

Subversion of Patriarchy: Intertextuality in Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife**

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The World's Wife (1999), written by Carol Ann Duffy, who is the first woman and first openly LGBT person appointed Britain's poet Laureate, is a collection of poems which makes full use of intertextuality to show Duffy's subversion to patriarchy. In this collection, histories and myths are parodied, quoted, alluded and even rewritten. Women in her poems are given chances to speak out for themselves, which can be seen as a form of resistance against patriarchy. In this article, constitutive intertextuality as well as manifest intertextuality like parody, quotation and allusion in *The World's Wife* will be discussed specifically. By analyzing how those intertextual features are adopted as a form of resistance against patriarchy, this article aims to help readers form a better perception of the feminism Duffy raises, and tries to help more women who are being suppressed by men, to find and reconstruct their identities.

Keywords: *The World's Wife*, Carol Ann Duffy, Subversion to patriarchy, Intertextuality

Introduction

Carol Ann Duffy and *The World's Wife*

As a Scottish poet and playwright and a Professor of Contemporary Poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University, Carol Ann Duffy is also the first woman and first LGBT who was openly offered Britain's Poet Laureate. "Duffy had been considered for the position of Poet Laureate in 1999, but because she was a lesbian, she was not appointed the position" (ZHOU, 2013, p. 2). One of the reasons why she can obtain this honor as a woman is the special works she has written and the achievements she has made. Her main collections include *Standing Female Nude* (1985), the winner of a Scottish Arts Council Award, *Selling Manhattan* (1987), which won a Somerset Maugham Award, *Mean Time* (1993), winner of the Whitbread Poetry Award.

The World's Wife is Carol Ann Duffy's first themed collection of poems, which was first published in 1999. The themes address issues such as sexism, equality, bereavement and birth. In this collection, Duffy takes characters, stories, histories and myths which focus on men, to present them anew for us to look at not only the women that were previously obscured behind the men, but important events in history from a female perspective. The collection includes 30 poems, as Lanone (2008, p. 186) noted, "the title recalls George Eliot's famous definition of gossip: 'Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender—not the world, but the world's wife'" (Eliot, 1996, p. 490).

* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is part of the outputs of The Guangzhou University Scientific Research Project for High-level Personnel (No. 2700050348) and Guangdong Province Social Science Post-funded Project (No. GD17HWW01).

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Duffy's poetry is "well-known and well-liked", and is mainly on topics like "gender and oppression, expressing them in familiar, conversational language that made her work accessible to a variety of readers" (ZHOU, 2013, p. 1). An intertextuality analysis will help deepen the understanding of the hidden themes of the collection.

Intertextuality and Its Representation in *The World's Wife*

Intertextuality originates from Bakhtin's view of dialogism and heteroglossia, which shows that language is dialogic, and "meaning is relational: utterances do not have a singular meaning in themselves but only in relation to other utterances" (FENG, 2005, p. 10). Influenced by Bakhtin, Kristiva raised the notion of intertextuality in 1969, and considered intertextuality as dialogue between texts, or text and social context. In Fairclough's view (1992), intertextuality points to how texts can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions to generate new ones (quoted in Momani, Badarneh, Migdadi, 2010), in other words, intertextuality can enrich the meanings of new text. In 1992, Fairclough classified intertextuality into "manifest intertextuality" and "constitutive intertextuality" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 117). The former signifies intertextual elements such as parody, quotation, allusion, etc. "The latter signifies the interrelationship of discursive features in a text, such as structure, form, or genre" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 117). Bakhtin's theory of "dialogism" indicates that intertextuality can be seen as a communication between the prior text referred or quoted by writer, and the new text. Hence, knowing how a text transforms prior texts to a new text, and how it reconstructs an existing text, can not only help readers discover new understanding of a prior text, but also reveals the ideology behind its intertextuality, for example, the attitude of writers towards culture the prior text involves.

Bloom has mentioned the relation between intertextuality and poems in *Poetry And Repression* (1980), which indicates that every single poem is written by a writer based on his misreading of a prior work or its writer, so every poem can be a "inter-poem", and the understanding of a poem is a kind of "inter-reading" (quoted in LUO, 2006). This means the analysis of intertextuality in a poem is a process where the ideology behind the lines could be revealed.

