

Cosmic Rebellion: Deconstructing the Other Woman in Post-Colonial Narratives Through Tarot

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Abstract:

This paper offers a new pathway into post-colonial literary criticism by blending it with the mystical languages of astrology and tarot. At the heart of the work is the often-dismissed figure of the 'other woman' — the one who breaks rules, holds rage, reclaims her silence, or simply dares to want more. Through this lens, I explore how colonial beauty and morality ideals continue to echo across generations, particularly shaping the experiences of women from formerly colonized cultures.

Characters like Sethe, Annie John, and Shanta are not just plot devices. When read through the zodiac and the major arcana, they unfold as layered, intuitive, spiritually resonant beings. This paper doesn't aim to moralize their choices but to understand the emotional weight they carry — as women who inherit pain, have power, and refuse to fit into acceptable boxes.

By introducing the mystical into academic critique, this paper invites a softer yet bolder engagement with literature — one that recognizes energy, intuition, and ancestral echoes. *Cosmic Rebellion* ultimately makes space for the 'other woman' not as an outcast, but as a luminous presence in both narrative and psyche.

Keywords: Post Colonial Literature, The Other Woman, Tarot Archetypes, Psycho-Astrological Reading

Introduction:

I am the other woman. The meaning of this statement takes the shape of whatever context we use it in. Sometimes it's a home-wrecking mistress, other times it's what colonized women are defined as. Well, writing this I'm seeing a connection: the concubine, the uncivilized, the fallen woman, the 'lover', the exotic; lastly the mad

woman. Western colonialism didn't just conquer lands- it conquered more than that- narratives, identities, and the very meaning of womanhood. Through tightly drawn boundaries of beauty and morality, the West created a template for the 'ideal' woman: restrained, chaste, fair-skinned, and submissive. These standards didn't remain confined within its borders; they seeped into the global consciousness, influencing the way women in colonized societies were viewed, treated, and even imagined in literature. Those who didn't fit in were exiled into the margins as 'the other woman'. But what happens when we reclaim those margins through mysticism? By mapping zodiacal traits and tarot archetypes onto selected female characters in post-colonial literature, this paper tries to understand their characters in depth and illuminate the buried symbolic acts of feminist resistance they perform. It seeks to not read them as villains or victims but as cosmic forces- wounded, wild, and wise.

Chasing Perfection: The Western Template

Lately, I've been seeing the Scandinavian scarf trend on Instagram. As an Indian woman, I saw a dupatta wrapped around a dress or sometimes a two-piece set. Then I saw some comments. Some South Asian women described the 'scarf' as a 'dupatta' and the 'Westerners' tried so hard to defend it being a European scarf. Ah! The tug-of-war in that comment box got me thinking. It's so hard for them to digest the fact that anything related to our culture, fashion, rituals, and knowledge systems can ever inspire them. The discomfort that reflects through their baffled defense around this speaks so much about how the East is still perceived.

Reading Homi K. Bhabha made me realize the cyclical trap the colonized are caught in. Wanting to be White; initially mentally, then spiritually (confiding in the Western god & abandoning the traditional deities) & finally physically? Well, not quite. For women, here's where we discover that surface-level gap. A divide that persists endlessly- not being able to be White enough for the Westerners, and no more 'original' for the natives.

Western ideals of the so-called perfect woman were exported and embedded across cultures. The white man imagined his comprehension to be ultimate, thus, anything remotely foreign seemed impermissible. Dealing with women, what the West labeled as irrational, untamed, mystical & exotic, was just unfamiliar feminine energy. What they saw was merely something 'different' & 'unknown' which they quickly accounted as unacceptable. In contrast, Western women were framed as soft, innocent, submissive, and fragile. Western literature saw these women as meek, voiceless & agreeable.

