

Jane Eyre & Wide Sargasso Sea: A Spytastic Reading

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Abstract: In this essay, I attempt to solve the Snowden conundrum using the narrative framework provided by *Jane Eyre* & *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I briefly examine whether we can legitimately deny serious analytical status to famous works of fiction just because they are 'not real'. How close can you get to the truth of the puzzle using the power of delusion and procedural irrationality?

Keywords: Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea, Bertha, Rochester, MI5, MI6, GCHQ, NSA, Snowden, al-Qaeda, Bletchley Park, Englishness, controlled disclosure, Antoinette, Windward Islands, Jean Rhys, terror, terrorism, terrorists, mad woman, attic, British people, Usuk, US/UK, Charlotte Brontë, whistle-blower, secrecy, Thornfield Hall, Phoenix.

My favourite fictional character is Bertha Rochester, the mad and morally depraved wife of *Jane Eyre*'s romantic hero. The lost voice of Bertha is one which the bosses of MI5, MI6 and GCHQ would neither articulate nor acknowledge: the voice of female passion, of the Other who is both biologically and racially alien. Faced with the inexplicable 'horror' of Mad Bertha, facing disclosure open[ing] upon disclosure, Whitehall agreed that it would be better if it were a 'controlled disclosure', a non-sensational version by a puppet operated by NSA and GCHQ. And yet, because of the very cynical nature of the spy chiefs' defence of the secret services role in combating terrorism and in stopping so many terror plots, together with their indecorous, almost pornographic descriptions of terrorists' happiness after the Snowden's disclosure ('It's clear that our adversaries are rubbing their hands with glee, al-Qaeda is lapping it up,' John Sawers, the Head of MI6 told Parliament in November 2013), I suspected that mad Bertha had been silenced during the spy chiefs' vindication. Indeed, Snowden was silenced too.

But Mad Bertha's silence is very suggestive. It appears to be curiously like its overdetermined counterpart – the spy chiefs' inflated narration – in that both constitute a form of concealment. In speaking for both Bertha and Snowden, the spy chiefs could not help but suggest that there was 'just' One¹ voice to be replaced. And thus Bertha's silence implies that which cannot be spoken in post-9/11 discourse: not the generalised, discreet parameters of desire for exotic jihadi fighters or Snowden's correct and natural desire to 'spill the beans' only to acquiesce to his bosses' natural demand for a 'controlled disclosure', but an even more specific and repressed component: loss of self, of identity, of the spirit of Bletchley Park, of home, of a familiar English culture in general.

¹ The psychopathy of One can be expressed as: One/One is to a(=)a as One/Many is to exception/rule. a(=)a can be defined as the relationship '(=)' between 'a' and 'a', where 'a' can be either 'a' or the delusional 'a' which is more like a 'b' and where '(=)' being variable can be anything from 'wanting to be' / 'more or less equal to' / 'not completely being' to anything that can be similarly and randomly thought. '(=)' implies that two things cannot be exactly the same unless there is an observer imagining that they are the same. The first [qualitative, a(=)a=One/One] relationship is related to the 'identity' component of the psychotic desire, mania or obsession for total equality as read from the I/eye. The second [quantitative, exception/rule=One/Many] relationship is related to the extreme/borderline 'value' of the psychotic experience. It is about the rarity, uniqueness, exceptionality, oddity, scarcity, and life-changing potential of the psycho/semio experience. The I/eye is the site of sovereignty in a psychotic society; an imaginary point from which the moral code is read/shared and the binarised decision is taken.

Because the spy chiefs never relinquished or interrogated their assumptions about their own moral superiority, they could never find logical constructions with which to locate the terrorists' difference in order to comprehend it: 'But it is lost, that secret, and those who know it can use it against us.' Ian Lobban (GCHQ) complained: 'It will make our job far, far harder for years to come.' Here a reversed thought would be Rochester's displeasure with both Antoinette and the Windward Islands for withholding their secrets from their colonial conqueror in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Clearly, the spy masters' irritation stems from their own perceived displacement from a privilege position of racial and cultural superiority, a displacement which threatens all their culturally entrenched axioms attesting to their superiority over dark-skinned terrorists and mad women. They are working-class boys talking on behalf of the Eton social class; defending their colour, their gender, their Englishness; and counting on their intrinsic superiority to put Snowden in a vulnerable position.

