



RESEARCH PAPER

Desubalternity: A Psychoanalytical Study of Displacement of Emotions in Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife*

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the characters and their interrelated relationships as an outlet of their psychological burden which they share as same sex. By scrutinizing the elements of psychological displacement of emotions, the research tries to identify the gap between the realities and how by giving voice to these characters, the repressed desires are being transferred and changing the narrative for the reader. The research analyzes selected poems from the collection *The World's Wife* by Carol Ann Duffy through the lens of psychoanalytical process of displacement. The selected poems deconstruct the gender politics and emphasize on the narrative of the silenced female mythological and historical figures. By identifying displacement of emotions in the female characters and analyzing those emotions through introversion and the gender politics that it creates, the concept of desubalternity comes to shore. The research actively traces the collective metamorphosis of the female characters without being a critique on masculinity which paints the complex image of the phenomenon of being doubly marginalized and how these characters' model introversion through desubalternity. The paper suggests that peeling both layers of marginalization is required to gain a true sense of power.

KEYWORDS Displacement, Gender Politics, Introversion and Desubalternity

Introduction

The research focuses on the examination of emotions in Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* highlighting the elements of displacement and desubalternity. The study examines the psychoanalytic perspective of the selected text by applying the theoretical structure of the repressed emotions as introduced by Freud. It also analyses the displacement of the aforementioned emotions and their results on the psychological condition of women.

Duffy not only advocates for the marginalized, however she also writes on the themes of love, social issues and gender politics. The major characteristic of her writing is that she questions and tries to revert the traditional narrative. She also focuses on the amalgamation of personal and universal elements. Duffy concentrates on multilayered meanings to be conveyed in an easily understandable way and each layer of meaning highlights the socio-political complexities. Her empathetic description of the emotional condition of the characters highlights the different phases of human life (Dowson, 2016). The research focuses on the emotional and psychological self of the characters to analyze their development and transformation.

Duffy's *The World's Wife* focuses on the diversity of women's being such as mythological and historical who were either not given voice when their male counterparts were made historical heroes or were labelled according to the patriarchal powers. The selected poems focus on the subject matter that is exclusively feministic and highlights the portrayal of strong female persona that implies and reverts the gender politics and power dynamics. The uniqueness of this collection of poems is the concoction that Duffy has made by inculcating all categories of women who were marginalized and made subaltern in the history and the "common link is that the poems themselves are told by the spouse-voice of the famous male", reflecting the commonality of situation of women all over the world through ages (Winterson, 2018). The spouse's voice declares the presence of the other partner, too, and they automatically appear as a part of the conversation.

Literature Review

The World's Wife is a powerful take on the psychoanalytical status of women, on the macro level, it is a celebration of female narrative and gives power to its female characters. It shares the experiences of power dynamics and shows what happens when they are reverted. It shows how when women are in control, the situations change but if looked deeper into the text it also explores the fears and anxieties faced by these women. It is the projection of these emotions which leads to the displacement of emotions as we see through the jealousy of "Medusa" and the melancholy of "Mrs. Icarus" (Duffy, 1999). Through this collection, Duffy is shedding "light on the struggle and pain that comes with feeling marginalized and deemed unworthy solely based on external appearances" (Alhgam, 2023).

All of the female characters which are portrayed in the collection, are longing for love and acceptance but at the same time they are defying the societal laws. By writing the stories from the female perspective, Duffy is trying to bring the female narrative back in the picture. Since time immemorial, the female perspective has stayed behind, be it a woman who was influential or a woman of shadows, all were portrayed through the lens of the patriarchy but bringing in this fresh narrative of female characters of the past is placing female narrative "into the text—as into the world and into history – by her[sic] own movement" (Cixous, 1976). This narrative then not only works to bring the female point of view into the mainstream but also helps them in having agency ultimately aiding their realization of their own status.

In her poems, Duffy is "demythologizing" the stories that we are used to. By debunking the previously established stories, through her poetry she is giving potency to these marginalized women. Not only does it help them to get rid of the stain of the stereotypical notions but also helps them show the effects of channelizing their emotion. It also makes the centuries old injustices that they faced manifest in a way that it undo the original sin and makes it a social construction. Duffy portrays women as equally concerned about the progress and evolution of the ideas and world they live in however, since they have been labelled by the patriarchal society as the originator of sins, all of their actions will ultimately be perceived as evil or self-centered. Her poems emphasize that "women have been erased from mythical and historical narratives" and at the same time they are a comment on "topical gender politics" (Duchen, 2023). Duffy highlights the subjugation and erosion of women from the certain narratives through her works and struggles for the revival of their lost position.