The World's wife shows strong intertextual features. For one thing, the title *The World's Wife* shows intertextuality. For another, it takes characters, stories, histories and myths, and represents those important events in her renowned feminist way, which is an application of intertextuality, either. In what follows, based on the types of intertextuality mentioned above, which includes "manifest intertextuality" involving parody, quotation, allusion, etc., and "constitutive intertextuality", this article discusses first about the intertextual features in two poems selected from *The World's Wife*, "Little red cap" and "Anne Hathaway", then further discusses in what way these features convey a sense of feminism or Duffy's subversion to patriarchy.

Detailed Analysis of Intertextuality in the *World's Wife*

Parody in "Little Red Cap"

Parody is one type of intertextuality which is most widely used in *The World's Wife*. To show how Duffy conveys the sense of feminism through intertextual features in her poems, the opening poems of the collection, "Little Red Cap", can be the very example. The story it parodies is a well-known fairy tale, *little red cap* by Grimm.

In the original version, women were stereotypically described as always being weak, ignorant and incapable, which can be found in the following detailed plots. Firstly, the "Little Red Cap" was portrayed as a

young foolish child, who had made a wrong decision to talk to the wolf, which resulted in being devoured. Secondly, her grandmother was portrayed as a sick old woman who could hardly take good care of herself. Thirdly, at the end of the tale, a hunter showed up, bravely rescued them from the wolf, and cleverly, set a trap for the wolf.

However, in Duffy's version, she used the original story lines, but changed many messages. Duffy makes the little red cap the first person here, in the last line of the first stanza, "It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf", as the first person, little red cap is going to narrate what she has experienced. Meanwhile, the wolf here is described as a "wolf-poet" who was attracted by the girl's youth and charm, and bought the girl a drink. And the third stanza, surprisingly, in the girl's words, explains that the reason why she accepted his drink was his poetry, although she knew exactly she might lose her virginity. What's more unbelievable is that the girl learned about sex from the wolf and fell in love with it. But after she discovered his real nature, cruelty, she made every effort to devour all his books, and became a great poet like him in ten years. She took an axe to kill the wolf by herself, and left the forest.

Duffy parodied the old fairy tale, but her version is totally contrary to the original one. Duffy gave the silent girl the right to speak for herself by telling people she is emotional but also rational, intellectual and brave enough to struggle with what she hates. In this way, Duffy is actually satirizing patriarchy indicated in the old version of Grimm.

Specific Strategies of Parodying in "Little Red Cap"

Parody can be employed in various ways. When parodying the original tale, Duffy adopted specific strategies both in plot and language. In terms of plot, Duffy imitated the original tale but rewrote some plots. Firstly, different from the original tale where the story is narrated by the third person, the little red cap narrates her experience and feelings in her own words as the first person. Secondly, the reason she talks with the wolf is his poetry but not his innocence, because she knows exactly how much she is going to risk. Thirdly, she falls in love with the wolf for his talent in poetry. Last but not least, she killed the wolf by herself after realizing his cruelty, which is opposite to the original plot that she was rescued by a hunter.

Among these changes, for the little red cap, she represents the transformation of a innocent girl to a mature woman; for this whole poem, it is trying to say "NO" to the original version, in which there is a sense of patriarchy, women is innocent, incompetent, while man is brilliant and always the hero.

In terms of language, Duffy mainly applied emphatic sentence, personification and irony when parodying the original tale, which also contributes to the subversion of patriarchy. "It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf" (Duffy, 1999, p. 1), this emphatic sentence in the first stanza emphasizes the subject "I", it is also a sort of emphasis on the girl's point of view of her experience that she is going to say below. Besides, the wolf is personified as a self-centered poet, who reads "his verse out loud/In his wolffy drawl, a paperback in his hairy paw" (Duffy, 1999, p. 1). He also seduced and raped the girl, and "My stockings ripped to shreds, scraps of red from my blazer/Snagged on twig and branch, murder clues. I lost both" (Duffy, 1999, p. 1). In the final stanza, "The glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones" is an irony to the lost of her virginity ten years ago as well as her love for him (Duffy, 1999, p. 2).

