief Historical Overview of the Western Canon and Its Exclusions

The formation of the Western canon can be traced to the classical education systems of ancient Greece and Rome, but it was during the Enlightenment and the 19th century that the idea of a fixed list of culturally superior texts solidified. Figures such as Matthew Arnold championed the idea that literature had a moral and civilizing influence, and thus only works that met a certain standard of "greatness" a standard defined by the values of the ruling class were included. As Western colonial powers expanded, their literature became a tool of cultural dominance, reinforcing a worldview in which white, European, male perspectives were presented as universal. Simultaneously, the voices of Indigenous people, enslaved Africans, women, and others were dismissed or excluded. Even when non-Western texts were acknowledged, they were often interpreted through an Orientalist or colonialist lens. As a result, the canon came to reflect not just literary merit, but ideological control. It preserved



and perpetuated the narratives of the dominant culture, often at the expense of others, and created a hierarchy in which the literature of the oppressed was labeled marginal, primitive, or secondary.

1.3. Purpose of the Paper: Exploring How Contemporary Reinterpretations Confront Issues of Gender, Race, and Power

In response to the exclusions and limitations of the traditional canon, contemporary writers and scholars have increasingly turned to reinterpretation as a method of critique and reclamation. This paper seeks to explore how modern retellings and adaptations of classical texts serve as acts of resistance against the established literary order. By reimagining canonical works from the perspectives of those historically excluded women, people of color, postcolonial subjects, queer individuals these reinterpretations do more than simply revise old stories; they interrogate the systems of gender, race, and power that shaped the canon in the first place. Through a critical examination of such retellings, this paper aims to reveal how literature can be a site of both oppression and liberation. These reinterpretations not only allow for the inclusion of new voices but also challenge the authority of the canonical texts themselves, calling into question who gets to tell stories, whose stories are remembered, and how cultural memory is constructed.

1.4. Thesis Statement

This paper argues that contemporary reinterpretations of classical texts function as political and cultural interventions that challenge the traditional literary canon's embedded structures of gender, race, and power. By rewriting canonical narratives through marginalized perspectives, these works expose the exclusions and hierarchies within the canon, while simultaneously reshaping cultural memory and expanding the boundaries of literary value. Through the lens of feminist theory, postcolonial critique, and critical race studies, this paper will analyze how such adaptations not only critique the past but also offer new frameworks for understanding literature in the present.

2. The Canon and Its Discontents

2.1. Origins and Function of the Classical Canon

The origins of the classical literary canon are deeply rooted in the educational and cultural institutions of the Western world. In ancient Greece and Rome, certain texts such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid* were revered as exemplary models of literature and moral instruction. As these civilizations influenced later European societies, especially during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, the practice of elevating specific works as "classics" became central to the construction of Western identity. Over time, this selection process became institutionalized within academia, with universities, publishing houses, and literary critics acting as gatekeepers of cultural legitimacy. The function of the canon was thus twofold: it served as a pedagogical tool, providing students with access to what were deemed the most important ideas and styles in literature, and it functioned ideologically, reinforcing a shared cultural heritage that was overwhelmingly Eurocentric, patriarchal, and class-based. While this selection of texts was often presented as objective or timeless, the choices were shaped by dominant cultural norms, reinforcing particular worldviews and marginalizing others. In essence, the canon became not just a collection of texts, but a mechanism for maintaining social and intellectual power.

2.2. Critiques from Feminist, Queer, and Postcolonial Perspectives

By the late 20th century, the canon came under increasing scrutiny from scholars and writers working within feminist, queer, and postcolonial frameworks. Feminist critics argued that the canon was overwhelmingly male in its composition and perspective, marginalizing or stereotyping female characters while excluding women writers almost entirely. They questioned the criteria by which texts were judged "great," noting how those criteria often dismissed or ignored emotional depth, domestic themes, or non-linear narrative styles more frequently found in women's writing. Similarly, queer theorists highlighted how heteronormative assumptions shaped canonical

narratives, rendering queer identities invisible or perverse. They examined how gender nonconformity and same-sex desire were either erased or villainized, and called for a recognition of queer subtexts and alternative readings within classical texts. Postcolonial critics, meanwhile, interrogated the racial and imperial foundations of the canon. They emphasized how the canon reflected and perpetuated colonial ideologies, often glorifying empire and denigrating colonized peoples. Postcolonial scholars sought to recover and legitimize the literatures of colonized nations and diasporic communities, revealing how the canon served to enforce white, Western cultural supremacy. These intersecting critiques exposed the canon not as a neutral body of work, but as a deeply ideological structure, constructed through systematic exclusions that upheld dominant power hierarchies.

