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**ALTERNATIVE VOICES FROM ‘HIS’TORY:
A NEW HISTORICIST READING OF CAROL ANN
DUFFY’S *THE WORLD’S WIFE***

Ayşegül AZAKLI

Thesis Advisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yiğit SÜMBÜL

MASTER’S THESIS

**DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURE
DIVISION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND
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INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

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ALTERNATIVE VOICES FROM ‘HIS’TORY:
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Ayşegül AZAKLI

ANKARA HACI BAYRAM VELİ UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Philosophers of history had considered historiography an authentic source of the past. However, with postmodernism and the novel ways of reconsidering the past, it has been discovered that history has overwhelmingly tended to be formed with preconceptions when the blanks, either forgotten or neglected, were to be filled by the powerholders. As a reaction to the claimed universality of truth shaped in the hands of the victors, winners, and thus the superiors, new historicism, which flourished in the early 1980s as a literary theory, functions as a return to the past by the equal treatment of both literary and non-literary texts which affect and are affected by the construction of history. Contextualising a literary work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era, new historicism approaches past events with a sceptical viewpoint. Thus, instead of striving for universal truth, it brings to light the dominant tenets and ideologies at the time. As a literary form and thus a co-text of history, poetry functions as an asset to reflect the sociocultural facets of a particular society in an era. When scrutinised under the new historicism theory, the poetry collection *The World’s Wife* (1999), written by the first female and openly lesbian poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy, displays how power relations circulated in the late twentieth century in Britain, how the poetry book was affected by the same power relations, and, in return, how it contributed to the forming of history. Analysing selected poems from *The World’s Wife* under the themes of lesbianism, violence, and misandry respectively, this study aims to propound the role of women as the inferior, oppressed, and suppressed minorities who now have the chance to give voice to their subjective past: ‘her’story.

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TARİHTEN ÖTEKİ SESLER: CAROL ANN DUFFY’NİN
THE WORLD’S WIFE ADLI ESERİNİN YENİ TARİHSELÇİ BİR OKUMASI

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Ayşegül AZAKLI

ANKARA HACI BAYRAM VELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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ÖZET

Tarih yazarlığı, tarih düşünürleri tarafından geçmişin güvenilir ve aslına uygun bir kaynağı olarak ele alınmıştır. Postmodernizm ile gelişen tarihi yeniden ele alma yaklaşımlarının da etkisiyle tarihin aslında güç sahibi bireyler tarafından tarihteki boşlukların öznel ve taraflı olarak doldurularak oluşturulduğu keşfedilmiştir. Tarihi şekillendiren gücün fatihlerin, kazananların ve üstün kimselerin elinde şekillendiğini savunan ve tarihin sözde nesnellğine bir tepki olarak 1980’lerde bir edebiyat kuramı olarak ortaya çıkan yeni tarihselcilik teorisi hem kurgusal hem de kurgusal olmayan yazılı kaynakları tarihi şekillendiren ve de günün sosyokültürel şartlarını bünyesinde barındıran eşit nitelikte ve aynı öneme sahip kanıtlar olarak görür. Bu kanıtları bağlamsal olarak inceleyerek zamanın etkili ve baskın dinamiklerine şüpheci bir tavırla yaklaşır, tarihin nesnellğini sorgular. Edebi bir tür ve tarihe eş metin olarak şiir, bir toplumun sosyokültürel özelliklerine ayna tutar. İlk eş cinsel kadın kraliyet şairi unvanını taşıyan Carol Ann Duffy’nin *The World’s Wife* (1999) adlı şiir koleksiyonuna yeni tarihselci bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşıldığında 20. yy. sonlarındaki Britanya’da olagelen güç ilişkileri, şiirlerin güç hegemonyasını nasıl yansıttığı ve eş metin olarak şiirlerin bu güç sirkülasyonuna nasıl yön verdiği ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmada lezbiyenlik, şiddet ve bunlara bağlı oluşan erkek düşmanlığı temaları altında *The World’s Wife*’tan seçme şiirler analiz edilerek geçmişte söz hakkı sahibi olmayan, bastırılan ve aşağı görülen kadınların toplumdaki yeri irdelenmiş, tarih bu kadınların ağzından yeniden aktarılmıştır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a contemporary poetry collection, Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999) presents itself as a feminist manifesto with its ironic title; however, the issues tackled in the poems do not revolve solely around feminism. The female characters who are introduced with more powerful and authoritative voices overshadow the male ones, the protagonists of the original stories the poems are based on. Poetry as a literary genre evinces that it functions as a co-text and can serve as a reflector of the social and cultural aspects of the era it is yielded in. By subverting the original stories which have male narrators and voices as protagonists, Duffy in the poems unmask women's perpetual problems stemming from their subordinate positions to men. Duffy's *The World's Wife* does what novels have been claimed to do; that is, holding up a mirror to the subjective reality through functioning as a conversation across time. As Duffy also asserts, "Poetry is part of the dialogue of a country" (PBS News Hour, 2012). The poems included in the poetry book are highly distinctive as they provide the reader with the oppressed minorities' realities and the widespread discrimination that they have faced.

Written from the perspectives of various female characters in the form of dramatic monologue, *The World's Wife* embodies women from mythology, folktales, the Bible, and even from real life on an imaginative level, creating fiction with the female versions of male figures from the twentieth century in Britain. The shared characteristic of these women is that all were muted and confined in history, yet the poems are now narrated by themselves as "the spouse-voice of the famous male" (Winterson, 2015). In Duffy's subverted, upside-down settings, history is reconsidered by the females' story, giving voice to the neglected and ignored spouses deprived of narratives throughout history. The use of irony as a literary device in the composition of the poems designates the intensified vehemence of the situation in which women had been placed. Duffy thus propounds the marginalisation of women who have no essential place in history. As well as the use of irony as a literary device, "Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue allows a socialization of the self, enabled by the projected fantastic self who carries utterance without fear of censorship" (Rees-Jones 2010: 50). By using the literary devices of irony and dramatic monologue, Duffy freely

propounds her concerns regarding treatments of women both in the British society and in history.

The women depicted as socially and/or culturally underprivileged members of society in *The World's Wife* fall under the same category as beings with so-called abnormal sexual orientations and attitudes deviating from the norms and standards. In light of both literary and non-literary textual evidence from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the female characters in *The World's Wife* biasedly mention the inequity they have been exposed to. The female characters' tendency to be poignant and hostile while retelling the wrongdoings of the male characters results from the injustice they have been subjected to throughout recorded history. By approaching *The World's Wife* through the theory of new historicism, this thesis demonstrates the potential motivations behind the poet's heavy emphasis on such subject matters as lesbianism, violence, and misandry. Such matters, indeed, are in line with the social, political, and cultural events of the historical period in which the poet was literarily active. As an essential token of new historicism, the literary text has been closely read within an "archival continuum" (Wilson and Dutton, 1992: 8) in rigorous association with co-texts by the parallel reading of both the literary and non-literary texts of the same historical period, attributing equal weight to each text. Analysis of the data thus has been carried out through the parallel study of a large amount of literary and non-literary texts with an elaborate examination of the similarities and/or differences for reaching a reasonable conclusion.

