Duffy's Feminism and Dramatic Monologues: A Study of Some Poems from The World's Wife

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Abstract:

This research aims at investigating Carol Ann Duffy's representation of feminist issues by recalling historical, religious and mythological figures using the dramatic monologue. Duffy subverts feminine archetypes through a series of dramatic monologues in her volume *The World's Wife* whose structure is based on an eclectic mixture of influences that build up intertextual and metatextual webs reflected in themes of love, as well as the loss of love, sexist oppression, sadness and loneliness, and many others. Be it noted that *The World's Wife* shows difficulties, set by a patriarchal society, in the way of women as well as men. Duffy's simple language is traced back to Wordsworth, while her use of the dramatic monologue reminiscent of Browning and T. S. Eliot. To express female desiderata, Duffy has revisited different female figures such as Medusa, Mrs. Midas that holds intertextual semantic relations based on world text theory with Ovid's king Midas' story from *Metamorphoses*, and Delilah and Salome. Other gender-bending figures, illustrated not by cross-dressing but by cross identification, appear like Mrs. Darwin, Mrs. Aesop, Mrs. Sisyphus, and Mrs. Faust.

Keywords: Feminism, dramatic monologue, Duffy, poetry.

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الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة كيفية تصوير كارول آن دافي للقضايا النسوية من خلال استدعائها لأشخاص تاريخية، ودينية، وأسطورية مستخدمة المونولوج الدرامي كقالب للتعبير عن هذة القضايا. وتقوم دافي بهدم النماذج النسوية الأساسية من خلال سلسلة من المونولوجات الدرامية في ديوانها زوجة العالم، والذي يقوم في تركيبه على خليط منتقى من التأثيرات التي تبني بدورها شبكات تناصية وشبكات ما وراء النص تنعكس في مواضيع مثل الحب وفقدان الحب، والإضطهاد على أساس الجنس، والحزن والوحدة، ومواضيع أخرى. وتظهر في زوجة العالم صعوبات وعراقيل يضعها المجتمع الذكوري في طريق النساء وكذلك الرجال. ويمكن تتبع اللغة السهلة التي تستخدمها دافي في أعمال وردزورث، أما استخدامها للمونولوج الدرامي يُذكرنا ببرونتج وت. س. إليوت. ولكي تعبر عن الرغبات الأنثوية، أعادت دافي النظر في شخصيات مثل ميدوزا، ودالية، وسالموي، والسيدة مايداز والتي ترتبط بعلاقات تناصية، على مستوى المعنى قائمة على نظرية النص العالمية، بقصة الملك مايدز في التحولات لأوفيد. وتظهر أيضاً شخصيات خلطت بين النوعين-الذكر والأنثى- لا عن طريق ارتداء ملابس الأخر، بل عن طريق اتخاذ هوية الأخر. من هذة الشخصيات: السيدة دارون، والسيدة إيسوب، والسيدة سيزف، والسيدة فاوست.

Introduction

Feminism: Body and Gender Throughout history accepted ideas about women's bodies have yielded a social construction of these bodies. Be it noted that "the body is a concept, and so is hardly intelligible unless it is read in relation to whatever else supports it and surrounds it" (Riley 222). Long ago, women's bodies were considered as men's property, passed from fathers to husbands. Therefore, women played no role in the decision of their fate. Moreover, they were looked down

upon and seen as inferior to men. "According to Aristotle, only embryos that had sufficient heat could develop into fully human form. The rest became female"(Weitz 3). The idea of a half-baked body was common among doctors until the eighteenth-century. Based on their lack of heat, women were stuck with many deficiencies "including a smaller stature, a frailer constitution, a less developed brain, and emotional and moral weaknesses that could endanger any men who fell under women's spell" (Weitz 4). Even marriage was a humiliating event for a woman's body and soul, since she lost everything under this sacred bond. By the end of the nineteenth-century, women's status improved a little as in Mississippi "the law gave married women the right to retain property they owned before marriage and wages they earned outside the home"(Weitz 5). Ideas about the frailty of Victorian women's bodies were Darwinian-based. At that time, women's sexual desires, including lesbianism, were not paid attention. Deprivation of education was justified under the pretext of preserving femininity because nineteenth-century doctors claimed that education took women's beauty and made it difficult for her to give birth to children (Aman, Body Representation and Gender Reformulation 7).

The concept of women having "devalued bodies" underpinned by biological facts, led some feminists, who suffered from somataphobia, not to "engage with the female body"(Price and Shildrick 3). However, women's intellectual achievements

downplayed the so called effect of their biological bodies. Sexual differences have been much focused upon that they turn into a double-edged weapon: "on the one hand it may uncritically universalise the male and female body, while on the other it appears to reiterate the biological essentialism that historically has grounded women's subordination" (Price and Shildrick 5). Highlighting sexual differences as the primary and only category that distinguishes the body hinders the advancement of feminism. The main concern of feminist theories of the body is to refuse oversimplification of the body, and to

> reject that easy categorization, or any striving for a false unity that belies the sometimes confusing but always productive tensions of disparate starting points, perspectives, and aims… The body, then, has become the site of intense inquiry, not in the hope of recovering an authentic female body unburdened of patriarchal assumption, but in the full acknowledgement of the multiple and fluid possibilities of differential embodiment. (Price and Shildrick 12)

The nature of women has always been defined by widely-used terms such as essentialism, biologism, naturalism and universalism. These terms were used to stress women's limitations, subordination and mediocrity in a male - dominated society. Essentialism stresses the idea that women's natural/biological/ psychological essence is fixed and commonly shared among them. "Essentialism thus refers to the

existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization"(Grosz 48). Biologism reduces women's social possibilities to their biological natures assumed to be inferior to men's. Naturalism is usually supposed to have an invariant biological form. On the other hand, it "may be asserted on theological or ontological rather than biological ground"(Grosz 48). However, "naturalism presumes the equivalence of biological and natural properties" (Grosz 48). Universalism refers to the social characteristics shared by women everywhere, "at all times and in all social contexts" (Grosz 49). These four terms, which help reproduce patriarchal values, are used by feminists. Assuming women's essence, nature, biology and universal characteristics as bedrock of their status and social role is a backlash to feminism since it confines and reduces women's roles to fixed attributes and thus renders social change impossible. Duffy's feminism is highly developed since it transcends these fixed attributes, in order not to criticize men's characteristics only, but to assume their identities as well, proving women to be sometimes superior to men.

The body has dragged the attention of contemporary scholars so much that a lot of conferences were held on and many books were written about it. Thanks to feminism, the body has emerged as a political issue tackled through women's struggle for their emancipation from a phallocentric culture and androcentric society. Racism and the body were so

interconnected that body features were taken as a pretext to colonize and enslave people (Aman, *Body Representation and Gender Reformulation* 9-10). The body has been a focal point and a recurrent theme in almost all recent feminist writings. Since the juxtaposition/dualism of mind/body has always been in favour of the former, supported by Platonic and Cartesian underpinnings, recent feminist researchers have been exerting efforts to crystallize the role of the body in culture reproduction and transformation. The mind/body dualism has often been considered from a gendered perspective. In "Are Mothers Persons", Bordo explores "how-despite an official rhetoric that insists on the embodied subjectivity of all persons-Western legal and medical practice concerning reproduction in fact divides the world into human subjects (fetus and father) and 'mere' bodies (pregnant women)" (14). The body is like a gym with different facets which when explored shows itself as "a cultural medium, whose changing forms and meanings reflect historical conflict and change and on which the politics of gender are inscribed with special clarity"(Jaggar 5).

