

The world's wife 'little red-cap'

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How true would it be to say that 'Little Red-Cap' is representative of the body of Carol Ann Duffy's collection 'The World's Wife'? Duffy includes a range of themes, which are portrayed in an idiosyncratic way within the collection 'The World's Wife'. Most prominently 'Little Red-Cap' focuses on the issues of female dominance whilst contrasting it with female exploitation. Alongside, qualities of ambition and independence Duffy can represent her female characters as significant and therefore hinder men's reputation in the current patriarchal society.

This point is further elucidated by Michael Woods who stated 'the poet fuses these ideas to reinforce the unremitting nullity that is forced upon many women when they are required to take a man's name in place of their own. In fact, the central theme of The World's Wife is encapsulated in this critique upon male arrogance.' [1]. Particularly this is something Duffy concentrates on in 'Queen Herod', 'Mrs Rip Van Winkle', 'Thetis' and 'Mrs Aesop' alongside 'Little Red-Cap'. In order to intensify the value of women in society Duffy typically portrays her female characters as more dominant than the males.

In 'Little Red-Cap' the adolescent's control is clear especially in the final and penultimate stanzas as the twist on the original tale of Little Red Riding Hood 'I took an axe to the wolf as he slept, one chop' gives the narrator the power to dominate over the controlling, male character. Her impatience to escape the wolf's rugged seduction is especially evident from Duffy's use of enjambment between these two stanzas where she 'took an axe / to a willow to see how it wept'.

Further her power is apparent from the last line, 'singing, all alone', as Duffy explicates the satisfaction with her triumphant victory over the dark character without the assistance from the hero, typically being a male character. Duffy identifies the problem in which men are portrayed in 'Queen Herod' where women commonly see men, deceptively, as a 'Hero', 'Hunk', 'the je t'adore' and showing that this is a problem by incorporating the negatives in contrast, such as 'The Wolf', 'The Rip', 'The Rat'.

In comparison, the humorous pun used in the final stanza of 'Mrs Aesop' portrays the female as over powering through the trenchant ridiculing of the male's 'little cock that wouldn't crow'. Following this, the witty threat; 'I'll cut off your tail, all right, I said, to save my face', which refers to the Bobbit case where his wife cut off his penis, is suggestive of threatening the same act upon him, which 'shut him up' and she 'laughed last, longest' proving how much control Mrs Aesop has over her husband.

Comparatively, there is a distinct semantic field of power in 'Queen Herod' from the use of phrases such as 'I swore', 'Do it' and 'I sent for the Chief of Staff', showing the power, and confidence in that power, that Queen Herod has over the male characters. Perhaps this portrayal by Duffy is to influence women that this attitude can be acceptable and possible in our modern day society. Despite this, Duffy contrasts the power of the female gender with the exploitation of females in society.

The wolf in 'Little Red-Cap' is alluring whilst his chin beholds a hidden sign of adulthood; 'red wine staining'. The last line of the second stanza 'he spotted me, sweet sixteen, never been, babe, waif, and bought me a drink' elucidates the overpowering control the wolf has over the adolescent. It is

considerably regarded as an issue as the adolescent initially sees the wolf as seductive rather than threatening, as seen in most modern day relationships. Perhaps here Duffy is attempting to inform the reader of the dangers of growing up too fast in the company of an influential man.

Particularly, in 'Mrs Rip Van Winkle' the female 'sank like a stone' as if drowning, which creates a traumatic and confining image where the narrator has lost control and explicates her failure. The use of 'still' in the extended metaphor 'I sank like a stone into the still, deep waters of late middle age' suggests a sense of calmness contrasting with the panic of drowning in from experiencing the menopause. This contrast gives off the suggestion that it is only the woman that changes meanwhile the rest of the world remains 'still' and composed.

This is compared with 'Thetis' where female exploitation is extremely acknowledged. Similarly, the wife of Thetis 'shrank' and 'sank' herself to escape the controlling power of the male character. Identifying this issue allows the reader to regard it seriously thus influencing the reader, which is most likely to be female, to share feminist views and condemn the male population. 'Little Red-Cap' especially consists of the themes ambition and independence whilst growing up.

The story of 'childhood's end' is the transition from innocence to experience with a journey of impetuous turmoil to find love, passion, sex and independence. For Little Red-Cap, poetry is the reason why she chooses ambition because of its richness, the mystery of its ambiguity and the wolf (the dark, mysterious character) can provide this for her. Perhaps, for Little Red-Cap, growing up is poetic and therefore desirable. This can easily be <https://assignbuster.com/the-worlds-wife-little-red-cap/>

compared with 'Mrs Rip Van Winkle' who, 'while he slept', found adventure in her life.

As she explains 'I found some hobbies for myself' it is evident that she is thinking only of what she wants from the use of personal pronouns for the first and last words of the statement, which further portrays her as unimportant regarding her development in reaching triumph in adventure. This is especially explicated through the sibilance of 'seeing the sights' as it conveys these adventures as stimulating thus influencing her female readers to reach out further than their heterosexual relationship.

Clearly, Duffy's collection consists of various profound and weighty subjects and 'Little Red-Cap' contains the majority of the themes present in the collection. In an interview in 2005 with Duffy the interviewer, Barry Wood, identified particular poems in this collection that 'are unashamedly set in a contemporary idiom, re-casting the old stories in terms of modern life' allowing Duffy to 'subvert[ing] them' [2]. Arguably, the act of modernisation here allows her readers to identify with the aforementioned issues raised.

This therefore allows hope for the future for women regarding their status and value as individuals rather than as simply wives or mothers. As a homosexual, Duffy's feminist views coincided with the notably iconic statement made by Dorothy Parker; 'heterosexuality is not normal, it's just common' as her collection 'takes a very common relationship - that of man and wife - and presents a collection of poetic monologues from the perspective of the wife' [3] in order to give the world's wife a voice. 'Little Red-Cap' has been identified as a personal account of her relationship with her ex-husband in the interview with Barry Wood as he suggestively asks '
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with a strong autobiographical investment, focusing on the idea of yourself as a young poet, asserting your independence. ' with a reply of ' CAD: Yes. ' therefore proving that the poem is reflective of Duffy's feminist views and opinions on heterosexual relationships. The World's Wife' consists of providing wives of famous and infamous historic, fictional and biblical male characters a voice in society as the majority were not even considered, whilst commonly criticising the male population for its ignorance, arrogance, selfishness; the list is incessant. Because it is a personal poem Duffy's views are most definitely included within ' Little Red-Cap' as are they included in the collection as a whole. Therefore the poem of subjection is representative of the collection ' The World'sWife'.

Word count: With quotes- 1, 245 Without quotes- 952 Bibliography: 1. Michael Woods critique of Queen Herod: <http://www.sheerpoetry.co.uk/advanced/carol-ann-duffy/notes-on-selected-poems-advanced/queen-herod> 2. Interview with Carol Ann Duffy and Barry Wood: <http://www.sheerpoetry.co.uk/advanced/interviews/carol-ann-duffy-the-world-s-wife> in 2005. 3. An essay written by username: doralulusparky <http://www.studymode.com/essays/The-World-s-Wife-Carol-Ann-Duffy-598083.html> in February 2011.