Before colonialism projected Western ideals onto the world, these ideas were already deeply entrenched within Europe through strict cultural, religious, and patriarchal

setups. These ideals translated racially (among other standards) when exported to the colonized world, but well within Europe, behavior policing took immense control over the society. The need to dominate the feminine was/is not new. We see different layers of it now and then, but it has always existed. In Europe, the Western realm, women were expected to be virtuous. They needed to embody the socially set morals; modesty, obedience, and silence. Being submissive was boxed in with being feminine, being a woman. Behaviours were monitored, criteria were set, and then in due course weaponized to control the second gender. Whiteness was burdened with the illusion of inherent superiority. It symbolizes nobility, high status, and 'being better'. In the West, beauty was not limited to your physical features, it seeped into women's behaviour too. It was about how women moved and talked. Patriarchy pitted her against herself to the extent that before questioning the world, she questioned herself, she corrected herself. Sandra Bartky wrote in *Femininity and Domination* that women were trained to be their own jailors.

A well-known Victorian poet Coventry Patmore coined the phrase 'angel of the house', capturing the essence of the feminine ideal perfectly. She was divine, self-sacrificing, humble, and delicate. This was not just poetic and imaginative, rather it embedded this female archetype into literature & society. She knew her place at home and made it her world. This trope was greatly enforced through literature, etiquette books, and psychology, among other various ways. Our favorite authors, knowingly or unknowingly, coyly defined for us what the perfect woman was supposed to be like. A father's obedient daughter, supportive sister, sincere wife, and a loving mother. In *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy's fragile voice becomes a symbol of class privilege. She performs the role of ideal femininity- emotionally elusive, passive, and silent. She never challenges the world around her, rather her beauty and class protect and afford her freedom. Even Charlotte Bronte gave us Blanche and Jane. While Blanche was the epitome of nobility and class, Jane on the other hand was plain, simple, and extremely local. Blanche's beauty was overshadowed by her superficiality and cruelty. She fits the ideal aesthetically but is morally flawed, which makes her undesirable.

Inherited Gazes: The Globalization of the Ideal Feminine

Around the 15th century, European powers started to aggressively expand their empires across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Initially, it was welcomed, for it being merely trade relationships. But, it evolved into full-blown political and social control with smaller countries first. That's how we saw the making of British & French colonies. The West didn't just come in military capacities but brought with them their social hierarchies, values & beauty ideals. These ideals were deeply rooted in Eurocentrism: pale skin, delicate bone structure, and submissive & ladylike behaviour.

With the establishment of public organizations in colonies, like schools, churches, and even governments, they sow seeds of superiority and civilization. Viewing European traditions and values as elite, high-class, and civilized became a custom. On the other hand, colonial/local traditions were labeled as barbaric and old. With no regard to colonial history, the narrative of the 'Western ideas are ultimate civilization' was pushed extensively and deliberately. Local people were initially gently influenced to give up their primitive traditions and then eventually this was done explicitly.

The goal of many colonial regimes was not just limited to land control, but instead focused on 'shaping minds'- especially women's minds. Women in colonized societies were subtly taught that to be desirable or even respectable, they needed to emulate the Western model- many times at the cost of their identity. As a result, women tried to imitate white femininity, but because it wasn't (never is) physically possible, they would always be not quite enough; close, sure, but never enough.

The global dominance of these beauty ideals continues to shape advertising, social media, and the entertainment industry. The advent of fairness creams, lighter skin tone treatments, and even matrimonial ads for light-skinned brides is not new in colonized countries. The residual grip that Europe has on these countries is not visibly present but is as firm as before. The beliefs of white superiority are so deeply embedded in our minds that we unknowingly fall prey to the set standards. We are acquainted with the colonial explications and our subjugated history but, we still try to be white, but not too white, but white enough to fit in, but not too far gone that we lose our indigenous identity.

The theory of colonial mimicry is one of the theories that fascinated me the most. Homi K Bhabha, in his work, *The Location Of Culture*, elaborates on the complex relationship that we have with our colonizers. He writes about how the colonized subject constantly tries to mimic his European superior's aesthetics and values and is never fully acknowledged. In fact, he is always perceived as inadequate- 'almost the same, but not quite'. The lowly, uncivilized local tried to imitate his rulers but was never successful. And while he was at it, Europeans weren't too flattered by this mimicry. Why, you ask? Because this reflected and highlighted the flaws that they always thought were nonexistent. For the White man, he was perfect; God's precious creation without any defects or faults; but when the local man mimicked him, he saw himself in a different, uncomfortable light; thus deeming the mimicry 'not alike'.