Feminist scholars are interested in the study of the body because it "has always been-and continues to be-of central importance for understanding women's embodied experiences and practices and cultural and historical constructions of the female body in the various contexts of social life" (Davis 7). Feminist scholars often discuss three problems concerning the body, viz.,

difference, domination and subversion. The body is rejected as explaining difference. However, difference is essential for understanding embodiment; how the individuals interact with and through their bodies. The female body is associated with the practices of power since it is exploited, inferiorized, excluded, controlled, colonized and violated. Many empirical studies show the active role individuals play in contemporary body regimes. Cultural gender norms can symbolically be subverted through such bodily practices as cross-dressing, gender bending or transsexuality. This trend has been confirmed by queer theory's emergence which many feminist theorists embraced:

as a radical perspective for rethinking feminist body theory and developing an alternative politics of the body. It offers a way of celebrating a politics of creative subversion without retreating to identity politics or the tactics of collective rebellion which belonged to body/politics in the 1970s. Politics becomes aestheticzed and, unsurprisingly, the body takes on a central role in the transgressive aesthetic of performance and display. (Davis 13).

For all that, feminist theorists are more interested in theorizing than in tensions evoked by the body.

Gender is done or constructed by the person and others in his society. Contrary to this established idea, Judith Butler, in her book *Undoing Gender*, sees that gender can be done by resisting and escaping from the clutches of the social norm through which gender is recognized. She argues: "I may feel that without some

recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable"(4). Butler strikes many examples of gender resistance to social recognition such as intersex, transsexuality and queers. She poses a critical question: "how might the world be recognized so that this conflict can be ameliorated?" (5) Though the body has been considered by many as a distinction of gender, the reconstruction of gender is not as dependent on the natural body as on social praxis. Therefore, gender differences cannot be realized and fixed at the sex level. Gender is a social form reconstructed through interpersonal relations. Gender is "socially constructed…the sexed body is not" (Davis 8).

Stressing the dislodgment of gender from sex, Simon de Beauvoir said: "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295). Though body distinction can be natural, gender construction cannot. Gender recognition is socially realized since "it is the way that anatomy is socially invested that defines gender identity and not the body itself" (Benhabib and Cornell 14). The body, though not static acting as the contact point with the environment and society, is a naturally-given fact, unlike gender. Indeed, "it is our genders that we become, and not our bodies"(Butler, "Variation on Sex and Gender" 129). Unlike sex category, gender recognition is the result of social contacts. Paula England argues that

> gender is accomplished through ongoing interaction with others…gender [is]
>
> conduct that is accountable to normative conceptions of womanly or manly

> natures… Our sex category is generally consistent with our biological sex, but

need not be, as in the case of a woman "passing" as a man. (13)

The aid offered by technology in reformulating gender has been much disputed. Some feminists refuse it as it effaces sexual difference. By so doing, they "risk naturalizing heterosexual reproduction" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 11). On the other hand, others, such as trans-people, seek "access to technology to secure certain changes" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 11). Duffy has deftly reformulated gender in her volume *The World's Wife*, thus producing never-to-be-existed before female character so domineering that their actual male counterparts stand as overshadowed foils.

The Dramatic Monologue

The importance of the dramatic monologue lies, not in animating the past, but in questioning history stressing the fact that reconstructing history is a partial attempt (Byron 5). However, the importance of the dramatic monologue ebbs and flows:

> At the end of the nineteenth century…interest in the dramatic monologue began to decline…the speaking 'I' fragments into multiplicity of voices…Although the dramatic monologue was by no means the central poetic form during the first part of the twentieth century, the work of such poets as Charlotte Mew and Langston Hughes suggests it survived in a far healthier sate than is generally assumed, and that it did so primarily as an instrument of social critique. (Byron 5-6).

Once more, during the last twenty years, the dramatic monologue has flourished as an

effective means of questioning social and political conditions. However, contemporary monologues often have a tincture of feminist politics, differ from earlier ones since "they present an incongruous 'I' which conflates the historical or fictional speaker's world with the contemporary world of the writing poet, consequently drawing more attention than ever before to questions of representation" (Byron6-7). Thus the form and content hold a reciprocal relationship; i.e., a social and political critique is best represented through dramatic monologue. "In "The Dramatic Monologue" (1947), Ina Beth Sessions defined seven characteristics that should be found in any perfect dramatic monologue: "speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present" (Byron 8). One of the best examples which follows Sessions's taxonomic list of characteristics is Browning's "My Last Duchess".

Unlike the lyric, and contrary to the New Critics' opinion, the speaking 'I' is not connected to the poet. While the reader, guided by the poet, lives inside the speaker in the lyric, he/she stands back to have a better understanding looking at the speaker of the dramatic monologue. In fact, the speaker and the poet cannot be conflated. The distinguishing signals may be referred to in the title as in Browning's "Porphyria's Lover". However, sometimes these signals are not found, which makes distinguishing the dramatic monologue from the lyric more difficult. Alan Sinfield tried to solve the problem by using the idea of the 'feint' developed by

Käte Hamburger in her exploration of fictional narrator (Byron 13). Thanks to Sinfield's idea of the feint, many poems, such as Tennyson's 'Oenone' (1832) or 'The Lotus Eaters' (1832), are identified as dramatic monologues.

It should not be forgotten that while the speaking 'I' is recognized as a distinguishable character in the poem, the poet's presence is sensed through him. Both ideas of a "divided consciousness" and a "double-voiced discourse", which suggests a Bakhtinian dialogic relation between the speaker and the poet, suggest themselves: The former makes the reader obliged to divide his recognition of the speaking 'I' and the 'I' of the poet by setting them side by side while reading. The latter further stresses the former since it distinguishes and recognizes two different voices; hence, a reading based on dramatic irony. As persons, the speaker and the poet are recognized as separate entities but as voices they may share similar opinions. The dramatic monologue can be labeled under what can be called the double poem.

As above mentioned, the dramatic monologue should have a speaker, an identified auditor who must be silent so as not to turn the monologue into a dialogue. Many critics stressed the importance of the auditor's presence which activates the interplay between the speaker and the auditor; thus enriching the ideas. However, ideas are well presented in many monologues-like Webster's 'A Castaway' without the auditor taking any part (Byron 20). Indeed the auditor provides other perspectives than the speaker offers the reader; but this does not mean that the auditor should be a

living one. This is clear in Browning's "To My Last Duchess" where the dead duchess who, framed in a picture on the wall, yet provides a threatening perspective to the duke (Byron 21). It should be noted that the reader plays so important a role in the dramatic monologue that critics like Dorothy Mermin, in her book *The Audience in the Poem*, lets the reader interfere into the role of the auditor who, silent and passive as he is often presented, pulls the reader into action so much so he contextualizes himself as the product of social and cultural conditions (Byron 22-3). The reader should be well aware that the speaker reveals certain aspects of his character to realize his aim.