Instead of the mere focus on feminist interpretations, this study intends to reveal what urged the poet to produce such poems with the ignored female protagonists behind history. For convenience, selected poems are placed under the categories of lesbianism, violence, and misandry. Hence, this thesis shows why and how the poems provide us with not only feminist practises but also a deeper inclination to reverberate the muted desires of the silenced once they get the ground to speak up for themselves. It has been rendered possible by the new historicism theory, which is conducted through textual evidence from interviews, books, diaries, archives, documents, videos, and visuals in addition to narrative analysis and observation.

Through such methods which require an elaborate synchronous analysis of the literary work (*The World's Wife*) and non-literary texts of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the

lines in the poems are revealed to unfold the social, political, and historical events that occurred back then. Hereby, for a broader understanding of the given historical periods, we could conclude in terms of the mentioned themes of the poems whether they correspond closely to the non-literary textual evidence. Consequently, the originality of this thesis stems from its focal point being the selections from *The World's Wife* under the unprecedented guidance of the new historicism theory.

This thesis thus centres upon the suppressed, unattended voices of mostly women with and without a less-favoured sexual orientation finally awakening and making heard their voices through lesbianism and violence, resulting in misandry. In this regard, the theory of new historicism, which is essential for the examination of the reasons and the urges that might have prompted the poet to yield such a work, enables us to delve into her era for scrutinization by means of co(n)texts. Thus, the study aims to reveal both the actual and potential motivations behind Duffy's efforts to recognise the suppressed minorities, especially the women with or without sexual orientations deviating from heterosexuality.

The era in which the poet was literarily active is also noteworthy since the application of the new historicism theory to literature is rendered possible via co(n)texts the specific period presents. This thesis thus aims to put forth the events and issues the marginalised people did not have the chance to touch upon back in the day. Thus, it is among this study's objectives to manifest the most prevalent themes and concepts from the 1970s to 1990s through the characters, highlighting to what extent their focus displays their concerns of having been suppressed. Besides, since the practices – discursive, behavioural, physical – might shed light on the discrimination they have claimed to experience, such practices are also scrutinised. The themes of lesbianism, violence, and misandry in the book are to be unfolded, utilising texts of all kinds from the mentioned historical period, with no privilege over another as the new historicism theory suggests. For Duffy, *The World's Wife* is partly autobiographical: "It might be that it is autobiographical in that it might be true to my imaginative life or my emotional life but not necessarily true to the actual details of my life" (Wood, 2005). New historicism suggests the analysis and interpretation of the author's life and relations since the theory attaches importance to biographical criticism. "I'm a very private person and I will continue to fiercely protect my privacy and my daughter"

(qtd. in Flood, 2009), Duffy however says. Thus, she does not provide us with ample textual evidence regarding some of her relationships, yet there are relevant proofs hinting at the issues.

This thesis encompasses solely Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* as the main and only literary text. For both a more detailed, on-target research and the appropriateness of the poems' topics, the thesis will focus on eleven poems in the book. The study consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, the theoretical dimension of new historicism is discussed. Since it developed as both a reaction to and continuation of the historicism theory, old historicism is also tackled in the chapter. Next, hermeneutics is briefly discussed since new historicism requires the interpretation of events with a sceptical approach to the assumed objectivity of history. The chapter continues with the new historicism theory with a subtle emphasis on Stephen Greenblatt, the pioneering figure of the theory. He is succeeded by Michel Foucault with his knowledge and power dichotomy. Additionally, discursive practices are further discussed. Since knowledge is power and discursive practices are formations of knowledge, the epistemological scepticism towards the scrutinization of history is necessitated by unveiling the power dynamics of the time. In *The World's Wife*, the less powerful ones in history, the late twentieth century in this thesis, seem to be the women reputed to be sexually abnormal, exposed to violence, and in return, forced to develop a sense of misandry. The chapter closes with the adaptation of the theory in literature with statements by literary critics.

The second chapter provides an account of the poet Carol Ann Duffy and women's role in social conventions in the late twentieth century in Britain. The focus is on the institutions of family and marriage. Sexual politics is further discussed with Carol Ann Duffy's sociocultural background and the social and political dynamics in the late twentieth century. As Duffy is the first openly homosexual and female Poet Laureate, her upbringing, relations, and emotional and psychological state are of importance for the new historical analysis of the poems under the themes of lesbianism, violence, and misandry. Duffy, drawing attention to her "ordinary background", propounds: "[P]oetry is of the people and of our utterance [...] and it seemed ridiculous to me that poetry, even the very best poetry, shouldn't be accessible to where I came from" (qtd. in Wroe, 2007); hence her taking sides with the marginalised. Furthermore, as a

significant historical figure of power, Thatcher is also briefly touched upon not only because she was England's prime minister in the late twentieth century but also because, in her own words, Duffy's "great angry days were in the Thatcher years" (Patterson, 1999). This chapter is of vital importance for the scrutinization of the motivation behind the poet's production of the poems as the new historicism theory emphasises.

In the final chapter, the themes of lesbianism, violence, and misandry in eleven poems from *The World's Wife* are respectively analysed within the framework of the new historicism theory. Firstly, the original stories behind the selected poems are summarised, explaining the potential motivation behind Duffy's preference for rewriting the particular poems. The selected poems are as follows: "Queen Herod", "*from* Mrs Tiresias", and "Mrs Quasimodo" are scrutinized under the theme of lesbianism; "Queen Kong", "The Kray Sisters", and "Mrs Beast" are included in the theme of violence; and finally, "Mrs Aesop", "Mrs Darwin", "Mrs Sisyphus", "Mrs Icarus", and "Eurydice" are tackled under the theme of misandry with textual evidence from the 1970s to the 1990s in Britain as well as Carol Ann Duffy's biography. Lastly, the conclusion section will lay out the key findings drawn from the main arguments of the study with a discussion.

2. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO NEW HISTORICISM

2.1. Historicism

2.1.1. Historical and Theoretical Background

Most people, in fact, will not take the trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear.

—Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 431-404 BC

The theory of historicism dates back to the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, primarily in the disciplines of philosophy and hermeneutics. It is predicated on the assumption that all human ideas and values are historically conditioned and subject to change. Before delving into historicism, it is crucial to briefly probe the etymology of history, which the term “historicism” stems from. Etymologically, the entrance of the term “history” into the English language corresponds to the late-fourteenth century, first from the Old French “estoire”, later from Latin “historia”, designating a “narrative of past events, account, tale, story” (Harper, (n.d.)). In Middle English, it is believed to be used firstly in the late-fifteenth century in the meaning of “the recorded events of the past” (Harper, (n.d.)). The past events and narratives have inevitably reached out to the present time by means of written records. As for the term historicism, which is claimed to have derived from German “historismus”, it was coined, according to Iggers, by Friedrich Schlegel in 1797 in his fragmentary notes on philology in the meaning of the total “unique nature of Antiquity” (1995: 130). Historismus in the nineteenth century prevailed in the works of Carl Prantl in a similar pattern to Schlegel’s. As Prantl¹ put it, historismus indicated a historical orientation recognizing individuality in its “concrete temporal-spatiality” in Iggers’ translation (131).

The emergence and development of historicism are often attributed to a long line of German philosophers due to the philosophical significance of historicism during the Enlightenment Era in Europe. It was ground-breaking as it challenged the existing views concerning history as linear. The novelty brought about by historicism was the emphasis on the diverse and unsteady historical contexts which called for specific

¹ Prantl, K. (1852). *Die gegenwartige Aufgabe der Philosophie*. Munich.

approaches to each. Truth, according to historicism, is conditioned by historical conditions and contexts. Such a claim is at odds with the early-twentieth-century modernists' views on the objectivity and universality of truth. Historicism is found problematic by critics primarily for its undermining of the assumed universal validity of knowledge and objectivity of truth. Debates on the historicity of knowledge are ongoing.

Historicism can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman thinkers including Curtius. In his "Historismus", historicism is presented as a movement which focuses on the historical context in the interpretation of any text. As mentioned above, the emergence of historicism as a movement can be attributed to particularly German philosophers, who were seeking the validity of universal truth through the tackling of history as a scientific matter, yet those German Idealists were opposed by a group of historians. Romantic aesthetics came forward as the justification of the impossibility of reducing human history to a concrete understanding of the Enlightenment, an understanding no different than a scientific calculation. Romantic aesthetics was later superseded by hermeneutics, which sought to demonstrate that the aesthetic tradition was not outside of but complementary to natural sciences with the slight difference that it was not seeking validity of the truth (Hamilton, 2003: 1-2).

History begins with writing. Though celebrated as the Father of History, Herodotus who wrote about the past is opposed by Thucydides, who was to distinguish his own style from the previous historians. Accusing Herodotus of rewriting the past events from his own perspective by intermingling fables, myths, and accounts of unproven partial victories and defeats, Thucydides "imposed the idea that contemporary political history was the only serious history" (Momigliano, 1966: 131). Herodotus' idea of the historicity of the past events situates him ideologically, for instance, when he is of the Athenian ideology while depicting the heroic deeds of the Athenians, calling them "the saviours of Greece" (Herodotus, 2013: 478). Herodotus himself is not objective. Thucydides might have had the same question in mind as modern readers do: How could history be?

Aristotle, who lived approximately a century after Herodotus and Thucydides, approached the writing of history by comparing and contrasting history with art, the art of poetry in particular. Art and history are often seen as rather contradictory due to

the distinguished seriousness of their purpose. Aristotle, however, did not agree to the discrete serious goal to be the main difference between art and history. For him, the balance between probability and possibility was the separating factor at work. Probability in poetry is what is witnessed the most. On the contrary, history is constructed by possibilities. Thus, according to Aristotle, “poetry is a more philosophic and honourable pursuit than history” (1819: 23). One can purge one’s emotions and desires through the probabilities in poetry, yet history submits to the possibilities despite their improbability, or even despite their distorting the coherence of the flow of the events and the reign of kings, queens, and the authorities. This is what makes history vulnerable to criticism unlike poetry, which is a “philosophical imagination” (Hamilton, 2003: 7), that is, it has little to know ethical responsibility for accurate historical representation.

As two influential critics of the Enlightenment, Vico and Herder contributed to historicism to such a great extent that the initial formulation of historicism owes a great deal to them. History, which is considered a text, is expressive. Vico asserts that the expressiveness of a historical fact is vital since the individuality of different histories results in various literary interpretations, which the hermeneutic tradition utilises. The cyclical nature of history then is inevitable for Vico as he believed in the “course” to reoccur as “recourse” throughout the history of humankind with the inherited pattern creating a motif repeated in human progress (1961: 20). Vico further asserts that universality of truth is not conceivable, unlike the claims on truth’s being transcended by human history. Karl Werner, in his book on Vico (1879), emphasises the essence of the historicist’s perspective in Vico’s notion that the human mind identifies reality with history because, owing to the recordings, humans can have an opinion of the past, and thus history is made by them with the aim of reflecting human intentions, that is, the meaning of the motives behind the human actions.

Herder, on the other hand, criticises the ideas of the Enlightenment Period built upon the presumptions that rationality, a term inseparable from the truth, is a sole unit valid for all societies and their cultures as the progress of history for each culture is linear with the same pattern of development. Herder further emphasises the uniqueness of each value system existing in historical periods with an awareness of their differences since each historical context renders the interpretation of the past authentic. Human

progress, for Herder, is an “endeavour”, not science. Human beings adapt themselves to the given situation of the given epoch, their contemporary era (Herder, 1968: 187). Both Vico and Herder then are in the belief that human beings are implicated in history.

According to the German Idealist Hegel, universal truth in historical production was attainable though not immediately. His contribution to historicism is not limited to the possibility of universal truth. Most importantly, Hegel puts forth three kinds of historical writing: (1) original history, (2) reflective history, and (3) philosophical history (2001: 14). Simply put, original history is the one where the writer is “immersed in the spirit of the events” that he “describes”. The main characteristic of original history is that historians manifest neither feelings nor comments on what they write since the historians serve as eyewitnesses with no sentiments to be objective in their writings. Reflective history, on the other hand, includes the historian’s interpretation of certain historical matters in order to justify the universality of truth. This partial universality, however, handicaps the reliability of the recording since reflective history requires the writer to establish a link between the past event and its reflection on his present day. Still, reflective history strives to be didactic in the sense that it teaches a moral lesson taken from the past to the people in the present. This facet of reflective history is referred to by Hegel as “moral reflections” (2001: 19). Philosophical history is “the spirit which is eternally present to itself and for which there is no past”. It is the “thoughtful consideration of it” (22) owing to its essentiality in human life. It is incontestable that human beings differ from the rest of other beings in their ability to think, which they owe to their capability of reasoning (Hegel, 1975: 13, 16, 19, 24). Hegel’s contribution to historicism is then vital in that it offers three different models for history writing.

