



Metaphors of Patriarchy in the Context of Intertextuality: Rereading *To the Lighthouse*

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Received 19 November 2013; accepted 3 February 2014

Abstract

This paper rereads *To the Lighthouse* from the viewpoint of intertextuality. It takes the classical fairytale *The Fisherman and His Wife* by Brothers Grimm as a breakthrough point and tries to reestablish the relationship between the two texts. It introduces the theory of intertextuality and tries to find out how the two texts (the tale and the novel) intertextualize with each other. In the meanwhile, the metaphors of patriarchy are pointed out in the context of intertextuality.

Key words: *To the Lighthouse*; The fairytale; Intertextuality; Patriarchy

HUI Jingrui (2014). Metaphors of Patriarchy in the Context of Intertextuality: Rereading *To the Lighthouse*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 8(1), 110-115. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320140801.4181>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320140801.4181>

INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf, whose position in English literature no critic can ignore, is one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the twentieth century. As the daughter of the well-known English essayist, critic and biographer Sir Leslie Stephen, as early as childhood, she received a very good education and at the same time suffered from periods of nervous depressions. In 1904, she began her writing career until she drowned herself in 1941.

Virginia Woolf has mainly made three contributions to English literature. First, together with James Joyce, she is an experimental novelist for the use of the stream-

of-consciousness method in fiction. With her skillful representation of inner workings of human mind, her works present readers a new possibility and authenticity of expression such as in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *The Waves* (1931), etc. . Second, she is also an excellent literary critic and her literary reviews are mainly collected in *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Second Common Reader* (1932). Third, she is a feminist and her feminism is shown in *Three Guineas* (1938) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In fact, throughout all her works, she reveals the discrimination women have received in society and calls for real equality between men and women.

1. STUDIES OF TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

As one of the representative works of Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* was published in 1927 and received the most appreciation from the readers among her works. Roger Fry writes to Woolf that he thinks *To the lighthouse* “the best thing you’ve done, actually better than *Mrs. Dalloway*” (Bell, 1986, p.128) and Woolf replies that it has “kept me on the right path, so far as writing goes, more than anyone” (Evans, 1989, p.101). E. M. Forster writes that the book is “awfully sad, very beautiful both in (non-radiant) color and shape, it stirs me much more to questions of whether and why than anything else you have written” (Woolf, 1980, pp.77-78). It is also one of the writer’s favorites, “My present opinion is that it is easily the best of my books” (Evans, 1989, p.101).

The story is composed of three parts. In the first part, The Ramsays are on vocation with some friends in their villa by the sea. The youngest child James puts forward a request “going to the lighthouse” the next day, which receives warm response from his mother, but cold and rational disapproval from his father with weather being possibly bad as the excuse. With the flow of consciousness, the picture shifts from mother and son

to other members and friends of the family and then to a family dinner party with beautiful hostess Mrs. Ramsay as the center. In the second part, the war breaks out and ten years passes in which Mrs. Ramsay has passed away suddenly, her beautiful daughter Prue gets married but later dies of childbirth, and her clever son Andrew dies on the front. In the third part, the broken family returns to the villa by the sea, and under the leadership of Mr. Ramsay, together with his two children Cam and James, they set out for the lighthouse.

1.1 Different Reviews on *To the Lighthouse*

In the past few decades or so, the study on *To the Lighthouse* can be divided into several periods. Just after the publication of the novel, in spite of warm welcome from readers, it received some sharp criticism from the critics. *Times Literary Supplement* finds its characters “not completely real” (Majumdar & McLaurin, 1975, p.194) and the *New York Times* finds most of the characters “one-dimensional fragments that have been created with great insight but insufficient vitality” (Majumdar, & McLaurin, 1975, p.197).

However, “A Significant moment in the history of Woolf’s critical reception in general came in 1953 with the publication of Willard R. Trask’s translation of Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (first published in Switzerland in 1946)” (Hussey, 1995, p.311). It was beginning with this book that the critics began to show special interest in the special narrative method of the novel and relative critical works in this field were published one after another.