Through inference and imagination, the reader participates in building up the dramatic situation and is involved in it. He compares between what the speaker wants him to know and what the speaker's own unintentional revelations betray of other facts and insights. The reader plays the role of the silent listener who is capable of neither sympathy nor judgment. The listener is passive until the speaker finishes his eloquent rhetoric. The speaker primarily deceives himself since he does not understand his situation. Revelation of the aspects of the speaker's character is not perceived by the reader or given unconsciously by the speaker. Rather, the speaker's character, with shown and hidden perspectives, is the product of a speech act (Aman, "Tearing up the Bowels" 234).

In the Victorian Age Robert Browning's use of the dramatic monologue increased the popularity of the genre. There are

many features of the dramatic monologue, the most important of which are: 1-a single person who voices the poet's ideas choosing a particular moment; 2- the listeners' presence is discerned through clues given in the interlocutor's (single person's) speech; 3-the poet focuses on what is interesting to the reader in order to reveal it through the speaker. Modernist dramatic monologue is exemplified by T. S. Eliot and others. Twentieth century women poets, such as Carol Ann Duffy, have shown interest in writing dramatic monologues.

Duffy's The World's Wife

Carol Ann Duffy, the first UK female poet laureate in 2009 succeeding Andrew Motion, writes about love, the loss of love and many topics which reflect her rich background and interactive approach to the problems of her world. She had a shocking love affair which culminates in her being bisexual. Lesbianism shows in *The World's Wife* as "Queen Herod feels the desire of the black Queen, one of the Three Magae; Mrs Tiresias, whose husband has turned into a woman, takes a female lover (Smith).

Duffy's work shows an eclectic mixture of influences that build up an intertextual and metatextual webs reflected in her themes and techniques. Her simple language is traced back to Wordsworth, while her use of the dramatic monologue reminiscent of Browning and T. S. Eliot:

> Her use of demotic, everyday language can be traced back to Wordsworth, while her interest in the dramatic monologue links her to Browning and Eliot. Her work also shows the

> influence of Philip Larkin (nostalgia and dry humour), Dylan Thomas (elements of surrealism), the Beat poets and the Liverpool poets. Rees-Jones comments on this eclectic mixture and its effect on Duffy's work: '[T]here is an impulse towards realism running through Duffy's work', along with 'her early interest in the Romantics and her journey through Modernist and Surrealist practices'. (Carol Ann Duffy)

The World's Wife is based on intertextual webs and most of the poems take the form of a dramatic monologue. Duffy chooses to play the intertextual game in order to convey a certain message, to voice her ideas through historical, religious and mythical figures. She focuses on the marginalized, women in particular.

> Her trademark dramatic monologue is successfully employed in *The World's Wife* (1999) in which, drawing on Greek mythology, the Bible, fairy tales, literature, history, and film, Duffy gives voices to such characters as Mrs. Midas, Queen Herod, Mrs. Beast, Mrs. Faust, Frau Freud, and Queen Kong, who present their versions of life behind the myth of famous men. (Haase 279)

Her good use of the dramatic monologue is tinctured by a feminist touch:

The World's Wife (1999) returns to the dramatic monologue with an innovative collection of poems that articulate the voices of the wives of various historical figures, both real and fictional. Titles include 'Mrs Midas'; 'Mrs Lazarus'; 'Mrs Aesop'; 'Mrs

Darwin'; 'The Kray Sisters'. Though not regarded as one of her greatest collections poetically, it has nonetheless been extremely popular and Duffy intends to write a sequel. (Carol Ann Duffy)

> Duffy's sexual orientation influences her feminist poetry. In the "Little Red Cap" the girl is portrayed as an independent person while the stereotypical role of the wolf was altered. Duffy's admiration of fairy tales' archetypes can be traced to the tales told by her mother. *The World's Wife* shows her ingenuity in subverting feminine archetypes (*The Poetry Archive*). *The World's Wife* is "a series of witty dramatic monologues spoken by women from fairy tales and myth, and the women usually air-brushed from history… When it comes to character delineation, she is known, as novelist Charlotte Mendelson described her, for "ventriloquism"" (Savage).

This multi-vocal representation of feminist features reflects a unifying concept, a consistent line of thought.

> Some are from classical myth with Little Red Ridinghood (renamed Little Red-cap to point up her revolutionary potential) representing folk myth. Some are actual women, biblical (Delilah, Salome, Pilate's wife) and more recent (Pope Joan, Anne Hathaway, Mrs Darwin and Frau Freud). The largest group are the wives of unpraised famous men, classical (Midas, Tiresias, Aesop, Sisyphus, Pygmalion and Icarus), biblical (Lazarus) and literary (Faust, Quasimodo, Rip van Winkle and the Beast,

as in Beauty and). Finally and most originally, there are the female versions of hitherto male figures: Queen Herod, Queen Kong, the Kray Sisters and Elvis's twin sister. (Smith) Each poem is a struggle against male domination, a serious attempt at women's emancipation. Women outmaneuvered men and outdid their violence, most of the time by myth or humor.

Historical Figures

Mrs. Faust

"Mrs Faust", though based on Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus, discusses materialistic aspects of modern life, using modern language and images, and stresses equality between men and women. The couple's fast life and quick success are reflected in the pace and short statements. The opening lines show a relationship based on equal footing. Their success culminates in Ph. D degrees but without any kids. The meaning, or rather the meaninglessness of their life, is construed into material goods:

Fast cars. A boat with sails.

A second home in Wales.

The latest toys-computers,

mobile phones. Prospered. (Duffy 23)

Their lifestyle is characterized by a hustle suggested by "fast cars" and "computers" and "mobile phones". They cannot achieve spiritual prosperity, though.

The first flaw in the married relationship is Mrs. Faust's depiction of her husband as "clever, greedy, slightly mad" (Duffy 23). She shares the same characteristics of her husband as

she says: "I was as bad" (Duffy 23). Their love of materialistic life destroys their marriage:

I grew to love lifestyle,

not the life.

He grew to love the kudos,

not the wife (Duffy 23).

The antithetical relationship between "lifestyle and kudos" and "life and wife" illustrates the superficiality of their thinking and the futility of their married life. The repetition of "grew to love" reflects the cult of materialism, tedium of marriage and the absence of mutual understanding. They are no longer partners: Faust seeks whores to satisfy his sexual desires, while she, feeling not jealous, takes to spiritual means of support such as "yoga, t' ai chi,/ Feng Shu, therapy, colonic irrigation" (Duffy 24).

Faust is not satisfied with all he has and boasts of, or with satiating his desires with prostitutes. "He wanted more" (Duffy 24). Moreover, Faust's corruption affects other people. He:

invested in smart bombs,

in harms,

Faust dealt in arms.

Faust got in deep, got out.

Bought farms,

cloned sheep.