In literature, these imposed beauty standards often became a tool for character development and symbolizing the social standing of characters. As discussed in the previous section, literary works often enforced the ideas of Western supremacy and

beauty standards heavily. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the depiction of women is tied with the colonial notions of purity and nobility, who embody the Western civilization, in contrast to the dark, chaotic, and uncivilized 'other women'. The colonial women's exotic looks and behaviour were admired from afar but ultimately were seen as inferior. They serve as the antithesis of European beauty, not just via their physical appearance but also their roles in the colonial context. The African women with their 'proud' postures and 'dark' beauty are juxtaposed against the submissive, virtuous, and delicate women of the Western world. African women symbolized savage, untameable, and immoral, while European women symbolized disciplined, civil, and morally upright. This inherited ideal, once foreign, now seeped into the bones of post-colonial societies- reverberating through Western standards, in the language of the West. These globalized standards of femininity weren't requested, only imposed, and the colonized woman became both the subject and spectacle, forever trying to become what was taught to admire.

When the Universe Speaks: Reading Her Through Astrology & Tarot

Before we dive into this section and understand how astrology and tarot illuminate the complex layers of post-colonial female characters, please note that visual aids of key zodiac signs and tarot archetypes are used in the analysis, specifically those that resonate with the women explored here. Each image is accompanied by keywords and quotes to capture the essence of these mystical symbols, offering a clearer understanding of their deeper significance within the narratives.

Imagine being so in tune with your divine feminine and intuition, that people around you start feeling threatened by it. Oh! To be her...

In the realm of literature, mysticism—particularly astrology and tarot —has long existed on the outskirts of acceptable discourse, often dismissed as dangerous and irrational. What was once rooted in ancient traditions that emphasized emotion, intuition, and patterns, was — and I'd say still is — looked at as a foreign, uncomfortable subject. Astrology offered knowledge, information, and beliefs that were outside of sanctioned structures, thus making it utterly intolerable. Literature saw this unknown source of knowledge as demonic. Often portrayed as diabolical, astrology, in some works, was also seen in the light of resistance and inner awakening. As colonial rule tried to civilize not just lands but also minds, the intuitive and feminine-coded languages of the stars became radical.

To understand this in the context of Europe, we look at the works of Silvia Federici. Her *Caliban and the Witch* powerfully describes how the witch hunts across Europe were not only attempting to silence female healers and spiritualists but rather also to crush the entire epistemologies centered on embodiment, intuition, and feminine

power. Mystical women were persecuted not just for their practices but for refusing to conform to ideals of rationality, domesticity, and even beauty. These women did not conform to the beauty standards, they instead expressed themselves through their clothing, makeup, and hair. The looks of mystical women frequently gave away their inclinations towards the otherworldly leanings. Even in Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine*, it's explained that 'the Feminine' was feared precisely because of its chaotic, intuitive, unknowable energy. As literature progressed, these mystical elements, once feared, began reappearing in characters and narratives, as warnings as well as revelations.

Astrology, in its essence, is a system of archetypes. Each planet, each sign offers a symbolic framework for understanding the complexities of human nature, transformation, and conflict- in my eyes, making it a potent literary device. In post-colonial and feminist literature, these astrological archetypes can be easily mapped onto characters who resist normative expectations of behavior and beauty, acting from emotional intensity, psychic pain, or even a deep refusal to assimilate.

