

**Unleashing Satire: Deconstructing the Stereotypical Image of
Women in Selected Poems by Carol Ann Duffy**

Dr. Muhammad Mustafa Muhammad Abdulrahman

A Lecturer

Department of English and Simultaneous Interpreting

College for Girls —10th of Ramadan City

Al-Azhar University

Abstract

This paper explores the treatment of satire in Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999) and its significance within feminist literature. Given Duffy's substantial influence on contemporary and British poetry, understanding satire's nuanced role in her works is crucial. However, existing scholarship overlooks this aspect, creating a notable gap in research. Consequently, this study aims to fill this void by examining how Duffy employs satire to subvert traditional gender roles and societal norms. Drawing from structuralists' binary oppositions and feminist revisionism by post-structural French theorists, the research adopts a qualitative-analytic approach to analyze selected poems, uncovering the complexities of female experiences and empowering agency. The selected poems, including *Mrs Aesop*, *Mrs Midas*, *Mrs Sisyphus*, *Mrs Eurydice*, *Mrs Icarus*, *Mrs Darwin*, and *Mrs Faust*, are analyzed to restructure female convictions and identity. The findings highlight satire's transformative potential in critiquing societal constructs and amplifying marginalized voices, contributing to a deeper understanding of feminist literature and emphasizing satire's role as a tool for social critique and empowerment within the field.

Keywords

Carol Ann Duffy, Satire, Feminist Revisionism, Binary Oppositions, Gender Roles

إِطْلَاقُ العِنَانِ لِلهَجَاءِ: تَفْكِيكُ الصُّورَةِ النَّمَطِيَّةِ لِلمرأةِ
فِي قِصَائِدِ مُخْتَارَةِ لِلشَّاعِرَةِ كَارُولِ أَنْ دَفِي

المُسْتَخْلَص

يُعَالِجُ البَحْثُ تَنَاوُلَ الهَجَاءِ فِي دِيوانِ كَارُولِ أَنْ دَفِي الشَّعْرِيَّ "قَرِينَةُ العَالَمِ" (1999)، وَأهميته فِي الأَدبِ النِّسَوِيِّ. وَنظَرًا لِتَأثيرِ (دَفِي) البَلِغِ عَلَى الشَّعْرِ المعاصرِ وَالبريطاني، فَإِنَّ فهمَ الدورِ الدقيقِ الَّذِي يَلعبُه الهَجَاءُ فِي أَعْمالِها أمرٌ بالغُ الأهمية. وَمَعَ ذلك، فَإِنَّ الدِّرَاساتِ الأَدبِيَّةَ الحَالِيَّةَ تَتجاهلُ هَذَا الجانِبَ، مِمَّا يَخْلُقُ فجوةً جَلِيَّةً جَدِيدَةً بِالمِلاحَظَةِ فِي البَحْثِ. وَبالتالي، تَهْدَفُ هَذِهِ الدِّرَاسَةُ إِلَى مِلءِ هَذَا الفِراغِ مِنْ خِلالِ دِرَاسَةِ كِيفِيَّةِ اسْتِخدامِ (دَفِي) لِلهَجَاءِ لِتَقْوِيضِ الأَدوارِ التَقْلِيدِيَّةِ لِلجنسِيينِ والأَعْرَافِ المِجتمَعِيَّةِ. وَبالاعتمادِ عَلَى المِعارضاتِ الثنائِيَّةِ لِلنِّسَوِيينِ، وَالتَّفْكِيكِيَّةِ النِّسَوِيَّةِ المِستوحاةِ مِنَ المُنظِّرِينَ الفِرَنسِيِّينَ ما بَعْدَ البِنْيَوِيِّينَ، يَتَّخِذُ البَحْثُ مِناهجًا تَحليلِيًّا نَوْعِيًّا لِتَحليلِ قِصَائِدِ مُخْتَارَةِ، لِإِماطَةِ اللِثامِ عَنِ العِلاقاتِ المَعقَدَةِ وَلِتَمكِينِ الفاعِلِيَّةِ الأَنْثَوِيَّةِ. يَتِمُّ تَحليلُ القِصَائِدِ المُخْتارَةِ، بِما فِيها "قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ عَيْسُوب"، وَ"قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ مايداس"، وَ"قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ سِيزِيف"، وَ"قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ يورِيداسِي"، وَ"قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ إِبْكاروس"، وَ"قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ دَارُوين"، وَأخِيرًا "قَرِينَةُ السِيدِ فَاوسْت" لِإِعادَةِ هيكَلَةِ قِناعاتِ الهُويَّةِ الأَنْثَوِيَّةِ. وَتَسَلُطُ النَتائِجُ الضَّوءَ عَلَى إمكانياتِ الهَجاءِ المُعَيَّرَةِ فِي انتقادِ الهياكلِ وَالنُّظُمِ المِجتمَعِيَّةِ وَتَعزِيزِ الأصواتِ المُهمِشَةِ، مِمَّا يُسَهِّمُ فِي فهمِ أعمقٍ لِلأَدبِ النِّسَوِيِّ وَالتَّأكيدِ عَلَى دورِ الهَجاءِ كأداةٍ لِلنقدِ الإِجتماعِيِّ وَالتَّمكِينِ فِي هَذَا المِناحِ أَوْ النِّطاقِ.

الكَلِمَاتُ المُفْتاحِيَّةُ

كارول أَنْ دَفِي، دِيوانِ قَرِينَةُ العَالَمِ، الهَجاءُ، التَّفْكِيكِيَّةُ النِّسَوِيَّةُ، المِعارضاتِ الثنائِيَّةُ، أَدوارِ الجنسِيينِ

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Introduction

This study consists of two parts: the first is focused on the theoretical framework, while the second involves an applied analysis. The theoretical framework explores the concepts used in the analysis, specifically the binary oppositions and the revisionist mythmaking. It aims at defining and understanding these concepts within literary analysis. Moving on, the applied study focuses on the poems being analyzed. The analysis delves into the contrasting binaries found within male/female relationships. By examining both the opposing elements and the feminist approach of revisionism, the study aims to uncover deeper layers of meaning and underscore the inherent tension in the relationships depicted in the poems.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

In May 2009, the Scottish-born Carol Ann Duffy became Britain's foremost female Poet Laureate. In 2015, the talented poet was made a Dame, the female equivalent of a knighthood, and was praised as "a great public poet who deserves her public honour" (Wilkinson, *Guardian*, 2014). Duffy has been widely acclaimed for her innovative and expressive poetry that can be approached from various literary theoretical perspectives, such as feminism, gender binaries, national identity, post-structuralism, and revisionism. In her poetry collection *The World's Wife* (1999), Duffy expertly utilizes the feminist revisionist approach to deconstruct the traditional portrayal of canonical historical and legendary figures by presenting them through the lens of their significant others—their wives. Hence, she employs mythology and satire to create an alternative history narrated from the women's perspective, not the men's. According to Ian Gregson, "The most important motives of Duffy's work—the desire to give voice to those who are habitually *spoken for*" (99). This anti-patriarchal strategy recreates history from a female perspective, her-story: the "other". Giving voice to silenced female characters is a distinctive feature that sets Duffy apart from other

poets. Therefore, reconstructing such concepts also uncovers truths that deconstruct grounded ideologies. Moreover, situating Duffy's work according to debates about feminism and how she subverts the traditional narrative perspectives is the benchmark of the present study. Furthermore, the study examines how subverting traditional narrative not only serves as a subtle rebellion against the male-dominated literary canon but also critiques and reprehends the power dynamics and gender roles perpetuated by these stories.

