



Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (Of Shenhe)

Jerry Dean Leonard

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This book presents a critical investigation of the thought of Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak from the standpoint of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao. Spivak has recently suggested that her writing in an “odd typography” proceeds from “the hope that some patient reader will know why plain prose has to be tortured in order to grasp a deep problem” Of course this conception of writing and reading in the domain of “torture” does not lighten the intellectual task of grasping “deep problems” but rather increases, intensifies, extends and reprobematizes the work of critical theory. Jerry Dean Leonard’s book patiently and meticulously submits itself to this exceedingly curious project of “hope” – yet also with an ever-present spirit of critical and oppositional inquiry, recalling the deep problem of the capitalistic regime of subhuman labor as Marx grasped it in 1867: here the worker is compelled, on pain of outright expulsion and destitution, to follow “the movements of the machine,” becoming “its mere living appendage” in a “miserable routine of endless drudgery and toil,” where human labor becomes – is reduced to – “a sort of torture” which “deprives the work of all interest.” Such is the very odd encounter with theoretical writing and reading which this book takes up by investigating Spivak’s thinking in its connections with -- and disconnections from -- the “red” archive of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao. As Marx put it, an “integument” of contradictoriness binds the “odd” to its other series -- the common, the “plain,” the mass, and also the overfamiliar. In this extended study, the reader may consider whether something all too familiar and historically impatient lurks beneath the oddities of Spivakianism: the protracted and fundamental economic torture of one class by another, and the obscured reflection of this struggle of classes along the ideological faultlines of theory. The work strives to make “theory” thoughtfully and provocatively interesting, creative and alive for all “readers” of Spivak. Nine workshops include “key concept” lists to promote discussion and study. Chapters include . . . “The Use-Value of Titillation,” “Boggy Depot,” “Guerrilla Warfare and Deconcoction,” “Spin the Black Circle,” “Giving the Reader a Headache,” “Gravity, or, the Hoary Truism That ‘Chicken Feathers Can’t Fly Up to Heaven’” . . . and many more. Essential reading for students and teachers of “advanced” theory in the humanities. “Leonard . . . undertakes the ambitious project of re-evaluating and resituating Indian philosopher Spivak in the context of writings by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Lenin and Mao Zedong. . . . This work isn’t an ideal introduction to Spivak, . . . but it is a valuable text for those interested in an in-depth Marxist/Maoist reading of an author. Leonard’s approach to Spivak is politically and intellectually illuminating, and both author and his subject certainly deserve consideration from the careful reader. An intriguing untangling of a complex theorist, with a Marxist spin.” -- Kirkus Reviews

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