2.3. Who Has Traditionally Been Excluded and Why

The traditional literary canon has systematically excluded a wide range of voices based on intersecting axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, and geography. Women, for instance, were long denied access to formal education, publishing opportunities, and literary recognition, which meant their contributions were rarely documented or preserved. Even when women did write, their work was often dismissed as sentimental or trivial, unworthy of scholarly attention. Similarly, writers of color especially those from formerly colonized regions were excluded because their experiences and perspectives did not align with Eurocentric notions of literary merit or universality. The canon also erased the voices of LGBTQ+ individuals, whose identities were seen as deviant or immoral and thus unfit for serious literary expression. Indigenous writers, working within oral traditions or in languages outside of the colonial norm, were frequently deemed primitive or non-literary. Working-class authors were ignored in favor of those who reflected elite, educated values. These exclusions were not accidental but systemic, rooted in broader structures of patriarchy, racism, colonialism, and capitalism that determined whose voices were valued and whose were silenced. The result was a canon that reflected only a narrow slice of human experience, presenting it as universal while erasing the lives and stories of the vast majority of people.

3. Gender and the Rewriting of Classical Texts

3.1. Feminist Reinterpretations of Classical Works (e.g., *Circe* by Madeline Miller, *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood)

In recent decades, feminist writers have turned to classical texts as fertile ground for reinterpretation and critique, reclaiming narratives that have long silenced or marginalized women. Novels like Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018) and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) exemplify this literary intervention. These works engage in a deliberate act of rewriting, taking well-known male-centered myths and re-centering them around female voices that were previously overlooked or vilified. In *Circe*, Miller gives depth and agency to a character originally portrayed in Homer's *Odyssey* as a minor enchantress who turns men into pigs. Miller reimagines Circe not as a one-dimensional temptress but as a complex, emotionally rich figure who challenges divine authority, questions male violence, and carves out a space of autonomy in a world ruled by gods and men. Similarly, Atwood's *The Penelopiad* reconsiders the story of Penelope, Odysseus' loyal wife, and the twelve maids who were hanged upon his return. Atwood's narrative not only gives Penelope a voice to express her frustration, suspicion, and sorrow, but also turns the chorus of murdered maids into a haunting refrain, confronting readers with the patriarchal brutality buried beneath the heroic narrative of *The Odyssey*. These feminist reinterpretations serve not only to recover lost voices but to interrogate the ideological frameworks of the original texts, revealing how classical stories have been complicit in perpetuating gender hierarchies.

3.2. Themes of Female Agency, Voice, and Resistance

A central concern in the feminist rewriting of classical texts is the restoration of female agency granting women the power to act, speak, and resist within narratives that historically rendered them passive or invisible. In many classical works, female characters are either idealized as virtuous mothers and wives or demonized as dangerous and transgressive figures. Feminist adaptations seek to complicate this binary by portraying women as

full moral agents who navigate a patriarchal world with intelligence, desire, and political will. These retellings often emphasize the act of speaking giving voice to women who were previously silent or silenced. In *The Penelopiad*, Penelope's narration allows her to reframe her legacy, offering sharp commentary on her treatment in both myth and history. Similarly, in *Circe*, the protagonist's ability to tell her own story becomes a form of resistance against the gods' attempts to define her. This reclaiming of voice is not just a literary device; it is a political act, asserting women's right to be the authors of their own narratives. Resistance is another key theme whether it manifests as open rebellion, quiet defiance, or strategic compromise. In these feminist reimaginings, resistance is not always triumphant, but it is always meaningful, reshaping the emotional and ethical contours of the original tales.