Binary Oppositions

Binary opposition is a fundamental concept in Structuralism. It refers to the act of classifying two ideas or concepts as opposing entities. "According to structuralism, the human mind perceives difference most readily in terms of opposites, which structuralists call binary oppositions: two ideas, directly opposed, each of which we understand by means of its opposition to the other" (Tyson 213). This classification allows for the study of their interactions and functions in relation to each other. While binary oppositions are prevalent in our everyday lives, they can also contribute to societal issues of exclusion and oppression.

According to Putri and Sarwoto, binary oppositions are fundamental in various fields of study, including literature. Furthermore, the reconstruction of binary oppositions helps readers understand the implied meaning of a text and choose from different interpretations. They also serve as a tool for authors to convey their ideas in their writing. Therefore, they are of equal importance for both authors and readers. They assist authors in generating, combining, and emphasizing their ideas, while allowing readers to decode the author's intentions, comprehend the entire text, and follow its narrative development (84). One of the fundamental binary oppositions or dichotomies in metaphysics involves the concept of male and female. This contrasting dichotomy is marked by conflict and tension. It also implies that males hold a superior position and exert absolute dominance in social life, while females are subjected to control and subordination. In society, men are often privileged to express their opinions publicly while females are relegated to the position of "other," and have their right to speak violated. According to Zidan, the persistence of patriarchy in society remains a significant concern, as it perpetuates binary oppositions that marginalize women and perpetuate traditional female roles (13).

For Derrida, binary oppositions in literature or discourse privilege one term over the other, creating a hierarchy of meaning. By analyzing

the contrasting dichotomies and identifying their opposing poles in a text, one can unmask the underlying ideology being promoted by the text. However, these dichotomies, Tyson asserts, are paradoxical and unstable, and the opposing poles are not completely separate. This instability allows detecting the limitations of the ideology being presented (254-7). Critics often acknowledge the ideology revealed by the contrasting dichotomy of men and women. This ideology critiques male-centrism and hegemony. It is important to note that this ideology has limitations. While it acknowledges the tragic experiences of women, it fails to recognize that women's experiences are also influenced by their vulnerability.

Following the lead of deconstructionism, binary oppositions, such as man/woman, oppressor/oppressed, and colonizer/colonized, are not fixed and can be inverted and challenged. The rise of feminism and female authorship has given women the power to challenge masculine norms and confront their weaknesses by critiquing and reconstructing the fragmented and dismantled identity of female characters. This process aims at motivating women to discover their unique identities and realize their self-worth. The deconstructive strategy aims to expose the ingrained ways of thinking, by reversing dichotomies and corrupting them. Zidan argues that deconstruction seeks to challenge the traditional hierarchical structures and rigid categorizations inherent in metaphysics. It questions the notion that concepts can be neatly divided into opposing categories, such as good versus evil, male versus female, or black versus white. Instead, it aims at revealing the complexities, contradictions, and interplay of multiple meanings within these oppositional categories (14).

Revisionist Mythmaking

Female has been a focal point of feminist literary analysis. Feminist theory is an appropriate tool for analyzing gender binaries that often silence feminine perspectives. In her article, “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking” (1982), Alicia Ostriker believes that a poet is using myth whenever he/she “employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture” (72). Similarly, in her essay, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision” (1972), Adrienne Rich defines “revisionist mythmaking” as “The act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.” Rich emphasizes the need for women to revisit the past and get to know it differently to change the future, that is, to create new scenarios for life. It is more than a search for identity; it leads to autonomy and self-determination. It is worth noting that Rich’s

call for re-visioning/re-writing the cultural heritage involves retelling its stories from the perspective of post-colonialism, feminism, and gender and queer studies. This is because, as she puts it, “until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (18). This approach has not only transformed the understanding of the past but also the understanding of how we come to such an understanding (Plate 389). In other words, this pursuit is also valuable for women, not only to promote self-awareness but as an urgent response to the self-destructive nature of male perpetuation of inequality, which can lead to collective action eventually.

In the same vein, Ostriker defines the term as “the old vessel filled with wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible” (“Thieves of Language” 72). According to her, the essence of revisionist mythmaking, for women poets, is in the confrontation and rectification of gender stereotypes depicted in myth. In *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America* (1986), Ostriker also adds that myths are “the sanctuaries of language where our meanings for “male” and “female” are stored; to rewrite them from a female point of view is to discover new possibilities for meaning” (11).

Feminist revisionism has also gained valuable insights from arguments inspired by French post-structural feminists and literary theorists like Hélène Cixous (1976), Luce Irigaray (1982), and Julia Kristeva (1985). These critics are concerned with the way the language system dominated by masculinity tries to marginalize or erase women's voices. As a result, they encourage women to rewrite feminine histories from their own standpoint rather than conforming to patriarchal norms of writing. Therefore, they assert the validity of women’s authorship.

Based on female subjectivity, *Écriture féminine*, or “feminine writing,” is a term coined by Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” which she wrote in (1975). Cixous voices similar views to Rich. Besides, she wants to establish a literary genre that highlights the contingent and discursive nature of all identities, drawing from ideas presented in Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), deconstruction, and the Lacanian triad. According to Abigail Bray, *Écriture féminine* is an “avant-garde textual practice which challenges and moves beyond the constraints of phallogocentric thought [...] a path towards thought through the body” (70-71). Cixous argues that feminine discourse entails women writing themselves. Women “must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven

away as violently as from their bodies [...] Women must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history” (qtd. in Freedman 319).

In this context, *Écriture féminine* presents a chance for transformation. Women are encouraged to express themselves through writing, breaking masculine norms, and infusing subjectivity and life into their text. Cixous challenges the central idea that writing belongs to men, thus deconstructing the dogma that “writing is at once too high, too great for you, it’s reserved for the great—that is, for “great men.” According to her, it should be the prerogative of all women. Cixous also explains how women, who may be positioned as “Other” in a masculine symbolic order, can reaffirm their understanding of the world by accepting and engaging with their otherness, both within their minds and beyond (qtd. in Freedman 320).

Analysis

Duffy’s Feminist Retellings

1- Satirizing Questionable Genius and Fragile Masculinity

Throughout history and literature, there has been a tendency to celebrate masculine accomplishments while negating the feminine. As has already been pointed out, Duffy’s classical myths tend to erase women’s voices, so she focuses on reclaiming them back. Thus, she addresses the significance of the female voice. Compared to what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar wrote in their significant feminist work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), what Duffy presents in *The World’s Wife* involves less essentially radical outcry (Zhou 133). However, this does not imply that Duffy is less conscious than Gilbert and Gubar. As a female poet, Duffy realizes the need to subvert and re-establish the deeply ingrained male-dominated tradition and to deconstruct and reconstruct it. While subversion is the outcome, the essence of her ambition lies in creating a new discourse system that empowers women and is powerful enough to satirize the previously male-focused poetic imagination. Seen in this light, then, the ironic vision overlaps the satiric side in the following selected poems. In this respect, the poems offer a much more subtle kind of gendered satire—a satire, infused with irony, aimed at exposing the follies and absurdities of male figures.

Contemporary satire possesses a unique potential power. Northrop Frye believes that the innate nihilism found in satire, while often reactionary and misguided, can be harnessed for revolutionary purposes in an age where radical change is urgently needed (“Nature” 88). To elaborate, Frye defines it as “militant irony” that “assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (*Anatomy* 223),

Unleashing Satire: Deconstructing the Stereotypical Image of Women in Selected Poems by Carol Ann Duffy

thus establishing a clear structure of judgment that deprecates the grotesque. This poses a question whether the use of satire, for these repressed women, is ameliorative or punitive procedure or offers a critique or a sense of superiority over men.