In the 1950s and 60s, because of Virginia Woolf’s feminism ideas, many critics saw the novel in terms of struggle between masculine and feminine “principles” with Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as the rivals and the lighthouse as the symbol of androgyny. Herbert Marder is one of the first critics to hold such feminist perspectives in his *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf* and Nancy Topping Bazin holds similar ideas in *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*.

Many critics also analyze the novel from the viewpoint of archetypal significance of the main characters and mythic meanings. As Fleishman (1975) notes, Joseph Blotner “brought together much of the textual evidence, along with supporting information from psychology and mythology, to establish the Demeter and Persephone myth” as the heart of the novel. Some critics also hold that Woolf and her circle are influenced by the theory of Freud, and show special interest in the typical symbol of Oedipus complex from which James Ramsay has suffered. As many critics have discussed, James Ramsay “inhabits a classical oedipal triangle as philosophy and art, reality and fiction, struggle over and for him” (Minow-Pinkney, 1987, pp.105-106).

Since the publication of Quentin Bell’s two-volume biography of Virginia Woolf in 1972, some critics began

to relate the plot of the novel to the life of the woman writer. They compared the Ramsays with Woolf’s parents and found many proofs to prove their arguments. Gayatri Spivak even takes “Times passes” as a “hinge” that “narrates the production of a discourse of madness” (1987, p.35).

In addition to these studies above, there are also many other books or journal articles about this novel because Virginia Woolf is too great and so is her *To the Lighthouse*. Even today, in different countries throughout the world, the novel can still arouse readers’ interests.

It was probably since in 1988 Qu Shijing translated and edited the essays of *A Study of Virginia Woolf* that Chinese critics began to pay attention to this genius writer. Then in 1999 Wu Houkai translated Woolf’s *Moments of Being*. Under the influence of these works, more and more critics try to relate her works to her life and even regard *To the Lighthouse* as the writer’s autobiography.

In the meanwhile, because of the unique position of Woolf in the feminist movement, the feminism ideas expressed in her works are revealed in more and more journal articles such as Yang Yuehua’s *From Antagonism to Dialogue: Reading Sexual Principles of Main Characters and Obscure Meanings of Androgyny in To the Lighthouse* (1998), Wang Wen’s *The Feministic Expression of Sense and Sensibility: A Feministic Reading of To the Lighthouse* (2005), and so on.

Besides, many other articles discuss about the novel from the viewpoint of narrative method, the philosophical meaning expressed through time and space in the work, life and death, etc.. We can read the articles such as *Art of Time in To the Lighthouse* by Lu Jing (2007), *Beauty of Space—Reading To the Lighthouse* by Zhang Zhongzai in 2007, *Trip to the Soul: The Indirect Inner Monologue in To the Lighthouse* by Qin Hong (2002), and so on.

1.2 Purpose of this Study

It can be seen clearly that in recent years most attention has been paid to the novel’s narrative method, the philosophical ideas revealed in the novel, the androgynous idea, and even the autobiographical study connected with the writer’s madness, etc.. In the process of probing, more and more details have been found, but few people have noticed that during the first ten chapters in Part I “The Window”, the famous fairytale *The Fisherman and His Wife* by Brothers Grimm is repeated several times. According to the theory of intersexuality, this fairytale intertextualizes with the novel. But when I search the critical articles, I find few people have paid enough attention to this fairytale and dealt with the novel from the viewpoint of intertextuality. In our country, only Chen Zhijie writes an article about the relationship between the tale and the novel, tries to read the novel from the viewpoint of intertextuality, but because of his own gender, he finally turns his article into another male hegemonic text which obviously violates Woolf’s feminism views.

My paper attempts to adopt the theory of intertextuality to read the novel and to build a connection between the novel and the fairytale. In my opinion, *To the Lighthouse* is a rewritten fairytale *The Fisherman and His Wife* in which the Ramsays are the counterparts of the fisherman and his wife, but the real living state of the fisherman couple has been distorted by Brothers Grimm. *The Fisherman and His Wife* is a typical male hegemonic text which is restored to truth in *To the Lighthouse* under Woolf's pen.

