

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

IJELLH

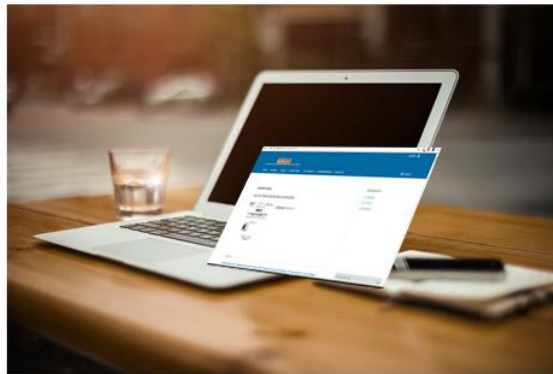
Crossref
INDEX  COPERNICUS
INTERNATIONAL

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

UGC Approved Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



**Volume 6, Issue 7
July 2018**

www.ijellh.com

Priyanka S Jani

Ph.D. Scholar

Department of English,

Sardar Patel University,

Vallabh Vidyanagar,

Anand, Gujarat,

India.

Priyankajani26@gmail.com

“Feminine Ecriture: An Escape from Phallocentrism

in *Pygmalion's Bride* by Carol Ann Duffy”

Abstract: The researcher looks forward to explore the ironic social construction-deconstruction-reconstruction of traditional gender roles by problematizing predominant mode of male writing that is mainly created and judged by a male-chauvinist perspective. It tries to show how author problematises not only socially-culturally constructed additional categorization of male-female writing but also interrogates the very ideas of writing where female have always been portrayed as passive viewer and an absent individual in the canon of English writing by referring to Carol Ann Duffy who paid linguistic tribute to those lost identities of wives of famous males in her first themed collection named “The World’s Wives” by enduring to the female mode of writing that is known as Feminine Ecriture, a woman writing the rhymes and rhythm of her own body and by doing so she actively creates her own individual identity by rejecting the male constructed social identity. In the present poem “Pygmalion’s Bride” the bride was always been presented as a sex object by her male and other historical writings but Duffy gives a voice to the unsung pangs of the bride who otherwise was made silent and absent. (Key words: Feminine Ecriture, Phallocentrism, female identity)

I. Introduction

Language constructs reality, for poststructuralist thinkers, rather than representing reality in objective manner. So by using language differently one can produce different reality (ies). Language has always been a masculine discourse, defined and analyzed in phallogentric

terms. Simone Beauvoir, quoting Poulain de la Barre, mentions in *The Second Sex* that everything that men have written about women should be viewed with suspicion because they are both judge and party. Similarly, Cixous also says: “Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason...it has been one with the phallogocentric terms”. So any woman, while writing anything, is just reproducing a phallogocentric way in her writing and thus hiding her essence. As per the generally accepted norms, man is endowed with reason and mind whereas woman is endowed with rhythm, feelings and heart. And reason is having an upper hand as compared to the feelings in accepted norms of male-chauvinist society.

II. Feminine Ecriture and Phallogocentrism

Helene Cixous, being a poststructuralist French Feminist, sees language as an active creator of women's oppression and invites her to write about her own body by subverting, dismantling, reimagining, revisioning and reconstructing the existing masculine languages into what she calls “Feminine Ecriture” – a feminine mode of writing. A woman, writing the rhythm of her own body, can be an effective way for the escape from the labyrinth of phallogocentrism. The masculine mode of writing has powerfully created the reality (ies) and so feminine way of writing can actively subvert the existing reality and can shape the new reality (ies) as writing itself is “the very possibility of change”. A woman's body and instincts have always been defined and analyzed by a male constructed mode of writing as Freud said, “...the vagina has not yet been ‘discovered.’” Here what Freud meant by “the vagina has not yet been ‘discovered’” is perhaps the very absence of feminine way of writing which prevents vagina to be discovered in a phallogocentric mode of writing. It is this way of writing that Cixous and Carol Ann Duffy try to initiate. In the entire history of Philosophy, either the woman is passive or she is non-existent so she has to follow the male-constructed modes of thinking and living, accepting the myth of femininity created by a man who does not know what it is to be a woman and to make them know, a woman must write ‘what it is to be a woman’, rejecting the manmade myth of femininity, focusing on her own body and thereby writing the rhythm of her own body. The Second wave feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Helene Cixous and Carol Ann Duffy have explicitly tried to express through their works what it is to be a woman by exploring the lived experience of a woman which created a new aura of a feminine mode of writing. All these three female writers have tried to define femininity through their works in terms of lived experiences, essentialism and feminine instincts, respectively. Helene Cixous very politically asks the question,

“Where is she? / Activity/passivity, / Culture/Nature, / Head/heart, / Intelligible/sensitive,…”