Jane Dowson perceives that satire is “a favourite form in postmodernist poetry” and a form consummately practised by Duffy, especially in her first collection, *The World’s Wife* (248). Through satire, Duffy casts a critical eye on the traditional gender roles and the patriarchal power structures that have historically oppressed women. By juxtaposing these traditional gender norms with alternative and subversive reinterpretations, Duffy’s female heroines effectively challenge and deconstruct the oppressive male-dominated narratives. Further, using a persona or mask of the speaking ‘character’ provides an acceptable public voice to explore concerns and issues related to culturally determined differences, particularly that of gender subjectivity. More importantly, Duffy adeptly transforms her dramatic monologue into a sort of satiric mode to suit her indignant voice, her authorial displeasure with the overriding “husband’s world” (Abad Garcia 11). The dramatic monologue form permits feminist rage in a culturally acceptable form: the rage expressed is not directly attributable to the poet.

The term “questionable geniuses” refers to individuals whom history depicts as exceptionally smart, but their spouses think differently. Using myth gives the writer “the sort of authority unavailable to someone who writes “merely” of the private self” (Ostriker, “Thieves of Language” 72). As a feminist retelling, *Mrs Aesop* is a dramatic monologue from the perspective of Aesop’s wife concerning her husband’s genius. In this poem, Duffy uses humour and quips about male figures that history has valorized. Who would know a man better than his wife or partner? Duffy exploits this aspect and uses it artistically to bring about notches in the masculine ego. This approach also conforms to post-structuralist call for women to represent themselves in writing, to be active agents rather than passive followers. Moreover, Duffy questions the supposed genius of these celebrated men by giving a satiric voice to their voiceless spouses, who often have a different perspective. Hence, she brings the wives, who were once hidden, subordinate, and obscure from an unseen world, to the forefront. They now have their voice to express their innermost thoughts, whether they are the pains of loss or the triumphs of revenge.

In her analysis of *Carol Ann Duffy: Selected Poems* (2005), J. Michael Woods also highlights the privileged feminist perspective

reflected in Duffy's aesthetics, saying that: "Through making individual women's often either forgotten or disregarded voices heard, [Duffy] builds up what amounts to an orchestra of individual women's voices resulting in a collective female chorus" (68). Similarly, in her review of the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy (2015), Jeanette Winterson observes that Duffy's collection *The World's Wife* gives the woman behind the scenes, who have been overlooked in history and mythology, a glorious and powerful voice. Winterson comments:

The poems in *The World's Wife* are hybrids: first person, dramatic situations, at once intimate and theatrical, as you'd expect from a monologue, but with the authority of a ballad—a legend being told, a larger-than-life figure that belongs in myth as well as history. And there's something of the broadside here, too, in their high-stepping protest at the truth that the story unfolds. Some of these poems are laments for women in captivity. (*The Guardian* 2015)

Mrs Aesop begins her monologue by bluntly expressing how she finds her husband so boring that he would make Purgatory even worse than it already is. This is seen in the first stanza:

By Christ, he could bore for Purgatory. He was small,
Didn't prepossess. So he tried to impress. Dead men,
Mrs Aesop, he'd say, tell no tales. Well, let me tell you now
That the bird in his hand shat on his sleeve,
Never mind the two worth less in the bush. Tedious.

Thus, Duffy opens up the poem with Mrs Aesop's pungent mocking of her husband's tedious talk and dull marriage. At this point, Duffy employs colloquial language to describe how Mrs Aesop perceives her husband as dull as Purgatory. "By Christ," she says, using lightly blasphemous language to reveal that she is unafraid to speak her mind. The reader notices how the tone of boredom is set and accentuated in the first line by using metaphors. By invoking Purgatory, the notorious place in the catholic tradition, the titular character, or the persona, tries to convey a sense of utter boredom for her spouse's company. The comparison to Purgatory serves as an instance of hyperbole, emphasizing the monotony of their marriage, which seems interminable like an unbearable place with no end in sight. This is part of the image Mrs Aesop envisages to satirize her significant other.

Then, the scene becomes quite satirical. Mrs Aesop continues to demean her husband for being "small" in stature, ugly, and lacking a conventionally masculine presence and confidence despite his attempts to "impress" people with his fables. For her, Aesop's constant moralizing has ruined their marriage. She also disdains his fables, finding them

uninteresting. Being witty enough, Mrs Aesop knows how to twist the morals of his stories to show his absurd obsession with fables. In addition, she uses both allusions and sarcasm to censure his idioms, viewing them as trite and obvious. For example, in lines 2-3, “Dead men, Mrs Aesop, he’d say, tell no tales,” she ridicules the notion that a dead person cannot speak. Similarly, her use of sarcasm is evident in her critique of the idiom “A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.” To her, the bird in hand is worthless because it defecates on the person’s sleeve, much like her unbearable spouse.

More importantly, Mrs Aesop also presents a relevant scenario—that of a husband who is intolerable and thinks he knows everything. Such a person often causes nuisance and irritation. Being in a relationship with a person like that is not easy, which is evident in the second stanza of the poem:

Going out was worst. He’d stand at our gate, look, then leap;
scour the hedgerows for a shy mouse, the fields
for a sly fox, the sky for one particular swallow
that couldn’t make a summer. The jackdaw, according to him,
envied the eagle. Donkeys would, on the whole, prefer to be lions.

Although Aesop is regarded widely as a genius, he tends to employ clichés that are overused and hackneyed. They are the forte through which he displays his genuine talent. However, he remains unaware of his wife’s dissatisfaction, who is equally frustrated with his lack of creativity. Genuinely, creating evident and contrived sayings randomly from natural phenomena does not imply ingenuity. For Mrs Aesop, it is conspicuous that before leaping, any human being should look and that the presence of a single swallow in the sky does not necessarily indicate that it is summertime. As a result, the boredom experienced by her is intensified by the wandering mind of her husband, who becomes fixated on mundane things. She is also unable to engage in a sane conversation with her husband, as he is unable to focus on anything of substance.

In her frustration, Mrs Aesop alludes to components of Aesop’s tedious tales. She mentions a “shy mouse [...] a sly fox [...] one particular swallow / that couldn’t make a summer.” Each alludes to a specific fable, but she does not go further to cover other parts of the fable. By excluding the morals those animals conform with, the poem clarifies how Mrs Aesop does not care about the fables in the first place. In their wanderings, when Aesop takes a note about a tortoise, Mrs Aesop hints and compares her marriage to a slow tortoise creeping up the road. The use of the simile “slow as marriage” satirizes the lacklustre of their

relationship. As can be seen, she uses a form of character attack as a means of critique and overt satire. Thus, she wins the race with her husband. This is shown in lines 14-15: “*Slow / but certain, Mrs Aesop, wins the race.*” In the penultimate stanza, after Aesop says, “Action speaks louder / than words,” Mrs Aesop pivots to her most biting critique of her husband: their sex life sucks. Therefore, in the final stanza, Mrs Aesop twists other well-known idioms, “the pot calling the kettle black,” and “cutting off one’s nose to spite one’s face,” to threaten directly her husband’s masculinity.

