

Interpreting The Dogs of Babel through A Feminist Lens

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Abstract: *The opening chapter of The Dogs of Babel sets up the suspense of the death of the protagonist's wife, Lexy, who fell from an apple tree. It unfolds for the reader Paul's quest to discover the truth about his wife Lexy's death in the form of reminiscences by the main character, Paul. The only witness to Lexy's fall from the tree is a Rhodesian Ridgeback, which Paul the linguist hopes to make talk. In the course of his efforts, memories of Lexy converge gradually and the gap between husband and wife emerges progressively. The presence of a feminist element in the Dog of Babel cannot be ignored, and this paper attempts to explore some of the feminism and the female predicament shown by Lexy from a feminist perspective.*

Keywords: The Dogs of Babel; Feminism; The Female Predicament.

INTRODUCTION

Carolyn Parkhurst is an A famous best-selling female author of the new generation in America whose first full-length novel, *The Dogs of Babel*, attracted widespread attention and enthusiastic response when it was released and became a major bestseller. Published in 2003, the novel has been translated into more than 30 languages and has had a worldwide impact. She has been praised as one of the brightest of the new generation of American writers. In the book, Lexy's seemingly bizarre death is both accidental and inevitable, and all the dilemmas she faces are pushing her to death. The "Tower of Babel" symbolizes not only the linguistic separation between the human and the dog, but also the deep separation between Lexy and Paul, who has been witnessed everything by the dog. As the dilemmas are revealed one by one, issues such as women's autonomy in intimate relationships, women's individuality, and women's neglected spiritual world gradually emerge. This paper tries to do some exploration on this.

1. CHAPTER I

Feminism has matured and perfected through the three waves of its development and has formed many schools of thought, such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, existentialist feminism, ecological feminism and so on. Though the theoretical basis and the social background of each school of thought are different, their focus of attention is invariably directed to the realization of equality between men and women for the whole of mankind. They focus on the situation of women in patriarchal societies and point out that women are oppressed and discriminated against all over the world. Feminist thinking has undeniably influenced all aspects of society. Accordingly, there are many manifestations of feminist thinking in the field of literature. Here, this paper will analyze the feminist factors in *The Hound of the Tower of Babel* as an object.

Although Carolyn Parkhurst has also published some works in magazines, *The Dogs of Babel*, published in 2003, is Carolyn Parkhurst's first officially published novel. It focuses on Carolyn Parkhurst's ability to grasp and control the atmosphere of the novel, as well as to design and arrange the rhythm of plot advancement with ease. Carolyn Parkhurst doesn't use dramatic plot to catch people's attention, but there is no lack of appropriate conflict to make the plot move forward naturally. Her writing is subtle but not too distant that hope and despair can coexist in her words. As a new generation of American writers, Carolyn Parkhurst has already understated her talent for navigating words in *The Dogs of Babel* and readers all over the world have recognized it as such.

2. CHAPTER II

The novel revolves around the quest for the cause of Lexy's death through two intertwined pathways: Paul's recollections of the minutiae of Lexy's life prior to her death; and Paul's attempts to make the Ridgeback dog, who witnessed Lexy's death, speak. The novel follows the mask maker with a rich spiritual world as she confronts her years of intimacy, feels a mixture of emotions of happiness and confused pain and is ultimately crushed. Although these emotions seemed so reasonable and ordinary to Paul at the time and even in the process of recalling them

were not surprising, it was these tiny, ant-like feelings that destroyed his beloved wife, Lexy. With delicate strokes, the novel portrays a thoughtful, creative, romantic woman with a hint of paranoia, and also conveys the author's thoughts on women's problems in marriage and in facing themselves.

By analyzing Lexy's time with Paul, we are able to feel the feminist elements in the work. Lexy's death at the beginning of the novel injects the whole novel with an undiminished undercurrent of sadness. In order to understand Lexy's sudden departure, Paul had hoped to make the dog, which had been accompanying Lexy all the time, talk, in an attempt to understand Lexy better. The idea of putting down his work to make the dog talk in order to understand his wife may seem heartfelt, but in the face of such a thought, it is hard not to question Paul's lack of confidence in his understanding of Lexy, who prefers to rely on a dog rather than using his own mind to recall and analyze the situation. Here, it can be seen that men's lack of understanding and attention to women in intimate relationships, especially in marriage, has developed, which makes the tragedy happen not by chance. During the course of Lexy's time with Paul, Lexy expresses herself to Paul almost unreservedly, as can be seen in Paul's reading of Lexy's dream diary. Lexy doesn't mince words and opens up to Paul, whether what she expresses is quirky or sad, unrealistic fable or seemingly absurd idea. But even with this openness, Paul never really empathized with Lexy or understood her spirituality until she died. The fact that women's voices in intimate relationships are not truly heard and treated is one of the major reasons for Lexy's eventual destruction.