With emphasis, personification and irony, Duffy succeeds in conveying a sense of respect to women as well as a sense of irony to patriarchy. For one thing, she tries to draw readers' attention to woman's thoughts; for another, she tries to expose the perfect-hero image of men and satirize the aggressive male power.

Quotation and Allusion in "Anne Hathaway"

Besides parody, Duffy also used quotation and allusion to subvert patriarchy. Both of them can be found in "Anne Hathaway".

Anne Hathaway was the wife of William Shakespeare. She married him at the age of twenty-five, seven years older than her eighteen year old husband. For most of their married life he lived in London while she remained in Stratford-upon-Avon, raising their three children.

The poem begins with an epigraph quoted from Shakespeare's will, "Item I gyve unto my wife my second best bed..." (Duffy, 1999, p. 30), which means Shakespeare left his wife a bed, and it has aroused discussions on whether "the second best bed" was an expression of love or an insult.

As mentioned in Katherine Scheil's critical survey on "the second best bed" in 2009, Shakespeare's will were his two daughters. Judith, the younger daughter, was bequeathed a total of three hundred pounds, to be paid in installments. Susannah Hall, the other daughter was bequeathed the majority of her father's estate. Other bequests were reserved for designated friends and family. However, to his wife, Anne Hathaway, he left her a "second best bed", which has led some people to question the nature of their relationship. People even considered the bed as an insult that Anne Hathaway would have been attended to by other members of the family.

According to ZHANG (2015), "the second best bed" has been a myth that discredits Anne Hathaway. As a result, in this poem, Duffy quoted an epigraph from Shakespeare's will, without which what Duffy is going to say in this poem may be hard to be understood; Besides, it is also a strategy to arouse readers' opinions before Duffy tells them she doesn't agree to view the second best bed as an insult, in this way, a discussion between readers and Duffy is created to some extent. What's more, it is also an allusion appropriated by Duffy to highlight the fact that women have been ignored or silenced for a long time, and to presents stories, myths, fairy tales and characters in Western culture from the point of view of women.

Duffy shares her view on the second best bed by giving Anne the right to speak in this poem. Anne tells everyone her passionate and sincere love with Shakespeare, tells everyone it is the bed where Shakespeare created plays and poems, where they enjoyed the romance, where she dreamed of him when she missed him too much.

Constitutive Intertextuality in "Anne Hathaway"

In "Anne Hathaway", Duffy adopted the sonnet structure as the form of the poem. Sonnet, derived from Italy, is a form of poetry with a strict rhyme scheme and specific structure, chosen by a poet for romantic subjects. A man usually adopted it in praise of a woman in Shakespeare's time. It was sonnet, the lyrical poetry style, that Shakespeare was really good at, Duffy chose sonnet as the structure of "Anne Hathaway", which is an effort to memorize Shakespeare's great talent and romance in his poems. What's most important is that, in doing so, Anne, as the first person, can not only express her feelings, but also "write" her poem in praise of her husband's love for her, in this way, some prejudice about her might be eliminated.

Conclusion

Indeed, by parodying, quoting, and alluding, etc., the intertextuality in *The World's Wife* is an attempt to rewrite the traditional patriarchal culture that Duffy subverts. In doing so, Duffy tries to generate a new "Her-story" to resist "His-(s)tory", and to create a communication between feminism and patriarchal society.

That is to say, Duffy disagrees with the culture in the prior stories, myths, fairy tales, where women is always soft, weak and controlled by men; she holds the thought that on the contrary, women should be brave to speak for themselves to resist the prejudice from society and the suppression of men. When generating a new “Her-story”, Duffy also tries to create a communication between female characters in the poems and the contemporary female readers, which encourages women to be independent and brave to pursuit what they want, strong to undertake what they would undertake.

The analysis of intertextuality in Duffy’s poems aims to help readers form a better perception of the feminism Duffy raises, and to help more and more women, who are being suppressed by men, to find out and reconstruct their identities.

Although only two typical poems in *The World’s Wife* are mentioned in this article, what this article has done may help offer a framework for people who are interested in *The World’s Wife* and Duffy’s other poems, to interpret the feminism in them.

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