But Snowden isn't your local porn actress – over and above being a 'man' whose pornographic material has been seen worldwide, it is inconceivable that men from a lower social class like the spy chiefs should make him feel vulnerable. If Snowden doesn't blink, not being in the least bothered by their comments, it is because he has very good patrons. He can afford to poo in public. The sole manner with which the secret services can guarantee their own imperial superiority and retain Snowden is to lock him up in Europe's attic, Russia. So Vladimir Putin can say: 'He's mad but mine, mine.' It is within this discourse of imperialist and masculine economy that Snowden becomes Bertha as he is made 'peripheral' by location. Under this spytastic scheme, the Usuk² government in collaboration with NSA/GCHQ re-wrote the Jane Eyre story. The spy bosses occupy the position of Mr Rochester; the duped people play the role of Jane; whistle-blower Snowden is Mad Bertha; and Putin is Grace, the hired nurse who keeps Bertha under control while Rochester travels abroad to forget his horrible marriage.

There isn't even anything discreditable about being duped under these circumstances, whereas every other situation reflects badly on the naive people whether or not they are duped. Suppose someone is led by a lover's putative wealth to gratify him in the hope of making some money out of it, but his hopes are dashed: the lover turns out to be poor and he doesn't get any money. It doesn't make any difference that he doesn't actually gain. It is still discreditable, because what he is seen to have revealed about himself is that he would do anything, however servile, in the hope of financial gain, and that is not to his credit. On the same principle, suppose the people are led by the spy agencies to hand over all their civil liberties in the expectation of gaining, for their part, total security/safety for themselves and their families, but their hopes are dashed: the spy agents turn out to be scoundrels and to have no goodness to their name. Even so, being deceived in this way is all right, because the aspect of themselves which *they* (the duped people) are seen to be shown is that they would gladly do anything for the sake of their families, and there is nothing more creditable than that. So there is absolutely nothing wrong with gratifying spies for the sake of virtue.

The introduction of Bertha/Snowden inaugurates what can be identified as Usuk's radical revision of the Cinderella story. Technically, Usuk's substitute for the expected marriage scene between the people (Jane) and its secret services (Rochester) signals a comic denouncement, a climatic revelation scene. Snowden's revelation of mass surveillance presents an opportunity for the secret services to explain and reveal past mysteries and crimes. The scene of Snowden's discovery, in which the romance plot between the spooks and the people is most at risk, is, after all, simultaneously the scene of the British people's absolute objectification ('to keep *them* safe' – Yes, the British people had been told their communications data was being routinely hoovered up to keep *them* safe³); and the invocation of the binary opposition of alien terrorist abomination versus English correctness prompts the almost seamless subordination of the people (Jane) to the secret services (Rochester) within both the domestic political economy of Usuk and, indeed, the 'war-on-terror' discourse itself.

Thus the accusation by Snowden of conducting 'mass surveillance' on ordinary citizens served both as decoy of the 'real' military operations and TOTAL⁴ war and as a trigger: an opportunity for NSA/GCHQ to show how 'good' they are; how

² In my poems, essays and stories, the US and the UK are two countries incarnated in one biblical Usuk. A descendant of Goliath, Usuk stands alone and against the concept of civilisation and the rest of the countries of the world. Ultimately, Usuk is an imaginary union which represents barbarism on an unimaginable scale.

³ The government and its agencies are in the business of making difficult decisions in order 'to keep you and your family safe'. So reads a fragment of section 16 (Extremism Bill) of the Queen's Speech delivered from the Lords Chamber on Wednesday 27 May 2015.

⁴ Following Baudrillard, the TOTAL is the new hegemony which represents absolute 'Evil'. Baudrillard says that 'this absolute Evil comes from an excess of Good, an unchecked proliferation of Good, of technological development, of

‘necessary’ they are; how intelligence officers work around the clock to identify the nuggets of intelligence that protect Britain/America from terrorist attacks, rescue hostages abroad, thwart organised crime and pinpoint the location of child abusers. Whatever the agencies say about our safety, with all their the scaremongering about hacking, cyber warfare, terrorism and paedophilia, the question that remains, after numerous propaganda campaigns immediately followed by private briefings from the agencies, is not whether they need to give people more reassurances that the new powers needed to adapt to technological changes and to the increasing sophistication of criminals/terrorists are only going to be used in a necessary, proportionate and accountable way; but whether their own existence is necessary at all. A national security force, where there are no terrorist attacks to discover and no terrorists to arrest, not only will provoke and invent new terrorist attacks, but also will use these imaginary threats to defend, support and explain its own existence.⁵

