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Poetic Authority in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy

A B S T R A C T

For centuries, women poets had to suffer due to the inherited Western literary tradition which offers creative women no defined place, or even no place at all. The literary canon is male-dominated and hence women poets had to find a way to challenge this tradition and to create their own distinctive place. Hence Writing is the most powerful way to challenge male domination and create a place in the literary tradition.

Being a woman and a poet, Carol Ann Duffy faced the same challenges when she starts to write and, more importantly, to acquire the poetic authority long taken from or renounced by her male counterparts, and to make this possible, she uses her persona. Her writing is deemed to be a rebellion against patriarchal authority, as well as the prescribed gender roles of women, their misrepresentation of art and literature as a passive object.

The research will shed light on the poetic voice of Duffy in her poetry, which emanates through the use of various vivid and colourful female personas as the poet's own voice. The poet claims the authority to present herself as a poet as well as a persona, to challenge the patriarchal authority and male-dominated literary tradition.

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السلطة الشعرية في شعر كارول آن دافي

شيماء زهير الوتار / جامعة الموصل / كلية الادب / قسم اللغة الانكليزية

الخلاصة:

لعدة قرون، كان على الشاعرات أن يعانين بسبب التراث الأدبي الغربي الموروث والذي لا يكون فيه مكاناً محدداً للشاعرات، أو بالأحرى لا مكان على الإطلاق. يهيمن الذكور على الأدب، وبالتالي كان على الشاعرات إيجاد طريقة لتحدي هذا التقليد وخلق مكانهن المميز. ومن ثم فإن الكتابة هي أقوى وسيلة

لتحدي هيمنة الذكور وخلق مكانة خاص بهم في التراث الأدبي .
كونها امرأة وشاعرة، واجهت كارول آن دافي نفس التحديات عندما بدأت في الكتابة وسعيها لاكتساب السلطة الشعرية التي سلبت منذ فترة طويلة من قبل نظرائها الذكور، ولجعل ذلك ممكناً، فإنها تستخدم الشخصية في شعرها. تُعتبر كتاباتها بمثابة تمرد ضد السلطة الأبوية، والأدوار المحددة للمرأة، وتمثيلها في الفن والأدب ككائن سلبي.
سيليقي البحث الضوء على الصوت الشعري لدافي في شعرها، والذي ينبعث من خلال استخدام شخصيات نسائية متعددة مفعمة بالحياة كصوت للشاعرة . استطاعت الشاعرة الحصول على السلطة الشعرية من خلال تقديم نفسها كشاعرة وشخصية أيضاً في شعرها وذلك لتحدي السلطة الأبوية والتراث الادبي الذي يهيمن عليها الذكور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر، السلطة، الشاعرات، دافي، النسوية، التقليد الأدبي الغربي.

Being a woman and a poet, the Poet Laureate and celebrated figure of contemporary British poetry, Carol Ann Duffy finds herself faced with the task of writing in a male-dominated tradition, wrestling with the shadows of the eminent touring male poets to create a place for herself in this arena. To do so, Duffy set off on a journey to search for her real identity, voice, and poetic authority. Hence, writing is a real challenge for her as a woman poet who is living in a male-dominated society. Her writing is deemed to be a rebellion against patriarchal authority, as well as the prescribed gender roles of women, their misrepresentation of art and literature as a passive object. More importantly, she had to acquire the poetic authority long taken from or renounced by her male counterparts. To achieve all this, the subversion of patriarchy seems to be the first step.

It is noteworthy that the “difference between man and woman labels the latter as the inferior "Other" sex. This inferiority, in fact, dates back to Aristotle's time. In his Politics, Aristotle examines women and children through the premise of irrationality and thus they should be excluded from public life to be under the full responsibility of men.” (Al-Doory & others, 2019, 52) Even if the oppression of women is not the patriarchy's aim, the patriarchal practices undermine the importance and the role of women by turning them to mere objects of desire. The role of women had been prescribed for them, to be the beautiful maiden, the self-less mother and wife. Their stories are to be told for them and never have the chance to tell their own stories. Women are voiceless, suppressed and marginalized and subvert patriarchy. The first challenge for

women in general and women poets in particular is to reclaim their voices, to be able to tell their own stories and to present their real selves and distinctive identities.

So, the first and most important challenge for a woman poet is the act of self-creation and the assertion of her poetic voice. Gilbert and Gubar assert that women poets are faced with what they denominate as the “anxiety of authorship”, they contend that “‘the anxiety of influence’ that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary ‘anxiety of authorship’—a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her” (qtd. in Villar-Argaiz, 87). To overcome this anxiety, the assertion of a woman poet’s voice and her self-creation turned to be the first step for a woman poet to define herself as a poet. A woman poet's endeavours for self-creation involves her in a most-needed revisionary process; the task of rewriting, revising, and reforming the deeply rooted inherited ideologies of the distorted and misrepresented images of women created by male poets.