Duffy’s Orpheus, Sisyphus, Midas, Aesop, and Icarus are all represented as “men of futile action,” and her Medusa, Circe, Eurydice, Mrs Tiresias, and the bride of Pygmalion “all represent what men fear:” unleashed, mature, female sexual energy (qtd. in Michelis and Rowland, 50, 53). This alternative perspective is crystallized in this poem. Duffy satirizes Aesop by portraying him as an insipid and unremarkable individual. Due to the vagueness of details on Aesop’s historical background, it is more effective to create this provocative hypothetical interpretation from the perspective of his wife. Some scholars suggest that he is a myth created by the intellectuals of his time, known primarily through references in the works of Aristotle.

This satirical alternative version is Her-story, which Cixous praises as “speaking of a woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history” (qtd. in Freedman 319). According to Mary Louisa Lum, “both genders make up the historical experience and the negation of one is unfair, it is therefore imperative for women to attempt revisionism as indicated by Cixous” (17). Aesop’s holier-than-thou attitude can be attributed to his deep concerns about his masculinity. This, in turn, creates a direct allusion to the fable and correlates with an anti-Aesop feeling. The poem satirizes the traditional societal norms of male dominance and female subservience. It also highlights the fragility of the male ego, suggesting that some men may seek fame and authority, but this is simply a result of their wounded pride.

2- Satirizing Masculine Idiocy and Pure Selfishness

In *Mrs Midas*, Duffy conveys feminist marginalization through a persona that is deprived of speech. She takes the traditional myth of King Midas and gives voice to Mrs Midas, his wife. While the poem explores the strange consequences of King Midas’ wish, it also, in a sense, delves into the dynamics of the conventional marital relationship. In addition, it

satirizes how a selfish act by one partner can affect both individuals, leading to erasure, isolation and loneliness. However, the satirical dimension is less intense as the matter of gender violence rather keeps to the psychological.

At this point, Mrs Midas is hurt by her husband's wish, not just because of his greed and foolishness but because he does not consider her feelings. In other words, she realizes that in the moment of his wish, he disregards her experiences. From a psychoanalytic perspective, she points out that his wish is based on an act of erasure. "What gets me now," she claims, "is not the idiocy or greed / but lack of thought for me." This erasure of female experience is the root of the harm that follows. Ironically, the wish isolates Midas from what matters most: love, affection, and meaningful relationships with others and with his surroundings. It threatens to disrupt the intimate connection with his wife and the sexual bond they once shared.

The poem fuses both the dramatic and the interior monologue. Further, parody comes to the forefront, now of a more bittersweet kind, which also pervades the dramatic and narrative domains. The narrative is a part of the interior monologue and serves as a general frame for the entire story. This frame is based on an updated "revisionist parodization of the myth/legend of the paradoxically 'poor' King Midas and the Golden Touch" (qtd. in Abad Garcia 17). Through parody, the poem introduces a "dethroned" Midas and his wife no longer "queen" but "Mrs Midas." Both are, as befits satire, conveniently degraded and updated into ordinary lower-middle-class people with the wife in the kitchen resigned to "cooking vegetables" and the husband permanently wishing for economic or material improvement at all costs "... the fool / who wished for gold..." (*Lines 52-53*).

Thus, the poem opens with a scene of domestic order and normality. Mrs Midas is not a character in the original myth; the original story left out any women's perspectives. However, in this poem, she narrates her distress when a peculiar incident occurred in late September. While she was preparing dinner, her husband, Mr. Midas, was outside under a pear tree. Suddenly, she observed him holding a golden twig and plucking pears that turned into solid gold in his hands. The narrator sought to find a rational explanation for what she was seeing. Intrigued, she wondered if he was decorating the tree with fairy lights. Duffy says:

It was late September. I'd just poured a glass of wine, begun
to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen

filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath
gently blanching the windows. (*Lines 1-4*)

He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.
Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way
the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,
but that twig in his hand was gold. (*Lines 6-9*)

I thought to myself, is he putting fairy lights in the tree? (*Line 12*)

Mr. Midas is thus seen through his wife's perspective, which offers a fascinating and feminist twist on the original myth. Throughout history, women have been described from a male perspective, which is both subverted and deconstructed in this poem. Little insight is given into Midas's thoughts. At first, Mrs Midas sees him "laugh[ing]" about the wish, refusing to see the consequences of his actions and his fundamental selfishness.

The overall mood of the poem is nevertheless satirical. *Mrs Midas* is an example of individual satire that mocks the satirical *object* "Mr. Midas" for his obsessive and indiscriminate use of his "golden touch," as seen in the passage that is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "... He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne...", or in his wife's terror to be touched by him "... 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 ..." (*Lines 27-30*). The following stanza makes the point clear:

He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.
The look on his face was strange, wild, vain, I said,
What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.
I served up the meal. (*Lines 16-19*)

Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich. (*Line 20*)

Duffy deftly intertwines comedy and horror. Meanwhile, Mrs Midas made evident the psychological violence which pervaded the poem: her "shaking hand" when pouring the wine; the wineglass was transformed when he picked up to drink ("glass, goblet, golden chalice"), her "scream" and fear when she realized her husband's terrible gift. She took precautions to ensure he kept "his hands to himself." She referred to how Mr. Midas' golden touch affected their relationship and intimacy: "... Now I feared his honeyed embrace / the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art..." However, she questioned the value of gold, as it could not satisfy hunger or thirst. She dreamt that she bore Midas's golden child with its "perfect ore limbs" and "amber eyes." She woke to "the streaming sun," which was the only golden shower acceptable and

conducive to life because “who, when it comes to the crunch, can live/with a heart of gold?” Unable to live with a “heart of gold.” Duffy’s use of dramatic monologue maximizes an effective objectification of the speaker’s nuanced psychological change (Jeon 211). Mrs Midas conceived her difficult situation and decided to live apart from her husband. She told how Midas had to move out and live in a caravan in the wilderness, leaving her as “the woman who married the fool / who wished for gold.”

... I couldn’t believe my ears:

how he’d had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted.

But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?

It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes
no thirst. (*Lines 30-34*)

But now I feared his honeyed embrace,
the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.

And who, when it comes to the crunch, can live
with a heart of gold? (*Lines 41-44*)

The poem comprises eleven six-line unrhymed stanzas. The lines above epitomize the dissolution of Midases’ marriage due to his wish. The inclusion of the adverb “but now” refers to the contrast between Mrs Midas’s reflection on their early days of romance and their recent forced separation. They had been, as she says, “passionate then, / in those halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly, / like presents.” The absence of Midas’s wife from the original myth is also alluded to in these lines. Duffy transforms Mrs Midas into “a work of art” that exposes the complex reality of her experience to the audience.

In the final stanza, Mrs Midas, the satiric *subject*, uses satire that humiliates the satiric *object* for his greed and egocentricity, as mentioned in stanzas 9 and 11. Not only does she ridicule him by calling him a “fool” (*Line 52*), but, above all, she also mocks his “idiocy” and “selfishness” in the last stanza” (*Lines 61-62*). She further explains that what hurts her is “not the idiocy or greed/but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness ...” The ironic vision overlaps with the satiric side. Even though they can never be together, she still loves her spouse and satirically alludes to his absence and what she has lost, “... once a bowl of apples stopped me dead” (*Line 65*).