I mean, let's take into account the case of Bertha Mason from the *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While in *Jane Eyre* she was cast as the madwoman in the attic, here, she is just another woman destroyed by colonization and patriarchal suppression. Bertha, in my opinion, can easily embody the archetype of Scorpio- ruled by Pluto, the planet that represents destruction and rebirth. Mind you, this is not all that this sign represents, but these themes surround its aura more than others. Bertha's unfiltered emotion and untamed sexuality disrupt the fragile order of the colonial British home. But, what is depicted as 'madness' through the colonial gaze, could be read astrologically as a powerful plutonic transformation- something that was/is hard for the world to understand. Another example would be Sethe from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Even her character can be read through the planetary archetype of Pluto, but this time through the lens of pain turned power. Her past haunts her, both metaphorically and literally, and her choices, especially the harrowing decision to kill her child- exist in the realm of death and rebirth, sacrifice, and psychic trauma. Zodically, she aligns with Cancer, the maternal archetype ruled by the Moon- intuitive, emotional, protective, and deeply tied to memory and home. Cancers carry memory like a second skin, and for Sethe, her past lives inside her unbearable weight. Her fierce protectiveness and devotion to her children are hallmarks of Cancer's shadow and light. Morrison brilliantly 'reveals' her, doesn't condemn her. Sethe becomes mystical simply by refusing to be erased. Reading Sethe this way allows us to move beyond judgment and into a more intuitive and soul-level understanding.

Nyasha from Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, is the embodiment of psychological fragmentation born out of colonization. Educated in England and then placed back into the traditional setting of her homeland, Nyasha constantly feels the weight of not fitting in. Something related to what Homi Bhabha said in *The Location of Culture*. She is too Western for home and too African for the West. Moreover, she is sharp, articulate, and rebellious but also fragile. Her eating disorder, emotional outbursts, and quiet aching intellect all stem from the cultural dissonance she can't escape. Astrologically, Nyasha exhibits traits of Aquarius - the sign of rebellion, intellect, and discomfort with conformity. She observes systems, questions power, and tries to create space for a new identity, but is ultimately crushed by the very systems she tries to out-think. Her story isn't one of triumph, but one of painful awareness- a reminder that post-colonial women often carry the cost of rebellion in their minds and bodies.

This archetypal mapping is not limited to the zodiac. Tarot, too, plays a crucial symbolic role in literature- especially when we take into account its original purpose. In ancient times, tarot was a system of storytelling, prediction, and introspection. It wasn't just about fate; it was about understanding cycles, energies, and inner, deeper truths. As such, literature that incorporates tarot directly or indirectly often becomes a site of layered meaning.

Celie from *The Color Purple* emerges as a woman whose life is shaped by cycles of silence, abuse, and systematic oppression. Her voice is stripped away, her body objectified, and her identity denied—yet she reclaims her voice and her space in the world. Still, she doesn't just reclaim her voice — she carves a space that feels entirely her own. Celie represents the zodiac sign of Virgo, often misunderstood as merely reserved or docile, but in truth deeply observant, grounded, and transformative. Her growth is rooted in healing rituals and slow reclaiming of control over her life- which I think hallmarks Virgo's earthy resilience. The tarot card that captures her essence is The Hermit: not a symbol of loneliness but of extremely deep inner work, reflection, and spiritual awakening. Her strength lies not in open defiance, but in her ability to endure, evolve and radiate from a place of inner clarity.

In the Indian context, my mind went straight to Rukmani from Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. She carries the weight of survival with a grace that feels almost mystical. Rukmani is the woman who endures- famine, loss, displacement- and still speaks in faint whispers of hope. In a world that constantly stripped her of control, she clung to rituals, to routine, to a belief that something sacred still existed. Seen through an astrological lens, she radiates Taurus energy — steady, rooted, and unshakably persistent in quiet ways. She becomes the Hierophant- a card that

represents traditions and customs. Not loud or rebellious, but strong in a way that commands respect without demanding it. In her quiet resistance, in her ability to grieve with dignity and love with no guarantees, Rukmani becomes a symbol of the women who were never seen as radical- but in my opinion, truly were.

Bringing these threads together, we discover how astrology and tarot have always been more than just mystical tools. In post-colonial and feminist contexts, they provide new ways of reading character, choice, and fate. Where colonial structures wanted uniformity, mysticism offered multiplicity. Where the West enforced one standard of beauty and behavior, tarot dealt with shadows, chaos, and intuition, all of which made the latter uncomfortable.



