

# *The Advantages of Rewriting and Decentering Classical Literary Works*

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## **Abstract:**

Classical works are precious works that mesmerize a myriad of readers all over the world. However, they are not perfect. This article endeavors to shed light on some rewritten classical works that have been decentered by some authors to show the importance of rewriting classical oeuvres. Although rewriting classics seems needless since it is based on repetition, this study seeks to vindicate that rewriting is advantageous for both writers and readers. By using different literary examples and critical perspectives, the analysis reveals that Aimé Césaire in *A Tempest* writes back to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to empower colonized people. In addition, Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* revises Bartha's misrepresented image in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Moreover, Angela Carter and Carol Ann Duffy rewrite the fairy tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" to give a voice to voiceless women. Rewriting is also helpful for postmodern authors to demonstrate their literary talents in conveying new postmodern identity issues, like Tom Stoppard decentering Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Consequently, there are various merits of rewriting classical literary works and the act of rewriting is necessary rather than repetitive.

**Keywords:** Advantages; classical works; perspectives; revising; rewriting; writing back.

## ملخص:

الأعمال الكلاسيكية هي أعمال ثمينة التي تفتن عددًا لا يحصى من القراء في جميع أنحاء العالم. ومع ذلك، فهي ليست مثالية. يحاول هذا المقال تسليط الضوء على بعض الكتب الكلاسيكية المعاد كتابتها لإظهار أهمية إعادة صياغتها. على الرغم من أن إعادة كتابتها تبدو غير ضرورية لأنها تستند على التكرار، إلا أن هذه الدراسة تسعى إلى إثبات أن إعادة الكتابة مفيدة لكل من الكتاب والقراء. باستخدام أمثلة أدبية مختلفة ووجهات نظر نقدية، يكشف التحليل أن إيمي سيزار في مسرحيته "زوبعة" أعاد كتابة مسرحية "الزوبعة" لشكسبير لتقوية الأشخاص المستعمرين. بالإضافة، قامت جين ريس في "بحر سارجاسو الواسع" بمراجعة صورة بارثا المشوهة في "جين آير" لشارلوت برونتي. علاوة على ذلك، أعادت أنجيلا كارتر وكارول آن دافي كتابة القصة الخيالية "ذات الرداء الأحمر" لاعطاء صوت للنساء اللواتي لا صوت لهن. إعادة الكتابة مفيدة أيضًا لكتاب ما بعد الحداثة لإظهار مواهبهم الأدبية في نقل قضايا جديدة تتعلق بهوية ما بعد الحداثة، مثل توم ستوبارد الذي غير "هاملت" لشكسبير في مسرحيته "روسنكرانتز وغيلديسترن موتي" وبالتالي، هناك مزايا مختلفة لإعادة كتابة الأعمال الأدبية الكلاسيكية وفعل إعادة الكتابة ضروري وليس تكرار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مزايا : الأعمال الكلاسيكية؛ وجهات نظر؛ مراجعة :إعادة الكتابة؛ كتابة الرد.

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## 1– Introduction

One of the most outstanding topics in literature is rewriting canonical classical works. It provokes ceaseless debates and endless discussions either of approval or disapproval. Accordingly, due to their importance, many researchers and scholars promote disseminating canonical literary works by rewriting them. Although translating classical works is always encouraged, rewriting them is a controversial matter. Many critics and readers oppose the idea of rewriting the canonical classical literary works and attack the writers who dare to resemble the great literary figures and use classical masterpieces. However, many researchers encourage rewriting and retelling the precious classics by giving them another version, especially in modernism and postmodernism which are based on parody and pastiche. A myriad of authors follows Ezra Pound's emblem of "Making [classical works] New". It is generally acknowledged that classics are literary works par excellence that charmed countless readers and audiences over many years and all over the world. In one way or another they are rewritten by different generations, but is it good to remain within the same circle of repeating and rewriting original classical works? Hence, what is the importance of rewriting classical literary works? Rewriting is like a double-edged sword because it has favorable as well as unfavorable consequences. Accordingly, this study seeks to shed light on the positive aspects of rewriting canonical classical works. The research encourages rewriting classics not for the sake of repeating, but for putting authors' own inputs, personal touches and individual talents. That is to say, the study aims at showing that rewriting classics does not mean following blindly and slavishly the original work. It is, rather, based on novelty and creativity. Thus, the research aims to show that rewriting canonical classical works is extremely helpful and useful for the writer as well as for the reader through different examples of literary works belonging to different historical periods, mainly modern and postmodern eras. The importance of this research lies in demonstrating the various benefits of rewriting classical works.