The inherited images of women are the stereotypical distorted images which serve as objects for male poets. They are silenced, objectified, and marginalised and hence the battle for self-creation and the process of rewriting themselves is a profoundly debilitating task. To gain poetic authority, this demands a change in the female voice from the state of silence created and used by male poets to a state of positive conscious subject. Carol Ann Duffy, as well as many other women poets, undertakes this challenge to attain her well-deserved, though hard-won authority.

Duffy asserts her authority by writing using her own voice as a woman and as a poet, turning from being the object of male poems to being the author of her own poems. Also, she reclaims women’s voices, who are always being spoken about but they never speak of themselves. Hence, her hard-won authority is reflected in the poetic voice of her poems, a voice that is explicitly female which strongly contrasts and challenges the authority and power of the male poetic voices.

As a woman and a poet, Duffy tries to acquire her voice, the poetic authority which she herself lacks as a woman poet, and this demands a

challenge and a revision of the literary canon and its male-centred foundations. Carol Ann Duffy is well-known for “making characters speak, and in particular for giving voice to the disenfranchised, socially marginalised or previously silent” (Roche-Jacques, 2013, 59).

To achieve her poetic ends, Duffy uses various persons in her poetry which adds to the subtlety and richness of the poems. The women in her poems are aware, independent, and confident. In contrast to the authority and power of male poetic voices, Duffy creates an explicitly women voices in her poems. Her persons, who are used to be unrepresented, marginalized, and unvoiced, are given voice to speak out for themselves and to become the authors of their own stories and fates.

No doubt that the “feminist movement strongly shaped writing.” (Abdul Hameed, 2019, 24) and in her two collection *The World's Wife* (1999) and *Feminine Gospels* (2002), Duffy rewrites various myths, fairy tales, and histories within which lurk archetypal female characters but from a female perspective. Duffy in her feminist creation defies the patriarchal authority which disempowers women and demines the feminine role. In her *The World's Wife*, she empowers women by giving the marginalized and silenced wives a voice to speak for them, and to tell their own stories from women's perspective.

Interestingly enough, in this volume Duffy revisits and experiments with the dramatic monologues creating a poetic voice that is explicitly female, and at the same time she adopts a post-modern feminist stance in her poems. Duffy gives full voice to the world's wives and a distinctive female voice is established through the various monologues of long-ignored wives who were silent in history. Their voices together challenge the heroic, manly and superior images of their famous husbands. Duffy's creating of this unique female-dominated voice challenges the well-established power and authority of the male poetic voices. Also, by the retelling of the stories of women and the recreating of realistic images of women, Duffy knocks the predetermined and culturally romanticized heroic and manly figures off from their pedestal.

The stories Duffy tells in her poems are taken from myths, fairy tales, and history. In these stories lurking the archetypal, cliché female characters. The characters are typically of beloved, wives, mothers and goddess. The titles of

the poems are mostly the same as the title of the original myth or story. Unlike the title of the collection, *The World's Wife*, which recalls George Eliot's famous definition of gossip: "Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender— not the world, but the world's wife" (Eliot, 1996, 490).

In *The World's Wife*, the poet rewrites several fairy tales, myths, and stories from history from the perspective of a woman. Her poems 30 poems are in the voice of anonymous mythical, historical and legendary women, real or imaginary, who are constantly defined in relation to their famous husbands and men. The women in the poems are nameless but simply bearing their titles in relation to men as in "Mrs. Midas," "Mrs. Sisyphus", "Mrs Tiresias", "Mrs. Darwin", "Frau Freud", others like "Elvis's Twin Sister" and "Pygmalion's Bride." By giving them the voice to tell their stories , Duffy brings her female characters to the center of attention, dramatizing their anxieties and releasing them from the narrative captivity forced on them by patriarchal male-authors.

The stories are told in a fantastical mode of storytelling as the poems are arranged in a specific order as Duffy explains that there are " 30 women's voices in the book each voice taking up some untold story of the World's Wife I've ordered the poems so that together they carry a narrative" (García, 2007, 23). *The World's Wife* is indebted to the feminist revisionist tradition from the 1970s of the classical myths, fairy tales and history. In this collection:

....the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends
..... the old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy. Instead ... they are representations of what women find divine and demonic in themselves..... retrieved images of what women have ... historically suffered; in some cases they are instructions for survival (Ostriker 1986,315-316).

This practice of revision of the existing narratives is popular especially among feminist writers as it equips them with a means that helps them to engage in a social or cultural critique.

The Wold's Wife is distinctly feminist and Duffy's undeniably feminist agenda and feminist message can be seen clearly. The poems in this collection are clearly feminist and the collection is "certainly committed to feminism" (Michaelis& Rowland, 2003, 25).

