CONSTRUCTING THE FEMINIST IDENTITY, SUBVERSION AND DIVERSIVNESS: SOME INSIGHTS OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Magical realism similarly aims to improve upon our understanding of the reality by separating it from its mundane context and then puts it in another totally different context and thus re-contextualizes the reality. And this de-familiarization enables us once again to see the world in its true sense. Thus it makes it also possible to come up with the realities of the text than just one reality. Besides the questions of narrative styles recurrent in Magical Realist texts, such as distortion of linear order of events, uncertainty, decadence and multiple possibilities, there are also more specific themes in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's text, most of which are critical of established worldviews and stereotypical modes of representation. The current study focused on the literature available on the debate of feminist identity. The study discussed the view and ideas of different researchers, authors, and writers.

Keywords: Faminist Identity, Diverseness

INTRODUCTION

The origins of the literary mode called Magical Realism can be traced back to 1927, when Franz Roh, a German art critic, introduced the term in visual arts. Although Roh, in his essay, described Magical Realism to be totally grounded in reality, the term became applicable to literature, as a distinct form of writing, in Latin America in the latter half of the century. Although Arturo Uslar Pietri introduced the term in his collection of essays Letras y hombres de Venezuela (Literature and Famous Figures of Venezuela) in 1948 as a term used for a certain type of Hispano-American narrative prose, it was only in 1955 - when a study under the title "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction by Professor Angelo Flores was published - that this technique gained popularity. The most well known and widely read Magical-Realist is the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927) who is considered to be a member of the generation of authors following Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986).

The first critic to develop a coherent narratological theory of Magical Realism was the Brazilian, Irlemar Chiampi; - in 1980 – and a Spanish translation of her book appeared in 1983. According to her the most prominent of the ideas that Magical Realism may involve are either: 1: 'denaturalization of the real' or 2: 'naturalization of the marvelous'. (Chiampi)

As Hans Bertens puts it: "In the Deconstructionist binary oppositions too either/or gives way to both/and" (Bertens p; 131). †††††††††††† As in magical realism there is a balance between realities and the magical they both exist at the same time and complement each other, therefore, not an opposition but a shift takes place: when the ordinary becomes magical and where the magical is mundane. Magical realism aims at showing the 'alternative' reality not the 'opposite' reality. Thus magical realism is truly post- modern in its rejection of the binaries.

With the addition of deconstruction of the existing power relationships, knowledge of the condition of women and equality between the genders in male authored texts many literary theorists have transformed feminist insights and have created it as a diversified field of studying literature. Most feminists agree that male-female relationships have a significant impact on our lives and existence. There are many male authored texts in which female characters are of significant importance and the inner thoughts and personalities of these women have been successfully portrayed in those texts. The current study focused on the literature available on the debate of feminist identity. The study discussed the view and ideas of different researchers, authors, and writers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The American feminist Judith Butler (1956-) has contributed much to the feminist theory. She has written several books among which Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993) are the two most significant. One point of Gender Trouble which is widely taught is "not to prescribe a new gendered way of life, but to open up the field of possibility for gender". Sara Salih has observed that Butler "ask(s) questions about the formation of identity and subjectivity, tracing the processes by which we become subjects. When we assume the sexed/gendered/raced identities which are constructed for us [...] within existing power structures" (Salih: 02).

Keeping in view the assertions about gender identities Butler continues her investigation of "the subject" as to by which means these identities are constructed? By which process these identities come into existence? And if these identity constructions work or fail then, how? What brings to mind here are a couple of significant queries?

Firstly whom do we oppress by constructing our own identities?

Secondly if these identities fail then will new identities be formed?

Thirdly even if we are allowed to do our identities our own way then to what possible extent will we be granted the freedom to do so?

Fourthly as connected to the second one where Butler talked about the reconstruction of the identity. If the identities are reconstructed will the new one be as suppressive or as oppressive as the old one?

The answers to these questions may be vague and may require several volumes of research to answer but one thing becomes clear about Butler's epistemology; that her quest is to find out the source of the formation of the proper identity of the feminine, which is, for the purpose of my research, the most significant aspect of Butler's books Gender Trouble and Bodies That Matter. Butler's theoretical analysis of the subject that is to say the feminine; is primarily drawn keeping in context the Hegelian notion of the dialectic the psychoanalytic theory of the French philosopher Michael Foucault (1926-89) and 20th century French thinker Jacques Derrida (1930-). Foucault's notion of the "variable constructions of sex and sexuality in different societies and contexts provide Butler with a theoretical framework of her own formulations of gender, sex and sexuality as unfixed and constructed identities." (Salih: 05.)

If on one side Butler and Foucault describe "subject formation as a process" (Salih: 07) which has to be situated within its historical context to be understood then on the other hand Derrida's linguistic theory helps to formulate language used within literature for constructing those identities. Along with these Simone De Behaviors' the Second Sex (1949), where

Behaviour proposes the theorizations of gender construction, is of significant influence on Butler's theorizations.