## 2– Theoretical Background

Canonical classical works are precious books that attract the attention of a myriad of readers all over the world. Among the ways to disseminate such works are translation and rewriting. Much ink has been spilled on the benefits of translating literary works to be universal, especially in the globalization era. Yet, rewriting classical works is sometimes discouraged to advocate creation and innovation. Hannah Fielding says: "For me, the answer to whether we should rewrite the classics is 'no'. First, because I feel it is

disrespectful to the author. As Sam Leith put it in the Guardian article, ‘If you rewrite an actual novel, you look the author in the eye.’ Second, because evidently the original work is powerful given that it has endured, and to interfere with the work risks diminishing that power” (2020). However, this research endeavors to argue that rewriting classical works is important in the modern and postmodern literature.

Actually, in many cases, rewriting canonical classical works is encouraged. However, to rewrite a classical work, in modern and postmodern periods, it is necessary to keep the essence and the core of the original literary work and add personal modifications. In other words, any writer’s fingerprint and flavor are essential to avoid repetition, otherwise, the process of rewriting classics is spoiled. Any writer is in need to create a literary framework that distinguishes him from other writers to stand as a peculiar and unique writer rather than merely recycling other ideas and repeating the classical works. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of the most outstanding German writers, claims that “apprehension and representation of the individual is the very life of art. Besides, while you content yourself with generalities, everybody can imitate you; but, in the particular, none can— and why? Because no others have experienced exactly the same thing” (as cited in Zhang, 2006, p. 375). In this regard, using a writer’s individual talent is highly appreciated in writing and rewriting classical works.

Various writers advocate the idea of mingling tradition with modernity to get a new masterpiece, but the most remarkable authors are T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett. In his essay “Tradition and The Individual Talent”, T. S. Eliot, who is a classist in literature, states the importance of tradition by having a historical sense of previous dead authors and their masterpieces. He says that tradition

involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which ...involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (Eliot, 2000, p. 2207).

That is to say, tradition is not inherited, but it requires great labor. T. S. Eliot ascertains: “Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor” (2000, p. 2207). Yet, Eliot clarifies the true meaning of tradition. He says: “If the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged... novelty is better than

repetition” (2000, p. 2207). That is to say, rewriting classical works without novelty is discouraged. In this case, the dissemination of literary works remains in an empty cycle of repetition and imitation.

However, by rewriting canonical classical works with innovation, the dissemination of such works through rewriting is tremendously beneficial not only for the writer, but for the reader as well. According to Justin Cox, “Rewriting is always a great idea. Before something publishes, rewriting helps flesh out ideas and clarify points. After something publishes, it’s never a bad idea to clean up issues that were missed or correct a typo here and there” (as cited in Jungton, 2020). Rewriting classics enables the writer to approach the literary masterpiece from another angle and another perspective. Accordingly, the writer does not only update the classical work, but he also criticizes and views the work from another standpoint and even ‘writes back’ to the original writer. In other words, the writer can be a colonized person writing back to the colonizers as he can be a female responding to the male’s canon or he can be any writer who wants to transplant and update the classics to suit the needs of his society and readers. Moreover, rewriting classics increases the writer’s reputation because he dares to resemble the classical works and his name is connected with the great literary figures. Thus, rewritten books fascinate more readers because they are, most of the time, familiar with the original work. Although there is not any original story, readers, reading the rewritten work, are curious to draw similarities and differences between the two works and in case the reader does not have any idea about the canonical classical work, he needs to read the original one to appreciate the rewritten literary work. Indeed, rewriting classics widens readers’ knowledge since they are no longer passive recipients, but active partners, especially in modern and postmodern periods.