As a successor of Hegel, Nietzsche puts forth the idea of the “last judgment”, which shares a common basis with the philosophical history of Hegel. Through this final judgment, enriched with examples from the past, scientific history can be actualised (Nietzsche, 1983: 102). Like Habermas who takes a similar stance and stresses the necessity of “solidarity” (1987: 13-15) with the past through past spokesmen, the victors, Nietzsche also champions the victors, the winners, and the grand historical figures. He avoids reaching out to the losers or the ones left on the margins. He elaborates on his thoughts by paraphrasing Schopenhauer through the metaphor of

giants and dwarfs: “One giant calls to another across the desert intervals of time and, undisturbed by the excited, chattering dwarfs who creep about beneath them, the exalted spirit-dialogue goes on” (Nietzsche, 1983: 111). Nietzsche further canonizes the historian as he considers the past voices of the glorified ones, as an “oracle” that will be understood only by the “architects of the future” (94) capable of knowing the present. History repeats itself yet symbolically. When George Santayana uttered the famous dictum “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (1905: 284), he might have laid emphasis on historical events’ inseparability from the moment with which Nietzsche partly agrees.

Readers, writers, historians, and critics are all inclined to seek a motif behind the past events and habits of human beings implicated in human evolution and progress. However, history itself is a kind of text and thus subjective interpretations of past events are inevitable. In order to create a firm basis for history, the search for a scientific ground, to rationalise it, is called forth. Timeless thinkers, timeless in the sense that each belongs to a distinctive era, have consensus on the same sole thing: the existence of a science of history. The twentieth-century philosopher Karl Popper, on the other hand, dissents from the thinkers who have believed in the predictability of the course of human history. He presents the analogy of the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly: “The most careful observation of one developing caterpillar will not help us to predict its transformation into a butterfly”. He then quotes H.A.L. Fisher who asserts that the uniqueness of the plot, the rhythm, and the actions concluding these cannot be generalised with an artificial expectation of them on the same basis (Popper, 1961: 109). Consequently, Popper acknowledges on the probability of events to recur but not with absolute certainty.

2.1.2. Hermeneutics

The historical character of interpretation aptly changes as the understanding of the past is an unending process. Historicism, then, serves to familiarise us, contemporary people, with the past by explaining the different interpretations it is open to. The art of interpretation has necessitated the hermeneutic tradition. As E.H. Carr elucidates, it is hermeneutics that serves as a dialectic, a historicist dialectic, “a hard core of facts” and “a hard core of interpretation” surrounded by one another moulded in the hermeneutic tradition (1986: 4, 18). “Hermeneutics”, according to Hamilton, “is the science of

interpretation” (2003: 44). It is science as it is a systematic whole. Still, it avoids scientific generalisations since it requires a preference for the multiplicity of meanings and approaches to past events. It sometimes necessitates the reinterpretation of notions, which is a recurrent feature of historicism.

Schleiermacher, as a renowned figure in the field of hermeneutics, developed two approaches: Linguistic and Psychological. The former is often related to grammar and is demonstrated in his early writings. He treats language as the sole presupposition in the art or science of interpretation. He gives no place to thoughts without words. The latter, on the other hand, focuses on the psychology of the author, for his inner experience is the special object of the interpretation; hence the insistence on an empathetic understanding of the author’s words (1998: 24, 38). This divinatory method is a result of his emphasis on the likelihood of the past being explained through a principle rather different from the generalisations. Hermeneutics’ initial focus was “the special”, and it “went no further than the special” (19). Expressiveness which Vico was after then is attainable through psychological hermeneutics since language expresses the historical. This is in line with the notion that the reader or the critic must understand an author better than he understands himself, which attributes paramount importance to our ability to comprehend things. These two approaches of Schleiermacher are dialectical in nature, holding two opposed positions simultaneously to create tension for the sake of the science of interpretation.

Wilhelm Dilthey, too, shares Schleiermacher’s belief that understanding an author better than he understands himself is crucial, and he names it the “final goal” of hermeneutics. He believes it to be the “necessary conclusion” of “unconscious creations” by the reader (Dilthey, 1976: 259-60). According to him, human beings understand history in relation to themselves, to their own expressiveness: “The reflection of a person about himself remains the standard and basis for understanding history” (218). By means of emotional purgation, poems, and narratives, the focus on inner experience functions better than science to understand history. To be history, the past must be expressive, and Dilthey can only record history he can interpret, reducing history to his own ideas (69-70). Dilthey’s attempt at founding a conceptual application of historicism in philosophy is also of notice. In defiance of Kant, Dilthey in his incomplete book “The Formation of the Historical World in the Human

Sciences” (1910) reconsiders the concept of reason, opposing its so-called neutral and a-historical nature. He further asserts that history cannot be repeated as each historical event is unique, leading to the present (Dilthey, 2002: 178). Experience and rationality then are socially and historically contextualized.

Another leading figure associated with hermeneutics is the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. According to him, history tends to fill the gaps with prejudices and speculations with no firm base. Thus, he sees historicism as an “overcoming of all prejudices” (1989: 276). For him, the main goal of hermeneutics is to explain that our understanding of the world and history is not confined to yet dependent on science. Gadamer propounds another philosophical concept of historicism: mutual construction. It justifies historicism’s theory that we human beings are historical creatures, historically conditioned, and historically subjective. This dialogic or “historically effective consciousness”, as Gadamer puts it, is then the interpretation of the past. This is where the expressiveness of history and the ability of the reader are at work. By means of this dialogue, self-reflexivity is in the foreground as people gain awareness of themselves, of what they believe to be true through the kind of history they construct. Still, historical distance or remoteness discloses awareness of unfamiliar circumstances in human evolution. This historical distance enables us to appreciate the past since the distinguished features of the past and the present can be grasped through the tradition which is “a genuine partner in dialogue” (Gadamer, 1989: 8). The act of engaging in dialogue with a past voice requires the present-day participant to intervene in the tradition. This kind of interference, for Gadamer, does not mean agreeing with the past voice; instead, understanding is always agreeing to differ.

2.2. New Historicism: A Reviewed Return to the Past

2.2.1. Stephen Greenblatt

Stephen Greenblatt (1943-) is undoubtedly a prominent figure in the emergence of the new historicism theory, which has been among the most salient veins in the field of literary criticism since the 1980s. Breaking away from the traditional methods of interpretation, Greenblatt’s theories provide the contemporary reader and critics with a ground-breaking device of interpretation. Unlike the New Critics, Greenblatt strives for the interpretation and scrutiny of texts in light of their sociocultural contexts in

order to reveal the intertwined textuality and sociohistorical conditions. He begins doing this with the analyses of the Renaissance texts, especially Shakespearean plays with a particular interest in the “social energy” in the Elizabethan Era (1988: 6). In fact, Greenblatt puts forth his ideas about the issue of power relations embedded in texts in several articles as well as books, and he labels his novelty “a poetics of culture”, which may be used interchangeably with “new historicism” as both theoretical concepts serve the same purpose. As Greenblatt defines it, “a poetics of culture” refers to the “study of the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices” (1988: 5). The “relations” for him are predominantly social and political; hence power relations. They are circulated in society by the social energy inherent in the given culture through its exchange between cultural elements. The social energy, for Greenblatt, gives no place to “motiveless creation” as all expressions have “an origin”, and the representations are neither “transcendent” nor “timeless” (1988: 12). Instead, in the mould of the reflections of the existing culture, they hold a mirror to the cultural relations of the then society.

