

While money can't buy happiness, it certainly lets you choose your own misery: A postcolonial investigation of How It Happened as a Rewriting of Pride and Prejudice

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Abstract

The undertaken study focused on the theme of money by detecting the influence of Pride and Prejudice on How It Happened and how the theme is manipulated within the cultural scenario of South Asian Pakistan. The postcolonial theory of rewriting provided the theoretical framework for the study. The comparative method in the textual analysis provided the technique for data extraction and analysis of the two undertaken texts. The findings proved that the influence of Pride and Prejudice existed with all its charm for the past 200 years. The gap is bridged by the act of rewriting, within the specific cultural scenario of the once reader and now the rewriter Haider (2013), portraying her indigenous and regional influence by accepting and transforming the inspiration of the canon text and depicting the impact of money on characters, their thought and actions. However, the findings led to the conclusion that the theme of money stands secondary to the preferences of the characters and the differences in treatment of mercenary values by the characters explicitly depict How It Happened as an extension to Pride and Prejudice.

Key words: *Rewriting, postcolonial, comparison, money, cultural scenario*

Introduction:

Among various writers from the past, Jane Austen has been prominent among all and has been influencing the literatures of the world with her inspirational power. Austen had been one of the writers, who have been translated into languages other than the one she originally wrote in; rewritten and recontextualized in different parts of the world, and at different times. Her works have been adapted, filmed and staged accordingly. Fuller (2013) opines that for the past 200 years, the universal appeal of *Pride and Prejudice* sustained with its commencement, characters, comedy and charm. The proposed study read *How It Happened* as an Austen-inspired text. In other

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words, it assumed that the writer, Shazaf Fatima Haider, accepted, managed, channelized, and recontextualized the influence of the classical English novel, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Literature Review

The postcolonial rewritings are not simply the reversal of binary oppositions that generally appear in the first work. It is a far more multivalent task. The tradition of rewriting lies in the postcolonial era, when the western canonical texts were used by the post-colonial writers to write back, rewrite or write through the European canon, highlighting the cultural and the historical aspects of the once subjugated society. Thus, the influence of the colonization is also determined and reformed (Ashcroft, et al. 2002). The socio-cultural background of the aimed text is important for possible substitute meanings of the source text, as rewriting leads the source text through a metamorphic process, getting it transformed and enriched (Plate, 2008).

The study of postcolonial literature undertakes the theoretical approach of rewriting aided by a model which the Empire uses to write back to the imperial center (Ashcroft et al., 2002). The writers rewrite canonical works to restructure the realities of Europe, “in post-colonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based” (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 32). Terdiman (1989) opines that the postcolonial rewritings of canonical texts are counter-discourses, “always interlocked with the domination they contest” so, “their footing is never equal” (p. 18).

However, the origin of rewriting does not lie precisely with postcolonial literature. It is a common characteristic of literature in all times that no writer can work in segregation from the prior texts. Mohamed (2012) quotes John Thieme, who affirms rewriting as liberation and an act of mimicry. Rewriting is an act of substituting the ancient text by entering with an original and a critical perspective (Ashcroft et al., 2002; McClinton, 2001).

The perspective of transportation of a text into a new culture is trans-cultured by the act of rewriting (Hilkovitz, 2011; Hutcheon, 2006). The postcolonial rewrites indulge in, “decolonizing fictions” in, “cross-cultural interactions” (Brydon & Tiffin, 1993, p. 11-12; DuPlessis, 1985).

Rich (1979) comments on rewriting that, “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction...it is an act of survival...” (p. 35) recommending a different knowledge of the past than was known before. The concept is further enriched by Michel Butor, who opines that, “We are part of a complex of evolving cultures...one is never the sole author of a text...All this undermines the walls set up by our society between author and reader...” declaring it a freedom and wakening (as cited in Newman, 1995, p. 191). The

study of target culture increases the consciousness of the readers and knowledge of the original mentioned texts with rising new meanings (Bazerman, 2003; Rayner et. al., 2004; Furutaka, 2009).

In order to identify dissimilarities and similarities in a work, Remak, 1961 (as cited in Shahbazi & Termizi, 2012) remarks that, “Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on one hand and areas of knowledge and belief...on the other” (p. 3). The comparative study has been identified as being interdisciplinary and multicultural (Boldor, 2003).

In the multicultural scenario, the rewriters have been especially exploring, celebrating and interrogating subjects like love, courtship, marriage, constructions of femaleness and femininity, and the desire to have both love and independence, opines Santos (2011) according to their peculiar cultural context. Whiltshire (2001) opines that the text of Austen is, “reworked, rearranged and recycled” (p. 3). In the cultural context of South Asia, in Pakistan, “Lizzie Bennet comes to Karachi” becomes a catching phrase appeared in the book review of *How It Happened* by Soofi (2013).

A debut novel, *How It Happened*, by Shazaf Fatima Haider, a woman from Pakistan, depicts that women might be enjoying the liberty in education and independence of choice in career, seems under some cultural constraints. Objectives:

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the influence and meaning of money the authors derive from their particular cultural scenarios.
2. To analyze the influence of the concept of money on characters, happenings and events in the two texts.
3. To determine the rewriting in the depiction of the theme of money in *How It Happened*.