Duffy's wit is clearly revealed in *The World's Wife*, as she cleverly and skilfully revises fairy tale, myth, and history reworking them into contemporary situations and settings blending at the same time the "formal ingenuity and social concern in insightful, exuberant dramatic monologues" that explore "contemporary and historical scenes from surprising and unexpected viewpoints." The female characters are presented as "wise, cynical, and scornful", other times they are "blunt and bawdy like" or they are simply annoyed and angry with the follies of their men. (Satterfield, 2001, 123-124)

Through the feminist revision of fairy tales, myths and history the poet will be able to present more crucial subjects, voice contemporary women experiences and anxieties and to criticise and challenge freely the inherited patriarchal literary tradition. The feminist revision promises, among other things, the resurges of the poet's authorial voice at the same time a drastic change of the clichéd canonical poetic images of women is achieved. In the hand of Duffy, the feminist revision is used to turn the old stories into realistic everyday life stories of contemporary women breathing life into the previously dehumanised, marginalised, and silenced and women.

To sum up, in *The World's Wife* the poems are direct and critical in which the poet endows the female characters with intelligence, self-integrity, and self-consciousness as well as a voice of their own. The feminist voice created by the poet in the poems is empowered by giving the women the role of storyteller, a role used to be only for male authors. The storytellers in Duffy's poems have been endowed with the power to retell, rewrite and revise the old stories from fairy tales, mythology or history which had been written by patriarchal males. This subverting revision is essential as it leads eventually to change the gendered prescribed roles typically assigned to women. The emancipation of women and the gaining of women voice are represented in the opening poem "*Little Red Cap*". The speaker who is a teenager tells her story and her journey of searching for self-autonomy as a woman and as a poet.

The opening poem of the collection “*Little Red-Cap*” is considered as the best postmodern feminist revisionary approach to Grimm’s fairy tales “Little Red Riding Hood”. Duffy’s as well as other women poets’ tendency to revise myths and fairy tales is best explained by Alicia Ostriker as she suggests that the feminist interest in such material as it “has a double power. It exists or appears to exist objectively, in the public sphere, and consequently confers on the writer the sort of authority unavailable to someone who writes “merely” of the private self” (Ostriker, 1982, 72) . For her the core of revisions “lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes” (73) She suggests that while women poets use revision they blend both creation and destruction, as they “simultaneously deconstruct a prior ‘myth’ or ‘story’ and construct a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself” (Ostriker, 1987, 212).

However, Duffy’s revision of the classic fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” is not simply a revision to subvert the traditional story with a feminist agenda in mind. The revised story is consciously bitter critique of the traditional Grimms’ story voiced by a strong female narrator. The poet adapts the classic tale to be the story of a modern teenager who is seeking to find her real voice, identity, and self-autonomy. Furthermore, the poem is also about Duffy’s own journey as a poet describing at the same time male bias and pressure on women poets in an androcentric, patriarchal society.

The poem “*Little Red Cap*, ” opens the collection strongly, the traditional story tells of a young innocent, if not a foolish, girl who made a wrong decision, devoured by the wolf and eventually bravely and cleverly rescued by the hero of the story, the hunter. The story portrayed the girl and her grandmother as both passive victims who dependent on the male to save them, for Duffy such portray of female character and the encoded message are totally not acceptable. She revised the old version keeping the original story lines but subverting the patriarchal stereotypical characters and messages.

The persona in the poem is not the typical innocent female victim, who is silent, passive, incapable, and reliant on male to save and protect her. The first major change is the voice Duffy gives to the little red cap by making her the first person in the poem, the narrator. The girl narrates her own story, and what she experienced and her struggle to gain her own voice, to be a poet. The poem is clearly a personal narrative, the poet’s persona presents the struggle of young

women poets and the pressure on them in private as well as public spheres which led them to seek their emancipation and reclaim power. The poet includes the challenges she has encountered as she tried to find her own voice and self-autonomy in a patriarchal society and an androcentric literature.

In her meticulous portrayal of the persona, Duffy remains true to the image of real, everyday life woman which has nothing to do with the gendered prescribed image usually assign to women in fairy tales and literature. She skilfully and successfully presents a realistic modern-day poetic persona to question gender issues relevant to the production and dissemination of poetry.

The poem opens “*At childhood’s end,* ” (Duffy, 2015, 229) which indicates that the journey to adulthood for the twentieth century adolescent female begins, and she is telling her own story, taking the readers on her journey and sharing with them her own experiences . The setting of the poem is stranded, contemporary urban surroundings: the houses, playing fields, the factory, allotments, and silent railway line. The teenager continues her description of her surroundings, of her world, saying:

Till you came at last to the edge of the woods

It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf. (Duffy, 2015, 229)

She gets to the final point of her description of the setting. What really distinguishes this setting is that it allegorically alludes to her marginalization by society and her attraction to the wolf. The edge of the woods, the edge of her world where she stands represents for the young female the margins of the male- dominated literary tradition and society.