Lilith In Literature: The Rejected Feminine & The Rebel

Before patriarchy gave her a name to fear, Lilith was all about power. As the first woman created equal to Adam, she was exiled the instant she chose autonomy over obedience. And from that moment on, she became everything that made people uncomfortable; not limited to only men but even women. She was sexually independent, emotionally wild, and terrifyingly self-aware.

She is the Lilith of the stars — not soft, not silent, but a mythic reminder of everything womanhood was told to suppress. It's the placement that holds our refusal to behave, to confirm, to make ourselves smaller for the comfort and acceptance of others. She isn't sweet. Nor is she 'easy to be friends with'. But she is the truth. The untamed, the raw. And in literature, Lilith exists in all the women who are called 'too much'. Through the lens of feminist literary theory, it's natural to see Lilith embody Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*- the one who disturbs borders, blurs definitions, defies society and makes men feel uneasy. Helene Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*, as articulated in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, also becomes relevant here—writing that is fluid, embodied, emotionally rich, and intentionally defies patriarchal structures of logic and order. Lilith doesn't just speak- she screams. And oh does she scream loud.

When wanting to tie Lilith and literature together, I found myself thinking of several characters. The women who were declared mad, the ones who were suppressed and rejected for being different, and the ones who found the courage to convert their rage to victories.

Annie from *Annie John* by Jamaica Kincaid immediately came to mind. Annie walks through the pages of Kincaid's novel like a storm waiting to break. Annie is every teenage girl who ever felt the quiet fire of not fitting in and refused to dim herself for the world's comfort. Her defiance may not be overt, but it runs deep and remains unwavering. Through her strained bond with her mother and her discomfort in the colonial school system, Annie becomes a symbol of personal rebellion. She mirrors The Tower in tarot- that energy of sudden shifts, necessary chaos, and painful but purposeful growth. And if I had to pin down her zodiac sign, I'd say she's an Aries. Bold, fiery, and unafraid to walk away from what doesn't feel like home. Ruled by Mars, the Aries's quality of a refusal to be molded is felt while reading Annie. She doesn't want to follow, she wants to create herself- even if it means burning bridges and walking alone. And while Annie speaks of her rebellion, I think it's important to note that not all women express identically- some resist simply by being. Beyond bold archetypes, tarot and astrology honor the quiet ones — the emotionally layered,

the soft-spoken, the unseen. Each card, each sign, holds space for a different kind of power. It's in this space of quiet, intuitive force that we meet Shanta.

Shanta from *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai, exists on the margins of the central narrative, but her silence says more than most characters' dialogues. She is unmarried, childless, and disconnected from the typical feminine roles that post-colonial society imposes. She doesn't try to fit in, nor does she chase recognition. She simply exists—and in that unapologetic existence, she becomes undeniably powerful. I interpret her through the lens of Pisces—a zodiac known for its emotional intensity, solitude, and subtle defiance. Shanta's life may seem passive to some, but it holds the essence of spiritual resistance. She aligns with The Moon archetype—a card steeped in intuition, shadow realms, and the mysteries that lie beneath consciousness. Shanta like The Moon, doesn't demand to be understood, she rather invites you to sit with discomfort and mystery. And that's what makes her so compelling in my eyes in the post-colonial landscape: she doesn't conform, she doesn't fight either; she simply refuses to participate.