Significance of the study

The undertaken study presents an examination and analysis of the two novels *How It Happened* and *Pride and Prejudice* by offering a new direction for the study of rewriting. Unlike many other studies, this critical analysis of the two novels enabled a dynamic interrogation in the cultural and artistic phenomenon, appreciating the artistic and cultural evolution over the past two hundred years. Above all, the study offered an approach which not only enables an interesting reading of the two literary texts but also signifies the critical tendencies which promote the adaptations into rewriting.

Methodology

The theoretical framework for the undertaken study is provided by the postcolonial concept of rewriting provided by Ashcroft et al. (2002). The study is limited to the work of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Shazaf Fatima Haider's *How It Happened*. The data is collected from the texts of *How It Happened* and *Pride and Prejudice*, by the comparison of the two undertaken texts, particularly within the theme of money. The phrases, sentences, situations or happenings relevant to the particular theme of money are sorted out. The similarities or differences among them are discussed for further analysis.

Data Analysis:

The rewriting of the theme of money is evident in *How It Happened*, but the rewriting of it in a different cultural scenario individualizes the presentation.

Pride and Prejudice depicts how a single man becomes the center of attention with his mercenary standing. Mrs. Bennet on hearing of Mr. Bingley exclaims with joy, "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Austen, 1996, p. 33). Dadi was excited to hear when the Rizvi's proposed to Zeba for their son that, "he was a successful banker and soon to be promoted to vice-president" (Haider, 2013, p. 154). Dadi had the privilege to boast of Haroon, who had, "Good job, good looks, good EVERYTHING!" (p. 65).

Pride and Prejudice portrays that a hindrance in marriage is caused by financial inferior status of women, which leads in making incorrect choices for the sake of future security if not happiness. About Lydia's going to Brighton, her father replied, "she is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody" (Austen, 1996, p. 243). The mode of rewriting allowed Haider (2013) to resist and accept the influence of the colonizer and the imperial force on both culture and writing. Shireen, whose mother rejected Haroon's proposal because she met another boy, "fifty-five year old" whose, "a businessman...owns a credit-financing firm...She will be very happy and very wealthy" (p. 48). The mimicry of *Pride and Prejudice* still individualizes *How it Happened* in accordance to the cultural values.

The introduction of men into the society is based on the mercenary status which he holds. Elizabeth talks about Darcy that, "he is a man of very large property in Derbyshire" (Austen, 1996, p. 102). Abbu after meeting Omer introduced him to Dadi, "He earns quite well" (Haider, 2013, p. 237). Though Saleha's mother, "blushed with embarrassment at the mention of the salary" (p. 141). *How it Happened* also portrays the case of Sakina Phuppo's husband, "Hussain Alam...who was not able to earn a decent amount of money from his property alone" (p. 11) and thus Phuppo was, "miserable for the first half of her marriage" (p. 11).

Pride and Prejudice describes the ill consequences of possessing a surplus of money. The excess and height of a mercenary station turned Darcy, “to be proud...all his large estate in Derbyshire” and, “he was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world” (Austen, 1996, p. 39) and, “he has the right to be proud” (p. 47). The intertextuality of the ill effects of money is portrayed by Haider (2013) in describing the a lady and her son, a flourishing banker, while examine Zeba, “raised one plucked eyebrow at my sister” while her son, “curtly acknowledged my sister’s presence with a nod and glanced at his mother with the arched eyebrow” and Zeba and Saleha, “instantly disliked this arrogant individual” (p. 122).

The issue of dowry has also been discussed by the authors. *Pride and Prejudice* gives no mention of Charlotte’s dowry. For Wickham, “it was impossible he could marry for money” (Austen, 1996, p. 284). Miss de Bough should marry Darcy as, “she and her cousin are expected to join the two estates” (p. 108). The conception of dowry is rewritten by Haider (2013) depicting it as an essential social requirement for the pride of the boy’s family that the girl they have chosen for their son belongs to an established social class, comprador of the society. However, the dowry had been abolished by the new generation and Dadi laments the fact that, “this was precisely why it was unwise for the boy’s family to tell the girl’s parents not to provide a dowry. ‘After all, we’re spending so much money on them, the least we can get is a bedroom set, a television, an air conditioner and a fridge in return” (p. 89). Thus, Saima’s parents were asked to, “Provide no dowry” (p. 89). Dadi narrated the story of Banoji, who was to be provided with a lavish dowry until her father, “deemed all the preparations” and sent Banoji to her in laws with, “nothing but clothes on her back” (p. 299) which outraged her in laws. So Zeba was provided with a lavish dowry as, “this was how respectable girls got married if they wanted to hold their heads up high in front of their in-laws” (p. 300).