As the persona in the poem has feelings of being casted away from standard social life, she seeks to find a place for her own, a realm for herself which she finds in the woods with the wolf, she says:

He stood in a clearing, reading his verse out loud

In his wolfy drawl, a paperback in his hairy paw

Red wine staining his bearded jaw. What big ears

He had! What big eyes he had! What teeth!

In the interval, I made quite sure he spotted me

Sweet sixteen, never been, babe, waif, and bought me a drink. (Duffy, 2015, 229)

Duffy subverts the original narrative to give the young persona a voice to speak telling the story is not the only revision. The poet makes the wolf a poet who is giving a poetry reading suggesting male domination in art and literature, while the act of reading his poetry loud stands for the greater publishing opportunities and publicity men usually have in comparison to women poets, questioning the masculinist poetic traditions.

Clearly, the young girl has been lured and captivated by the wolf, a male figure, and she makes sure he will notice her. The wolf/poet, on the other hand, is attracted by the girl's youth, daring and charm. He makes the first move and buys her a drink and she happily accepts his flirtation. Before she goes on to tell the rest of her story, she had to answer a persisting question raised in the readers' minds: why?! , and the answer is simply one word "Poetry":

*My first. You might ask why. Here's why. Poetry
The wolf, I knew, would lead me deep into the woods
Away from home, to a dark tangled thorny place
Lit by the eyes of owls.* (Duffy, 2015, 229)

The speaker is fully aware of the lurking danger and mystery of the risk she is taking. However, she is willing to take this risk and to go deep into the dark woods. The little red cap's motivation to follow the wolf is cleared; she is seeking knowledge, new experiences, and the much-desired transformation from the little, immature and vulnerable girl into a daring, self-conscious and free mature woman. For her, the mysterious woods "*Lit by the eyes of owls*" is the place to gain this knowledge as her own safe and comfortable home (society) failed to provide it for her and simply marginalised her. The owl, which is traditionally a symbol of wisdom and knowledge usually in fairy tales, is lighting the way for her and the wolf/poet is the source of this knowledge.

She accepted to take the risk and her inspiring driving force is the scene of the wolf/poet so liberally and powerfully reciting his poetry loud. The little girl is a young eager female poet aspiring to get the freedom and the authorial voice that she is deprived of by finding herself standing on the edge of the male-

dominated literary tradition, for being a woman. The lair of the wolf to which she willingly followed is but a world of books and language where she is going to learn her first lesson. Then she reveals will and strength to reject the male suppression and to free herself when she chooses to:

*... slid from between his heavy matted paws
And went in search of a living bird – white dove –
which flew, straight, from my hands to his open mouth.
One bite, dead. How nice, breakfast in bed, he said,
licking his chops... (Duffy, 2015, 229)*

The lines are major subversions of the fairy tales and the patriarchal gendered prescribed roles for women. The red cap is able to take decisions to shape her life and to reject and kind of patriarchal suppression or domination. She is able to free herself and slide from under the wolf/male's heavy paws, control or domination. The young speaker realises that the wolf/poet's love is temporary and did not fulfil her eagerness. Her real passion leads her to slide quietly to search for "a living bird", something different, fulfilling, pure, beautiful, and artistic represented by the "white dove".

With "one bite", the red cap's illusion of excitement and love seems to disappear, "dead", the wolf /poet is a self-centred, insensitive and for sure oppressive, who destroyed the thing she cherished the most. With this revelation, she realized the shortcomings and cruelty of the wolf/poet and she had to search again. This time she discovers something more exciting, a real treasure, she says:

*... As soon as he slept, I crept to the back
Of the lair, where a whole wall was crimson, gold, aglow with books
Words, words were truly alive on the tongue, in the head
Warm, beating, frantic, winged; music and blood (Duffy, 2015, 230)*

What charms the young speaker from the very beginning is the wolf/poet's relish for poetry and books, and now she discovers his library, she depicts it using rich and lavish imagery with the use of "crimson", "gold" and "aglow books". Finally she reaches something fulfilling, something really alive

“*Words, words were truly alive*”. She refers to words, to poetry as being warm, frantic and winged, this is a real charm.

What is noteworthy is that Duffy’s revision of the Grimms’ fairy tale is as grim as the traditional tale. The wolf/poet, who is clearly a male figure, is cruel, insensitive and arrogant who braggingly reads his poetry loud, while for the young female poet, the red cap, she had to suffer and sacrifice a lot to gain her voice, her poetic authority and even “it took ten years” to achieve this aim. The red cap admits that she was young and was easily attracted and affected by the wolf/poet when she first met him. After ten years, she is ready to share with the readers her experience, and what she has discovered.