Another woman from literary history, I'm reminded of Hester Prynne from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Even though she is not 'the other woman' in the post-colonial sense, her character deserves a place in this section because she embodies a form of feminine rebellion and complexity that transcends simple categorization. She is a woman in 17th century Boston, who is punished for committing adultery by being forced to wear a bold red 'A'- the infamous scarlet letter. Society demands her silence, her repentance, and her complete erasure through shame. But Hester wears that scarlet letter with dignity and quiet rebellion. She doesn't name the father of her child and through her silence, her work, and her independence, she unstaked the rigid morality of her time. To me, Hester is the epitome of Lilith's spirit—through and through. When I try to interpret her character cosmically, I don't find judgment in my heart for her; I find a stream of emotions, starting with sadness, pity, rage, anger, confidence, and eventually a sense of being 'seen'. And by mapping zodiacal traits onto her, I see her mirroring Lilith, almost like, if Lilith walked on Earth, she would've looked like Hester Prynne. But, not so shockingly, Lilith doesn't always arrive cloaked in dignity-sometimes, she storms in with fire in her eyes and chaos around her. Toni Morrison's Sula Peace from *Sula* offers us this side of Lilith- untamed, mysterious, and unapologetic. Sula is not just an outcast, she is a force of nature, living by her own rules in a community that fears her independence. She moves like a secret — calm, watchful, cloaked in inner knowing as if her silence is the loudest thing in the room. Simultaneously, she echoed The Devil card's energy—disruptive, seductive, and unafraid to push against the limits of social order. Her power lies in embracing her

contradictions and existing authentically, even when it means alienation. She embraces her sexuality, rejects domestic roles, and refuses to silently bear the weight of womanhood. Morrison gives us a moment that can easily make Sula irredeemable in the eyes of many- she sleeps with her best friend's husband. But when I look at this through the lens of astrology, I begin to unravel the layers of Sula's psyche: her craving for emotional freedom, her resistance to conventional attachments, and the chaos she carries within. I am reminded that not every act is meant to be judged morally- some are just the language of pain or misunderstood love. Reading her felt like reading a Sagittarius struggling with intimacy and loyalty, someone who finds it difficult to decipher the depths of both in the traditional sense, not wanting to 'follow the rules', and just, be different. To love Sula (which people find hard to do) or to even understand her, is to confront one's relationship with shame, desire, and control. All these women, Annie, Shanta, Hester, Sula, and so many others- carry a fragment of Lilith within them, at first glance, we may condemn, misread, or mislabel them- shaped by the same societal gaze that feared Lilith's defiance. But when we shift our lens, when we read them astrologically, we begin to uncover the deeper strata of their psyche- the hidden motivations, the pain beneath the rebellion, the suppressed feminine. These characters aren't black or white. Just like Lilith, they are shades of grey- sacred, wounded, and powerful. And in truth, I'd say that every female character, whether crafted centuries ago or written today- carries the energy of Lilith. Some whisper it, some roar it, but it's there.

Conclusion:

Closing The Cards, Reopening the Canon

This research paper began with a question- a quiet curiosity, almost about whether the mystical, symbolic languages of astrology and tarot could offer something new to post-colonial feminist readings. Often, literary interpretations stay rooted in structure, history, and socio-political critique, which are necessary, of course. But sometimes, that leaves out the invisible intuitive layers- the ones that live between the lines of what these 'other' women say, do, and feel. By introducing cosmic and intuitive frameworks, I've tried to listen to these voices in a different register, one that allows their symbolic defiance to shine through in unexpected ways. Maybe they were meant to exist outside the binaries of good and bad- wild, layered, untamed. I tried to, through this paper, read with intuition, not instruction.

By tracing Western ideals of beauty and morality, and following their long colonial shadows, we saw how they bled into the portrayal of women who didn't fit- initially the ones in their Western societies and then eventually in the colonized world. And how these women, in return, bled back into the page of rebellion. Through astrology

and tarot, tools long dismissed as mystical nonsense, we found a secret language- one that finally let us hear these characters speak in their voice.

Each character in this paper, whether soft-spoken or ferocious, was an echo of resistance, not because they always fought loudly, but because they existed truthfully in a world that demanded their erasure. Their bodies, choices, silence, chaos, and survival- all of it was resistance. And when we read astrologically, we don't flatten them into stereotypes. We see their cosmic blueprints. Their psyche. Their dualities. Their intentions. Their traumas.

The other woman is not 'other'. She reflects, obscures, and ignites—serving as a mirror, shadow, and flame all at once. She is all of us- just in different phases of awakening. And maybe that's the real rebellion. To view these women through astrology and tarot is not to mystify them-it is to finally read them in their full, unedited form.

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