Faust surfed the internet

For like-minded Bo Peep. (Duffy 25-6)

Faust represents corrupt politicians and businessmen, and whoremongers and womanizers who can do harm to other people even if they do not sell their souls to the devil. He is ready to cause mass killing by trading in either

deadly weapons such as smart bombs or genetically modified food produced from cloned sheep. He surfs the net in order to attract innocent "like-minded Bo Peep" girls. On the other hand, Mrs. Faust, who is as bad as her husband, enjoys lifestyle to the full. She has her face lifted, her breasts enlarged and her buttock tightened. She even has a tour to China, Thailand and African and gains knowledge.

In fact Faust ambition leads him to strike a deal with Mephistopeheles, to sell his soul in return for materialistic enjoyment. Faust discovers that all he has enjoyed and achieved will vanish as Mephistopeheles, or "the Devil's boy" (Duffy 27), will come to "reap what I sowed" (Duffy 27). Mrs. Faust heard "a serpent's hiss" (Duffy 27) which is a synecdoche as it refers to the devil. Faust is dragged to hell only to leave everything, every single material object, to Mrs. Faust whose comment is not only shocking but frightening: "C'est la vie" (Duffy 28). So short is the comment, yet it is trenchant. She recapitulates the material representation of modern life in one short statement. She weeps no dirge for her husband. Rather she laughs at him: "I keep Faust's secret still-/the clever, cunning, callous bastard/didn't have a soul to sell" (Duffy 28). The closing lines are a scathing tirade against so late a husband who, though materialistic and corrupt, left his widow a wealth. This shows how married life has become devoid of feelings and mutual care.

Mrs. Darwin

While "Mrs. Aesop" satirizes a man of letters, "Mrs. Darwin", which follows "Mrs. Aesop" in

The World's Wife, criticizes a man of science. Both supposedly male dominated aspects of life, viz., literature and science, are exposed to a scathing tirade by females. The context of talking about animals in "Mrs. Aesop" extends into "Mrs. Darwin". Duffy refers to this saying: ""Mrs. Darwin", is in a Zoo, after the animals in Aesop" (Wood).

7 April 1852.

Went to the Zoo.

I said to him-

Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds

me of you. (Duffy 20)

The speaker mocks Charles Darwin the scientist and the man as well. She doubts the theory of evolution which says that apes are the origin of human species reducing it into mere likeliness to a chimpanzee:

"Mrs Darwin" thus fittingly originates in a zoo, with a wife's contemptuous casual remark written down in a diary entry, mocking the Great Victorian figure but also recalling nd mimicking the attention paid by gender criticism to diaries as a private female space allowing intimate counter-discourse. ("Barring Skills")

Darwin the man is humiliatingly being satirized since he is likened to an ugly face that denies him any handsomeness. The rhyming words "zoo" and "you" stress the animalistic similarity the speaker wants to inculcate in her husband's and the reader's minds.

Biblical Figures

Delilah

Dalilah, a character in the Hebrew Bible Book of Judges 16 (Wikipedia

contributors. "Delilah."), has often been misread and stereotyped:

The first part of Amit's 'autobiography' is in fact about readings and the history of reading and misreading and misreading of Delilah, with an especially useful survey of her appearance in European fine art. It also underlines the truth that to become an immortal character means to suffer the prejudices of 'tradition', to become a stereotype, or even more than one stereotype. (Davies 19)

It is against these stereotypes that Duffy fights. She subverts the long standing misreading and stereotypes of Delilah imposed on her throughout history.

Psychological disturbance that overwhelms the poem is reflected in the irregular stanza lengths, enjambment and inconsistent rhyme and meter. The poem opens with Delilah and Samson in bed. The first line, "Teach me, he said" (Duffy 28), gives a sense that Delilah is superior to Samson. Her reaction of nibbling his earlobe does not sexually attract him. Stanza two sets up an image of a biblical courageous Samson:

I can rip out the roar

from the throat of a tiger,

or gargle with fire

or sleep one whole night in the Minotaur's lair,

or flay the bellowing fur

from a bear,

all for a dare.

There's nothing I fear. (28)

Duffy draws an image of a reckless Samson, courageous as he is, who wants to brag. He fosters into Delilah's belief that he is omnipotent; however, Duffy

stresses his audacity since he fears nothing. Stanza three shows how Samson is in need of care and tenderness, "he guided my fingers over the scar" (28). However, she does not act as a traditional female who may be tender and careful caressing his wounds. On the contrary, she finds it necessary not to give him a loving touch, "I have to be strong" (28). Stanza four, which opens with "He fucked me again" (28), stands in sharp contrast to the previous one which stresses the absence of care and love from the side of Delilah. The sexual relationship is of course devoid of love, something is reflected in the "darkening hour" (28). The stanza ends with a sarcastic reference to Samson as "my warrior" (28) who soon lies powerless "on the floor" (29).

The crescendo of suspense increases as she brings her scissors and fastens the chain to the door. The poem closes with Delilah avenging herself and women in general: "Then with deliberate, passionate hands/ I cut every lock of his hair" (29). The deliberateness is further emphasized by "every" which shows how she relishes while she destroys the symbol of Samson's power. The word "cut" entails an image of dismembering males who no longer can claim dominance over women.

Salome

Along with other five poems in *The World's Wife*, Salome, which is the title and the name of the speaker, features a biblical character. As narrated in the Bible, Salome, after dancing at Herod's birthday, and goaded by her mother Herodias, asked to be rewarded John the Baptist's head

on a plate. The poem opens with Salome in bed commenting on the head resting on the pillow beside her. The poem reveals a character that is strong and solid, yet ontologically unfit for ordinary life. The four stanzas of the poem differ in length and rhyme is not fixed, which adds to the tone of disorder. The opening lines "I've done it before/ (and doubtless I'll do it again,/ sooner or later)" (Duffy 56) build a negative image of the speaker and makes it difficult for the reader to communicate/sympathize with her. The physical description of the man she killed illustrates a cold relationship built on sex only. She does not even know his name "Strange. What was his name?" (Duffy 56). She is interested in punishing men in general regardless of the person in question. Despite the fact of having a head severed from its body, she thinks of having a meal: "I knew I'd feel better/for tea, dry toast, no better" (Duffy 56). Her life is dry of any emotions towards men; she even forgets the name of the beheaded guy.

The crescendo of woman-man hatred gets to the full at the ending lines which leave an impression that Salome is in control of her emotions and does not care a bit for any of her victims who are seen by her as victimizers:

> it was time to turf out the blighter,
>
> the beater or biter,
>
> who'd come like a lamb to the slaughter
>
> to Salome's bed.
>
> In the mirror, I saw my eyes glitter.
>
> I flung back the sticky red sheets,

and there, like I said-and ain't life a bitch-

was his head on a platter. (Duffy 57)

Blighter, beater and biter form a feminist image of the victim/victimizer, an image put in juxtaposition with the simile of a lamb. The bloody scene is illustrated by these words: slaughter, red and head. The glittering of the eyes may refer to Medusa's deadly powers, which deepens the sense of revenge. Both Oscar Wilde's and Duffy's version of the Salome story relate the protagonist to Cybele, the pagan goddess, who, as well as Salome, had a tendency to destroy male sexuality as a means of preserving woman's virginity. "Scholars like Christopher Nassaar point out that Wilde employs a number of the images favored by Israel's kingly poets and that the moon is meant to suggest the pagan goddess Cybele, who, like Salomé, was obsessed with preserving her virginity and thus took pleasure in destroying male sexuality" (*Wikipedia contributors*, "Salome"). Having the head on a platter, shows that it was done deliberately. The bloody atmosphere reflected in "the sticky red sheets" stresses her callousness and conveys a message that men who used to objectify females are now subject to the objectifying gaze of females.