Lexy and Paul had a disagreement about children. Even though they had been married for many years, they had not had a positive discussion about having a child. When Paul mentioned having a child, it was clear that Lexy was not ready to have a child. Paul later tried this with a joke, but it was strongly resented by Lexy. Paul has to convince himself to accept not having a child by saying "I love Lexy" and tells himself that he is doing it "for her". Lexy seriously realizes that she should have talked about it before they got married, but it is too late as they have been married for many years and Paul just rushes to calm Lexy down. The conflict over the kids was never resolved. Similarly, Paul still doesn't understand why Lexy doesn't want to have children, and Lexy doesn't want to talk about it and hastily ends the conversation. Here, instead of forcing Lexy for the sake of a child, Paul chooses to accept it, somehow already showing his respect and care for women. Paul, as a man, as a man, also has the capacity to care. The capacity to care is not necessarily linked to women, let alone tied to gender. Lexy's character is a powerful rebuttal of this stereotype of women, at the same time, society's belief that women should be able to care and take responsibility for it has already put pressure on Lexy to have children. Although Paul does his best to calm the storm, the differences between men and women in the intimate relationship over the issue of childbearing have already laid the groundwork for the tragedy.

More heated arguments are not absent between Lexy and Paul. Lexy receives a job to make a mask for a young girl who passed away at the age of 19. After completing the mask, Lexy shows it to Paul, but Paul's reaction devastates Lexy, who has an immediate emotional breakdown. Lexy's thoughts are undeniably biased and misinterpreted by Paul, but Paul, who loved Lexy dearly, continued to center himself around her emotions. When Paul is unable to calm Lexy down, he lets Lexy go. Lexy's spiritual world in this relationship is lonely: Paul loves her but does not understand her, and what the sensitive and whimsical Lexy needs is precisely empathy in an intimate relationship. Unlike the traditional housewife, Lexy does not devote herself entirely to her family, husband and children, but has her own creations at home and is able to derive a sense of fulfillment from them, which is the basis for Lexy's spiritual and material grounding. When Lexy is plagued by extreme emotions during the argument, Lexy shows that this is why she can't have children. Lexy is a progressive woman who does not follow the herd by saying, "I'll have a baby if everyone else will," but rather recognizes the shortcomings of her own character and refuses to have a child out of a sense of responsibility for herself and her child, rather than giving birth to a child in a state of ignorance about herself that would lead to more misery for herself, her child, and even her family.

The angst and tightness in Paul and Lexy's relationship never goes away, and it's not the emotional level, but the spiritual level that causes the misalignment. Paul is not right for Lexy, and Lexy is not right for Paul. This is evident in many details of their exchanges with each other. In the face of the legend about Blue Mary, Paul is always skeptical and in denial. Lexy goes from being convinced that she met Blue Mary to encountering the woman again and realizing that it wasn't Blue Mary, which sends her into an emotional tailspin. Despite Paul's comforting statement that he would rather Lucius was right, it didn't have a substantial effect. When Paul gives Lexy a novel idea that he hopes Lexy will accept, Lexy denies him. Paul ends up flirting with the idea that he had once affirmed Lexy's "Laundry of Souls." Whether Paul subconsciously did not approve of Lexy's idea, but gave a white lie, or Paul was annoyed at being denied and retaliated against Lexy, it does not make sense. If it is a white lie, it would be more damaging to backtrack on it; if it is because one's own opinion is not recognized then one turns to attack others, there is really no decency in that. By this point in the story, Lexy had developed a sadly thick barrier

to Paul. The differences in the spiritual world painlessly separate the two, adding a logical link to the eventual tragedy. Lacey, who was pregnant, felt so lost in the face of such a relationship that she had turned to Lady Arabelle, a tarot card diviner who helps visitors see their destiny online. The intimacy of a wife who feels lost and does not choose to turn to her husband, who is supposed to be a solid support, but to a soothsayer who does not know her, is already showing signs of withering away. Three feet of ice is not cold in a day. Anyone who enters into a marital relationship does so with careful consideration, and this is especially true of women. Failed marital relationships don't start out broken; the cracks intensify with each spiritual collision, and women who have paid the spiritual and physical costs of their marital relationships find it even more difficult to pull out of them in the face of a sinking marital ship, which is one of the factors that led to Lacey's ultimate tragedy.