Renaissance Self-Fashioning is among Greenblatt’s most influential books in terms of the birth of the new historicism theory as the relationship between the text and the individual is established in it. “Self-fashioning” as a term coined by Greenblatt is vital for the development of the theory in that “self” refers to the identity of one’s own that is constructed under the inexorable influence of the authority or the absolute power governing the society, corresponding to the State, the Church, and/or the Family in the sixteenth century. Eventually, despite being individualistic, the whole process of constructing an identity falls under the influence of the unanimous fashion i.e. clothing, literature, art, behaviour, attitude, symbols etc. of the era one lives in.

Nevertheless, the self, despite its submission to the authority, is not totally autonomous from the Other, which is the desperate marginalised confronting the absolute power in force. The struggle between the principal party and the dissidence –that is, the authority and the Other– then embroils the formation of the self (Greenblatt, 1980: 9). Under the effect of the firm institutional power, the loss of self that stems from the encapsulation of otherness is inevitable. Thus, the authorities’ self-fashioning refers to the power necessary for the control over identity of people in a society. For instance, Greenblatt’s reinterpretation, a new historicist interpretation, of the characters in

Othello brings forth an accurate example of the interplay self-fashioning. Iago's depiction as a malicious manipulator resembles Shakespeare's witty manipulation of his audience through the unbreakable link between fiction and history. What differs in both is that Iago avoids acting upon the norms of the sixteenth century with his wrongdoings whereas Shakespeare behaves accordingly, staging what is accepted as normal by the authority back then. Consequently, Shakespeare as a playwright is obedient to his culture of the Elizabethan Era as all his works end with justice, either divine or earthly. As a master in terms of highlighting the all-time-fashion human nature as the key point in his writings, he too fulfils the prophecy of self-fashioning, the nexus which functions as the root of Greenblatt's new historicism.

Greenblatt further refers to human beings as "cultural artifacts" (1980: 3), a phrase attributed to Clifford Geertz, who does not only refer to people but also their ideas and emotions as cultural artifacts (1973: 81), which is indeed a paradoxical reference. It is a twisted locution in that artifacts are human-made objects and tools exhibited as witnesses of historical changes from the past. Thus, when Greenblatt attributes the name "artifact" to human beings, it leads to a stalemate. Nevertheless, what is to be highlighted in this analogy is people's being human-made; that is, their being formed and shaped by each other throughout history by means of the elements which have contributed to the construction of culture.

He subsequently expounds that self-fashioning of a human is plausible by means of literature since it is literature that enables self-fashioning of a human in a unique sense with examples of past events. As for what literature briefly is, he puts forth three points each jointly taken into account for literature to essentially encompass: (1) the way the author's behaviour is manifested, (2) the way the codes that govern the mentioned behaviour are expressed, and lastly, (3) the way these codes are reflected on (1980: 4). To put it differently, it is humans that create the fashioning, are fashioned by these artificial formations they call fashion, and are socially conscious of being subject to the fashioning of the power in force.

Geertz's "thick description" borrowed from Gilbert Ryle in a more complex and sophisticated form adapted to anthropology is another term Greenblatt utilizes. To quote Geertz, "culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within

which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly-described” (1973: 14). For this kind of a description, Althusser suggests some apparatuses. The self, which holds an important ground for the demonstration of power relationships, is ideologically constructed and is an ideological formation. As Althusser asserts, Ideological State Apparatuses such as “the educational apparatus”, “the religious apparatus”, “the family apparatus”, and “the ‘cultural’ apparatus” enable the power to operate in society (2001: 150). The construction of these social parameters by the state gives way to the unconscious determination of the existent ideological system. Thus, the practitioners of new historicism study the cultural codes and social conventions to find out the circulation of power within the ideological system.

Greenblatt’s theories paving the way for the emergence of new historicism are criticised justifiably for being pessimistic. Chung-Hsiung Lai in his 2006 article argues that Greenblatt’s new historicist theory is pessimistic by nature because of Greenblatt’s belief in individuals’ being self-fashioned by the rules and regulations imposed upon them by the authorities in given cultures. He further claims that the individuals become subject to the enforcement of the ideologies having been obtained in the process of history through class, gender, religion, and race which are the anticipated elements of the ideology of a society. Forming an individuality according to the dominant ideology and authority in a culture is an essentiality for self-fashioning despite its pessimism, and it can be associated with the vitality of instincts to belong to a community, particularly to the most powerful one so as not to get eliminated from the circle.

Sense of belonging has always played a vital role in history, and thus it has called for forming the absolute power, dissociating it from the so-called marginalised, authority-threatening, hostile, and malicious minority who are to subvert the established order. Subversiveness is also a key term for Greenblatt in that sometimes it is deliberately created by authorities for the regulation of power. The subversive force is successfully contained by the very condition that it is built by, and this enables it to be policed more effectively (1988: 30, 41, 65). This equivocation of the apparent production of subversion serves the circulation of power only to influentially dominate it.

Greenblatt emphasizes some other terms in addition to self-fashioning, cultural artifacts, and subversiveness. Resonance and wonder, which is also the title of a work of his, are among these terms coined by him. “Resonance”, in Greenblatt’s

terminology, implies the effect of an object on the spectator which is considered more of an abstract power that can be obtained from the object's cultural origin which is also dynamic. New historicism, naturally, focuses on the relationship between the original, evolving, and current circumstances of resonance. Accordingly, museums are asserted to be remarkable examples of resonance where one can be presented with visually satisfying objects and artifacts from the past. These artifacts, especially the religious ones, tend to satisfy people's instinctive urge not principally owing to their visual quality but to the connotations of their names which are associated with the voices from the past, who said their prayers, worshipped, shed tears, and then were silenced for good.

Thus, it can be said that, despite the surface appeal of visual objects, it is their textuality that brings to light the buried vitality of emotions which are an essential part of human nature. As in a museum with displayed relics which seem unfamiliar due to their ancient and exotic appearance but stir a strange yet pleasant sensation, the appearance results in the perplexing touch of the past on human beings when they feel bewilderment in front of cultural artifacts.