2. THEORY OF INTERTEXTUALITY

2.1 History of the Theory

The theory of intertextuality came into being in the 1960s when various theories were invented in western literature in order that a science of literature be founded and become an independent subject. As a Bulgarian émigré and a member of French avant-garde Tel Quel Group, based her theory on Russian Bakhtin's dialogism, Julia Kristeva invents her new theory of intertextuality (There are also some critics who hold that intertextuality is the French counterpart of dialogism). According to Bakhtin, every text is a dialogue intrigued by words between this text and other texts. But Bakhtin never uses the word intertextuality. Kristeva derives some affixes and roots of several terms and coins the word intertextuality. The term intertextuality first appeared in her essay "*Word, Dialogue, Novel*" in 1966 and then she affirmed the definition in her "*The Closed Text*" in 1967. The classical definition, enshrined in critical readers in English and French, is taken from some sentences early in these essays and put in different means:

Intertextuality is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double. (Orr, 2003, p.21)

The interaction inside the same text can be defined as intertextuality. For the epistemic subject, the definition of intertextuality reminds readers of a means of reading history and embedding history. (Qin, 2004, pp.19-30)

The text is therefore productivity, meaning that (i) its relation to the language in which it is sited is redistributive (destructive-constructive) and consequently it can be approached by means of logical categories other than purely linguistic ones; (ii) it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a text, many utterances taken from other texts intersect with one another and neutralize one another. (Orr, 2003, p.27)

Just as Sollers illustrates the definition,

The definition of intersexuality is of much importance: any text is an intersection of numerous texts, is a rereading, renewing, condensation, displacement and deepening of those texts. To some extent, the value of a text lies in its integration and destruction to other texts. (Qin, 2004, pp.19-30)

Although Kristeva is the inventor of the theory of intertextuality, somehow for a time her theory has been

sidelined. Some critics hold that the reason lies in that her works are too complicated and her language is too obscure. After all, her works run from Transformational-Generative Grammar, Marxism, Psychoanalysis to Mathematical formula and Differential Integral. Maybe because of the same gender and sharing the same feelings, Mary Orr points out that it is because of Kristeva's female status that her theory has received unjust treatments and neglect from the male world, which makes a striking contrast to the fate of Roland Barthes's theory.

Roland Barthes plays a very important role in the development of the theory of intertextuality. Some critics say that intertextuality is a cooperated work by Kristeva and her Ph D supervisor Roland Barthes. For one thing, as an active member of Barthes's seminars, Kristeva is inspired to invent a lot of important theories like intertextuality. For another, as the Ph D supervisor of Kristeva, Roland Barthes contributes a lot to the reworking and propaganda of Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. Due to Barthes's simple writing style and enchanting words, the theory of intertextuality receives more attention than ever before. In 1973, Barthes provided the entry for "Theorie du texte" in the *Encyclopedie univeraslis* and mentions that "every text is a reorganization and citation of the existential texts" (Samoyault, p.12). His illustration of intertextuality is the exact echo and reworking of Kristeva's phrases. "If Kristeva opened intertextuality up to all its borders and permutations, Barthes and Riffaterre directly address its blind spots as theory of texts as productivity" (Orr, 2003, p.32). The following section is taken from the *Encyclopedie univeraslis*:

The text is productivity. Not in the sense that it is a product of being worked (as narrative technique or the mastery of style would demand), but as the very theatre of a production where the producer of the text and the reader come together: the text "works" whenever and however it is taken up; even in written fixed form, the text does not stop working, or undertaking a process of production. The text deconstructs the language of communication, representation or expression [...] and reconstructs another language. [...] Every text is an intertext; other texts are present within it to varying degrees and in more or less recognizable forms. [...] Every text is a new tissue of recycled citations. Fragments of codes, formulae, model rhythms, bits of social discourse pass into the text and are redistributed within it. [...] The intertext is a field of anonymous formulae whose origin is rarely recoverable, of unconscious or automatic citations without speech marks. (Orr, 2003, p.33)

However, with the publication of *La Production du texte* in 1979 and *Semiotique de la poesie* in 1983 by Michael Riffaterre, intertextuality was accepted as a theory.