### 3– Analysis

One of the most important advantages of rewriting classics is to ‘write back’ to the original writer. It is not only a favorable idea to rewrite canonical classical works, it is something necessary for the colonized writer to rewrite the colonizers’ literary works. Colonizers establish their own literary discourse and canon in which they depict the colonized people as weak, meek, inferior, evil, savage and barbaric creatures. They are the ‘Other’. However, they portray themselves as strong, superior, civilized and good humans. They are the ‘Self’. The colonized person needs to rewrite the classics to ‘write back’ to the colonizers as Salman Rushdie says: “The Empire writes back to the Centre” (as cited in Litvack, 2007). Thus, it is obligatory to rewrite classics to dispel colonial prejudices and negative attitudes towards the colonized. According to Helen Tiffin, “it

has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position... Thus the rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional records are vital and inescapable tasks” (Tiffin, 1987, pp. 17-18). The colonized writers establish their own discourse called “postcolonial counter-discourse” to give a voice to the voiceless colonized in colonizers’ literary canon. They rewrite the colonizers’ literary works to defend the position of weak colonized people and the most important leaders of the theory are Edward Said and Homi Bhabha.

Many canonical classical works have been rewritten under the category of colonial and postcolonial counter-discourse to eliminate the colonizers’ racist ideas in their literary canon. In fact, there is a myriad of examples of rewriting classics to defend the marginalized colonized people, but the idea of colonial discourse is dated back to many ancient European literary works. However, the most remarkable colonial discourse is mentioned in the works of Shakespeare; for instance, *Othello* and *The Tempest*. In 1969, Aimé Césaire, through his play *A Tempest* (Une Tempête) ‘wrote back’ to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. In addition, both Samuel Selvon, in his book *Moses Ascending* and J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* rewrote the classical work *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and Jean Rhys, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, responded to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Graham Swift’s *Waterland* and Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* are other versions of Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*.

As far as Shakespeare’s works are concerned, they embody colonial ideas, although his works are considered milestones in English literature. In *The Tempest*, he attributes negative images to the non-European character Caliban. He is the son of a witch named Sycoras who was born in Algeria. In addition, Prospero always insults Caliban calling him a “Dull thing”, “slave Caliban”, “tortoise!” (Shakespeare, 1964, p. 316) and “poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/upon thy wicked dam” (p. 319). In this regard, Prospero’s daughter Miranda also considers Caliban a villain and savage person. Yet, the most quoted offensive insult is the following:

PROSPERO. A devil, a born devil on whose nature  
Nurture can never stick, on whom my pains,  
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost.  
And as with age his body uglier grows,  
So his mind cankers. I will plague them all,  
Even to roaring (1964, pp. 188-193)

Hence, it is necessary to rewrite the play to dispel such prejudices against non-Europeans. Aimé Césaire writes back to Shakespeare by focusing on Caliban in his play *A Tempest* which takes place in the Caribbean. Césaire changes the beast-like Caliban in

Shakespeare's play to a colonized black person who calls for his freedom by articulating his ideas against Prospero and colonialism. For Liang Fei, "Shakespeare makes his Caliban disappear almost silently and gives the whole stage to Prospero, in *A Tempest*, Césaire gives the privilege to Caliban. He is no longer traceless even he does not appear on stage. His voice is heard" (Fei, 2007, p. 120). In other words, Caliban is a mouthpiece for Césaire who expresses his ideas against colonialism.

In Césaire's play, Caliban actively responds to Prospero in his native language. It is stated in the play:

CALIBAN: Uhuru!

PROSPERO: What did you say?

CALIBAN: I said Uhuru!

PROSPERO: Mumbling your native language again! I've already told you, I don't like it.

....

PROSPERO: Gracious as always, you ugly ape! How can anyone be so ugly!

CALIBAN: You think I'm ugly...well, I don't think you're so handsome yourself. With that big hooked nose, you look just like some old vulture. (laughing) An old vulture with a scrawny neck! (Césaire, 1985, p. 11)

Caliban in the play is given a voice by Césaire to defend himself to be free. He responds to Prospero in the following way: "Without you? I'd be the king...the king of the Island...given me by my mother, Sycorax" (Césaire, 1985, p. 11). Then, he adds: "What I want is (shouting) Freedom now!" (p. 21) and for him "better death than humiliation and injustice" (p. 23). In fact, Caliban's emblem in the rewritten play of Césaire is to restore back his usurped land by Prospero. In a conversation with Prospero, it is mentioned:

PROSPERO: What were you hoping for?

CALIBAN: To get back my island and regain my freedom.

...

PROSPERO: And what would you do all alone here on this island, haunted by the devil, tempest tossed?

CALIBAN: First of all, I'd get rid of you! I'd spit you out, all your works and pomps! Your "white" magic!