Hurye Reis (2004), Deryn Rees-Jones (2001) and Peter Cash (2007) are some other researchers who examined Duffy's work and have explored various themes in Duffy's poetry. Furthermore, her works are not just feministic but also demystifying, reverting the

main narrative while shedding light on the psychological processes of the characters as well as looking at them as a whole instead of a binary. According to *Love and Masculinity in The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy*, “men and masculinity are attacked constantly by more abrasive female narrators” in her poetry and “demonstrates that men and masculinity remain a site of (albeit critical) negotiation for the amorous subject” (Rowland, 2001). However, her characters are not trivializing men just to gain power, it is by removing their camouflage, they appear as frail.

Duffy’s characters in the collection are a pack of alpha females who appears to the reader as an emblem of strength, authority, and control. Her characters hold the power to flow the narrative according to them, yet the exchange of their thoughts show that the subject matter of their being is still like the other women. This inability to exterminate the roots of double marginalization even when they are empowered is desubalternity and to identify it, the patterns of displacement of their emotions and repression is to be observed.

Material and Methods

The research explores the desubalternity of the female characters of Duffy’s *The World’s Wife* applying the qualitative method. The research utilizes the psychoanalytical perspective of displacement introduced by Freud in his *Introductory Essays* (Felluga, 2015). It also utilizes the postcolonial concept of subaltern “who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes” (Ashcroft et al. 2000). By incorporating these two theoretical perspectives, the justification of the psychological introversion of the characters will be visible and leading to their displaced emotions and feelings which will further pilot their status of desubalternity.

Results and Discussion

Duffy strikes a balance between past and present in the world of her imagination. Her previous works like *Standing Female Nude* (1985), *Take My Husband* (1982) etc. focused more on the contemporary scenarios, but her collection *The World’s Wife* is a break from the usual and traditional everyday theme of subjugation of women. Though apparently the poems appear feministic, and they advocate powerful female narratives of historical female characters yet underlined in her texts are the themes of all types of emotions, not only positive ones but also the ones considered negative by society like hatred, jealousy, sexuality, desire, want, and anger. All of these emotions can be tested to see if they are the results of the marginalization of these characters or if they are an outcome of the displacement of those particular emotions onto some other feelings thus making them intense and higher in magnitude.

Displacement of Emotions

The concept of displacement is significant to highlight the socio-cultural positioning of a person carrying a different geo-cultural identity. Displacement is regarded as a “higher level defense mechanism” which helps maintain psychological balance in the person (Bailey, 2022). The characters like “Anne Hathaway” and “Mrs. Darwin” are two characters in her collection, of two different historical eras yet they share a bond of same displaced emotional baggage that is the need to be loved by their husbands. According to the poem, Anne being the wife of the most famous poet in the history of English literature; Shakespeare, was recorded nowhere in the history of literature and never even once was she given any reference. Although it is said that behind every successful man there is a woman, but not only she failed to be his muse as well as an acknowledgement. Moreover, while Shakespeare was busy being an actor and a successful writer, Anne silently took care

of the family as was the norm of that society, she had to stay back, look after the children, get ignored and do every other task that was supposed to be done into since he did not have time for other things. But as Duffy sarcastically mentions in the poem "I gyve unto my wife my second-best bed" (Duffy, 1999) he did not even provide her with the best bed although she in her devotion and love for him remained to think about him as "My living laughing love" (Duffy, 1999) who even after his death would not seize to be for her and that second best bed would be her best.

Displacement of emotions plays a role of a commentary of the inner working of a being, it elaborates on the functionality of "the essence of the dream-thoughts" making the repressed come to light through some other emotion (Freud 1935). The lack of ability of Shakespeare to give his best to Anne in his will (Nelson, 2022) shows his misogynistic aptitude and the societal conduct that would compel the men to dominate their women by subjecting them to the degraded things and values. Whereas, Anne's obsession on the other hand with the class of bed symbolizes yet another thing, her thinking about the second-best bed shows her want of appreciation and recognition from her husband. Although, the poem seems to be a beloved's reminisce but it truly is a regret. Her want to be recognized by her husband and her fidelity towards him makes her emotions of love displaced in such a way that the only theme that is visible in the poem becomes that of yearning and remorse. This also denotes the defense mechanism which is helping her "cope with acute anxiety by transferring emotions about a stressor onto other objects or activities that are less psychologically threatening" making her look like a calm-composed being at the end of the poem (Costa, 2017).

Another classical example of psychological displacement of emotions in Duffy's work can be the character of Medusa, who is villainized in the original myth (Ask, 2023). By deconstructing the historical discourse, the main culprit of making her as cruel as she is, is the one lesser discussed. Here in the poem "Medusa" she is fighting with the pangs of jealousy and unfaithful lover who is interested in just a pass time. Her dilemma resonates not with a mythological creature but with a modern girl facing dishonesty and disloyalty from her lover. She being the most powerful creature when says "Wasn't I beautiful? Wasn't I fragrant and young?" (Duffy, 1999) shows her feelings are truly hurt and that this betrayal that she has faced will erupt in the form of some intense emotions. The displacement of her feelings of love is then shown through her anger and monstrosity. For example, her situation in which she is self-analyzing by saying "I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued..." (Duffy, 1999) which is the effect of the displacement of emotions and feelings shows her introspection being a result of the lack of emotional intimacy.