2.2 Academic Schools of Intertextuality

The concept of intertextuality by Kristeva and Roland Barthes is the best generalization of the characteristics of texts, that is, every text is an intertext. Because the concept itself is too broad, obscure and uncertain, it can be easily enlarged and assimilated by other academic

schools. Since Roland Barthes provided the entry for “Texte” in the *Encyclopedie univervaslis* and legalized the theory of intertextuality, critical theorists of different backgrounds showed much interest in this theory and began to adjust and rewrite it according to their own needs and understandings.

There are mainly two schools of intertextuality. One group tends to enlarge the definition of Kristeva and Roland Barthes, to make an obscure and broad illustration of the theory and turn the theory into a critical weapon. The representatives are the Yale School who integrates the theory into American Cultural Criticism, New Historicism and Feminism. The other group tends to make more and more accurate definition of intertextuality and turn it into a descriptive instrument. The representatives are Michael Riffaterre and Gerard Genette (Qin, 2004, p.22). The first group unites Derrida’s theory of Deconstruction with intertextuality and hence develops the theory of Kristeva and Barthes, but the second group seldom mentions it and turns the theory into an critical approach to literature. Because of the influence of Anglo-American culture upon our culture, the scholars in our country mainly adopt the theory of Yale School.

2.3 Techniques of Intertextuality

Since the publication of *Palimpseste* by Gerard Genette, people used to classify intertextuality into two types. One type is the relation of copresence (Text A appears in Text B). The other type is the relation of derivation (Text A is repeated and transformed in Text B, which Genette calls hypertextuality). The following classification is based on the above principle. (Samoyault, 2008, p.36)

The techniques of citation, allusion, and plagiarism belong to the first type, that is, intertextuality. With these techniques the existential text is put in the present text so that several texts co-exist in the present text.

Owing to special printing marks, citation can be recognized immediately. Quotation marks, italics and words of separated lines help readers to recognize the cited text. If these marks help to mark the cited text, without these marks citation would become plagiarism. (Samoyault, 2008, p.213)

On the other hand, because of the technique of citation, heterogeneity is very clear between the cited text and the present text.

Annick Bouillaguet holds that “citation is a word-for-word and direct borrowing”, while “allusion is a non-word-for-word and indirect borrowing”. “Plagiarism is a word-for-word repetition, but is not clearly marked and heterogeneity is not pointed out” (Samoyault, 2008, pp.38-39).

There are still some other techniques that belong to hypertextuality. The characteristics of these techniques are not the relation of copresence, but that of derivation. With these techniques, the original text is not directly cited, but is transformed and imitated. The two main techniques are parody and pastiche. Parody is a transformation or

distortion of the original text. In my view, *Ulysses* by James Joyce mainly adopts the technique of parody. The difference between parody and pastiche lies in that “though pastiche may rewrite the original text, it mainly imitates the original text, while parody transforms the original text” (Samoyault, 2008, p.44).

3. INTERTEXTUALITY BETWEEN THE NOVEL AND THE FAIRYTALE

At the beginning of *To the Lighthouse*, when young James’s request of going to the lighthouse is rejected by his father, in order to distract James from his appointment, Mrs. Ramsay reads her son the fairytale by Brothers Grimm *The Fisherman and His Wife*. With the flow of consciousness, the plot of the tale is embedded in the novel and appears in the story piece by piece.