3.3. Deconstructing Patriarchal Myths and Roles

Feminist reinterpretations of classical literature are also acts of deconstruction. They dismantle the patriarchal myths and roles embedded in ancient narratives, exposing how these stories have historically been used to uphold male dominance and female subjugation. The mythological canon often reinforces rigid gender roles: women are expected to be obedient, chaste, and self-sacrificing, while male heroes are valorized for violence, conquest, and cunning. Feminist authors interrogate these roles, asking not only what they mean, but whom they serve. Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, for example, critiques the double standard that celebrates Odysseus for his infidelities while demanding absolute fidelity from Penelope. Atwood also uses the murdered maids to question the assumed justice of patriarchal vengeance. Likewise, Miller's *Circe* reconsiders the trope of the "witch" as a woman who defies male control, suggesting that such labels are often projections of fear and repression. These reinterpretations invite readers to reconsider the moral foundations of classical literature, and to see mythology not as timeless truth, but as a cultural product shaped by power. By exposing and reworking these myths, feminist writers not only critique the past but offer new possibilities for the future, where literature becomes a space for gender justice and imaginative freedom.

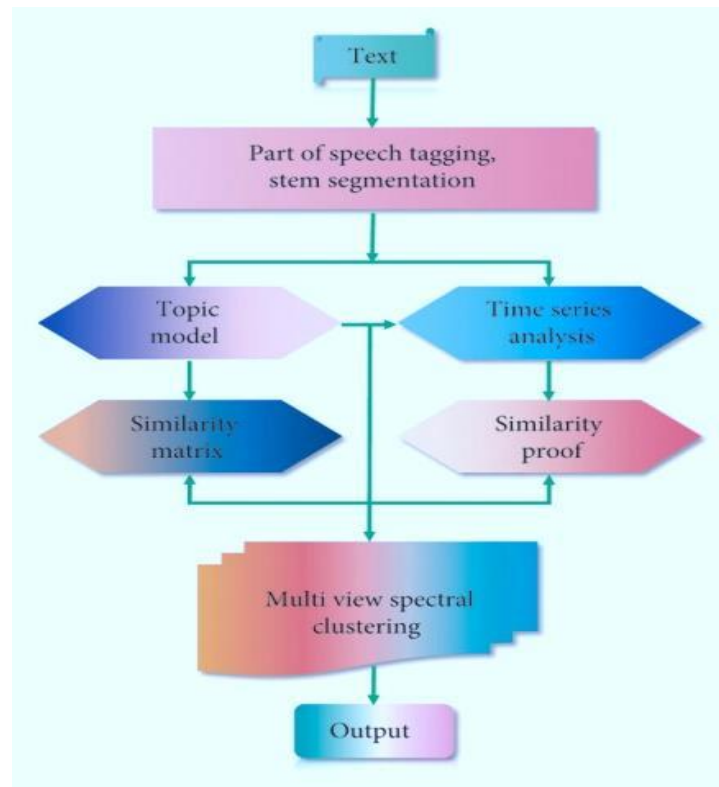


Fig. 1 Themes of Female Agency, Voice, and Resistance

4. Race, Colonialism, and the Canon

4.1. The Role of Eurocentrism in Shaping the Canon

Eurocentrism the privileging of European culture, values, and history as the universal standard has been a central force in the construction of the Western literary canon. From its early formation during the Enlightenment and imperial expansion, the canon was shaped to reflect and reinforce the worldview of Europe's dominant powers. It upheld Greco-Roman antiquity, medieval Christendom, and the literary traditions of Britain, France, and other imperial nations as the pinnacle of cultural achievement. Non-European cultures were often positioned as peripheral or primitive, their literatures considered folkloric rather than "literary," and rarely included in academic curricula or publishing circles. This Eurocentric foundation of the canon operated not only through inclusion and exclusion but also through representation: when the non-European world appeared in canonical texts, it was often through the lens of colonial desire, conquest, or exoticism. As a result, whiteness became the unmarked default in literary imagination, while Black, Indigenous, and other non-white identities were either absent or reduced to stereotypes. The canon thus mirrored and perpetuated the racial hierarchies of empire, framing Western civilization as the intellectual and moral center of the world. This dominance has made it difficult for non-European voices to be recognized on equal footing, even as they have long produced vibrant and complex literary traditions.