Butler's first book Subjects of Desire (1987) show curiously little interest in the issues which were subsequently to preoccupy Butler, namely the formation of the subject within sexed and gendered power structures (Salih:08). As she entered the philosophical theoretical field Butler began to study the category of the female subject as a self-evident identity. It was under the Foucauldian formulations that many 20th century theorists began to believe that sex was not biologically constructed rather it was "discursively constructed" as a sexed category. In her book Gender Trouble which I will discuss for the purpose of my research deals with the issues of sexual identity.

Butler discusses the issues of sexed identity in Gender Trouble (1990) which is one of Butler's most significant work and is regarded as an important hallmark for Butler's theorizations of "per formative identity" which has been described as "the sin qua non (i.e. the indispensable condition) of postmodern feminism" (Shildrick: 1996). Many theorists have accepted that Gender Trouble continues to be the most influential and important in a wide range of fields. Although Gender Trouble seems to have taken a change of direction from her first book Subjects of Desire. But to look closely it would seem evident that Hegelian threads of thought are running through both her works. "desire, recognition and alterity" are still very much on Butler's mind in Gender Trouble as in the context of the constitution of the subject, and the ways the identity is constructed, and in particular the way "gender identity is constructed by and in discourse". (Subjects of Desire xIV) (Salih 43-44). To claim that sex and gender are discursively constructed suggests the internal essence of the subject. "one of the basic contribution and constructivism is to explore how the body is produced with a web of taxonomical structures of binary logic" (Fragkon: p: 3). Thus by inscribing a stereotypical identity upon the female body that would majorly function as the reproductive organ, such norms and ideologies construct the intelligible and recognizable identities.

Butler in her article Variation of Sex and Gender; Beauvoir, Witting and Foucault claims that "gender is a choice" (VSG:128-9) "an idea that is not quite as straight forward as it might appear since by 'choice' Butler does not mean that a 'free agent' or 'person' stands outside its gender and simply selects it. This is impossible, since one is already ones gender and ones choice of 'gender style' is always limited from the start" (Salih: 46) says Salih discussing Butler's theorizations of per formative gender identity. To make her stance clearer Butlers says

To choose a gender is to interpret received gendered norms in a way that organizes them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew ones cultural history in one's own terms. This is not a prescriptive task we must endeavor to do, but one in which we have been endeavoring all along. (VSG: 131)

Hegel had claimed that identity is the product of and carries within it its relation to what is different and that no existence of any kind conforms to the (Lockean) maxim that everything is identical with itself and that difference is an external relation (Hegel: 1975: 166-7). In this way Hegel has challenged the existence of a "self- present identity".

For Butler gender is an act or a series of acts always recursively occurring, as it is impossible for one to live as a social being and yet outside the socially prescribed terms of gender.

Foucauldian formulations of "large group of statements" governing the way we speak about and perceive a specific historical movement or movements.

"framed and formed" (Salih: 147). At the beginning of *Gender Trouble* Butler asserts that feminist critique should analyze how the category 'women' is produced and restrained by power structures rather than looking to those structures for emancipation. She sets herself up to the task of investigating "feminist genealogy" (GT: 05) where she has used the word genealogy specifically in Foucauldian sense. As she puts it "genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses, with multiple and diffused points of origin"(GT Viii-ix). Butler is not interested in investigating the cause or the origin rather she studies the effect of gender. Assuming that gender is an effect Butler asserts that "gender is not a noun [but it] it proves to be per formative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (GT 25).

Reading gender identity through a Foucauldian lens Butler gives what she calls a discursive account of the cultural production of gender "in other words, she works from the premise that gender is a discursive construct something that is produced and not a natural fact." (Salih 51)

Foucault as Hall states is of the view that what is required is not an abandonment or abolition of the subject but a reconceptualization- thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm. It seems to be in the attempt to rearticulate the relationships between the subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs- or rather, if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices and politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail the question of identification" (Hall:p:16)

Hall in connection to the discursive practices is of the view that

Identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as the construction, a process, never completed – always in process. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost' sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required sustaining it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is in fact a fantasy of incorporation. (Hall: pg: 16-17)

The sociologists John Hood Williams and Wendy Cealy Harrison have questioned Butler's assertion that "there is no doer behind the deed". They think it is helpful to deconstruct the idea of the ontological status of gender. They wonder whether a new ontology is founded on the equally "foundationalist conception of gender performativity" (Salih: 69).

Gender is a corporeal style an act (or a sequence of acts), a 'strategy' which has cultural survival as its end, since those who do not 'do' their gender correctly are punished by society. (GT: 139-140)

Thus society in an indirect manner prohibits these altered behaviors and presents before the person an ideally acceptable model to follow like a masculine male and a feminine female. Thus the "stylization of the body" to quote Butler is purely an act which is performed before the audience which is here the society by large. She further says that both sex and gender are enactments that "operate performatively to establish the appearance of body fixity. "(Salih: 58). By using the word "enactment" takes us back to Butler's concept of performativity as she asserts that there

Is no sex that is not always already gendered? Thus all bodies are gendered by the very beginning of their societal existence; which further means that there is no natural body which leads us to the point of conclusion that gender is not something one is rather it is something one does more precisely a sequence of acts... a doing rather than 'being' (GT 25).