In "Queen Herod", the power that has been given to this queen by the poet, and the biblical story been portrayed through the narrative of a woman who was not only non-existent in the original narrative yet in this case she is the sovereign, is eminent. Her power is shown through her firm and harsh demeanor. She exercises her power and ability in the crudest manner but whenever she refers to herself, she uses the word mother. She addresses other women with respect too by giving them the stature of a mother but when she needs to assert herself, she orders to "kill each mother's son. /Do it. Spare not one" (Duffy 1999) reducing them all to her subjects. Duffy has shown the anxiety of being a mother in the poem, although Queen Herod is the most powerful character among all and is the protagonist of the story, yet her vulnerability is visible through her projection of her emotions which are unstable and thus the ruthless order to kill every son which is a very masculine act. Her state of being the sovereign and a mother are in conflict hence, she justifies herself by saying, "We do our best, /we Queens, we mothers, /mothers of Queens" (Duffy 1999).

The poems and characters of Duffy are all historical beings who were “women behind the scenes, women behind the throne, women behind history” (Winterson 2018) but nonetheless they were the reason behind the success of the men around them. They were all curated in a way by Duffy hence they are shown to be disrupting power politics in the poems. When these characters are reversing the power dynamics through displacement of emotions, they are not only asserting themselves but also creating a space where psychological introversion is taking place.

Introversion

Characters like queen Herod, Anne Hathaway, Medusa, Mrs. Icarus etc. are all either the wives of prominent male figures of history or mythological creatures but one thing common among them is that they all have delved deep into the psychological abyss of their emotional turmoil that has been caused by their marginalization. Some of the characters are the embodiment of grief, pain, loss and some go through the dilemma of jealousy, love and vulnerability. All of Duffy’s characters in her collection *The World’s Wife*, are going through the psychological phenomenon of displacement but this displacement of emotions is not always shown through revenge as in the case of Medusa, obsession of power as in the case of Queen Herod and hopeless love as in the case of Anne Hathaway. Duffy has used psychological introversion to show that displaced emotions also lead to a very different path i.e. a path where these female characters are behaving superior to their spouses or mocking them.

According to Jung, the introverted “applies his horne chiefly to himself i.e. he finds the Unconditioned Values within himself” (Geyer, 2012) similarly, these female characters of Duffy are channelizing the displaced emotions and introverting themselves. In the poem, “Mrs. Darwin” the famous scientist Darwin, who gave the theory of evolution is looked down upon by his wife and even shown to have plagiarized the idea of evolution from his far more intellectual wife, who in reality was never known to anyone. The way she is addressing Darwin shows her superior airs and her mentioning “Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds me of you” (Duffy, 1999) shows the channelization of her feelings of frustration and agitation with her husband. The constant availability and his riding her shoulder to gain success gives her the power to make fun of him by simply calling him a chimpanzee.

Similarly, the case of Mrs. Icarus is also an open specimen, who is openly criticizing his husband’s foolishness and showing her resentment through her disinterestedness. When she says, “prove to the world/ he’s a total, utter, absolute, Grade A pillock” (Duffy, 1999), it does not mean that she is only belittling him, but it shows that her mockery is the result of the past resentment and embarrassment that she had to face from the world.

Desubalternity

The displacement of emotions in the form of scapegoating, anger and negativity and inappropriate expression of emotions in the characters of Duffy show that these female characters even after being demarginalized still could not channelize themselves properly. The concept of subaltern then plays differently, since it is the idea that people on margins are subalterns but when Duffy becomes an embouchure to these people who are on margins, they seize to be the subalterns and hence are elevated from that previous status. In her article *Can Subaltern Speak?* the question is asked that are they really able to voice themselves and the answer to that question is “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, 1988) making the process of desubalternity a dark reality.

Conclusion

The characters of Duffy may be portrayed as power female protagonists who are shown by her as the narrative changer but at the end of the analysis, they are nothing but a façade wearing cloak of demarginalization. Spivak believes that giving voice to the marginalized is not going to help them elevate themselves from their marginalized situation. To make them truly unmarginalized and to bring them out of their binary's shadow, they need to get rid of the layers of marginalization.

Hence, it is proved that the characters of Duffy are unaware of the fact that though they have the power to speak and exercise or displace their emotions, this same displacement of emotions is the cause of them not being able to get rid of the twofold marginalization. Hence, the incapability of them to get themselves out of the category of subaltern. But because they have some sort of power and voice, and because they are reverting the power dynamics to a certain extent, they become the embodiment of desubalternity, which is the process of being able to revert the power dynamics and partly being able to get rid of the status of subaltern.

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