4.2. Reinterpretations by Authors of Color (e.g., *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie, *The Half-God of Rainfall* by Inua Ellams)

In response to this entrenched Eurocentrism, many authors of color have begun to reimagine classical narratives from their own cultural and racial standpoints, offering powerful reinterpretations that challenge the canonical center. Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), a contemporary retelling of Sophocles' *Antigone*, transposes the ancient Greek tragedy into the context of British Muslim identity, counterterrorism policies, and diasporic belonging. By centering the story on a Pakistani-British family and examining the racialized politics of citizenship and loyalty, Shamsie not only updates the ethical questions of the original text but also critiques the Western state's surveillance and policing of brown bodies. Similarly, Inua Ellams' *The Half-God of Rainfall* (2019) fuses Yoruba mythology with Greco-Roman gods to tell a story that is both epic and intimate, situating African cosmologies alongside and against the European classical tradition. Ellams uses the fusion to examine power, violence, and sexual abuse, especially as they affect Black bodies. His protagonist, a biracial demigod, becomes a symbol of hybrid identity and cultural resistance. Through these retellings, authors of color are not simply borrowing from classical traditions they are reshaping them to reflect contemporary experiences of race, colonial memory, and cultural hybridity. These works serve both as homage and critique, reclaiming space within and beyond the boundaries of the traditional canon.

4.3. Postcolonial Adaptations and Critiques of Whiteness and Empire in Classical Literature

Postcolonial adaptations of classical literature engage deeply with the legacy of empire, challenging the racial and imperial assumptions embedded in many canonical texts. These adaptations do more than translate classical stories into postcolonial settings; they interrogate the very foundations of the texts and the cultural systems that elevated them to canonical status. A prominent example is Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* (*Une Tempête*, 1969), a radical reworking of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In Césaire's version, Caliban becomes a symbol of Black resistance, directly confronting Prospero's colonial authority and rejecting assimilation. The play shifts the dynamics of the original, transforming what was once a tale of magic and reconciliation into a fierce indictment of racial oppression and imperialism. In this and similar works, the whiteness of canonical texts is not treated as incidental but as integral to their ideological function. Postcolonial writers expose how the canon has served to justify domination by framing European knowledge and power as civilized and universal. These authors use adaptation as a means of subversion, inserting marginalized perspectives, reworking character roles, and destabilizing the moral authority of the "classics." In doing so, they reimagine literary inheritance not as a one-way legacy of the West, but as a

contested and evolving dialogue between cultures. Through these critiques, the canon is no longer a fixed monument, but a dynamic site of resistance and redefinition in the postcolonial world.

Table 1: The Role of Eurocentrism in Shaping the Canon

Section	Main Focus	Key Points	Examples
The Role of Eurocentrism in Shaping the Canon	How Eurocentrism shaped the Western literary canon	Eurocentrism privileges European culture as universal standard Canon reflects Greco Roman, medieval Christian, British, French imperial traditions- Non-European literatures marginalized or excluded Non European cultures represented through colonial eroticizing lenses- Whiteness becomes default; racial hierarchies perpetuated	Canon dominated by Greco Roman and European texts Exclusion of Black, Indigenous, non white voices
Reinterpretations by Authors of Color	Authors of color reimagine classical narratives to challenge Eurocentrism	Classical stories retold from racial cultural standpoints Critiques of colonialism, racial politics, and identity Fusion of non-European mythologies with classical traditions Hybrid identities and cultural resistance emphasized	<i>Home Fire</i> by Kamila Shamsie: retelling <i>Antigone</i> with British Muslim context <i>The Half God of Rainfall</i> by Inua Ellams: Yoruba and Greco-Roman myth fusion
Postcolonial Adaptations and Critiques of Whiteness and Empire	Postcolonial works challenge racial and imperial assumptions in classical texts	Adaptations interrogate canon's ideological foundations Whiteness in classics viewed as central to imperial ideology Adaptation as subversion and insertion of marginalized voices Canon reimagined as dynamic, contested site of dialogue	Aimé Césaire's <i>A Tempest</i> : Caliban as Black resistance figure confronting colonial power

5. Power and Subversion in Adaptation

5.1. How Modern Retellings Interrogate Authority, Hierarchy, and Narrative Control

Modern retellings of classical texts do not simply update language or setting; they fundamentally question who has the right to speak, whose stories are told, and who is authorized to tell them. In traditional classical literature, narrative authority typically resides with male, often elite, protagonists and omniscient narrators whose perspectives are treated as objective or universal. Modern adaptations, however, disrupt these narrative hierarchies by shifting the point of view to characters who were previously marginalized, silenced, or villainized. This shift is not just aesthetic it is deeply political. When an author like Pat Barker retells *The Iliad* through the voice of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls*, she is directly challenging the authority of Homer and centuries of tradition that treated women in war stories as mere spoils or symbols. In doing so, such retellings deconstruct literary hierarchies that have long positioned certain voices as central and others as peripheral. By reclaiming narrative control, these works expose the constructed nature of "universal" truths, revealing how the canon has functioned to reinforce specific ideologies of gender, race, and class. Adaptation becomes a site of resistance, where existing power structures are not only revealed but also actively undone.