....

CALIBAN: You know very well that I'm not interested in peace. I'm interested in being free!, you hear? (Césaire, 1985, p. 63)

In this regard, Caliban advocates his freedom by responding to Prospero. Césaire's play ends with Caliban's freedom words by saying "FREEDOM HI-DAY, FREEDOM HI-DAY" (1985, p. 68). Thus, through the examples of Shakespeare and Césaire, rewriting classical works is fruitful for colonized people to express their wishes for freedom and most importantly to repudiate the colonizers' misrepresentations, prejudices and stereotypes. Therefore, Césaire keeps the original characters of Shakespeare's play, but he subverts their roles to show his talent.

Regardless of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and its prequel *Wide Sargasso Sea* written by Jean Rhys undoubtedly stand as another epitome of colonial and postcolonial counter-discourse. Rhys rewrites *Jane Eyre* by focusing on Rochester's wife Bertha, "The mad woman in the attic", and gives her a voice since she is not only silenced in Brontë's novel, but she is also portrayed terrifyingly. Mr. Rochester says: "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!--as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before" (Brontë, 1992, p. 257). She is simply described as the other. Furthermore, Brontë describes Bertha, a creole, as "a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal" (p. 258). Hence, Bertha is described in a humiliating way from the perspective of Brontë's colonial discourse.

From a postcolonial standpoint, Rhys writes back to Brontë by giving a voice to the voiceless Bertha. In an interview, Rhys explains her aim behind rewriting Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. She says: "When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she (Brontë) think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful mad woman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been....I thought I'd try to write her a life" (as cited in Kadhim, 2011, p. 590). Accordingly, Rhys empowers Bertha or Antoinette, her real name, to tell her story of her marriage and madness since "madness is not viewed as an inherited disease, but a condition these women are driven to" (Rody as cited in Tokley, 1999, p. 55). In this regard, Bertha's madness is not hereditary. It is the result of her patriarchal and colonial environment. In fact, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha shows resistance to Mr. Rochester, unlike her character in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. She refuses to be called Bertha, the given name by Mr. Rochester. She says: "Bertha is not my name you are trying to make me into someone else calling me by another name. I know, that's Obeah too" (Rhys,

1982, p. 133). Furthermore, she expresses her ideas freely. She responds to Mr. Rochester by saying: “I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it...I hate it now like I hate you” (p. 134) and “You see. That’s how you are. A stone” (p. 134). She aspires to repudiate her husband’s patriarchal and colonial shackles. In this regard, Helen Tiffin ascertains: “Wide Sargasso Sea directly contests British sovereignty– of persons, of place, of culture, of language. It reinvests its own hybridised world with a provisionally authoritative perspective” (Tiffin, 1987, p. 23). Bertha even tries to change her husband’s colonial vision of Jamaican land. Mr. Rochester states: “Everything is too much. I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me” (Rhys, 1982, p. 39). He considers the land and people as the other different from his homeland England, the self. In a conversation, Mr. Rochester says to Bertha: “This is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me quite unreal and like a dream” (p. 73). However, Bertha defends her land by responding in the following way: “But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?” (p. 73). Therefore, one essential merit of rewriting canonical classical works is to write back to colonial discourse to correct distorted stories about colonized people.

Apart from rewriting canonical classical works as postcolonial counter– discourse, they are rewritten by female writers to respond to males’ canon and chauvinism which adhere to the patriarchal system. Rewriting classics is also beneficial for women. Fairy tales as a major part of classics, play an important role in internalizing the idea of females’ passivity and submission and males’ superiority. Silima Nanda says: “Fairy tales embody the way in which society has attempted to silence and oppress women, making them passive. Fairy tales have been known to reinforce the notion that women should be wives and mothers, submissive and self-sacrificing” (as cited in Alexiou, 2020, p. 6). Thus, women rewrite the classics to subvert their position in males’ literary canon, especially fairy tales. Consequently, instead of saying “Once upon a time” to start a fairy tale, women writers may start it by saying “Twice upon a time” as Elizabeth Wanning Harries entitled her book. She says:

Re–vising or revisiting the canon with a cold and critical eye has been part of many women writers’ projects...Because the tales written by Perrault and by the Grimms had become the dominant, canonical fairy–tale mode, women writers of fairy tales...often wrote against that canon...Certainly much of the recent fairy–tales revival has involved the comic or tragic inversion of traditional fairy–tale expectations. (Harris, 2001, p. 14)



Hence, instead of portraying women in fairy tales as weak, meek, passive and submissive, women writers convert the original fairy tale written by men to depict strong and independent women who repudiate patriarchal assumptions.