Thus, Duffy cleverly subverts the narrative by challenging the idea that Midas’s power has brought him happiness. Ironically, Mrs Midas expresses her alienation and the impact of her husband’s supernatural ability to turn everything he touches into gold. Mrs Midas is not a

misandrist; her tone is of regret that she has lost the man she loves. What she misses most about her husband is the one thing she can never have: the emotional intimacy and connection, the warmth of his touch on her skin. Her final statement is a wistful longing to have him again. She admits her “thinking of him” and her “missing” him most, especially and ironically: “... his hands, /his warm hands on my skin, his touch” (*Lines* 64-66) which does not seem to be his “golden touch.” However, she fears “his honeyed embrace.” Most satirically, she reveals how her husband’s selfishness has deprived her of the opportunity to bear a child and experience motherhood. More often than not, relationships are ruined by foolishness, selfishness or greed; millions of women like Mrs Midas believe wealth will make them happy. The irony is that Mrs Midas is now rich (“I sold/the contents of the house”), yet neither she nor her husband has gained anything worthwhile. In accordance with this contrast, Duffy satirizes the consequences and emotional turmoil resulting from society’s pursuit of power and wealth. Mrs Midas is a strong-willed woman who has her own voice to speak out against discriminatory social norms.

3- Women's Marginalization and Lack of Choices: Satirizing Masculine Vanity

In *Mrs Sisyphus*, Duffy depicts the myth of Sisyphus, the ancient Greek king of Corinth, who is known for his attempts to offend the gods and cheat death. As punishment for his cunningness and arrogance, Zeus condemns him to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill for eternity. According to Greek mythology, Sisyphus had a wife named Merope. However, she goes unmentioned by name in the poem, which highlights the fact that her story has been overlooked due to her husband’s fame. In this context, Merope is given a voice to express how Sisyphus’s decisions have affected her life.

In the poem, Mrs Sisyphus is the narrator. She explains how she grows increasingly frustrated with her husband’s unwavering commitment to his work. Satirically, she presents Sisyphus as a fool who prioritizes irrationally his meaningless and interminable work over their marriage, leaving her lonely and unfulfilled. In lines 17-19, for example, Mrs Sisyphus laments her husband’s pointless attempts. She says, “That feckin” stone’s no sooner up/than it’s rolling back/all the way down.” The poem does not only ridicule the absurdity of modern culture’s excessive obsession with work but also highlights the egocentricity and unrelenting drive to succeed among men. Additionally, by drawing attention to Sisyphus’s disregard for his wife, the poem underscores the challenges

women have frequently had to bear for eroding relationships owing to men's vanity and pride.

Duffy aptly uses repetitive structures to emphasize the monotonous and emotionally detached nature of the couple's relationship. Similar to the Greek myth, this repetition reflects the cyclical nature of their lives. To be sure, the poem does not only shed light on the untold stories of women whose partners have eclipsed their aspirations, but it also stresses the significance of acknowledging and listening to their voices.

The poem consists of 32 lines of free verse, broken into three stanzas of varying lengths. It takes the form of a dramatic monologue and does not have a steady rhyme scheme. The poem also has a distinct feminist appeal. The opening stanza is composed of five lines. Mrs Sisyphus appears to be identifying her husband to an unnamed listener nearby. "That's him pushing the stone up the hill," she says, which means the poem takes place close enough to this hill to see Sisyphus in action. This also creates a sense of intimacy, as Mrs Sisyphus seems to be addressing the reader directly.

Mrs Sisyphus expresses her frustration with her husband's futile task of pushing a rock up a hill like a chump—an utter fool! Satirically, she compares the stone to a large church, emphasizing how it has grown from a minor annoyance to an infuriating presence. Moreover, this comparison also implies that Sisyphus worships ridiculously the mundane task he has been assigned. His intense commitment "just used to irk," or mildly annoy, her; now it "incenses," or enrages, her. What is more, it becomes evident that she is likely aware enough that he will never succeed. Sisyphus does not torture her body, but her soul. In such a state of mental agony, she entertains the idea of harming her workaholic husband with a dirk (dagger), revealing her deep-seated bitterness and resentment towards him. The stanza ends with a repetitive rhyme scheme; each line conveys a sense of irritation and anger, similar to Mrs Sisyphus' exasperating emotions toward her husband. As he pushes stubbornly the stone up the hill, she performs her endless repetitive task of repeating such anger, which, like his action, ultimately leads to nothing.

That's him pushing the stone up the hill, the jerk.

I call it a stone - it's nearer the size of a kirk.

When he first started out, it just used to irk,
but now it incenses me, and him, the absolute berk.

I could do something vicious to him with a dirk.

The next is a 14-line stanza, mimicking the length of the sonnet but without the meter. It decidedly loses the meter and over-emphasizes the

rhyming words with shorter line lengths. Mrs Sisyphus also satirizes the value of perks (perquisites) when there is no time for simple pleasures like opening a bottle of wine or going for a walk in the park. For her, Sisyphus's ambition is ruining their relationship. In other words, she satirizes how he is devoted to his worthless work, that he is, more or less, married to it, and has nothing left to "give" to anything else—including her!

Mrs Sisyphus knows this is a "load of old bollocks," but she is not rewarded for seeing through her husband's delusional vanity. Building on this idea, she satirically finds his dedication to his task absurd and compares his plight to someone attempting to "bark at the moon." The poem is written in free verse, and it does not follow a regular rhyme scheme. Words that play off each other are "jerk", "kirk", "irk", 'perk', and 'dirk'; they sound similar and have rhyming patterns. The sharpness of all those /k/ sounds evokes the speaker's growing outrage and reflects her mental agony. Mrs Sisyphus seems thoroughly disgusted by Sisyphus and the predicament he has situated her in. Like the form of iambic pentameter, there are five stresses in each line, though they are not composed of iambs. This consonance creates both full and slant rhymes between and within lines.

Think of the perks, he says.
What use is a perk, I shriek,
when you haven't time to pop open a cork
or go for so much as a walk in the park?
He's a dork.

The repetition in this short stanza of "Mustn't shirk" indicates the repetitiveness of the actions of Mr. Sisyphus. She ridicules that he does not evade his work and duty of pushing the stone up the hill only to watch it roll down again as a sort of punishment. Mrs Sisyphus also harbours a grudge against Sisyphus not only for making a mockery of himself but for involving and dragging her into his mess. At this level, her entire life has been unfairly shaped by her husband's choices. Her unhappiness cannot make Sisyphus accept reality. The following stanza refers to Mrs Sisyphus's satiric view of his work. He still thinks of himself "keen as a hawk / lean as a shark." He still believes that he might succeed and thus that he "Mustn't shirk" his duty. Duffy makes clear the point:

And what does he say?
Mustn't shirk-
keen as a hawk,
lean as a shark
Mustn't shirk!

Reflecting upon her loneliness, Mrs Sisyphus compares her situation to Noah's wife during the construction of the Ark and to Frau Johann Sebastian Bach. Their words do not matter, and all they can do is watch their husbands work hard endlessly. The dark tone of Mrs Sisyphus's reflection continues to show her feelings towards her husband. Words like 'alone' and 'dark' portray how she feels neglected and abandoned by him: "[lying] alone in the dark," waiting for his love and affection that never comes. The analogy to Noah and his wife highlights her despair. In addition, Mrs Sisyphus compares herself to Bach, the great German composer, whose works are not appreciated until after his death, suggesting that her voice will never be heard during her lifetime. The allusion to famous men and their wives emphasizes how women's lives have been overshadowed by their husbands' deeds throughout history. In contrast, Mrs. Sisyphus's life will be marked forever by her husband's notoriety; she will have to live with his hubris. Gloomy words like 'reduced' and 'twisted' emphasize the bleakness of her situation. By the end, Mrs Sisyphus reveals that the pain of her husband's absence has led to a sinister attitude, fueling her self-doubt and leaving her all alone, reduced, and twisted. Thus, her voice is reduced to a "squawk," and her smile has become "a twisted smirk," implying that Sisyphus is to blame for her bitter unhappiness. Meanwhile, her husband focuses solely on his arduous and futile work, disregarding her suffering. She says,

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.
My voice reduced to a squawk,
my smile to a twisted smirk;
while, up on the deepening murk of the hill,
he is giving one hundred per cent and more to his work.