5.2. The Role of the Reader/Audience in Reclaiming Meaning

Adaptations also place new demands on readers and audiences, asking them to question inherited meanings and engage critically with both the original and the retelling. In this sense, the act of interpretation becomes collaborative and political. Traditional canons often positioned the reader as a passive recipient of sanctioned knowledge, reinforcing the authority of the text and its cultural gatekeepers. In contrast, modern retellings invite the reader to become a co-creator of meaning, to compare versions, notice absences, and interrogate contradictions. For example, when a reader encounters both Sophocles' *Antigone* and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, they are not just absorbing parallel narratives they are participating in a larger cultural conversation about law, loyalty, and state

violence across time and geography. This active engagement destabilizes the idea of the canonical text as sacred or immutable. Moreover, the experience of reading becomes politicized: readers are asked to consider not only what stories mean, but for whom they were originally told, and who benefits from those meanings. By involving the reader in the act of reinterpretation, adaptations democratize literary authority, opening up space for multiplicity, contestation, and cultural reclamation.

5.3. Performance and Power in Adaptations (e.g., *Black and Queer Shakespearean Productions*)

Performance, especially in theater, offers a particularly dynamic and embodied form of reinterpretation where issues of power, identity, and voice are made visible on stage. In Black and queer productions of canonical works like Shakespeare's plays, performance becomes a radical act of subversion. These productions do not merely diversify the cast they actively reframe the narrative, reshaping the cultural meaning of the text. For instance, in Black-led performances of *Othello*, casting choices and directorial emphasis can shift the focus from a cautionary tale about jealousy to a critique of systemic racism and the colonial gaze. Similarly, queer reinterpretations of *Hamlet* or *Twelfth Night* foreground themes of gender fluidity, identity performance, and the instability of desire often latent in the original texts but historically suppressed in traditional stagings. In these performances, bodies on stage challenge the racial and gendered assumptions of the canon, transforming the theatrical space into one of political contestation and imaginative liberation. The power of performance lies in its immediacy: it reclaims the voice and presence denied in written tradition and confronts the audience with alternative embodiments of history and identity. Through performance, the canon is not only rewritten but re-lived, offering new scripts for understanding power and resistance in both the past and the present.

Table 2: Power and Subversion in Adaptation

Key Theme	Summary	Examples/Details
Modern Retellings and Narrative Control	Modern adaptations question who controls stories and challenge traditional narrative authority, often male and elite-centered. These retellings give voice to marginalized characters, exposing literary hierarchies and ideologies.	Pat Barker's <i>The Silence of the Girls</i> retells <i>The Iliad</i> from Briseis's perspective, challenging Homer's authority and gender norms. Adaptation as resistance.
Role of Reader/Audience in Meaning	Readers are called to actively interpret, question canonical meanings, and engage critically with both originals and adaptations. This process democratizes literary authority.	Reading <i>Sophocles' Antigone</i> alongside Kamila Shamsie's <i>Home Fire</i> invites dialogue on law, loyalty, and state violence, encouraging political and cultural engagement.
Performance and Power in Adaptations	Theater performances, especially Black and queer reinterpretations of canonical texts, embody subversion by challenging race, gender, and identity norms, reshaping the text's cultural meaning.	Black-led <i>Othello</i> critiques systemic racism; queer productions of <i>Hamlet</i> or <i>Twelfth Night</i> highlight gender fluidity and suppressed themes, transforming theatrical space into political contestation.