Angela Carter rewrites the fairy tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” by Charles Perrault. Her new story is entitled “The Company of Wolves”. In the original male tale, the Little Red Riding Hood is presented as weak and naïve and the male hunter is her savior. However, in “The Company of Wolves”, Carter depicts the female protagonist as strong and active. In other words, the wolf is transformed into a werewolf that eats the female’s grandmother and plans to eat her as well, but the Little Red Riding Hood is sexually strong because she is an adult girl and is not a child as in the original fairy tale. She succeeds to attract and seduce the werewolf. It is stated:

Naked she combed out her hair with her  
Fingers; her hair looked white as the snow  
Outside. Then went directly to the man with red  
Eyes in whose unkempt mane the lice moved;  
She stood up on tiptoe and unbuttoned the  
Collar of his shirt.  
‘What big arms you have.’  
‘All the better to hug you with.’ (Carter, 1979, p.459-466)

Then, the tale ends with the female sleeping with the werewolf: “See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s/ bed, between the paws of the tender wolf.” (Carter, 1979, p. 504-505). Carter portrays her female character as sexually strong and seductive as a man by converting the traditional established binary oppositions of gender relationships. She “strongly emphasizes the woman desire and sex liberation, playing with the reader expectations about the traditional roles of masculine and feminine... she brings to light the hidden aspects of female sexuality, fantasies and repressed desires” (Da Silva, 2004, p. 4). Thus, Carter sheds light on women’s sexuality which is regarded as a taboo in a patriarchal society. In this regard, “the majority of Angela Carter’s works revolve around...her critique of the patriarchal roles that have been placed on women throughout time. Her female protagonist often takes on empowered roles...and fight for both sexual and political equality” (Nouri & Mohammadi, 2015, p. 102). Albeit Carter is a British author, her works reflect American radical ideas to liberate women in patriarchal societies where the forest and wolves in Carter’s “The Company of Wolves” are symbols of life

and men in real societies. Therefore, rewriting fairy tales is beneficial for female authors to unfetter women from patriarchal stereotypes and shackles.

The fairy tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” is also rewritten by the contemporary Scottish poet, Carol Ann Duffy. She changes the story in her poem *Little Red Cap* by presenting Little Red Cap as a strong and cunning female who is “at childhood’s end” (Duffy as cited in Smith, 2006, p. 1), unlike the original female who is young and innocent. In her poem, the wolf is personified and presented as a male poet and Little Red Cap had a sexual relationship with him for a long time to learn poetry. Little Red Cap says: “my first. You might ask why. Here’s why. Poetry/ The wolf, I knew, would lead me deep into the woods/away from home, to a dark tangled thorny place” (Duffy as cited in Smith, 2006, p. 13–15). In the end, Little Red Cap kills the wolf by herself without the help of a male savior as in the original tale. It is stated in the poem:

to a willow to see how it wept. I took an axe to a salmon  
to see how it leapt. I took an axe to the wolf  
as he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat, and saw  
the glistening, virgin white of my grandmother’s bones.  
I filled his old belly with stones. I stitched him up.

Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone. (Duffy as cited in Smith, 2006, pp. 37–42)

That is to say, Duffy gives a voice to the voiceless and weak Little Red Cap and brings her from the shade to the spotlight by portraying her as strong and active as men. In addition, through rewriting fairy tales, Duffy criticizes males’ canon. In an interview, Duffy says: “The wolf’s belly, the grandmother inside, are all there waiting to be used. In a sense, in the poem, the grandmother’s bones are the silent women who aren’t present in English Literature. [Female writers] looked back to see why women hadn’t been recognized as a presence in poetry” (Duffy, 2005). Actually, rewriting fairy tales has a great advantage for female authors because it helps them to give a voice to the voiceless and marginalized women in males’ writings.