Thus, the poem voices a wife's hidden emotions and portrays how she feels while thinking about her husband. Mrs. Sisyphus is aware that her husband's delusional pride is the root cause of her own unhappiness. His refusal to accept the reality of his situation has made him a laughingstock. The rhythm reflects the repetitive task of Mr. Sisyphus and how he has left his wife feeling alone and helpless, through no fault of her own, merely stuck "alone in the dark." The language used is also cynical; it reflects Mrs Sisyphus's bitterness and scorn towards the situation. The final stanza shows how Sisyphus's vanity has "reduced" and "twisted" her, leaving her sad and resentful and her voice turns to a

mere “squawk.” She also resents her inability to distance herself from her husband's misdeeds. More importantly, she has been turned into a cliché: a nagging wife. Such stereotypes, as the poem implies, are deeply unfair and are a result of husbands’ selfishness and arrogance rather than wives’ neediness or pestering behaviour. By comparing her situation to that of other famous men's wives, Mrs Sisyphus implies that the intense need to succeed is a traditionally masculine trait, for which women, historically confined to the home, have often paid the price. The phrase “giving one hundred per cent and more” is used sarcastically to suggest that excessive devotion may not always be worthy of praise from the male’s part.

4- Female Agency: Satirizing the Archetypal Myth of Love

In *Eurydice*, Duffy reimagines the ancient Greek myth to satirize male arrogance and reflect on how it dehumanizes women by preventing them from speaking and defining themselves. Unlike the mythical Orpheus, the inspired poet/musician who tragically fails to regain his loving wife Eurydice from the underworld, Duffy’s satiric version of Orpheus is unheroic. Duffy depicts the relationship between him and his wife as one-sided; Orpheus objectifies his wife and places her on a pedestal as his ‘muse’ without letting her have a say in the matter. He is revealed to have some undesirable traits—stalker-like tendencies: a “Strutt[ing],” pretentious husband whose attempted rescue is unwanted and thwarted by his wife as she manages to escape a degrading, unfulfilling romantic partnership. Meanwhile, he keeps hovering, “follow[ing] her around/ call[ing] her His Muse” relentlessly. However, she feels physically uncomfortable in his “hover[ing]” presence.

Orpheus’s writing fails to make Eurydice feel honoured or appreciated. Instead, she feels trapped within clichéd notions about women. Orpheus prioritizes his desires and disregards her wishes, treating her as an audience or a “prize” to be won rather than an equal. As a result, Orpheus is portrayed as an embodiment of male vanity and entitlement, while Eurydice is highly sarcastic about his poetry and personality. She does not see any value in his poetry and describes it as mere “Bollocks.” She also refers to him dismissively as the “Big O. / Larger than Life. / With his lyre / and a poem to pitch, with me as the prize,” mimicking a big empty mouth and satirizing the emptiness and vacuousness of his poetry. She even trivializes his achievements with sarcastic and contemptuous remarks like “Aardvark to zebra” and “Wept wee silver tears.”

Eurydice is aware of being a hostage to a male-dominated system: “But the Gods are like the publishers, / usually male, / and what you

doubtless know of my tale / is the deal.” However, she satirizes male obsession with divinity, as men think they are gods, and so are the publishers. Consequently, Eurydice is tired of that and tricks Orpheus into leaving her, comparing their marriage to a living death. She dreads the thought of returning to their life together and feels trapped in his masculine language. She derisively imagines herself once again “trapped in his images, metaphors, similes, / ... histories, myths” whereas the underworld is “a place where language stopped, / ... where words had to come to an end.”

Eurydice is a rebellious, out-spoken wife, totally adamant that she wishes to break free not only from being theorized, confined, and encoded by a masculine language that is incapable of accounting for feminine experiences and viewpoints but also from her tyrannical husband’s psychological confinement (Pypeć 101). Tellingly, when her “inspiration” strikes, it is in the form of an escape plan, which seems to free her from Orpheus in particular, and more broadly, from male domination. Finally, she finds solace and feels “safe” in her silent afterlife, “underworld,” where she experiences “Eternal Repose” that “suit[s] her thoroughly” and feels liberated from her role of the “Muse.”

In this poem, Eurydice ridicules the mythic poet in a rather unsophisticated manner. Having recognized the inherent gender bias in the culture that reveres Orpheus’ poetry, Eurydice expresses a feminist yearning to be the author and protagonist of her own story; that is, to find her own poetic voice. She satirizes the notion of being a secondary character in male-centric myths. Given the opportunity to live once more “And given me time all over again,” Eurydice intends to change her role, to “speak for herself” rather than experience the misrepresentations of her identity “than be Dearest, Beloved, Dark Lady, White Goddess, etc., etc.” For her, speaking in her own voice becomes an act of discarding poetic clichés. This metaphoric liberation or radical feminist attitude is evident in her utterances. Her articulation encodes the problematic relation between female gender and the signifier ‘poet’ that is historic reality. Cixous insists that women can only deconstruct this double standard by writing “forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune” (qtd. in Freedman 320).

If Eurydice intends to express herself in language, she will have to find “small gaps” in the masculine language, “the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (qtd. in Pypeć 101). Eurydice recognizes that silence is a

prerequisite to any artistic creation. Silence becomes a desirable state she is scrupulously planning to execute. She prefers to be in the Underworld, where she is granted the power of self-expression and can make poetry out of silence: “near the wise, drowned silence of the dead.” She prefers to be a dead subject in the Underworld than a passive living object in the hands of her husband. For her, this represents a symbol of freedom. Not only can one observe a shift in tone, but the narration style also changes from satire to philosophical meditation. The concluding lines reiterate her sentiment.

The dead are so talented.

The living walk by the edge of a vast lake
near, the wise, drowned silence of the dead.

In *Eurydice*, one can say that Duffy, through ironic and satiric vision, debunks the archetypal myth of love between Orpheus and his wife. The poem portrays the repressed woman’s developing self; she desires self-actualization by escaping from the oppressive, patriarchal world of her husband. Hence, Eurydice treats her husband with humour and varying degrees of ridicule and satire. Even her memories of experiences are laced with parodies about him. She presents Orpheus as an arrogant, over-sensitive poet who relies too heavily on her. He also objectifies her and makes her passive. Eurydice’s counter-strategy is to find a coherent and vindicating shape to her parodied tragedy—a kind of understanding that will enable her to free herself from Orpheus’ repressive power and achieve her liberation. “I’d done all the typing myself, /I should know”, she confesses to the “girls.” Eurydice accordingly intends to start writing herself and find her own poetic voice:

And given my time all over again,
rest assured that I’d rather speak for myself
than be Dearest, Beloved, Dark Lady, White Goddess, etc., etc.