The term wonder, on the other hand, is defined in juxtaposition to the term "resonance". In Greenblatt's understanding, "wonder" is "an arresting sense of uniqueness" (1990, 19), which indicates Greenblatt's ardent pursuit of the marginalized, the buried to come to the surface by interrupting the automatic perception, and it shares the very same function with Shklovsky's concept: "defamiliarization". Thus, "wonder", for Greenblatt, is essential to new historicism not only because it is a tool for arousing renewed interest in the otherness embedded in the dominated history but also because it functions as a way of raising awareness for the cultural and historical meanings of the text with the reader forged between both the past and the present.

In *Marvelous Possessions*, Greenblatt expounds the substantiality of the reader's experience of wonder that resists "recuperation, containment, ideological incorporation" (1991: 17) in order for the spectator to delve into the realm of the culture which has been shaped in the course of time. In this regard, through wonder, the state of historical conditioning is disturbed, which allows more freedom on the way to the discernment of historical progress. Just as in resonance, he also asserts about the

wonder that the initial sources of wonder are not visual yet substantially textual, especially with the works of travel writing such as Marco Polo's *Book of the Marvels of the World* (1300) and Mandeville's *Travels* (1350). Wonder is a momentum of the rise of the novel with the first realistic example *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which is also claimed to be based on the real-life experiences of a traveller. If the order of the juxtaposition of resonance and wonder is of great importance, one can rely on Greenblatt's judgment. He asserts that the impact of cultural artifacts is far greater when started with wonder and followed by the desire for resonance (1990: 34). After all, wonder seems more appealing as the initial, and it can more easily lead to resonance than vice versa. Thus, new historicism aspires to sustain the marvellous lying at the heart of the resonant.

In the following sections of *Resonance and Wonder*, Greenblatt quotes Walter Cohen² who mentions the scope of the new historicists' subject matters as "obscure, even bizarre" such as "dreams, [...] festivals, denunciations of witchcraft, sexual treatises, diaries and autobiographies, reports on disease, birth and death records", and even "accounts of insanity" (1990: 18). Greenblatt seems to be bewildered at his contemporaries' interest in such concerns since the previous ones were so narrow-minded that they would call the scope of new historicism bizarre in a hostile way. This indicates the magnitude of the distance new historicism and critics have covered in comparison to the former, embryonic scope of historicism as a theory.

So far, it has been inferred that a way of arousing a sense of wonder for the history of the culture is by means of cultural objects. Nevertheless, wonder of the Other is not always a prospective attempt to understand an unfamiliar, distant culture, yet it renders it possible to provoke us to identify ourselves through newness. Now that the partly altered and unsaid history is unveiled by the power of the reader's wonder, the sense of the past will be reconsidered through miscellaneous perspectives which were not once resorted to due to the conventional understanding of history. As in the explanation of self-fashioning, Greenblatt's definition of the Other contains any kind of negative and pessimistic vocabulary ranging from "demonic" to "an alien". Nonetheless, he expounds this alien Other as an integral part of the self-fashioning, indicating that the Other cannot be erased; instead, it is always replaced by another alien, which is

² Cohen, W. (2005). *Shakespeare Reproduced*, 49.

absolutely in line with Greenblatt's statement "One man's authority is another man's alien" (1980: 9). Throughout history, the struggle between the authority and the dissidence has been always existent and will subsist since neither the absolute power nor the Other will vanish. In the case that one is erased, the other will take over to replace it, and the relatively weaker will be the new Other, maintaining the vicious circle.

Storytelling has a place in Greenblatt's theories, as well. It cannot be overlooked since narrativity purports the self and identity of a society by means of a narrative track that is in common with that of history. Texts, the ultimate products of literature, are of significance for human beings because people invest emotionally in these long-established cultural products that have been accumulated for centuries. Such statements of Greenblatt are all indebted to Foucault's concept of power and discourse along with Louis Montrose's phrases about the cohesion of history and literature as Greenblatt does not consider the textuality of the history exempt from the historicity of the text, and what is shared by both is the influence of ideology in the sociohistorical context. Hence, one can make use of the historicity of consciousness as well as the irresistible urge for contextualization with regard to the idea that a text is not simply a complete thing in itself but something connected to the things outside of itself. What surrounds the text outside is what is referred to as self-fashioning, a blend of the consented enforcement of absolute power and the disturbed desire of the Other coming from inside. Once uttered or written, words which form the language are estranged from the initial point where they came into being.

Greenblatt is aware of the power of language to both drift us away from the past and affiliate us with it through its elements linked to the present. Thus, language is a significant indicator of history and is a component of self-fashioning as Greenblatt's self-fashioning occurs in language through discourse. Likewise, Greenblatt's own "desire to speak with the dead" (1988: 1) stems from the unbreakable diachronic chain of the present with the past, for the past which now constitutes the history is prevalent in the present by human beings that are both cultural artifacts and their creators, passing them down to the future considerably by literature, which heavily relies upon language.

2.2.2. Michel Foucault

The French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is an eminent figure in the development of new historicism as Greenblatt owes him a great deal for laying the foundations of his major principles. The formation of new historicism as a school of thought is significantly influenced by Foucault, primarily in the scope of the production of knowledge, operation of power, and their circulation through discursive practices. As well as being a philosophy-oriented historian, his works in the fields of psychology and sociology are the key factors for the development of Greenblatt's theories.

2.2.2.1. Knowledge and power

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault propounds that archaeology does not deal with hidden meanings in discourses or what could be called allegorical. Instead, it defines discourses as practices constituted under certain rules to follow. To be specific, discourses are nothing outside themselves. They are described in relation to their formation and transformation besides the conditions and situations they are produced in and utilised for. Archaeology, moreover, does not seek to bring back the origin of a discourse. With neither intervention nor intention of restoring the origin of the discourse-object, it rewrites it (1972: 155-156). Archaeology is then an important means to study history. Instead of striving to find out a system of differences, it solely describes the differences in a particular time. By detecting a matter and determining its relation and circulation with other matters or events, it brings light to the different nature of events in the past (188).

Amongst many terms, perhaps it is the concept "episteme" that new historicism was keen to adopt from Foucault who defines it as "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems" (211). By the epistemes of a given epoch, one can obtain information about the discursive formations, the way they are situated in society, and how they operate. These give way to the knowledge we have of the specific era. One can even see the potential power relations by means of epistemes since the binary oppositions of inferiority and superiority changing through time reveal themselves in discursive practices. Thus, epistemes enable us to see what kinds of constraints and limitations are exposed in a given culture at a specific time and in the

given discourse. These sets of relations tend to be various and change even in a specific time as the discursive formations alter in accordance with the dominant knowledge and science in the era.