In Duffy’s poem, the wolf/male is a source of another kind of lurking threat and danger, the marginalization and suppression of women. Initially, the wolf was considered as a source of potential threat and danger in the traditional Grimms’ tale the little girl was devoured by the wolf. In Duffy’s revised story the girl’s eagerness to learn and to become a poet makes her devour the wolf’s books as much as she can, it took ten years of apprenticeship to emerge as a fully mature woman poet, one who has her own distinctive voice, who finally gain her poetic authority and who is able to freely and openly reject and criticize male domination in literature and poetry. Interestingly enough, the years of captivity in the woods with the wolf, which lasted for ten years, refers to Duffy’s own writing career and her relationship with the poet Adrian Henri, whom she met at a poetry reading. (Goursaud, 2019, 23)

After ten years the young female discovers that:

... *a greying wolf*
Howls the same old song at the moon, year in, year out
Season after season, same rhyme, same reason. (Duffy, 2015, 230)

Her early fascination is replaced by disappointment, the wolf/poet is now “*greying wolf*”, and his poetry reading is just a howl of old out-worn poems. There is no creativity and his poetic production is moribund. The female poet realises her own strength and vivid and lively creativity. The resulting artistic awareness leads her, and even compels her to take her final decision: “... *I took*

an axe to the wolf/ As he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat". (Duffy, 2015, 230)

She becomes disillusioned and realises the damaging relationship she is having with the wolf/poet and its consequences. Her subjecting of herself to the wolf/poet turned out to be of damaging consequences. She was subject to the suppression and undermining of her own creativity by an abusive and self-centred male figure. To end the poem with such an unexpected twist is really surprising. The girl in the original story needed the help of the hunter to save her life, but here the poem's persona has the power and free will to take matters into her own hands and to kill the wolf and be her own rescuer. The poem ends with such a so unexpected ending is no coincidence. Duffy has endowed her with intelligence and agency; she is now a wiser, self-conscious, and fully mature woman/poet.

The symbolic murder of the wolf/poet is really the rejection of the young female poet of the old, worn-out patriarchal literary traditions. The wolf has to be killed as the overwhelming and suffocating domination of male poets must come to an end so that women poets can reclaim their power. For centuries, male poets and their poetic production were considered as superior to that of women poets. Also, women have been limited to the role of the muse for the male poets, their voices are never heard and they are expected to accept their prescribed gender roles unquestionably. Their unjustified pressure on women poets in both private and public spheres deprived women poets of their rightful place in the literary canon.

Moreover, when the young female poet kills the wolf she says that she finds "*The glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones*" (Duffy, 2015, 230). The bones of the little red cap's grandmother, as Duffy explained, represent "the silent women who aren't present in English Literature" (as cited in Dowson, 2016, 24). Adding to that, Jeanette Winterson in her review of the Duffy's collection, "emphasized the organic link between women and creative power and compellingly interpreted the same lines from Little Red-Cap 'the skeleton of language is female. Deeper, it seems, than our mother tongue.' " (Akkoyuna, 2021, 568)

Hence, the novice female poet finds the hidden tradition of her ancestry women poets, and in the final line she totally embraces her own power and

creativity as well as her ancestor's heritage to re-emerge as a strong women poet: "*Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone*" (Duffy, 2015, 230). The young female poet is walking out of the woods as a triumphant heroine who is going back home, but she is now a totally different person. She is free, strong, and distinctly independent, who is holding her flowers, poems, and singing alone without the help or support of any one. Finally, her adventure in the woods ends and she is now a poet who can read her poems loud, who gains her authorial poetic voice and succeeds to escape from the male-domination of what she discovers to be worn-out poetic conventions.

Duffy uses the subversive of fairy tales heroine as a mask to satirise the old worn-out male literary tradition and the patriarchy indicated in the traditional version of Grimms fairy tales. The poet gives the silenced girl a voice to speak and to tell her story and she also gives the protagonist the power to experience love, and to discover the world of art and literature that she desires to explore. Duffy successfully provides the young poet with the power and agency to access the contemporary poetry tradition to which she desires access as she used to stand on the edge and margins of a patriarchal literary tradition.

In the second poem of the same collection, Duffy embarks on another journey this time it is in the fantastic world of mythology. Mythology is another foundation for the poet to build her poems upon. The second poem of the poet's collection titled "*Mrs Midas*" is a revised version of the traditional myth of Midas in which his wife as if she does not even exists. Duffy feminist revision of the myth is remarkable, in this poem Mrs Midas is the speaker, and Duffy gives her the chance to speak and tells the story of her husband Midas but from her own point of view.