Queen Herod

Duffy revisits the biblical story in order to show that it is Queen Herod, not the king, who ordered the murder of the innocents–to protect not the throne, but the heart of her infant daughter. This reinterpretation of the Bible is

both a testament to the ferocity of maternal love and an indication that the Queen perfectly conforms to the characteristics implied by her acquired surname. Duffy uses similar techniques throughout *The World's Wife* in order to retell well-known stories from a female perspective and, in some cases, to blur the lines between or even completely reverse the traditional gender roles that exist within the relationships she examines (Day).

The opening of the poem, which is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's "Journey to the Magi", records Queen Herod's illustration of an image of winter time and introduction of the three women guests: "The 'Ice in the trees' (Duffy 7) and 'furs' establishes the harsh, cold setting. The foreign queens are 'accented' and the exotic is quickly mingled with the erotic as Queen Herod notices their 'several sweating, panting breasts' (Duffy 7). They had not followed a star as the biblical Magi did but a 'guide and boy'. The queens brought gifts in exchange for their sumptuous accommodation and opulent entertainment. There is a clear sense of affinity conveyed between them and Queen Herod. They stay up together until 'bitter dawn' (Duffy 7) while others, including the 'drunken' Herod sleep" (Woods). The "bitter dawn" presages the coming danger that would befall the daughter.

The three queens saw the sleeping daughter and endowed her something each. The black queen's starfish heralded the new piercing star which refers to the would-be husband of the daughter and sexual intercourse, an act

disliked by Queen Herod. Therefore, she said: "No man, I swore,/ Will make her shed one tear./ A peacock screamed outside" (Duffy 8).

In European folklore the screech of the peacock is an omen of evil. The crowing of the cock signalled Peter's third denial of Christ and there is a clear sense here that Duffy is aligning ideas of betrayal. The man who swears fidelity will ultimately betray the woman her daughter will become just as a man who swore faithfulness to Christ betrayed him. (Woods)

The poem suggests and draws parallels between men's actions and women's reactions. Moreover, Queen Herod will spare no male baby. Therefore:

> The midnight hour, the chattering stars
> Shivered in a nervous sky.
> Orion to the South
> Who knew the score, who'd seen,
> Not seen, then seen it all before:
> The yapping Dog Star it his heels.
> High up in the West
> A studded, diamond W.
> And then, as prophesised,
> Blatant, brazen, buoyant in the East-
> And blue-
> The Boyfriend's Star. (Duffy 8)

The mythical allusions support the feminist claim for equality by setting female answers to every male powerful action:

the blasé response of Orion who had 'seen it all before' reminds us not only of a cosmos

indifferent to human affairs but also that Orion himself was turned into a constellation after Artemis set a scorpion on him for attempting to rape Opis, her attendant. Another constellation, Cassiopeia is mentioned in the 'West', a direct contrast to 'The Boyfriend's Star' in the East. It is introduced through the heavily alliterated, 'blatant, brazen, buoyant…/ and blue' which encapsulates the braggadocio of the male so dreaded by Queen Herod. Cassiopeia boasted that her beauty exceeded Hera's resulting in Poseidon turning her into a constellation. (Woods)

The poem ends with unshakable belief that mothers must take every possible action in order to protect her daughter from men:

We wade through blood

For our sleeping girls.

We have daggers for eyes.

Behind our lullabies,

The hooves of terrible horses

Thunder and drum. (Duffy 9)

Antithetical images highlight mothers' ferocious acts against any possible suitor/aggressor. The aural/visual image of a stream of blood through which they are willing to wade is put in juxtaposition to that of a sleeping daughter. Again the gentle sounds accompanying a lullaby is in contrast to the terrible sounds of horses; hooves that are likened to thunder and drum. Females are prepared for the attack.

Mrs. Lazarus

It is an eight stanza poem, each of which is five lines written in free verse. Myth and history are recast by Mrs. Lazarus who, despite the fact that she has no mention in the original Bible story,

represents feminine loyalty. The poem is one of bereavement, lament and sadness about the death of Lazarus; besides, it shows how one can overcome grief for life to go on. Duffy maintains that:

He died and was raised again by Jesus from the dead. I think in the

original Biblical passage it was three days dead. In my poem, it's

much longer, but the poem is about loss and grief and bereavement and

losing someone you love. But it's also about time and change and how in the process

of time even the most appalling suffering can be healed or move on towards healing (Wood).

Mrs. Lazarus accepts her husband's death, overcomes her sadness and tries to have a new start.

The opening stanza teems with sad feelings of Mrs. Lazarus who shows profound grief:

I had grieved. I had wept for a night and a day

over my loss, ripped the cloth I was married in

from my breasts, howled,

The sentence structure of the second stanza reflects a scattered self that has undergone an excruciating experience, viz., the loss of her husband. Sentences are short, which gives a feeling of a sharp knife. The word "half" which comes in the middle of the stanza symbolizes a complete separation from the dead husband. The sense of isolation gets more intense with anachronistic reference to "dark suits" stuffed into "black bags"; this results in thoughts of committing suicide referred to in "noosed the double knot of a tie around my bare neck" (50).

The third stanza is characterized by religious language and introduces Lazarus' resurrection at the hands of Christ. Yet it stresses the impossibility of regaining a lost relationship at our times since Christ is no longer there. She has "learnt/the Stations of Bereavement[(i)], the icon of my face/ in each bleak frame" (50). The fact is that her husband has been buried for months and the miracle of resurrection is fading away till he has become "a snapshot" in Mrs. Lazarus' mind, which is another anachronistic reference.

The last word in the third stanza, "going", is repeated at the beginning of the fourth one, which indicates that his memory is soon to be forgotten. The reference in "the last hair of his head" that "floated out from a book" (50) shows that resurrection is impossible. His physical presence, as his wife points out, is reduced to "the small zero held by the gold of my ring" (50). The fifth stanza deepens the sense of physical absence as the husband is considered "legend, language" (50). He is mythical and is only referred to as a name. She stresses her faithfulness as she seeks no male company until months have passed and he has become a "memory".

The sixth stanza shows the wife at ease one evening, tucked "in a shawl of fine air" (Duffy 51) admiring the edge of the moon that appears in the sky. This silent romantic image is disturbed by noise made by a hare which thumps and villagers who run towards her shouting. This sudden change, which is detailed and

crystallized in the seventh stanza, prepares for the unexpected appearance of her resurrected husband. The adjectives used to describe gossip bearers illustrate the trenchant effect of what they are going to say to her: the blacksmith's face has "a sly light", the barmaid "shrill eyes", and the crowd has "hot tang" and "sudden hands" (51).