In November 2013, when the UK intelligence chiefs, Andrew Parker (MI5), John Sawyers (MI6) and Ian Lobban (GCHQ), gave evidence to MPs, Snowden was revealed as a baddie. If Charlotte Brontë gave Bertha an evil laugh which Jane hears echoing around Thornfield Hall in the dead of night, the spy chiefs said that Snowden had done very bad things, like setting fire to the services’ (Mr Rochester’s) wedding bed and attacking her brother; that is, the trust that the people (Jane) had deposited on the state. Perhaps the whistle-blower had a point. Why should her husband lock her in a Russian attic while he flirts with other women right in her own house? Of course, Snowden had shamelessly broken into the bedroom and stolen the veil (state secrets). S/he’s an avenging fury. And the secret services’ heart is totally closed against Snowden. S/he is a traitor. They even blame him for his/her ‘actions’ – as though s/he had a choice. Like Bertha, Snowden often seems more a victim than a villain. According to feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the people (Jane) hated the services (Rochester) for dolling them up like an objectified princess, so Snowden (Bertha) ripped up the veil of secrecy for them. Jane (the people) has been controlling his passions since her aunt (the state) locked her up in the Red Room when she was small (universal school education), but ‘intemperate and unchaste’. Snowden/Bertha keeps bursting his/her bonds. And when Rochester (the state) bangs on about Jane (the people) being so tiny he could crush her, surely she sometimes wishes she had Bertha’s courage and could take him on. In many ways, the Usuk government and its secret services (Mr Rochester) are the villains of the piece, for their lying, their bigamy, and their brutality. At the end of the novel, the people (Jane) can become something else. Bertha sets fire to Thornfield Hall, and stands on its battlements, her ‘black hair . . . streaming against the flames.’ NSA was supposed to be Snowden’s house, but it became a prison; and now s/he’s its blazing queen. When Snowden/Bertha jumps to her death it’s horrible, but it’s also a psychotic leap of faith that sets her free.

John C.

Inglis, a former spy who until 2014 was deputy director of NSA, the US National Security Agency, gave the ‘blazing queen’ chapter away when he said to the press that the West’s intelligence machinery was being constructed after the Snowden affair: ‘Snowden may have burnt the house down, but we’ll get a better house. I don’t give credit to arson.’ He added: ‘You can expect that there has been quite a lot of work undertaken by intelligence agencies in many nations to try to figure out how they can get back into a place where they can serve the decision-makers.’⁶ Indeed, my dear Mr Inglis, NSA/GCHQ is rebuilding its digital spying powers after Mad Bertha burnt Thornfield down with the help of cutting-edge pieces of legislation.⁷ Of course, you don’t give credit to arson. Why should you? Arson resolves the problem when Bertha escapes, killing herself in the process. Thus after the major obstacle to cross the lovers’ path had been removed, Jane and Rochester (the people and the secret services) eventually marry and ‘live happily ever after’.

As a Jewish teenager growing up in London, I had to read Jean Rhys’s seductive, complex Jane Eyre prequel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It was part of the school syllabus. My feminist teacher encouraged her students to see Rochester as a racist

infinite progress, of totalitarian morality, of a radical will to do good without opposition.’ Jean Baudrillard, ‘The Roots of Evil’ in *The Agony of Power* (Los Angeles: Semotext (e) Intervention Series, 2011), p. 109. Applied to ‘war’, the TOTAL refers to a global situation where Western powers’ security services are fighting several wars at the same time: War on Terror. War on Crime. War on Drugs. War on antibiotics. War on immigration. War on war itself.

⁵ For the practice by Western powers of fabricating terrorism abroad see Jeremy Keenan, *Report on In Amenas: Inquest Cover-up and Western Involvement in Algerian State Crimes* (London: International State Crime Initiative, Queen Mary University of London, 2016). For state-funded terrorism in the pre-digital age, see Daniele Ganser, *NATO’s Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe* (London & New York: Frank Cass, 2005).

⁶ All these quotes are taken from *The Guardian*, the UK newspaper that ran the Snowden scandal story in great detail over a number of months in 2013 and 2014.

⁷ In the UK, for example, the Draft Communications Data Bill 2012, the Investigatory Powers Bill 2015, and Investigatory Powers Act 2016; more commonly known as “snoopers’ charters”.

and misogynist pig that transplants Bertha from the scented paradise of Jamaica to cold dull England, changes her name, represses her sensuality/sexuality, curbs her spirit and drives her into ignominious madness. But fantastic as this feminist reading is, it's not the whole story. In Rhys's novel, Bertha is not attracted to Rochester, she doesn't desire him, she doesn't want him: she has fun with local sex-buddies. She looms over the novel as I, a young alien, loomed over England: 'Like a cursed brother, like the demon all cursed brothers have in them, I was not entirely powerless.'

When I grew up, I married a gentile English woman, who had come from Jamaica to England. From the very beginning, my marriage was perceived as doomed: 'She's a white nigger, a white cockroach,' my mother would shout. Antoinette was neither English and rich, nor native and part of the community. She was as alien as I. Perhaps that was all we had in common. We went on honeymoon to the Caribbean and stayed at a village called 'Massacre' in the Windward Islands. Immediately, I disliked the place, the name of the place, the inhabitants, and the constant noise of cocks crowing. We were stopped by officials as we passed through town. They held us for nine hours in a room with no windows. There were six agents coming and going, asking us questions about our entire lives, about everything. Apparently, we were carrying USB drives of encrypted documents from Snowden. The agents took our drives, our computers – and even a video game my best friend had given us, the happy couple, as a wedding present to keep us entertained.