6. Case Studies

6.1. *Antigone Retold Through Feminist/Postcolonial Lenses*

Sophocles' *Antigone* has long been considered a cornerstone of the Western tragic canon, exploring themes of law, familial loyalty, and defiance against state power. Traditionally, Antigone is celebrated as a tragic heroine who upholds divine and familial duties over the edicts of the state. However, feminist and postcolonial reinterpretations have significantly expanded and challenged this framing, using her story to address the complex intersections of gender, resistance, and marginalized identity. In contemporary adaptations like Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, the Antigone narrative is reimaged through the lens of British Muslim identity and state surveillance, placing the conflict between individual conscience and authoritarian rule within a racialized and post-9/11 political context. Shamsie transforms Antigone's act of burial into a debate over national loyalty and cultural alienation, while also exposing the gendered burdens placed on women as moral anchors in diasporic communities. Similarly, feminist

readings of Antigone as in Judith Butler's essay "Antigone's Claim" see her not only as a figure of resistance but also as one whose grief and defiance destabilize patriarchal norms. These reworkings complicate the original's moral binaries and open it to global, intersectional interpretations, turning Antigone into a symbol of ongoing struggles against legal injustice, colonial legacies, and patriarchal constraint.

6.2. *The Tempest and Its Reimagining in Colonial/Postcolonial Contexts (e.g., Aimé Césaire's A Tempest)*

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has become one of the most frequently reinterpreted plays in postcolonial literature, largely due to its allegorical resonance with imperial conquest, enslavement, and the politics of "civilizing" the Other. In the original play, Prospero wields magical control over the island and its inhabitants, particularly Caliban and Ariel, whom he treats as lesser beings. This power dynamic has made *The Tempest* an ideal text for postcolonial critique. Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest (Une Tempête)*, 1969) is perhaps the most direct and radical reimagining, transforming the play into a confrontation between colonizer and colonized. Written at the height of anti-colonial movements in the Francophone Caribbean, Césaire repositions Caliban as a symbol of Black resistance, a revolutionary who refuses assimilation and asserts his own identity and language. Prospero becomes a more explicitly colonial figure, representing the violence and hypocrisy of European domination. In this adaptation, Shakespeare's metaphor of the enchanted island becomes a battleground for competing worldviews: one rooted in domination, the other in liberation. Césaire's work does not merely critique the original but wrests it from Eurocentric hands, reconfiguring it within a Black radical tradition and making it speak to histories of enslavement, cultural erasure, and decolonization.

6.3. *Hamlet Reinterpreted in Diasporic or Gender-Nonconforming Frameworks*

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has traditionally been read as a meditation on mortality, madness, and political decay. However, its richness as a text also allows for profound reinterpretation through the lenses of gender identity and cultural displacement. In gender-nonconforming productions, *Hamlet* becomes a powerful vehicle for exploring the instability of identity, the performativity of gender roles, and the pressures of heteronormative expectations. For example, when Hamlet is cast as a woman or nonbinary person, as in some recent experimental productions, the character's internal conflict can be reimagined as one of gender dysphoria or resistance to patriarchal codes of succession and authority. The existential struggle "to be or not to be" takes on new resonance when placed within a framework of queer marginalization. Meanwhile, diasporic reinterpretations, such as those set in South Asian, African, or Caribbean contexts, foreground themes of exile, language, and cultural hybridity. Hamlet's return from university and his alienation at court resonate with the experiences of second-generation immigrants or postcolonial subjects negotiating multiple identities and inherited trauma. These adaptations demonstrate that *Hamlet* is not a static monument of Western genius but a dynamic site of cultural translation, capable of expressing the psychic and political tensions of diverse, contemporary realities.

Table 3: Antigone Retold Through Feminist/Postcolonial Lense

Case Study Title	Key Theme and Adaptation Focus	Summary	Examples/Details
Antigone Retold Through Feminist/Postcolonial Lenses	Feminist and postcolonial reinterpretations of <i>Antigone</i> explore themes of gender, resistance, and marginalized identity.	<i>Antigone</i> is reimagined through modern lenses, addressing the intersections of gender, race, and state power. These adaptations challenge moral binaries and reveal complex global struggles.	Kamila Shamsie's <i>Home Fire</i> repositions the <i>Antigone</i> narrative within the context of British Muslim identity, post surveillance, and cultural alienation. Judith Butler's feminist interpretation in <i>Antigone's Claim</i> explores gendered resistance.
The Tempest and Its Reimagining in Colonial/Postcolonial	<i>The Tempest</i> as a postcolonial critique of imperialism, colonial	<i>The Tempest</i> is reinterpreted as a postcolonial allegory of domination and resistance,	Aimé Césaire's <i>A Tempest</i> reimagines <i>The Tempest</i> from a Black radical perspective, turning Caliban into a

Contexts	violence, and the relationship between colonizer and colonized.	focusing on the colonial dynamics between Prospero and Caliban.	symbol of anti-colonial resistance and reframing Prospero as a figure of European colonial violence.
Hamlet Reinterpreted in Diasporic or Gender-Nonconforming Frameworks	<i>Hamlet</i> as a vehicle for exploring gender identity, cultural displacement, and the instability of identity in diasporic contexts.	<i>Hamlet</i> becomes a site of gender and cultural reinterpretation, exploring identity, exile, and queer marginalization.	Gender-nonconforming productions of <i>Hamlet</i> reinterpret the protagonist's internal conflict as one of gender dysphoria or resistance to patriarchal norms. Diasporic adaptations explore themes of cultural hybridity, alienation, and postcolonial trauma.