Duffy employs her favourite devices of transferred epithet ('the sly light') and synaesthesia ('shrill eyes') and alliteration ('blacksmith… barmaid… bearing') as she describes the nastier expressions of schadenfreude, presenting the villagers' sentiments via their physical attributes. Particularly graphic is the crowd's 'hot tang', monosyllables which perfectly convey the acrid smell of sweaty excitement (Geddes71).

Now she faces the music:

He lived. I saw the horror on his face.

I heard his mother's crazy song. I breathed

his stench; my bridegroom in his rotting shroud,

moist and dishevelled from the grave's slack chew,

croaking his cuckold name, disinherited, out of his time (51).

The last stanza is full of negative connotations illustrated by a threefold image: visual, aural and olfactory. The husband's miserable appearance is deftly depicted with words such as "horror", "rotten shroud", and "dishevelled". His abhorring presence is stressed in "his mother's crazy song", in the wife's breath and in the metaphor of a grave being a mouth that chewed and spat him. Besides, his smell, realized in words such as "stench",

"rotting", "moist", supports the fact that he has been untimely resurrected. The cacophony in "croaking" and "cuckold" highlights his unwanted presence particularly as he has been "cuckolded" and is now "out of his time".

Mythological Figures

Medusa

Duffy's "Medusa" is the only poem under this section that is not modeled on a male stereotype.

The Medusa is a female figure whose power and tragedy are inextricably bound together. Traditionally, the beautiful Medusa has been made hideous by the vengeful Athene after Poseidon has slept with her. In Duffy's account ('Medusa', TWW, pp.40-1) her petrifying visage emerges from within the beautiful creature, a psychological distortion made manifest as a result of brooding upon 'A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy' about masculine betrayal, the 'perfect man, Greek God', who will 'go, betray me, stray/from home.' Hence her inverting herself into not only the antithesis of beauty but the power that can turn everything she looks upon , even a buzzing bee, to stone. (Michelis and Rowland 53)

Her volume *The World's Wife* has not missed the sarcastic laugh that characterizes her critical tone. The poem shows inconsistency in length of stanza and lines and rhyme, which reflects the disturbed state of Medusa's mind. The first line reflects ill feelings that crystallize an image of a monster inside not less ferocious and frightening than the monstrous outward appearance Medusa

wears. Her mind hosts this inward monster that feeds on " A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy" (Duffy 40).

Medusa, head full of "filthy snakes", steams with anger as she knows that her lover /husband "'ll go betray me, stray/from home" (Duffy 40). The physical transformation that results from being jilted portrays a feminist defense:

My bride's breath soured, stank

in the grey bags of my lungs.

I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,

yellow fanged.

There are bullet tears in my eyes (Duffy 40).

Words such as "soured, stank, grey, foul, fanged and bullet" spotlight the hideousness of Medusa. Now she commands her lover/husband to "be terrified", a hint that she starts giving full vent to her wrath turning everything she gazes at to a stony figure: "The fact that she has gone from bee to bird to cat to pig to dragon shows the ever-increasing size of her anger: she is not being satiated by these random acts of destruction. They are merely leading her towards greater, more powerful targets until she seems unstoppable" (Geddes 56). The concluding line "Look at me now" (Duffy 41) endorses the power Medusa has which enables her to wreck vengeance on menfolk. Medusa represents women who had undergone an ordeal in a male-dominated society and for this reason they dedicate their lives to strike out.

From Mrs Tiresias

In this poem Duffy deftly puts

the two sexes into one human being, with the female sex encroaching on male characteristics so much that Tiresias, as a man, undergoes gender bending changes and finally is declared a full-fledged female. By so doing, Duffy defies the myth of Tiresias and avenges Hera who, against Zeus' viewpoint saw that men found pleasure in sexual intercourse more than women did, and was confounded by Tiresias who said that women enjoyed sexual intercourse more than men did. Lorna Hardwick, in her essay " 'Shards and suckers': contemporary receptions of Homer", maintains that Duffy "re-examined Homeric and mythological paradigms from the perspective of the female participants, including 'Mrs Tiresias'… Duffy's poems add an edge of dark humour to the exploration of silenced voices and marginalized figures in Greek literature" (346).

Duffy's "Tiresias" reminds us of Eliot's The Waste Land, and the same feminist touch shows itself:

Similarly, Duffy's Tiresias is a far cry from T.S. Eliot's enigmatic blind old man with female breasts, "throbbing between two lives" (Eliot 1963, 71). He shrinks into a pathetic cross-dresser getting the body right but the voice wrong, moaning about period pains. The beginning of "Mrs Tiresias" dramatizes the wife's surprise with down-to-earth irony: All I know is this:/he went out for his walk a man and came home female (Duffy 14). ("Baring Skills")

The opening lines stress a fact, so evident yet so shocking. It is not so simple that a walk outdoors

causes a cross identity disorder. Rather, as it is revealed later, it is a curse, the reason of which is unknown, which effects a transsexual change. This curse, which in a sense refers to menstruation, is foretold in the personification of "a faint sneer of thunder" heard by the wife in the early morning. This prediction, though helpful in preparing the wife as well as the reader for facing the change, does not belittle the shock: "The eyes were the same/But in the shocking V of the shirt were breast" (Duffy 14). The wife fainted but quickly realized that "life has to go on" (Duffy14).

The wife tries to grasp the change and starts to be supportive to her gender bender husband who, with the passage of time, gets used to his new status so much that he sent "A letter/ To the powers that be/ Demanding full-paid menstrual leave twelve weeks per year" (Duffy 15). This marks the climax of the change since menstruation is a specific physical feminine feature impossible to be acquired by men. It is more painful for Tiresias to throb between two worlds in Duffy's poem than it is in Eliot's The Waste Land; however, in the former Tiresias opted for the female world:

> After the split I would glimpse him
>
> Out and about
>
> Entering glitzy restaurants
>
> On the arms of powerful men-. (Duffy 15)

The above lines depict an image of a prostitute at the beck and call of "powerful men". Though, at the first sight, this depraving portrayal of women may well backfire and do more harm than good to the feminist

theory, a scrutinizing view reveals that physical prostitution is a dehumanizing practice forced on women; yet, men sometimes willingly practice metaphorical prostitution.

To complete gender transformation, he sometimes appears on TV shows "Telling the women out there/How, as a woman himself,/ He knew how we felt" (Duffy 15). Nothing is perfect since he never got his voice right. There is still a difference marking him as an outsider who intrudes on the female realm, and who knows nothing at all about it. The last lines show gender bending at its best. Mrs. Tiresias, a lesbian who sits with her lover and her gender bender husband, feels confused and ill at ease: "And I noticed then his hands, her hands/The clash of their sparkling rings and painted nails" (Duffy 16). The aural image created by the clash of jewels refers to a deeper psychological one of bewilderment and anger illustrated by such dazzling words as "sparkling" and "painted"; it is impossible to say who is who.