Arresting stories of mass surveillance by NSA/GCHQ had been finding their way to the pages of *The Guardian* (via Glenn Greenwald and his partner David Miranda in the UK) and *The Washington Post* and *The Telegraph* (via Laura Poitras in the US) to inaugurate these papers' unprecedented, but entirely controlled, access to the dark secrets of Usuk's surveillance capability. The Jamaican Government said in a statement to the press that the couple's detention was 'without justification' – and that it was 'gravely concerned' about what had happened. Indeed, our detention was unlawful and inexcusable. We had been detained under a law that violates any principle of fairness. The only possible intent behind it was to harass me and my partner for analysing the data released by Edward Snowden.

This idea of 'writing back' by breaking down the official explanation of events, favouring more localised narratives and perspectives, casts a far darker shadow over Mr Rochester (the secret services) and Jane (the duped people) than I had intended. My original intention was to raise my hand and explain to the reader my interpretation the Snowden conundrum. 'You don't have to be Turing to crack the puzzle,' I wanted to tell the world. The recovery of 'lost' stories has a crucial role to play in allowing access to events and experiences which have not previously been recorded. Certainly, before the effect of the Jamaican honeymoon completely faded, I had a vivid vision which reminded me that 'there is always another side, always'.

If *Wide Sargasso Sea* re-tells the story of cruelty and suffering that lies behind some of the West's accumulated wealth, perhaps I could offer you a parallel narrative which in the controlled disclosure by the spy agencies is secret and mysterious. So, on 28 October 2015, when *The Times* celebrated its unprecedented, but totally controlled, access to the heart of GCHQ with a headline from a James Bond movie ('For Your Eyes Only') I knew I was onto something. I scanned the text of the various articles related to GCHQ and fed it to my computer. A little algorithm prepared by a friend of mine, a mathematician, was used to query the text for certain patterns. Interestingly, the algo pinpointed a suspicious reverse patterned structure in Mr Inglis's comments. Mr Inglis, a former computer scientist and air force officer, recalled the devastation that he and his colleagues felt when Snowden leaks first made the global headlines. 'You can expect that there has been quite a lot of work undertaken by intelligence agencies in many nations to try to figure out how they can get back into a place where they can serve the decision-makers,' My Inglis said. 'Snowden may have burnt the house down but we'll get a better house. I don't give any credit to arson.'

With these comments, the former spy, who worked at the NSA for 28 years, gave away a possible code name for the Snowden operation: 'Operation Phoenix'. The main contradiction spotted by the algo was that 'Phoenix' was a story of destruction-creation, and for the silly algo it had to be one or the other, but not both. According to Mr Inglis, Snowden's revelations had been an act of destruction: he 'may have burnt the house down'. But, when queried by the algo, Snowden's revelations had been an act of creation, for the spy agencies had obtained a new lease of life by arising from the ashes of their predecessors. The next question was: 'If the Snowden scandal was an act of creation, what had been the act of destruction which preceded the act of creation?' Mr Inglis must have been drunk or drugged when he made these comments to the press. As a professional spy, he must have known that it would take less than two seconds for a good mathematician to decipher the message. Unfortunately, he mentioned Bletchley too, and made a counter-factual proposition which could be read back to front. He drew a comparison between the Snowden leaks and the impact that

would have been created had the Nazis deliberately been tipped off about the Allies' knowledge of their Enigma machine during World War Two. Then, what would have happened? The British would have lost some of their targets and seen some much better tradecraft on the part of the Germans. According to John Inglis, the Snowden allegations had had a real and material impact on US counter-terrorism and espionage capabilities. 'We did lose some of our terrorist targets,' he said, 'and we did see some much better tradecraft on the part of various rogue nations, such as [those involved in the] proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or criminal elements that operate with transnational effect.'

What was the act of destruction? Who burnt the house down? To answer these questions one needs to assume two kinds of separations: a temporal separation and a geopolitical separation. The further removed in time and space, the more difficult would be to spot the act of destruction. Assuming that there is a partnership between NSA and GCHQ, between US and UK, if an American national was chosen for operation Phoenix then the problem must have been British. If the year 2013 was chosen for the operation Phoenix then the problem must have started long time ago, around 10 years earlier. It was the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords led by Bingham in 2004 (not Snowden in 2013) who left UK spooks in the lurch, forever wondering how they could get back into a place where they could serve the decision-makers. Indeed, it was Bingham (not Snowden) who 'burnt the house down'.⁸

⁸ For the life-changing 'burns' that the Belmarsh decision left on Usuk's secret services see Fred Perez, 'Guantanamo/Belmarsh and the Horror of Performative Memes' in *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 5:2, April-June 2017, pp. 187-215.