7. The Politics of Rewriting

Rewriting the canon is not merely a literary act it is a political one. To retell a canonical text is to intervene in cultural memory, to challenge the authority of established narratives, and to offer alternative visions of history and identity. The politics of rewriting involves a confrontation with the institutions academic, publishing, theatrical that have historically dictated which texts are preserved, studied, and revered. By rewriting these texts, contemporary authors and artists assert that the canon is not sacred but constructed, often through processes of exclusion, suppression, and ideological enforcement. Rewriting becomes a method of reclaiming space for voices silenced by colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and heteronormativity. It challenges the notion that cultural inheritance flows in a single direction, from the "center" outward, and instead emphasizes dialogue, disruption, and multiplicity. Moreover, rewriting is often met with resistance, as it threatens dominant identities and historical interpretations. Critics may accuse adaptors of disrespecting or distorting the "original," failing to recognize that what is considered original was itself shaped by context, ideology, and power. The politics of rewriting, then, is about more than content it is about reconfiguring authority, legitimacy, and belonging in the cultural sphere. It asks who gets to write, who gets to revise, and who is allowed to imagine different futures from shared pasts.

Table 4: The Politics of Rewriting

Aspect	Explanation
Nature of Rewriting	Not just literary, but a political act that intervenes in cultural memory and challenges established narratives.
Purpose	To offer alternative visions of history and identity by challenging canonical authority.
Institutions Challenged	Academic, publishing, theatrical institutions that control which texts are preserved and revered.
Canon Characteristics	Constructed, exclusionary, shaped by ideological enforcement (colonialism, patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity).
Goal of Rewriting	To reclaim space for silenced voices and disrupt the single-direction flow of cultural inheritance.
Method	Dialogue, disruption, multiplicity instead of fixed, linear transmission of culture.
Resistance Faced	Accusations of disrespect or distortion from critics who overlook the original's own ideological context.
Broader Implications	Reconfigures authority, legitimacy, and belonging; questions who has the power to write, revise, and imagine futures.

8. Conclusion

This paper has examined how contemporary reinterpretations of classical texts serve as critical interventions into the literary canon, challenging its historical foundations of gender exclusion, racial hierarchy, and cultural centralization. By exploring the canon's origins in Eurocentric, patriarchal, and heteronormative ideologies, we revealed how classical texts have long been used to uphold dominant power structures under the guise of timelessness and universality. Through feminist, postcolonial, and queer theoretical lenses, we analyzed how modern authors and artists reclaim and reshape these foundational narratives. Works such as Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*, and gender-nonconforming adaptations of *Hamlet* demonstrate how

reinterpretation functions not merely as an aesthetic project but as a political act an act of resistance, reclamation, and reimagination. These rewritings do not simply modernize the classics; they question who has historically been given narrative authority and who has been silenced or erased. As such, adaptation becomes a space where the boundaries of tradition are interrogated and transformed. The implications for literary scholarship are profound: reinterpretation should be recognized as a form of critical theory that invites more inclusive, flexible, and ethically engaged approaches to textual analysis. For creators and educators alike, the canon becomes not a static inheritance but a living archive open to recontextualization and innovation. The rise of rewritten texts from historically marginalized communities Black, Indigenous, queer, trans, diasporic, and disabled—enriches our collective understanding of literature’s capacity to evolve in dialogue with social change. Ultimately, the act of rewriting the canon is not about discarding the past but about rethinking how tradition can serve as a platform for transformation. It asserts that cultural heritage must be actively reinterpreted if it is to remain relevant and just. In reclaiming these stories, contemporary artists are not only reshaping literature but also expanding the cultural imagination making space for new voices, new meanings, and a more equitable vision of what it means to inherit and reimagine the classics.

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