The revision of the traditional myth is a tradition in the heart of the feminist poetry and this project is known as feminist revisionist mythmaking as it had been defined by Ostriker in her article "*The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist mythmaking*," feminist revisionist mythology, at its core, is "the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth" For her the poems which follow the feminist revisionism of myth are essentially "consist of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them" (Ostriker, 1982, 73-4). The traditional myths are a rich source for women poets as in these myths lurk archetypal female

characters. The revision of the myths and female characters lends women poets the authority they need and the agency to criticise the traditional patriarchal literary canon. Myths are typically described as misogynist; however, in the introduction to Veronica House's book *Medea's Chorus: Myth and Women's Poetry Since 1950*, House insists that:

Myth is neither inherently misogynistic nor paternalistic. It is an imaginative rendering of a culture's beliefs, which implies that as a culture changes, the wellsprings of the culture's imagination should change along with it to remain viable. When the women poets in this study engage in mythic revision, they are doing far more than re-writing old stories. They are embarking on the radical work of cultural transformation, work that confronts latent assumptions and drives modern culture to venture into new psychological landscapes. (House, 2014, xv-xvi)

The revision of the myths is a revision of a patriarchal inherited culture which perpetuates extremely harmful notions about gender roles and authority. The revision acted as a reformation of the patriarchal Western literary canon.

Women voices in myths had been silenced and they are typically represented as submissive girls or wives and above all the muses for the male poets and writers. They are usually marginalised, misrepresented, mistreated or left out altogether. The act of revision turns to be essential to change the cultural mores and to reclaim their long suppressed voices and authorship and affirm their role in the society. Realizing what power the Western literary tradition has over women poets, Adrienne Rich suggests in her article "*When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision*" that women poets and writers need to learn about tradition to "break its hold over us" (Rich, 1972, 19) rather than to continue this tradition. Moreover, she believes that:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. (Rich, 1972, p. 18)

Feminist myth revision turns to be an act of survival for women poets, a unique way to craft a new tradition in response to the already existed patriarchal canon. By the subverting of the traditional myths women poets can be included in rather than being excluded of the legacy of Western literary history. Moreover, women poets manage to escape the ever lasting impact of ancient myths on modern women poets and use feminist revisionist mythology to assert the validity of their authorship.

Duffy in her poem revises the old myth and brings to the centre of attention the wife of Midas, the woman who is unknown and nameless, bearing only the title in relation to her husband. Mrs Midas shifts by the myth revision from being only behind the most popular myth of her husband King Midas to be the centre of story, using her voice that had been endowed by the poet to tell another side of the story.

The revision in the myth is not only in the voice of Midas' wife but also in the scene presented in the poem that is a domestic scene of everyday life in the urban modern society that the readers are familiar with. The wife's life is a representation of everyday life of modern wife. The poem begins like a story that Mrs. Midas is telling of one ordinary day in her kitchen:

*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. So I opened one,
then with my fingers wiped the other's glass like a brow. (Duffy, 2015, 237)*

The ordinary scene turns to be a little bit strange if not obscure in the next stanza; while she is looking outside through her kitchen window she describes the garden that:

*...was long and the visibility poor, the way
the dark of the ground seems to drink the light from the sky, (Duffy, 2015,
237)*

This description prophesies something evil and dark as life force being drained and replaced by something evil that contrasts with the first image of the

comfortable, calm homely opening scene. Then something odd happened, she continues saying that while she is watching her husband he plucked a pear, and instantly the pear turned to gold. She whimsically and humorously comments:

*... And then he plucked
a pear from a branch. – we grew Fondante d'Automne –
and it sat in his palm, like a lightbulb. On.
I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree? (Duffy, 2015, 237)*

Here Duffy takes the reader back to the original myth, drawing on her readers by their knowledge of the myth of Midas. She presents her own version of the myth in which Midas' wife voices her feeling and agony, which is something the original myth neglected. Midas' wife shares her story and her life after her husband had been granted his wish. She describes their relationship as "*passionate*", and the days "*halcyon*", but all this change as Midas turned to be a person who is seriously threatening to her, she even "*feared his honeyed embrace,/ the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.*" There is a now a real gape between them she had to make:

*... 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, 2015, 238)*

The sense of estrangement is deeply felt in the lines; Mrs. Midas has to keep her distance from her greedy husband, since now he cannot come close to her with hurting her. What is really painful for Mrs. Midas is that the distance between them is not merely physical; Mrs. Midas expresses her frustration and anger when she says that "*What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed/ but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness.*" (Duffy, 2015, 238) despite realizing her husband folly, she did not mind the new life style she is force to live nor his foolish mistake. However what really gets her is his treating her as an object, he did not think of her and of their life together. Midas' selfishness is seen as basically the outcome of the inherited patriarchal ideology which emphasized the superiority of males and their concern with their own priority and the objectification and marginalization of women. His wife, their relationship and the love they are supposed to share meant nothing to him. He was thinking simply of himself and his desire and his materialism and lust for gold ruined his

life and that of his wife. The lack of understanding and appreciation of the love of his wife hurts her most causing the irretrievable breakdown of their marriage. Duffy recalls the loving relationship enjoyed by the couple, but after Midas being granted his wish their relationship become cold just like the cold objects turned by Midas golden touch.