Gender identities are both constituted and constructed, which is hereby to say that gender is preceded by language. Thus it would be rightfully said that "it is not that an identity 'does' discourse or language, but the other way around __ language and discourse 'do' gender" (Salih: 64) it is therefore in this sense that gender is performative.

The concept of identity as explained here is "a strategic one" (Hall: p: 17). Which is to say, that the concept of identity" does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change the bit of the self which remains always –already 'the same', identical to itself across cultural identity" (Hall: 1990). It thus means that identities are never unified and what we see before us are the multiple constructed forms of the "one single core", which are manipulated and multiplied, fractured and fragmented through politically manufactured discourses. Thus the process of construction of identification is an ongoing transformation and change. Therefore identities are constructed within discourse and we need to study these discursive practices of the identity formation strategies.

Similarly Hall believes that identity changes with a specific play of power, which may mean to be in the hands of the producer of the literary texts.

Hall proclaims that identities are constructed through difference. "This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the other. The relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term- and thus its "identity" can be constructed" (Derrida: 1981; Laclau: 1990; Butler; 1993).

Identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', objected. Every identity has as its 'margin', an excess, something more. Identity thus is constructed of a form of closure.

Laclau (1990:33) argues and agrees that "the constitution of a social identity is an act of power". Derrida has also expressed that the constitution of an identity is always based through exclusion and developing a hierarchy between two binary oppositions- man/ woman. As it is the same with the opposites of black and white relationship, where the white is associated with strength, purity and black on the other hand with emptiness, vacuum and vice. "So the unities which the identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed with the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality, but of the naturalized, over-determined process of 'closure'" (Hall: 1992). Hall is further of the view that the identities are constructed through the process of 'difference' through the discourse practices which hail or to say Butlerian 'interpelate' into a place as social subjects. "identities are as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representations are always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate- identical to the subject processes which are invested in them" (Hall: 2000:19).

Zamora and Faris have noted that "magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweeness, their all at oneness encourages resistance to monological, political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers from post colonial cultures and, increasingly to women" (Zamora&Faris: 1995:06) and that "magical realism is a mode suited

to exploring – and transgressing- boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographic or generic" (Zamora&Faris: 1995:05). This nature of magical realism makes it perfect for feminist literary texts in particular and feminism in general. This subversivness of the Magical Realist texts allows for the writer to let their female characters to "enact" or to use the Butlerian "perform" their selves subversively. Their continued study of the subversive and transgressive aspect of magical realism is very unique. As we can see in the works of feminist Angeela Carter where she has employed the technique of magical realism to subvert from the authority of the British ruling class, or as in the case of Salman Rushdi "who questioned the truth of the British version of Indian Colonial and Post Colonial History" (Bowers: 2004: 64).

CONCLUSION

De Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949), studies the cultural construction of woman as other which laid the foundations for much of the theoretical work of the 1970s. 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,'.... 'No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.' The category of the other, she argues, is fundamental in the formation of all human subjectivity, since our sense of self can be produced only in opposition to something which is not-self. Men on other hand have claimed the category of self or Subject exclusively for themselves, and relegated woman to the status of eternal other. The category 'woman' has thus no substance, being merely a projection of male fantasies (the 'myth of the eternal feminine') and fears. But since all cultural representations of the world presently available to us whether in myth, religion, literature or popular culture—are the work of men, women too have internalized these definitions and learned to 'dream through the dreams of men'. Indeed, a 'true woman' is required to accept herself as other for man: she must 'make herself object...renounces her autonomy'. In her analysis of how woman became the other, de Beauvoir argued that the key to women's oppression lay in their cultural construction as other.

Contemporary feminists at the same time like Butler have employed deconstructive strategies in order to destabilize a binary model inscribed in the masculine/feminine dyad. Instead, feminists have provocatively elaborated new frameworks in which to locate the gendered and sexual subject. These theorists have drawn from the Derridean model, which argues that binary structures will always privilege one of the binaries over the other: for example, male over female. Rather than trying to reverse this so that the feminine will be privileged over the masculine, as emancipatory feminism has striven to do, these feminists have attempted to destabilize the foundational structures on which binaries relies. Judith Butler proposed some exciting and provocative ways of re-thinking gendered and sexual subjectivity. She introduces the idea that all gender and all sexual identities are performed. So if we are to accept the idea that the dualism between the masculine and feminine is no longer the reigning discourse in the construction of gender, it would seem that, regardless of their gender, both men and women can and should stay vigilant and participate in developing new ways of constructing or in many diverse and subversive ways perform the contemporary subject.

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