The Fisherman and His Wife, as told by Brothers Grimm, moralizes against a greedy and ambitious woman. A fisherman and his wife live together in a filthy shack near the sea. One day, the fisherman catches a magic flounder who announces himself to be an enchanted prince and begs the fisherman to set him free, and so does the fisherman. After the fisherman gets home and tells his wife about this, his wife complains about his foolishness and encourages him to ask the flounder for a little cottage. The fisherman is reluctant to follow his wife’s advice and gets to the seashore. He finds the sea turn green and yellow. He calls back the prince flounder and puts forward his wife’s request which is realized immediately. But soon his wife has many new desires such as to have a palace, to become a king, to become an emperor and finally a pope. With the change of the wife’s will, the sea shows different disgusting colors. At last, the greedy wife wants to have the equal power with God and wants the sun and the moon to rise and fall upon her will. This time the flounder transforms everything into the former state and the fisherman couple still lives in the filthy shack just as before.

According to the theory of intertextuality, through Mrs. Ramsay’s telling, Woolf directly cites the classical tale by Brothers Grimm—a typical male text in order that her novel intertextualize with the tale. The quotation marks used by the female writer tell readers that the present female text conveys different meanings from the existential male text which now seems a bit ridiculous. In fact, some critics have noticed the relationship between this fairytale and the novel. Hussey says, “Many commentators on the novel have pointed out that the tale has significant thematic resonances with Woolf’s novel, although several also see the roles of husband and wife in the novel and the tale reversed” (Hussey, 1995, p.86). But it seems that few critics really deal with the novel from the viewpoint of intertextuality. For example, although David Ellison has noticed that the relationship between

this fairytale and the novel “suggests that the embedded fairytale casts uncanny light on the existential plight of the Ramsay’s marriage and on the unhappiness that awaits the romantic alliance between Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle, whose marriage Mrs. Ramsay promotes, because misery loves company” (Ellison, 2001, pp.198-200). Then he probes into the novel with psychoanalytical method and finds that the unreasonable wish in the fairytale which takes a false turn and deviates out of control “transforms its author from human to inhuman creature, from prince to fish”. While imaginative drive has within it an uncanny metamorphosing wish that “pushes apart the carefully constructed walls between life and art, between the sea and the shore, and thrusts the prince become fish into the whirlpool of invading waters” (Ellison, 2001, p.205). And relating to Woolf’s suicide in the river, Ellison holds that by doing this, Woolf eliminates her human features subconsciously. Obviously, Ellison unavoidably ends his study with an autobiographical conclusion.

In fact, *The Fisherman and His Wife* is a typical patriarchal text, in which women’s emotions and wills are misread, exaggerated, and distorted into a farce. DiBattista (1980) refers to the tale as one in which female confronts with male and different wills of two sexes struggle drastically. By embedding the classical tale in the novel, Woolf restores the tale to the true state in patriarchal society where women suffer from severe inequality and prejudice, whose intelligence is ignored and despised. *The Fisherman and His Wife* is a typical male text against women when men hold the discourse power.

In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf reverses the protagonists’ position in her novel. By doing this, she actually rewrites the fairytale. In other words, *To the Lighthouse* is a twice-told *The Fisherman and His Wife*. By retelling the classical tale, Woolf successfully attracts her readers’ attention to this male text which has absolutely distorted women’s real living condition and describes the real state in which women are suffering, tortured and neglected. As a feminist, Woolf’s feministic ideas are expressed thoroughly in this novel.

4. METAPHORS OF PATRIARCHY

Brothers Grimm creates an ambitious and powerful woman in their fairytale, the fisherman’s wife. Her husband seems unable to deal with this insatiable woman and dare not oppose her. However, whenever she puts forward a new request, there will be some changes in the sea which seem to protest against her wish. At the beginning of the story, the fisherman “was sitting there fishing and looking into the clear water” (Grimm & Grimm, 2002, p.60). When the flounder is set free by the fisherman without any rewards, the fact that the sea still keeps clear is emphasized: “With that he put it back into the clear water, and the flounder disappeared to the bottom, leaving a long trail of blood behind him” (Grimm