Though Mrs. Midas is cynical and scornful and she is raging at the folly of her husband, she turns to be more serious and even grim at the end. After the death of her husband she felt that she has lost the man she loves twice, the first time when he ruined their life with his greed and the other when he died leaving her alone with all the material unworthy things, things he touched and turned to gold.

Her tone at the end is of regret, a wistful longing to the man she loves and wish to have him again. She retains a fair memory of him, she says, *'I think of him in certain lights, dawn, late/afternoon', and mourns: "I miss most /even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch."* (Duffy, 2015, 238) The realistic everyday story of women who lost their happiness due to their husbands' obsession with their making of money/gold is embedded in the story of Mrs Midas. She is presenting the life a wife is forced to live after losing her husband's love and affection due to his masculine selfishness and self-contained. It is not only the mythical story but everyday story of women who lost the touch, the sympathetic and loving touch of their husbands, such a touch that means the world for these wives and gives them the sense of their importance and value in the lives of their men. The ultimate irony is that Midas who possessed a *'magic touch'* fails to realize the magnitude of the physical touch which had the power to transform his wife into a loving and a happy wife.

One of Duffy's achievements is her creating of the character of Midas wife, who has been mentioned in the classic myth just in reference to her husband. The poet develops the character of Mrs Midas as a real character that can think, feel and act in her own accord. In this poem Mrs Midas is empowered by giving her a voice to express her feeling, anger and grief. She presents the story of her husband from her own perspective exercising of a kind of a grim wit at her husband's expense. The poet's reworking of the classical myth and her sarcastic presentation of Midas cut down the figure of mythical King Midas to a ludicrous size. Moreover, Mrs Midas, who had been left out altogether in the classic mythology, is given a voiced by Duffy, which asserts the validity of

her individuality and authorship. Duffy's feminist mythic revision is a unique way to craft a new tradition in response to the inherited canon.

Another source Duffy uses in her collection *The World Wife* is history. In her third poem she uses a neglected historical figure that had been overshadowed by her husband, Anne Hathaway. She is known only for being the wife of the towering figure William Shakespeare. In her poem "*Anne Hathaway*", Duffy revisits actual historical wife, she uses her as the persona who narrates her own part of the story from the perspective of a woman who is living without her lover. Duffy grants Anne Hathaway with a voice raising her from being an ordinary woman to be the narrator of her own love story, and to romanticize her relationship with her husband. Anne Hathaway is the one who speaks now telling her feelings and stating her love, and not her husband the great poet who is speaking.

Noteworthy is that the poet uses the name of Anne Hathaway as the title of the poem, which is significant as she chose to keep her maiden name so that the emphasis is all on Anne while her husband who had constantly overshadowing her is now in the background. Also, in the poem Anne Hathaway as she expresses her passion is refuting all the allegations that her husband did not love her. The poem is an answer all critique and questioning of the nature of their relation after her husband banqueted her "*second best bed*" (Duffy, 2015, 256), which was considered as an insult by some people.

'*Anne Hathaway*' it is a clever parody of Shakespeare's sonnets in form and the subject matter, it is a true love poem. The poem is considered as "an evocation of the marital relationship from the wife's perspective and becomes a sort of Indirect Interior Monologue which shows an authorial presence by the use of the 3rd person, but the syntax and focalization is that of character" (García, 2007, 21) Drawing on the sonnet form and utilising the persona of Shakespeare's neglected wife, Duffy narrates a romanticised version of their relationship. This poem is a rebuttal to all those who think that Shakespeare did not love his wife.

Duffy says about this poem:

... I suppose I would call this a relaxed sonnet, rhythmically it is, and the rhyme is "relaxed": echoed in "a softer

rhyme/to his”, doing that in the poem as well as in the relationship. And this is, on a quite simple level, about Shakespeare and sexual feelings, and love, my life, our lives. The poem is challenging the interpretation of his will as being an insult to her. (Wood, 2005, 15)

The poem begins with quoting Shakespeare’s will bequeathing his second best bed to his wife Anne Hathaway:

‘Item I gyve unto my wief my second best bed...’
(from Shakespeare’s will) (Duffy, 2015, 256)

The poem is in the voice of Anne Hathaway herself; she is telling her tale as a widow who is remembering her husband with love. The second bed which has aroused a lot of controversy is described by Hathaway as:

*The bed we loved in was a spinning world
of forests, castles, torchlight, cliff-tops, seas
where he would dive for pearls. My lover’s words
were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses
on these lips;* (Duffy, 2015, 256)