Finding a financially stable girl has been the quest in *Pride and Prejudice*. The Bingley sisters rejecting Jane uttered, “such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it” (Austen, 1996, p. 63). The Bingley’s sisters, “wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money...” (p. 158). Wickham’s elopement with Miss Darcy was her, “fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds” (p. 217) and trying to get rid of Lydia was because, “he must know my father can give him nothing” (p. 279). Haider’s (2013) rewrite altered the outlook of how *Pride and Prejudice* has been interpreted and received and placed among the classical work for substitute readings. Dadi declares about Zeba’s background that, “My Hussain is a doctor and we live quite well” (p. 152). Dadi quotes the example of Chandni Bano, who,

“hailed from one of the richest families...many a suitors was flayed alive...” (p. 159).

The pride of strong family background is evident in the attitude of some ladies described in both the novels. The Bingley sisters, “had a fortune of thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank” (Austen, 1996, p. 43). Rewriting shows that revising *Pride and Prejudice* helps look back into the past and into the future, incorporating the exoticism of Haider’s (2013) own era. Shabban, “was proud that, “Bhakurajian girls in her family did not work” while she, “sat stiffly; her lips pursed with disapproval” p. (182).

The pomp and splendor of money presented by Austen (1996) and rewritten in *How it Happened*, creates a pompous display of wealth. Lady Catherine arrived, “with a rapturous air, the fine proportion and finished ornaments” (Austen, 1996, p. 180). Haider (2013) as a postcolonial writer tries to reestablish the racial distorted history of the colonized from the imperial authorities of the colonizer. She depicts through her rewritings that the people as a whole and not as a race, share similar dilemmas, issues and calamities by describing the entrance of Dadi before Zeba’s in laws, “And what an appearance she made!...adorned with gold bangles and earrings and carrying her silver paan-dan...the impact her forceful personality had made...” (p. 275). In Zeba’s marriage, “Naureen made her glittering entrance..., resplendent in diamonds and expensive shalwar-kameez provided by her wealthy new husband” (p. 297-8).

Mrs. Bennet and Dadi degrade their opponents with the comparison of money and status. Mrs. Bennet complains that if ever Charlotte gets hold of some property, which she would never inherit from her husband or father, she would own it at the expense of the Bennet family. So does Dadi says about Qurrat that, “people like Qurrat who were born in poor household always have an inferiority complex. One whiff of money and they lose control” (Haider, 2013, p. 80-1).

Austen’s (1996) attitude towards mercenary motives is intertextualized in Haider’s (2013) attitude and their heroines do not fall for money or the glamour of the riches. Elizabeth, “must own that she was tired of great houses; after going over so many, she really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains” (Austen, 1996, p. 251). Similarly, Zeba resists when Alam Bhai lures her into marriage, tempting her by the boast of his economic status, “I’ll give you a house with a big lawn. And in Canada, it’s air conditioned all the time... you have one of those high-tech kitchens...” (Haider, 2013, p. 106).

The boast of success in hunt for a rich husband is fully displayed in *Pride and Prejudice* and is rewritten keeping in view the ambivalence of her

own people by Haider (2013). Mrs. Bennet joyful cries to Elizabeth, "Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought of it...Jane's is nothing to it-nothing at all. I am so pleased" (Austen, 1996, p. 376). In *How it Happened*, Qurrat Dadi boasts of Naureen's catch of the husband. She claims that, "The boy's family is very rich" (Haider, 2013, p. 79). Dadi boasts that Omer was a good catch for them as, "he makes close to 5,00,000 a month!" (p. 292).

Findings and Conclusion:

Haider (2013) depicts a different social scenario where to get the children married off is far more significant than the issues of money. Secondly, we move into the circle of an upper middle class family, whose acquaintances are also in the same class. Thirdly, no such case of marriage and mercenary problems in a lower social class is presented. Fourthly, a family with no issues of heir is presented. Lastly, the suitors for Haroon are shortlisted after serious scrutiny and ending up to, "seven" (p. 35) which eliminates the chances of lower than class and rank proposals. As for Zeba, the prospective suitors also belonged to the same social class, so there are almost none that would raise the mercenary controversies. Though, the social and financial status before finalizing the proposal is never ignored. Perhaps the social class we are introduced to is financially secure, who have other issues to pay attention to more than the mercenary matters.

Haider's (2013) treatment of money however, leads to a partial background of mercenary matters and more focus lies on settling other issues of marital matters. The influence of money on characters, happenings and events in the two texts shows a difference with a more display of financial accounts especially during the marriage ceremonies, however, both the novels show the apparent display of riches at social levels of the characters at a conscious level.

Haider's (2013) rewrite in the depiction of theme of money definitely marks her identity, as the arguments and the debates, the general attitude and the social customs along with traditions are portrayed keeping in mind the cultural scenario and the social setting of financially social stable class, whose preferences are much wider and beyond just than the financial accounts. They deal more with ego and secular class than mercenary motives.

Haider (2013) knew that imperialism symbolized the cultural representation of England. She respects and does not try to rectify that comprador portrayal, rather portrayed similar situation with the imperialism of her own cultural scenario. Hence, *How It Happened* cannot be stated as a faithful imitation rather the importance of this literary text as the complex connection and the relation in comparative terms between the two novels are stressed and explored.

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