III. Carol Ann Duffy and Feminine Ecriture

Cixous tries to answer this question in her philosophical treatise *Sorties* whereas Duffy answers this question through the representation of the lived experiences of women in her poems, especially in her 1999 collection *The World's Wife*. Duffy gives a way out to the marginalized women to find their own way, identity and recognition in this escape-proof labyrinth of unsurpassable male dominance of a patriarchal society, if not socially, at least linguistically, by providing rhymes and rhythm to the unsung pangs of once demolished wives and offered her first ‘themed’ collection as a linguistic tribute to the emotional sacrifice of once neglected wives as well as of present wives by recontextualising them in modern and contemporary setting. Duffy wrote this poems with an intention to give a voice to women who were denied a say in the past and to “look for the missing truths, rather than accepting the way we have been taught and which hadn’t been amplified previously” and to find a female perspective on “great” and well known male characters who had thrown their wives aside by neglecting them to quench their personal, emotional, intellectual thirst. Duffy plucks these marginalized women from history and myth and replants them in contemporary context in center by removing their peripheral position she re-moves all of her readers. In these poems, Duffy rejects the myth of femininity by explicitly expressing sexual desire and bodily instincts of a woman who is otherwise supposed to remain silent about her sexual desires by so called moral norms of society. For Duffy, Writing itself has an erotic quality. It is an “eroticism of the mind”. There is a surge of pleasure when one is writing a poem that is akin to physical eroticism. This eroticism of writing, especially of female mode of writing, is amply visible in her poems of *The World's Wife*. In her sparkling and inventive themed collection, Duffy examines the socio-cultural construction of masculinity and femininity from the feminine perspective. The poems in the present volume look at important events in myth and history from female point of view in a controversial way to problematise gender, sex, female embodiment and female subjectivity.

IV. *Pygmalion's Bride*

This poem with a popular historical reference can be considered as a comical re-contextualization of myth in the modern times though the poem captures serious overtones of female identity crisis. It refers to Pygmalion, a sculptor and the king, who in the quest of an ideal woman, carves a statues of ivory and eventually could not restrain himself from falling

in love and surrenders to its beauty. He invokes Aphrodite and the goddess blesses the ivory statue with a life and he marries her by transcending that lifeless statue into his bride. The title itself hints to the very absence of individual identity of a female. She is 'his' bride and recognized by the possession of her male counter- part, who carved her, craved for her and created her so the bride is always having the passive identity endured with a sense of individual alienation throughout the accepted history and myths, but in the present poem, Duffy beautifully moves towards a complete sense of female freedom. Initially Pygmalion tries to mould her as per 'his' wish and desire by presenting her 'girly things' and she 'played statue, shtum', may be in order to adhere to the relative security of her existence as a lifeless object by avoiding (not refusing or opposing) sexual intercourse. The reference to

“He spoke-

blunt endearments, what he'd do and how.

His words were terrible.

My ears were sculoture,

stone-deaf, shells”

marks the active part of speaking by Pygmalion and passivity of only listening to by the bride. The lines:

‘he squeezed, he pressed.

I would not bruise.

He looked for marks,

for purple hearts,

His nails were claws.

My heart was ice, was glass.’

imply more of offensive passive act, rather than loving, without female involvement. The first part of the poem deliberately adheres to traditional image of the bride just to puncture it later on. When statue started responding to him, actively participating, the male started losing interest in her as he started losing his possession over her:

“So I changed tack...

kissed back,

began to moan,

got hot, got wild,

begged for his child,”

Here, Duffy gradually and beautifully tries to move the center of the poem from male to female, from Pygmalion to the bride, from passivity to activity, from ancient myth (when was denied a say regarding sexual desire) to modernity (where she becomes active in sexual act, without passive surrender) and finally plucks the bride from peripheral and replants her to the center, making her the subject and not the object of the poem.

Duffy, while writing the stanza of the poem, resembles the rhythm of a female body and linguistically, through typographical pattern of short lines and absence of capitalizations, presents the complexity of achieving orgasm. here also Duffy subverts the idea of male masculinity as Pygmalion fails to satisfy a female, his wife and she has to fake the orgasm, “and at the climax/screamed my head off-”. She has not actually reached to orgasm but it is “All an act.” The end of the poem is where Duffy presents her linguistic tribute to Pygmalion’s bride by subverting the myth where the bride rejects her socio-cultural identity stumbled upon her by Pygmalion. Duffy rejects the socially accepted portray of Pygmalion’s bride by mocking Ovid’s and G.B.Shaw’s assumptions about passive female identity. She gets rid of him and her male constructed identity:

“And haven’t seen him since.

Simple as that”

So here comes the moment of her libration.

Work Cited

Beauvoir Simone, *The Second Sex*, Vintage, 2010

Duffy Ann Carol, *The World's Wife*, Picador, 1999

Cixous Helene, "The Laugh of Medusa", Columbia University Press, 2014

Zajko Vanda, *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2008

Freud Sigmund, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Cambridge University Press, 2010

Cixous Helene, "Sortis", *The Helene Cixous Reader*, Routledge, 1994

Cixous Helene, *The Third Body*, Northwestern University Press, 2009