Orpheus exemplifies the negative attributes of male egotism and sexism. From Eurydice’s perspective, Orpheus is clueless, self-centered, and lazily entitled; he does not even exert the minimal effort required to “shave” before pursuing his bride. By contrast, Eurydice assumes the role of the hero, assertively claiming agency (defiance against male dominance to achieve self-actualization) for herself and outwitting male misogyny. Thus, Duffy subverts the notion present in the myth about Eurydice as a passive female figure content with being the object of fulfilling masculine desires and whims. This feminist reinterpretation of the myth deconstructs the misogynistic tendencies that objectify women to mere objects, that is, ‘Muses’ for men to flatter and rescue as damsels in distress. Eurydice’s explicit instruction, “Girls, forget what you've

read” does not only introduce her perspective but also urges women to define themselves through a literary tradition of their own. This address may convert Eurydice’s statement to a public statement that questions ambiguously the sexual politics of literature’s writing and publication. In addition, satire may produce ambiguity and problematize the argument for the text as a feminist polemic.

To conclude, Eurydice exhorts her female audience, ‘Girls,’ to trust her subverted account of events rather than the traditional, male-oriented legend: ‘So imagine me there’ and ‘then picture my face in that place.’ In her view, only women can understand her. Therefore, she repeatedly addresses them throughout the narration, urging them to picture themselves in her place and re-visualize the myth through a woman’s perspective: ‘Just picture my face’ and ‘In fact, girls, I’d rather be dead.’ Her use of internal and end rhymes does not intensify the satiric tone but makes it difficult to determine whether the message is persuasive or didactic.

5- Satirizing Masculine Narcissism and Machismo

The World’s Wife reiterates the motif of women's resentment towards their husbands, who are insensitive to the needs and feelings of their significant others while being celebrated ironically as geniuses. The husbands’ fixation on their work and fame often leads to anti-social behaviour and a lack of consideration for their partners. While their heroic deeds are celebrated, the mundane and overbearing aspects of their lives are often ignored. This self-absorption makes them undesirable partners, as they are too busy to understand their wives’ interests and desires.

Self-absorbed individuals have often been characterized as selfish and narcissistic; a survey of many great characters throughout history has proven this assertion right. Duffy’s historical revisionism is plausible, as she scrutinizes legends like Icarus, Charles Darwin, and Faust from the perspective of their partners.

While the preceding poems focus on liberation in terms of portraying women as equally capable as men, the following poems present women as superior to men through humiliation and contempt. In the four-lined poem *Mrs Icarus*, Duffy portrays a frustrated wife who witnesses her husband’s tragic downfall as he flies too close to the sun, fueled by his male hubris—that exaggerated pride and determination to prove how great he is to the world. Ultimately, he proves nothing more than his foolishness. In other words, the poem implies that throughout

history, women have often had to watch their husbands make huge mistakes due to their puffed-up egos. Duffy's witty choice of words creates a humorous tone, as the verbal abuse directed towards the husband appears to be an amusing anecdote from a wife who has witnessed many of her husband's foolish, impulsive actions. Moreover, the reference to other wives generalizes the experience and implies that this is the reality of many women who are stuck in a marriage to men they despise.

Mrs Icarus is portrayed as a woman who mocks her husband's foolishness, arrogance, and lack of common sense. From a marginalized female point of view, she remarks, as if on behalf of all womankind, "I'm not the first or the last / To stand on a hillock, / Watching the man she married / Prove to the world / He's a total, utter, absolute, Grade A pillock." Stupidity and wisdom are not gendered traits. However, in a patriarchal world, egotistical men often ignore female wisdom and end up looking foolish. Thus, rather than focusing on her husband's tragic demise, Mrs Icarus shifts the narrative to his own failed attempt at flying. This shift serves as an allegory for the societal constraints placed on women, as Mrs Icarus is essentially grounded in her domestic responsibilities and expectations placed on her by patriarchal norms. A "pillock" is an English colloquialism that refers to someone who is inconsiderate about the feelings of others or is not as smart as he assumes.

Referring to the myth of Icarus, Duffy draws attention, more and more, to the silencing of women's voices throughout history. Just as Icarus' perspective dominates the original myth, Mrs Icarus's narrative is often overshadowed or disregarded. Here, Duffy also reclaims the female voice, allowing Mrs Icarus to share her side of the story and challenge the traditional male-centered narratives. She applies emphatic sentences, personification and irony when parodying the original tale, which contributes to the subversion of patriarchy. Duffy also exposes the perfect hero image of man and satirizes the aggressive male power. Overall, Duffy skillfully conveys the complexities of gender roles, social expectations, and the desire for freedom through her witty and subversive verses.

Similarly, in *Mrs Darwin*, the wife mocks her husband's grand theories of evolution and natural selection. Darwin is often attributed to having made the connection between humans and chimpanzees, but what this poem reveals is discredit and questions this belief. The poem is short, taking the form of a diary entry, a feminine form. In a zoo excursion with her husband, Mrs Darwin remarks that the chimpanzee reminds her of him. As such, the poem implies that Mrs Darwin's comment—"Went to

the Zoo/I said to Him/ something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds me of you”—is what puts the idea of human evolution into her husband’s head. However, she never receives any credit for her comments. She does not even get a proper name in the poem for that matter. She is referred to only in terms of her relationship with her more famous husband. In addition to implying the overlooked importance of women, the poem also satirizes men’s frequently overstated genius. The speaker ironically refers to her husband as “Him,” that capital ‘H’ indicating how Darwin (or men in history) often receives god-like status, but women very rarely. Perhaps he sees himself as God-like, and his ego has gotten the better of him, which his wife acknowledges and then ridicules. To elaborate, the wife also uses this capital letter to highlight the distance between the public perception of her husband as a towering genius and the actual, flawed, ordinary man she knows.

It seems that by comparing her husband to an ape, the speaker brings him down to earth and subtly undermines his authority. Moreover, the insult also alludes to the husband-wife dynamic by comparing him to an animal. Mrs Darwin may even suggest that her husband is uncivilized or oafish. More broadly, the imagined scenario hints that many of the most famous men throughout history were just regular, flawed human beings, and may not have achieved greatness without the support of women like Emma Darwin by their side.

In other words, the poem highlights Duffy’s attempt to demonstrate that history is dominated by men who achieve genius status due to the patriarchal and phallogocentric norms in society. Women are hindered from contributing to reason and history because of the structures that allow men to ascend to positions of power. If Emma Darwin had made the initial discovery instead of a man, there would have been no way for her to receive recognition for it.

A prime example is the poem *Mrs Faust* that portrays the classic tale of Faust, an ambitious scholar who makes a pact with the Devil to receive limitless knowledge, riches, and pleasure in exchange for his soul. This is told from the perspective of an overlooked or invented female figure. Mrs Faust is the protagonist of this dramatic monologue, telling her side of the story. In this monologue, Duffy depicts Mrs Faust as clever and greedy, just like her husband. The poem traces their cynical marriage, from their meeting as ambitious students to their life as a successful power couple. It is more like a successful business partnership than a romantic union from beginning to end. Each partner uses the other

to get what he/she wants. In addition, it is founded on greed rather than love.

The poem is written in free short verse lines and has fifteen stanzas. Each stanza contains nine lines. It does not follow a consistent meter and has no regular rhyme scheme; however, it does have rhymes in each stanza. Mrs Faust begins with a direct introduction (“First things first”), then provides a brief history of her relationship with Faust, using fast-paced *parallel* clauses and *epistrophe*. Then, in quick succession, they move in together, break up, make amendments, and ultimately they get married. The terse phrases and repetitions evoke a relationship that moves fast, generating a lot of conflict and drama within a short time. The early “split” of the couples foreshadows the male/female tensions to come.