Genealogy, which is often thought to be the continuity of Archaeology in *The Order of Things*, is a crucial concept for the formation of new historicism, and Foucault initially borrowed it from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. It focuses on the history of the present, striving to figure out the roots of the system of knowledge that is in effect at the present time. Its main instrument is the discourse, and through discourses, he puts forth the unstable nature of knowledge, drawing attention to the diversity of what has been called truth and its authenticity in the sense of the validity of truth. In other words, no discourse, whether ancient or modern, is truer than another; instead, it is the power that controls and is controlled by the authority that determines what truth is.

Foucault's concept of power is widely criticized by some literary critics for its negative implications. As claimed by John Brannigan, power for Foucault is a "monolithic system" with merely negative connotations attributed to it (1998: 52-53). Explaining the cultural and historical events in a single period of time through only one mode of power seems too totalitarian, ignoring the diversity of cultural and social phenomena. However, according to Foucault, power serves as a productive network:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (Chomsky and Foucault, 2006: 152-153).

Power, for Foucault, is not a notion solely related to the body as force or violence. Instead, it is the relationship between the individuals whose actions have an effect on one another with no absolute power obtainment since power exists anywhere and everywhere. The punishment of criminals by the state, an issue in which Foucault has taken considerable interest, can efficiently illustrate the matter. There has been a shift in the focus of judgment on the motives and passions of the criminals through not only punishment but also supervision, which enables criminologists and psychiatrists to delve into the subjects' knowability. The soul is private and peculiar; thus, it requires an elaborate investigation as well as a means of punishment. Through power, a free

subject is got to do what they would have not done otherwise, which involves a restricting and reshaping touch upon their will. Unlike what is seen on the surface, power is not merely in the hands of the political authority since it is present in any aspect of society with its unstable nature that resists inhibition. Power generates truth and thus knowledge. Because power, truth, and knowledge are inseparable, it would be reasonable to make the claim that knowledge classifies individuals, and thus it greatly influences the generation of power and the punishment techniques to preserve the temporarily obtained power.

2.2.2.2. Discourse and discursive practices

Discourse, for Foucault, is the only route to the past. New historicism makes visible the power relations implicit in texts and discourses. After all, a discourse inevitably shapes and is shaped by the society and the sociocultural elements of which it is a product. The power to represent is the power to dominate. Discourse is a vehicle of power, perhaps the most effective one. Hence it plays a major role in determining the positions of the subject, which, according to Foucault, bears double meanings: something self-aware and something controlled, subjected. The subject is the outcome of an inescapable social and historical development. As a social and historical construct, it manifests itself in and through discourse.

Discursive practices, as developed by Foucault, refers to the sets of operations of discourses for knowledge formations, contrary to the common opinion on its focus on linguistic practices. The term discourse may be deceptive by name; however, Foucault's concept of discursive practices is a combination of materiality and language, not solely linguistics. Foucault defines discourse as "a body of anonymous, historical rules" and intends to write a history of discourse (1972: 117). As he suggests in one of his courses, discursive practices as a phenomenon are "systems of thought", which is beyond the scope of "the demands of logic or linguistics" (1970-71: 199). Furthermore, as Bacchi and Bonham put it, what Foucault emphasises is not the content and linguistic structure but "the operation of a whole package of relationships" in a broader context to produce what is said to be true through symbolic and material opponents to legitimatise the things said (2014: 179). In the Foucauldian sense, discourse correlates to knowledge, so discursive practices aim to find out the ways knowledge is produced through various practices in different fields. By understanding

how specific knowledge operates in different areas, one can be led to the core of the knowledge formations and the motives behind them.

“Discourse”, for Foucault, “is constituted by the difference between what one could say correctly at one period [...] and what is actually said” (1991: 63). Hence, it is the process and the circumstances giving way to the production of the discourse that determine what is said and what could have been said to replace the uttered. These processes and procedures are referred to as “rules of formation” by Foucault, and it is the application of these rules to a specific context and period which constitutes the limits and scope of what is likely to be said. Foucault’s rules then function as sets of relationships which render it possible to expound the ways of becoming to know things. Discourses are practices, and practices are knowledge. Thus, discursive practices refer to how discourses install regimes of knowledge that are at work through the operation of their own rules of formation that give them authority. As Mol suggests, putting Foucauldian discourse into work requires “words, materialities and practices” to “hang together in a specific, historically and culturally situated way” (2008: 9) rather than disunity and autonomy.

Indeed, Foucault’s main purpose is to display how pieces of knowledge construct their truths through bodies of rules i.e., sets of relations which are essentially discursive practices. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault asserts the term “historical a priori”, an episteme which is a set of unconsciously formed ideas that determines the concept of the truth and knowledge in specific periods. Discursive regulations in each period then both shape and are shaped by the claims to truth. Since the meaning and structure of discursive formations are formed as superior in a given period, they indicate claims to power. The unity within a period or historical a priori may demonstrate the relations between other historical a prioris. Altogether, the organization of a visible existence of a domain of knowledge becomes evident. Power, which comes to light by means of the way epistemes are formed, is a set of force relations.

Discursive manifestations alter in accordance with the needs of a self-regulating order of power in a specific period. Consequently, the way power is produced and circulated among subjects can be seen in texts, statements, and events within discursive formations. Foucault further asserts that each particular historical time has only one episteme whether displayed in a theory or put into practice, and each episteme is bound

to be overthrown by another as the social and cultural dynamics fluctuate in time. This remains an obstacle in front of the objectivity of truth. Similarly, in *Language and Man*, he emphasises the epistemological consciousness of man, making a comparison between the Classical Age and the Modern Age. In the former, human beings serve as representatives of the locus of knowledge whereas they are treated as the source of knowledge in the latter. Thus, whether ancient or modern, the mention of objective truth has not been possible.

Simply put, it is striking that Foucault's assertions and ideas influenced Greenblatt on his way to establishing the foundation of the new historicism theory. Power dynamics in the Foucauldian sense have played a significant role for new historicists in that whoever has the power, though temporarily, has a say in what is considered truth as knowledge is shaped in their hands, as well. Thus, in order to have an opinion on either the literature or the history of a specific period, it is vital to pay great attention to the historicity of text and the textuality of history (Barry, 2002: 172). It is through such scrutiny that one can get access to what was once called the truth, and in light of it, the centralized and the marginalized stand out, the latter being suppressed by the former. Likewise, as a way of displaying the power in effect, discourse, which reveals the sociocultural context of a historical era through utterances and operations, is made use of. Not surprisingly, discourse itself is under the influence of knowledge formations which ultimately determine the dynamic nature of the truth.