& Grimm, 2002, p.62). When he gets back to the sea with his wife’s first wish for a cottage, the sea “was no longer clear, but yellow and green”. With the wife’s new requests put forward one by one, from wanting a palace to becoming a king and an emperor, the water gets from “purple and dark blue and gray and dense, and no longer green and yellow” to “dark gray, and the water heaved up from below and had a foul smell”, and then “the water was all black and dense and boiling up from within. A strong wind blew over him that curdled the water” (Grimm & Grimm, 2002, pp.62-65). Later on, when he arrives at the sea with his wife’s new wish of becoming pope,

The wind was blowing over the land, and clouds flew by as the darkness of evening fell. Leaves blew from the trees, and the water roared and boiled as it crashed onto the shore. In the distance he could see ships, shooting distress signals as they tossed and turned on the waves. There was a little blue in the middle of the sky, but on all sides it had turned red, as in a terrible lightning storm. (Grimm & Grimm, 2002, p.67)

Finally when the woman wants to become God, the fisherman finds that:

Outside such a storm was raging that he could hardly stand on his feet. Houses and trees were blowing over. The mountains were shaking, and boulders were rolling from the cliffs into the sea. The sky was as black as pitch. There was thunder and lightning. In the sea there were great black waves as high as church towers and mountains, all capped with crowns of white foam. (Grimm & Grimm, 2002, p.68)

In the fairytale, the fisherman is created as a weak, kind-hearted but hen-packed man who seems to be powerless to prevent his wife from putting forward so many requests. However, behind him there seems to exist a powerful supporter, i.e. the sea, which is the symbol of patriarchy. When the wife can’t bear the living conditions and wants to make some changes, she challenges not only her husband, but the whole patriarchal system. The changes of the sea indicate the shake and shock of the patriarchal system when its order is to be broken by woman. The flounder, in my view, is a symbol of the economic dominating position of man. The distinction of division of social labor makes man hold more and more economic power than woman, which decides that man finally holds the discourse power. Fishing is the work in favor of man who finally gets the chance to get the flounder. So when the fisherman’s wife wants to say “no” to the inequality of woman’s position, she receives the opposition from the whole system, all the supporters of the fisherman.

Likewise, in *To the Lighthouse*, the “fisherman” Mr. Ramsay has also a lot of followers such as Mr. Carmichael, Mr. Tansley, and so on. When Mr. Ramsay objects to his wife’s idea that the weather of the next day might be fine, Mr. Tansley makes an immediate response. “‘It’s due west’, said the atheist Tansley, holding his bony fingers spread so that the wind blew through them, for he was sharing Mr. Ramsay’s evening walk up and down, up

and down the terrace. That is to say, the wind blew from the worst possible direction for landing at the lighthouse. (Woolf, 1994, p.4). In the following descriptions, whenever Mrs. Ramsay comforts his son that they might go the lighthouse, Mr. Tansley would oppose. More than that, he also holds deep prejudice against women which badly hurts Lily Briscoe.

He was not going to talk the sort of rot these people wanted him to talk. He was not going to be condescended to by these silly women ... They made men say that sort of thing. Yes, it was pretty well true, he thought. They never got anything worth having from one year's end to another. They did nothing but talk, talk, talk, eat, eat, eat. It was the women's fault. Women made civilization impossible with all their "charm", all their silliness. (Woolf, 1994, p.62).

Besides, his comment "Women can't write, women can't paint" hurts Lily so much that she has no confidence in her painting and whenever Mr. Ramsay draws near, she will hide her picture at once. In the context of intertextuality between the two texts, we can conclude that just like the sea and the flounder that eventually punish the wife in the fairytale, the fisherman's supporters of the female version also hold hostile attitude towards the attempt of woman's independence. Woman has really a long way to go to win her independence and equality with man.

SUMMARY

The Fisherman and His Wife has been regarded as a common fairytale for hundreds of years, but through intertextuality of the two texts, the female writer reveals its nature as a typical male hegemonic text and strongly expresses her anger, satire and rebellion. The metaphors of patriarchy that have been ignored in the fairytale are emphasized and strengthened in *To the Lighthouse*. In this way, Woolf successfully expounds her feminist thoughts.

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