The bed or the house with his wife was just like a magical world, the universe of Shakespeare where he was inspired to produce his best works, “*pearls*”. Anne Hathaway describes the bed and her life with him with love and admiration. Speaking passionately about their relation and calling him “*My lover’s*” as well as the fact that Shakespeare finds love and tranquillity with Anne Hathaway challenges the traditional view of Anne Hathaway as a forsaken unloved wife. She has been presented as a neglected wife who is staying in Stratford while Shakespeare was in London , also she was older than him and she was not the first Anne in his life, the first is supposed to be Anne Whateley.(See Lloyd-Evans 1987, 4, 23)

The poem is a true love poem told by a wife who lost her lover, she says:

*Some nights I dreamed he’d written me, the bed
a page beneath his writer’s hands. Romance*

and drama played by touch, by scent, by taste. (Duffy, 2015, 256)

Their love is documented in Shakespeare's writings; he showed his love for his wife through the medium he is most known for, poetry. After his death, Anne Hathaway misses him and his tender love, his passion and his touches.

Duffy brilliantly chooses the sonnet form for this poem. It is the form that Shakespeare mastered and utilized in his writing of love poems, but now it is his wife is given a voice to tell her story and expressing her love to her husband. As a historical figure, Anne Hathaway who has been ignored, marginalized, silenced and even underestimated, but in the very capable hands of Duffy she turned to be the narrator of her own story. Through the poem, the second best bed proves to be an expression of love rather than insult to Anne Hathaway after all.

Just like Shakespeare in his sonnets, Duffy ends the sonnet with a couplet in which Anne Hathaway cleverly embedded her satire:

*My living laughing love—
I hold him in the casket of my widow's head
As he held me upon that next best bed.* (Duffy, 2015, 256)

She describes her husband as her "living laughing love" pointing up the reality of her recollection, and of their time together, she will always hold him dear in her memory. To the last line of the poem, Duffy skilfully keep the focusing on drawing a beautiful , lively image of the Anne Hathaway and Shakespeare's marriage, she presents them as romantic, passionate lover . Anne Hathaway will always be faithful to the memory of her late husband and keeps it in her small "widow's head", the use of the widow head is suggesting that she is ironically using the words casket and widow head. Through the whole poem Duffy is very careful not to direct or even suggest any satire towards Shakespeare, however in the final couplet she satirizes not the husband but the whole society, Pilar Abad suggests that the satire in the poem "Anne Hathaway":

..... is not a personal satire aimed at exposing or even debunking a male figure, but rather a *social* satire aimed at ridiculing marital domestic uses of the day, such as hosting and testamentary habits

(both of which push into the background the wife figure), and, by so doing, the satiric process implicates both marriage as institution and the husband figure. Consequently, we do not have here a legendary feminine character ... as satiric voice, but a no less anonymous yet historical one: AH[Anne Hathaway] who turns to *irony* as her weapon against gendered *social* violence on women/wives. (García, 2007, 22)

Duffy highlights the fact that for a long time women had been marginalized and silenced, they are always defined by their men Western culture so she uses Anne Hathaway and gives her a voice making her narrator to tell her story from women point of view. The widow head is a direct reference to the undermining of women, and as may be as a kind of paying back and challenging of the patriarchal society, she keeps the memory of her husband in her mind which is considered as inferior to that of men rather than in her heart. Anne Hathaway is “clever and subtle, she does not openly insult or attack her satiric object/s, rather she even pretends to *defend* the very outrages she is indeed condemning by turning to irony.” (García, 2007, 22) Moreover the poem’s title is also a challenge as Duffy uses the maiden’s name of Anne Hathaway to emphasize the fact that she presenting feminine historical character, her individuality and revealing a different and unknown perspective to her life and character, liberating her female character from the stigma of being neglected and shrew.

In her collection *The World’s Wife* and through her poems, Duffy strives to create a new type of personality of women characters for the new coming generation of women to follow. She revises and retells well-known stories from mythology, history and fairy tales revising the female characters that had been marginalized and silenced by patriarchal culture to be strong, independent, wise, lively and even sort of elusive. The poet tries to set a model for the contemporary women readers encouraging them be brave, strong and independent and to pursuit their dreams and what they want and also she urges them be strong enough to do what it takes to achieve their dreams.

Duffy personas are strong female narrators who are brave to speak for themselves. The poet endows them not only with voice but with authority to tell their own stories from their own perspective. Duffy’s personas are highly critical of the patriarchy and society and the male dominated literary tradition.

By replacing the stereotypical traditional feminine figures that had been suppressed, silenced and marginalized with new type of women Duffy is urging all the new generation of women to follow and to learn from so that they can find out and reconstruct their identities without silencing or critiquing by the patriarchal society. The authority given to the personas is the much needed authority for all women to resist the prejudice from patriarchal society and to free themselves from the suppression of men.

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