Mrs. Sisyphus

The main issue of the poem focuses on the utter futility of married life as the husband is dedicated to his job and, meanwhile, neglects his wife. "In 'Mrs. Sisyphus', the male is portrayed as the negative part "stupid and ego-centric" (Peukert 4). The speaker gives full vent of her anger through a masculine rhyme and half rhyme which, if deeply thought of, gives a sense of irritation. "The poem is particularly distinctive for its manipulation of various kinds of sound effect"(Strachan and Terry

70). Speaking about the beauties of rhyme, Jeffrey Wainwright says:

"Sometimes we might gorge on a wonderful excess as in a poem like

Carol Ann Duffy 's (1955-) 'Mrs Sisyphus' (1999) which plays

exultantly on the words 'jerk', 'kirk', 'irk', 'berk', 'dirk', 'perk', 'shriek', 'cork', 'park', 'dork', 'gawk', 'quirk', 'lark' and 'mark' (106).

The dominant "k" sound gives a sense of a cracking of a whip which illustrates how angry Mrs. Sisyphus is. Moreover, the recurrence of the same sound in the end rhyme underscores the boredom felt by both Sisyphus, because of his ever repeated task, and Mrs. Sisyphus who is destined to be neglected by her husband.

Onomatopoeic effect shows in words, such as "shriek" and in "squawk", which visualizes the unpleasant noise made by Frau Bach, underlining the rage felt by women. On the other hand, "pop" Onomatopoeically crystallizes a much hoped for image of a warm family dinner, the absence of which makes Mrs. Sisyphus cry: "What use is a perk, I shriek,/ when you haven't the time to pop open a cork/ or go for so much as a walk in the park?" (Duffy 21). Mrs. Sisyphus is so much confused that she "has a very mixed attitude to her husband's ambitions" (Gordon 109). She does not accept the perks of his job altogether; yet, she questions its use when it hinders him from having a drink or a walk with her.

Mrs Sisyphus waits for a positive reaction after describing her husband at work tauntingly,

hinting at the folk who gathered to make faces at him, something stressed by the alliteration in "folk, flock"(Duffy 21). He does not pay heed to her; instead he barks at the moon because of the ever rolling stone he has to carry up the hill. Mrs. Sisyphus disparately comments on her husband's negative reactions:

And what does he say?

Mustn't shirk –

Keen as a hawk,

lean as a shark

Mustn't shirk! (Duffy 21)

The stubbornness of the husband is made clear in his declaration: "mustn't shirk". He will bear his responsibility, something stressed in his hawkeyed-like keenness and shark-like briskness; similes that reflect his insistence and persistence respectively.

To highlight the bitterness and mortification she feels, Mrs. Sisyphus relates her cause with other women:

But I lie alone in the dark,

feeling like Noah's wife did

when he hammered away at the Ark;

like Frau, Johann Sebastian Bach.

Her voice reduced to squawk,

my smile to a twisted smirk;

while, up in the deepening murk of the hill,

he is giving one hundred per cent and more to his work. (Duffy 21-2)

Male historical and mythological characters are employed in order to highlight the unjust treatment women have always suffered from. To this

effect Alderman says: "Sisyphus, Noah and Bach become contemporary workaholic husbands and the ironic collapse of historical difference produces the larger political claim concerning the universal and timeless oppression of women" (59).

Mrs. Midas

Mrs. Midas holds intertextual semantic relations based on world text theory with Ovid's king Midas' story from *Metamorphoses* (Ziolkowski 200). In *Metamorphoses*, Book XI, King Midas was granted a wish, viz., everything he touches, turns into gold. His wish proved to be a curse since his food and drink turn into gold. Upon his request, the wish was taken away. His foolishness did not stop at the curse-like wish; moreover, he commits another blunder when he judges Pan a winner in a music contest between Pan and Apollo. To punish him, Apollo gave him donkey ears (*SparkNotes Editors*). In this poem Duffy revisits and retells the story of King Midas to discover something hidden or to highlight something surprising in the familiar. In *The World's Wife*, as Duffy said in *Singapore Writers Festival 2013*, all she wants to do is to examine fairytales, myths, stories, episodes from history and characters from popular culture that she has been taught at school, and most importantly that have form in her imagination as a writer.("The World's Wife: Mrs Midas - Carol Ann Duffy @ SWF 2013")

The poem opens where Mrs. Midas is at ease at her kitchen enjoying domesticity. She

starts off relaxing in her kitchen as she cooks the evening meal, and is then confused by what is happening, expressing her exasperation with, 'What in the name of God is going on?'(1.18) Her confusion turns to fear as she realizes that she may be next to be turned to gold, but at the end the mood changes to nostalgia and regret as the narrator recalls how the thing she misses most is her husband touch. As Duffy points out:

although she is annoyed and exasperated with him, she is

also in love with him-'we were passionate then…unwrapping

each other like presents'. And his selfishness has ended their

love. So this is what this poem is about: selfishness destroying

their marriage (Duffy, www.sheerpoetry.co.uk).

(Naylor and Wood 91).

The opening lines portray warm domestic atmosphere, suggested by words such as "relaxed" and "gently", which makes it difficult to anticipate the drastic change the following lines show.

She cannot grasp the change at first, yet, it has been assured by contrasting images of "dark""light" and "gold": "the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,/but that twig in his hand was gold" (Duffy 11).

The effect of the curse is further illustrated by Fondante d'Automne that changes into a glittering light-bulb, doorknobs that are glittering, and the blinds that remind her of the Cloth of Gold[ii] and of Miss Macready. Commenting on the line that contains the Field of Cloth of Gold and Mrs Macready, Duffy says:

Miss Macready is Mrs. Midas's History Teacher! And the Field of the

Cloth of Gold was, as far as I remember, when Henry VIII met the

French king and they tried to outdo each other by showing how much

wealth they had. And because Midas is turning everything into gold…

a sort of school note comes into the poem. (Wood)

The curse worked on the husband creating a grotesque atmosphere since he, sitting as a king showing a "strange", "wild" and "vain" face, started to laugh. The meal is served and everything he touches turns into gold to the horror of his wife: "It was then I started to scream" (Duffy 11).

The husband-wife relationship falls apart and they become segregated because of the husband's life threatening wish/curse:

I made him sit

on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself,

I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.

The toilet I didn't mind. (Duffy 11)

They are psychologically as well as physically separated. The wife keeps a distance between them so much that they have separate beds, and protects the cat and the phone, signs of domesticity and communication. Only can he have access to the toilet, a symbol of a basic need. Gold proves of no use and creates a deadening atmosphere to the extent that the husband turns

"the spare room/into the tomb of Tutankhamen" (Duffy 11). Though everything is made of gold, the room is likened to a tomb. The breakup is complete when she "drove him up/under cover of dark" (Duffy 12). Though he is selfish and fool, she still thinks of him and misses his warm hands on her skin, his touch.