What modern women face in intimate relationships is no longer a situation of being oppressed and controlled, but when women exist in intimate relationships as independent individuals, they are not cared for or not understood. The differences in their spiritual worlds have gradually become a visible problem. Such differences are difficult to be reversed through bonding and adjustment. What type of spiritual world a partner has is inherent and difficult to change. The only way to solve the problem at its root is not to reshape the spiritual world of the partner, which is unrealistic and impossible; the only way to improve the fault in the spiritual world is to change the partner, but this does not apply to everyone and it can even be very costly. So women who are becoming more and more attached to the spiritual world should be aware of this in the early stages of the intimate relationship.

3. CHAPTER III

The *Dogs of Babel* portrays Lacey, a modern woman with a clear sense of herself and a complex and creative mental world. Her life is short, full of struggles and stubbornness. Lacey's youth was not a happy one, and she was plagued by mental illness, even contemplating suicide three times. Her spiritual world was pure and colorful, but there was always a tightness that lingered. The fortunate thing for Lacey is that she meets Paul who loves her, the unfortunate thing is that Paul who loves her doesn't understand her.

Lacey is a mask maker who creates in the basement of her home. Lacey has her own undisturbed creative time and space, unlike traditional women. "A woman's work is never done," according to some Marxist feminists. "'Women's work is never done' is more than an aphorism; it is a description of the nature of woman's work. Always on call, women form a conception of themselves they would not have if their roles in the family and the workplace did not keep them socially and economically subordinate to men." [1] Lacey, on the other hand, is a social character with independence and is not dependent on men, which is a subtle reflection of the shift in women's roles in the home. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Lacey is happy.

Lacey has a whimsical nature along with sensitivity, suspicion, and obstinacy. Lacey is happy to share her various novel ideas with Paul, and Paul responds positively. It's just that people can't help but express themselves, and sadly Paul's and Lacey's very different mental lives often lead to self-doubt and self-denial on Lacey's part as Paul expresses his own views on things. While blanket approval and praise is certainly not reasonable in an intimate relationship, how to balance the white lie with authentic self-expression is a subject that Paul does not handle well.

Lacey believes in legends, cares about dreams, and has a subjective spiritual attachment to some things. Lacey sympathizes with the Queen of the Fairies, who was robbed of her best knight, even though most people praised Jenny's love for her knight and her courage; Lacey is excited by the story of Blue Mary's ghost, even so excited that she thinks she met Blue Mary by chance, even though it turns out that it was not Blue Mary that Lacey met; Lacey had the same dream over and over again, and she likes to write it down, although Paul reads it years later and sees nothing more than Lacey's honesty; Lacey believes that tattooing snakes all over her head will change things, but Paul, who seems to know Lacey very well, doesn't know that Lacey has tattoos. Lacey's complex and secretive thoughts are more difficult for Paul to grasp than those of an ordinary girl. As a linguist, Paul is not deficient in comprehension skills. Paul may be lacking in Lacey's deep concern, the spiritual level of real concern, or perhaps Paul and Lacey's spiritual world is very different from the two worlds. Paul was able to achieve superficial understanding, rather than the seamless spirit of the melding, which is exactly what Lacey needs, but also the modern intimate relationship is often absent.

4. CHAP

The author unfolds an intriguing love tragedy by tracing the happy and painful past of Lacey and Paul, and raises the issue of understanding that cannot be ignored in modern intimate relationships, fully demonstrating the author's

spiritual care for women and expressing unique thoughts on the dilemmas that women have faced since their youth. *The Dogs of Babel* is both a suspenseful romance and a tragedy based on intimate relationships. It explores the mental prison of modern women in marriage, and although Lexy's ultimate choice of death as a solution to an unwanted future is negative and unworthy of promotion, the issues embodied in the novel are worthy of more in-depth exploration. This work is different from ordinary romance novels. Although the author does not explicitly show her feminist stance, she has accomplished an excellent novel of women's self-discovery by virtue of her keen observation and personal concern for women's situation, which is of landmark significance in the history of women's literature.

MARGINAL NOTES

Rosemarie Putnam Tong. *Feminist Thought A MORE COMPREHENSIVE INTRODUCTION*.63.

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