American female authors also rewrite fairy tales and the most noticeable one is Barbara G. Walker. In her book, she changes the original male tale by presenting women as strong and independent. One of the twenty-eight tales is the most well-known fairy tale “Snow White”, but Walker changes the title to “Snow Night” because the princess has “skin white as snow and hair black as night” (Walker, 1996, p. 24). Unlike the original tale, the women are all good persons, especially Snow Night’s stepmother who is portrayed as strong as well as a good-hearted woman. Hence, powerful women are no longer

associated with evil and witchcraft. In addition, hatred between stepmother and stepdaughter is absent in “Snow Night” and there is a sense of sisterhood. In a conversation between Lord Hunter and the stepmother, Hunter says: “But don’t stepmothers always hate their stepdaughters?” She responds: “That must be one of the ridiculous traditions about women invented by men. A stepmother has every reason to get along with her stepdaughter. Why cause unnecessary strife? In any case, I’m quite fond of Snow Night. She’s a good-hearted little thing....Why would I be so foolish as to mistreat her?” (Walker, 1996, p. 91-92). Actually, the conflict is between Snow Night and her suitor Lord Hunter because she refuses to marry him although he is “a very gallant gentleman” (p. 24). Thus, he decides to kill her, but the dwarves save her from Lord Hunter. According to Sofia Alexiou,

Snow Night’s objection to the Huntsman’s romantic advances are not traditional of the fairy tale genre....Additionally, the Queen’s fondness of Snow Night and disagreement with the Huntsman’s sinister suggestions to have her killed denote compassion and affection for her which contrasts with the original tale...in Walker’s version, the Queen’s liking of Snow Night omits the hostility, insecurity and competitiveness towards Snow White that is not only present in the original tale, but in society also. (Alexiou, 2020, p. 2)

In fact, Walker repudiates the traditional established system of gender roles in the original males’ fairy tales by depicting women as good and strong; however, men are portrayed as bad persons. The fairy tale ends as follows: “As for Lord Hunter, his reason quite gone....In later years, he sometimes passed the weary hours by writing stories. It is said that he wrote an entirely different version of the story you have just heard” (Walker, 1996, p. 104). Hence, Walker subverts the stereotypes about women and men to present evil men, like Lord Hunter and even his story is distorted. That is to say, women are in need to revise males’ stories to give them another dimension. Indeed, rewriting fairy tales is beneficial because women rewrite and transfer their weak and meek identities to strong and independent ones. In addition, the reader also benefits from rewriting tales because while reading a rewritten fairy tale, a flood of questions assails his mind and he is active to draw affinities and differences between the two versions of the fairy tales.

Another advantage of rewriting classics is criticizing them because they are not perfect works. They have shortcomings that ought to be highlighted. Rewriting also helps the writer to transmit a new message by depending on an easy-access source of classics to suit the readers’ needs. Rewriting canonical classical works facilitates conveying an effective message, especially if the work is as famous as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Many writers rewrite

*Hamlet*, but the most outstanding work is Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in the postmodern era. On the one hand, Stoppard rewrites *Hamlet* to criticize Shakespeare because his minor characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were not well developed in his play. Shakespeare's play focuses on the hero Hamlet and neglects the minor characters. However, Stoppard, in his play, puts much focus on little and ordinary persons that represent every man in a modern and postmodern world. He makes *Hamlet* upside down by changing the major characters from Hamlet to minor characters and placing minor characters such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the center of the play. Clive Barnes says: "The play of Hamlet not seen through the eyes of Hamlet, or Claudius, or Ophelia or Gertrude, but a worm's-eye view of tragedy seen from the bewildered standpoint of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" (1967). In the whole play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to scrutinize the reasons behind Hamlet's madness and they wait for the king's order to kill Hamlet. Another criticism of Shakespeare's play is that heroes, kings, queens and persons of high class are no longer at the center of plays and theater. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, "the narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). In this regard, little and ordinary men and anti-heroes are at the heart of modern and postmodern plays. For Dennis Huston, "The play's title is a quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In Shakespeare, the announcement comes across as an unfortunate mishap that is overshadowed by many other, more tragic, deaths. However, when repeated in Stoppard's play the little line picks up gravity, bringing significance to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths" (Huston, 1991, p. 422). Thus, through rewriting, Stoppard gives a voice to the minor characters as well as ordinary people. In this regard, he gives a new dimension to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