Mrs. Aesop

Although the poem is a dramatic monologue with a speaker modeled on a mythological character that had lived in 600 BC, it is a criticism of the poet's contemporary world. To this effect, Glennis Byron, in her essay "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue: Victorian Women Poets and Social Critique", maintains:

[The] opening lines reproduce many of the characteristics associated with the Victorian dramatic monologue generally; there is the abrupt beginning that places us in the middle of a situation, the presence of an auditor, and the use of colloquial language. But colloquial as it may be, Mrs. Aesop's chatty voice hardly sounds like the voice of a woman who lived around 600 BC… this is the poet's representation of that speaking subject, and once again, the social critique can be directed towards male-female relationships within the poet's own world. (96)

"Mrs. Aesop" is more about loss and need of love than criticism of male dominance. By criticizing her husband's behavior, the wife aims at regaining a wholesome relationship. In an interview, Duffy stresses this point: "She'd like less stories and

more passionate love. She wants him to stop strutting about and being big-headed and spend more time on their relationship" (Wood). Duffy herself felt bored by Aesop's stories when she was a child; a feeling that was highlighted in the poem.

Boredom stems from the husband's character, his behavior outdoors and his performance in bed. The opening lines create an image of a boring husband who is "small", does not "prepossess" but tries "to impress" (Duffy 19). When they go for a walk, she is fed up with his cautious behavior: "He'd stand at our gate, look, the leap" (Duffy 19). He pays attention to every single thing: a "shy mouse", a "sly fox", "a swallow", "a jackdaw", and "donkeys" (19). The list of animals shows how tedious his behaviour is. He even takes note of a napping hare and a creeping tortoise declaring the latter a winner of the race; for which declaration his wife calls him "asshole" (19). She burst into rage expressing tedium of his tales:

> What race? What sour grapes? What silk purse,
>
> sow's ear, dog in a manger, what big fish? Some days
>
> I could barely keep awake as the story droned on
>
> towards the moral of itself. *Action, Mrs A. speaks louder*
>
> *than words*. (19)

Mrs. Aesop's anger about her husband's dull stories reflects a strong desire to revive their marital relationship. Duffy reflects the same dislike to Aesop's stories:

Aesop's fables always disappointed me and I think it was

because of the moral tacked on the end. He has to make sense of things tell us what the story is about. I re-read as many of the stories as I could and all the references to the jackdaw envying the lion, the hare and the tortoise, sour grapes, etc., are from the tales. I suppose I'm looking at the idea of being bored by someone and looking at clichés-you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear-and so on (Wood).

Duffy/the speaker fights against boring ideas that threaten as sacred and important relationships as marriage.

Not only does boredom control the husband's character and behavior, but it also affects his sexual performance and renders him impotent, to the extent that separation ominously looms and hovers over their relationship. Mrs. Aesop stresses this fact as if she was listing examples of his erroneous boring behavior, and teaches him a lesson:

> And that's another thing, the sex
>
> was diabolical. I gave him a fable one night
>
> about a little cock that wouldn't crow, a razor-sharp axe
>
> with a heart blacker than the pot that called the kettle.
>
> *I'll cut off your tail, all right*. I said, *to save my face*.
>
> That shut him up. I laughed last, longest. (19)

Sex is described as diabolical, a strong indication of his inability to satisfy her. She turns the tables on him as she tells him a frightening fable taunting and threatening him. The pun in the "cock that wouldn't crow" stresses utter failure in their sexual relationship, and the cock,

slang for penis, being described as "little" endorses absence of sexual pleasure. The antithesis between a good-for-nothing little cock and "a razor-sharp axe" highlights the painful retribution that will befall him, something crystallized in words such as "razor", "sharp" and "cut off". The simile that makes her heart blacker than the kettle assures that she will have no mercy in performing the action. The pun in "tail" and tale" underscores complete physical as well as psychological mortification. The concluding line shows an antithesis between his humiliating silence as he was shut up and her resounding long laughter that endorses her victory over him.

Conclusion

Through the dramatic monologue, Duffy has actually given a chance for marginalized voices of women in order to speak their thoughts while, most of the time, hiding behind male historical, biblical and mythological figures. By this classification, Duffy's criticism covers almost all male stereotypes as she sees them. Each poem portrays two inevitably opposing images of men and women from a female perspective of course. And, de facto, two other relevant yet different images, portrayed by a male gaze, are present in the background. Diction, sound patterns and figures of speech are deftly used by Duffy to vividly portray the former images.

Under the first section Mrs. Faust and Mrs. Darwin fall. The former which is based on an historical/literary example of a scholar, whose aspiration for knowledge leads him to exercise

magic, criticizes aspiration for materialism that destroys not only married life but also life in general. Faust represents corrupt businessmen and politicians who care for nothing but their own interests. Duffy debunks a supposedly warm husband-wife relationship and proves the vice versa when she divulges Faust's secret, that is he "didn't have a soul to sell". Mrs. Darwin proves that men's bodies can be subject to a female objectifying gaze despite any scientific advancement they might have achieved. Darwin's theory is reduced to a similarity between the scientist and a chimpanzee, which suggests further criticism of Darwin as a man.

Two of the poems-"Delilah" and "Salome"- that come under biblical figures section assume no male disguise. They prove women's ability to outwit men and effect change, stressing women's superiority. Duffy subverts different misreading and stereotypical representations of Delilah who avenges herself and women in general. "Salome" stresses the fact that women's punishment can be ferocious and callous regardless of the man who is punished. What is important to Salome is to destroy men's sexuality as a means of preserving women's virginity. In "Queen Herod", retelling the biblical story from a female perspective shows that Queen Herod ordered the murder of the innocents, not to protect the throne as it was told in the Bible, but to protect her daughter's heart. Mrs. Lazarus underscores the fact that a widow is able to overcome her grief over her husband's death and start a new relationship.

The last section contains five poems four of which represent wives of mythological figures: Mrs. Tiresias, Mrs. Sisyphus, Mrs. Midas and Mrs. Aesop, with Medusa standing alone. "Medusa" is Duffy's criticism of men's betrayal of women. The poem shows how jilted and betrayed women can strike out. "Mrs. Tiresias" stresses woman's sway over man who pathetically dwindled into a cross-dresser, a prostitute; thus supporting Hera's opinion that men enjoyed sex more than women did, defying male's objectifying gaze. "Mrs. Sisyphus" records the futility of married life especially when the husband is so busy doing as boring tasks as the one Sisyphus has ever been undertaking. Other workaholic husbands such as Noah and Bach underscore women's timeless oppression. "Mrs. Midas" proves that a husband's selfishness can end a happy marriage. The social critique in "Mrs. Aesop" is directed to Duffy's world where contemporary women suffer from loss and need of love, spiritually as well as physically. Duffy's *The World's Wife* is an important chapter of feminists' society and a remarkable slice of their life.

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Notes

1- Stations of Bereavement: Otherwise known as the Stations of the Cross; a series of 14 pictures or carvings portraying events in the Passion of Christ, from his condemnation by Pontius Pilate to his entombment. (http://homepage.ntlworld.com/chris.thorns/resources/Duffy/CAD_notes.htm#topofpage).

2- It refers to the place when King Henry VIII, King of England, met Francis I, King of France. They

met in Balingham near Calais in 7 June to 24 June 1520 in the hope of cementing the friendship between the two countries. The significance of the Field of Cloth of Gold may refer to the kingly appearance of Midas which relates it to the temporary friendship between England and France in 1520 which was weakened after a wrestling game between Henry and Francis as Henry loses. In turning everything into Gold, Midas is likened to the two kings who tried to outdo each other in showing wealth.

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