Furthermore, it appears that Mrs Faust, whose marriage soon loses its romantic spark, has no emotional attachment to her how-we-met tale and prefers not to dwell on it. Likewise, her irreverent idioms, such as “shacked up” for living together and “hitched up” for getting married, convey a crisply realistic tone, even mocking attitude toward her past with Faust. Although previous versions of the Faust legend may have combined tragedy and comedy, Duffy’s rendition is a full-on satire.

First things first-
I married Faust.
We met as students,
shacked up, split up,
made up, hitched up,
got a mortgage on a house,
flourished academically,
BA. MA. Ph.D. No kids.
Two towed bathrobes. Hers. His.

Mr. Faust and his wife lead a materialistic lifestyle, thoroughly full of financial and sensual indulgences. Both resemble contemporary billionaires and oligarchs who live a luxurious lifestyle. Like the original Faust, Duffy’s Faust is a scholar, and so is his wife. However, he has no interest in seeking higher knowledge and instead uses his degrees to gain wealth and power. Thus, he diverges from the original Faust's pursuit of worldly knowledge over divine truth. Duff’s Faust continually acquires material possessions such as houses and cars. He also loves “the Kudos” he receives from others, “not the wife.” The ballad-form rhyming here in Duffy’s work is tidy and deadly, reflecting her adroit handling of both the English ballad and its 19th-century development, the dramatic monologue. Faust even engages in extramarital affairs with sex workers

and mistresses. Moreover, he also holds influential positions in both business and politics.

Fast cars. A boat with sails.
second home in Wales.
The latest toys – computers,
mobile phones. Prospered.
Moved again. Faust's face
was clever, greedy, slightly mad.
I was as bad...
He grew to love the kudos,
not the wife.
He went to whores. I felt, not jealousy,
but the chronic irritation.
I went to yoga, t'ai chi,
Feng Shui, therapy, colonic irrigation.
And Faust would boast
at dinner parties
of the cost of doing deals out East.
Then take his lust
to Soho in cab,
to say the least,
to lay the ghost,
get lost, meet panthers, feast.

None of it is ever "Enough," as Faust is never content with what he has. He seeks more and strikes more bargains with the Devil to satisfy his selfish, insatiable desires. At the height of his power, Faust claims that he "[knows] more than God" and can light a cigar on "the Sun." Furthermore, he represents a typical modern tycoon, acquiring private boats and aircraft, investing in questionable military technology, and even more. The poem criticizes modern capitalist societies that promote and reward individuals like Faust.

He wanted more...
Enough? Encore!
Faust was Cardinal, Pope,
knew more than God;
flew faster than the speed of sound
around the globe,
lunched;
walked on the moon,
golfed, holed in one;

lit a fat Havana on the Sun.

Then backed a hunch -
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.

Like her salacious husband, Mrs Faust is also morally vile. She shares the same level of cunning, cynicism, and greed and has no interest in seeking higher wisdom. Besides, she happily joins Faust in that life of trendy purchases and always seeks the latest fads. Even though she claims to “love” wealth and a fashionable “lifestyle,” she and Faust do not love each other. When Faust cheats on her, she does not experience romantic “jealousy,” but rather “irritation.” To gratify her whims, she indulges in spiritual pursuits such as travelling in search of “enlighten[ment].” In other words, these activities are materialistic and are ways of acquiring experiences as part of her consumer “lifestyle.”

As for me,
I went my own sweet way,
saw Rome in a day,
spun gold from hay,
had a facelift,
had my breasts enlarged,
my buttocks tightened;
went to China, Thailand, Africa,
returned enlightened.

Faust is not content with this level of wealth and power. He plans to acquire even more without involving his wife in his scheme. His actions reflect the gender inequality that afflicts many traditional marriages, even among high-powered couples. Faust decides to pursue more wealth, “He want[s] more,” and arranges a private “meeting” to strike a deal, “a pact / with Mephistopheles, / the Devil’s boy” in his home. Regrettably, Mrs Faust is not allowed to such secretive, cigar-smoke-filled negotiations, which have historically been exclusive to men. Faust's wealth and power continue to grow, propelling him into the cosmic Old Boys’ Club.

Unlike most versions of the legend, Duffy's version has no redeeming moral at the end. Only can the wife escape her failing marriage. The poem satirizes greed as irredeemable and incurable, not a moral failing as much as a total flaw of morality. Although Faust does encounter consequences, they are nothing he cannot handle. While the Devil drags him off to hell, Faust is "oddly smirking."

Finally, Mrs Faust gets the last laugh, winning ultimate power from an agreement designed to disempower her. It is worth noting that she reaps the greatest reward from their partnership, as his "will" leaves everything he has acquired "to [her]." After her exclusion from her husband's bargain, Mrs Faust goes "[her] own sweet way," enjoying the fruits of Faust's newfound power without challenging him. She inherits all he has left behind; her greed goes effectively unpunished. When she contracts an "ill[ness]," it is not divine retribution or a spiritual affliction. Instead, it is merely a physical problem she can solve with money; as she puts it, "I bought a kidney / with my credit card." After Faust is dragged off to hell, Mrs Faust "keep[s] Faust's secret," the fact that he never had "a soul to sell," as if honouring an unspoken bargain they have struck between themselves. Thus, Mrs Faust subverts gender inequality in a patriarchal society by letting her husband take the blame for both of them. In the modern world, which is secular and hyper-capitalist, Duffy suggests that there is no real punishment for insatiable greed and lust. Her poem is a satirical retelling of a medieval legend, highlighting how savvy women in a male-dominated world often outwit men and turn marriage to their benefit.

Conclusion

The study deals with satire as a tool to critique patriarchal power structures that have marginalized women and reduced them to secondary creatures deprived of their voices. The binary opposition between male and female is a focal point of the analysis; gender roles are subverted and deconstructed. The study examines how Duffy's keen eye for the absurdities evident in ordinary lives and a deft poetic technique have helped her capture thirty female figures from history, myth and popular media and transform them into modern-day archetypes, thus undermining the strategies that lead to prejudice and discrimination between the male and the female. In addition, the study explains how the poems chosen present Mrs World's story from a different perspective—that falls under the well-established current of revisionist mythmaking. Moreover, it focuses on Duffy's empowerment of female characters as active agents

who transcend gender limitations, thus subverting societal norms and gender-specific agency. Those women are sometimes cynical, scornful or angry at their men's foolishness, while, at other times, they embody dynamics of power and control and the ability to rebel against established norms.

By incorporating feminist strategies from post-structuralist French theorists, the study critically adds a new depth to the depiction of those women icons, arguing that they refuse to be defined through their relationships with men. Instead, they assert their individuality and gender autonomy as women. Not surprisingly, they also use a sharp satiric tone not only as a mechanism to expose the male-female relationship in terms of both physical and psychological gender violence but also to express rebellion and the need for change. While seemingly radical, Duffy's goal, like the feminist revisionists, is to break with the past and to harmonize the canon with contemporary tradition. In this way, the study provides literary justice to both the voices that classical mythology has distorted or left out and the women denied by the Western literary canon. It also presents a fresh approach to classical texts, writings, and particularly stereotypical ideas.

Furthermore, the study underscores satire as a narrative form for subverting gender stereotypes, reshaping societal perceptions, and amplifying silenced women's voices. Duffy's inclusive 'Herstory' transforms the voiceless 'Other' into an active subject, an oppressor rather than the oppressed, and a victimizer rather than the victimized. Thus, the study contributes a fresh perspective to the discourse on gender and power, ultimately reshaping the literary canon and prompting a reevaluation of the myths that have shaped our view of the world.

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