However, on the other hand, Stoppard rewrites *Hamlet* to depict and address modern men's plight and existential crisis to shed light on the affinities between Hamlet's world and the modern world. Because many people are familiar with the play of *Hamlet*, Stoppard chose it to convey an effective and strong message. Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* mingles many ingredients. It is not only an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, but it also embodies absurdist characteristics which are echoes of Beckett's masterpiece *Waiting for Godot*. Yet, Stoppard adds his flavor through his brilliant language. Paul Cantor opines: "In [Stoppard's] *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*...*Hamlet* meets *Waiting for Godot*, and *Waiting for Godot* wins" (Cantor, 1989, p. 88). Stoppard rewrites and updates the classical work, but with a new structure that reflects the features of the Theatre of the Absurd. He rewrites the classical work *Hamlet* in an absurdist manner to meet his readers' needs and his historical period. Richard Corballis views that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are portrayed as an

extension of the audience and therefore as ‘real’ people; the Hamlet characters, by virtue of the onstage audience (added to the offstage one) are made to appear all the more stagey, ‘clockwork’ and ‘unreal’” (1984, p. 36). In fact, one feature of modern and postmodern literary works is rewriting canonical classical oeuvres in a new manner by following the emblem of Ezra Pound “Make it New”. Therefore, Stoppard transmits his message through the most outstanding play in English literature to be more effective and memorable.

Stoppard’s play addresses important issues in modern society that are almost connected to Hamlet’s world. Starting with man’s passivity, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in Stoppard’s play, are like Beckett’s characters Vladimir and Estragon. They spend the whole time waiting and in that way they are passive and paralyzed as a modern man who is unable to act and decide. Jean-Francois Lyotard says:

Rather than facing great dangers, they gamble and play word games; rather than embarking on great voyages, they remain static as the action of Hamlet swirls past them; and rather than seeking great goals, they complain of lacking any real ‘direction’. If anything ails them, they could be said to be suffering from the postmodern condition” (as cited in Buse, 2001, p. 51).

In this way, they are all like Hamlet who is also passive and unable to take an action. In the play, it is stated:

GUIL: Are you happy?

ROS: What?

GUIL: Content? At ease?

ROS: I suppose so.

GUIL: What are you going to do now?

ROS: I don’t know. What do you want to do?

GUIL: I have no desires. None. (Stoppard, 1967, p. 17)

Both characters, like Hamlet, are paralyzed in their postmodern milieu. They even confuse their names as a sign of their wandering and disillusionment: “ROS: My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz/ GUIL confers briefly with him/ (Without embarrassment) I’m sorry–his name’s Guildenstern, and I’m Rosencrantz” (Stoppard, 1967, p. 22). Another important issue is modern man’s existence crisis, especially after the appearance of existentialism which is an underlying theme in Stoppard’s absurdist play. In other words, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* echoes Hamlet’s existence problem

“To be or not to be that is the question”. According to Hooti and Shooshtarian, “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two useless characters in Shakespeare’s tragedy, are in search of their identities and their past in a modern sense, completely unaware that past and all its ideals are gone with the wind, and a new postmodernist atmosphere has pervaded the air” (2011, p. 161). To be precise and concise, through rewriting the canonical classical work, Stoppard highlights Shakespeare’s Hamlet’s shortcomings as well as he addresses new modern and postmodern issues that are connected to the classical work to make his message more effective and audible.

#### 4- Conclusion

The aim of the article is to investigate the importance of rewriting classical works. In this regard, the research unravels that rewriting canonical classical works is helpful for both the writer and the reader. Although classics inspire and bewitch many writers and readers, it is necessary to rewrite and view them with a critical eye to make things clear because in literature there is not a perfect work, there is always room for interpretation and criticism. However, rewriting classics is not always encouraged. It does not have merely advantages, it has also drawbacks and disadvantages in which originality vanishes. The analysis reveals that rewriting canonical classical works is beneficial to postcolonial authors to write back to colonial canon as the example of Césaire’s *A Tempest* rewriting Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* responding to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* to correct the misrepresented colonized characters. In addition, female writers also rewrite classical works to subvert men’s writings about women to advocate women’s rights, such as Angela Carter and Carl Ann Duffy rewriting the fairy tale of “Little Red Riding Hood”. The postmodern author, Tom Stoppard, rewrites Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to criticize and advocate postmodern messages congruent with the needs of his readers. Yet, such a topic of rewriting canonical classical works is open to further future research to diagnose other merits of rewriting classical works or pinpoint further shortcomings of rewriting.

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