New historicism mainly focuses on the way the forms of power operated in the past under a certain ideology. Thus, new historicism seeks to make the power plays visible. The forms of power inevitably differ according to the era and the dominant forces, the authority, and those whose voices are prominent. However, the nature of the very power remains the same. As Foucault asserts, "power is everywhere" because "it comes from everywhere" (1978: 93). In other words, power operates in a systematic way including the efforts of all individuals and groups making up a whole. Power would exist irrespective of the presence of any matter or being since it can stand solidly in its own right. Thus, epistemes conduce to the crystallisation of power plays, reflecting the nature of knowledge in a particular era, and both serve the same purpose: domination. It is the domination and operation of power at work that new historicism tackles.

2.3. New Historicism in Literature: The Telescoped 'Text' and 'Co(n)text'

New historicism emerged in the 1980s as a novel theory in the study of literature. As a literary theory, it is "a new way of approaching literature, open and attentive to alternative perspectives and identities" (Brannigan, 1998: 23). This new perspective differed from historicism in that it strived to break free from the traditional study of history which prioritises history over any other source that mirrors the historical conditions of an era. Additionally, historicism was found problematic by some critics primarily due to its standing up for universally valid knowledge and the objectivity of truth. In order to overcome the pursuit of objectivity in the making of history, which unsettled the basis of historicism, new historicism came into existence both as a reaction and a continuation.

'New historicism' was primarily coined in 1980 as a term rather than a theory in Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare*. The book was ground-breaking to the extent that it analysed and approached Jacobean drama by linking the plays to the social and political events of their era, unlike the previous and existing criticisms which had scrutinised them from the perspective of these former critics' contemporary period. New historicism's main interest in Renaissance studies stems from the fact that those plays, particularly the Shakespearean ones, serve as prominent examples of the cultural forms which shed light on the power plays in the era. After all, ideological and cultural forms including human behaviour and practices that are embedded and fabricated in society participate in the production of knowledge.

New historicism employs a method of parallel reading of both the literary and non-literary texts of the same historical period, attributing equal weight to each text as sources of history with "an epistemological scepticism about assured historical truth" (Eagleton, 1996: 197). These texts function not only as co-texts but also contexts as they work in collaboration to provide an integral picture of the past. Hence, unlike historicism in literature, there is no privileging of the literary text, textuality, and representation in new historicism, and perhaps, this is the essential novelty in the latter theory. In other words, as Louis Montrose puts it, the scope of new historicism initially focuses on "the textuality of history" and "the historicity of texts" (1986: 8), justifying the even importance of the texts that are both literary and non-literary. Hereby, it is

essential for the literary text to be closely read within an “archival continuum” in rigorous association with co-texts, which are not particularly literary (Wilson and Dutton, 1992: 8).

New historicism is now at the heart of literary theory and criticism mainly due to the uncertainty about the reliability of the narrative which has given way to the resurgent interest in history among contemporary critics and literary figures. Hayden White draws attention to it in *The Content of the Form* as “in contemporary historical theory the topic of narrative has been the subject of extraordinarily intense debate” (1987: 26). Elsewhere, White uses the term “emplotment” for the historical writings which historians select and juxtapose into a particular kind of story (1973: 7). This collaborates with the assertion that human beings make sense out of things and events only in the form of a story, and that history and literature are indelibly intertwined. Among many other new historicist critics, Oppermann refers to an event that had happened as a “historical product”, which is also the “textualized past” (1998: 44). Textualization of historical events, inevitably, calls for the reconstruction of the context; hence the ineluctability of indulgence in the containment of the social, cultural, and political phenomena forming the context. “The context itself is a text of sorts” Oppermann quotes La Capra, and she elaborates on it: “The reality of the past is constituted by multiple historical texts; therefore, the context is viewed as a text” (49). The past is contingent upon various contexts, and it undermines the objectivity of the conception of history due to its progressive nature resisting the authentic recovery of meaning from written records.

Literature, with no precedence, serves as evidence in new historicism. It is of great importance that new historicism treats equally both literary and non-literary works that reflect the social and cultural conditions of a specific period which are evidence of past events. For this very reason, its main scope is the minority groups such as women, homosexuals, the insane, and other oppressed and suppressed people who have been marginalised throughout and by history. All these disadvantageous groups of people finally get to have a say in and about the history of which they have been a part. Furthermore, according to new historicism, historical events cannot be repeated or reexperienced as they occur in a specific time around particular people and events which cannot be interpreted through today’s principles and beliefs. This applies to

works of literature, as well. As Greenblatt exemplifies in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, a literary work must be interpreted in terms of both its historical and textual context because it is not autonomous from the sociocultural conditions of the day in which it was written. Thus, history and literature go hand in hand to support one another while coming to conclusions about a specific time bound up in the past.

The collaboration of history and literature is necessary due to new historicists' claim that history passes down from one generation to another by means of human beings that are deprived of the faculty of objectivity. That is the reason for the insistence on a literary text or a historical event's being evaluated with the help of several literary and non-literary works that can function as witnesses for a relatively objective recording of the past. A literary text functions as an active participant in the process of fashioning and interpreting identity, society, and history. As Howards propounds, "[r]ather than passively reflecting an external reality, literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality" (1986: 25). It becomes viable to shape and fashion one's identity and individuality when they are conditioned and contained in a discourse under the influence of the era.

For new historicism, history is not a set of facts or objective knowledge composed outside the written texts. Instead, it asserts that historical conditions are demonstrated by texts as both material products and functional elements that make up social and cultural formations. Texts contribute to the process of historical change. In return, they may also constitute the change. Self, which is the key element of society, is ideologically and linguistically constructed. Since language as a medium forms and reflects individuals and groups, operations of power and interests within these systems are also revealed through literature. All kinds of texts make the power plays visible and thus literature's function in this dynamic is that it subverts and resists power to the end of demonstrating the power relations. Equivocation and multiplicity of the text, ambiguity in meaning, and (un)masking the power of authority reinforce the operation of power in literature.

New historicists seek to find ways of depicting the emergence and operation of thought systems and knowledge creation by shedding light on how the suppressed became or remained hidden initially and what forces are at work in unmasking them now. Representations of marginalised groups such as women, homosexuals, and the

unprivileged races in self-contained and self-regulated cultural systems by the oppressors constitute primary concerns of new historicism. Each epoch has specific, unique modes of power. As a result of this, subversion that is contained within texts is inevitable. By using subversion, powerful discourses modify power in their favour. Systems of representation function as systems of power in that both promote and contain subversions within their very structure. The suppressed are always contained within the suppressor's system of representations. The representations that form a discourse show the extent to which the texts form a circular and closed discourse. How one is represented indicates one's individuality in social, cultural, and political situations. The ability or power to represent is given to the victor since the power to represent is the right to dominate.

Power dynamics play a vital function in new historicism. The dominant identity or culture suppresses the marginalised minorities which are labelled "the Other". The marginalised groups, the oppressed are exposed to confinement and surveillance and are subjected to restraint. Thus, when the subject is observed, they are also recorded, which results in the fallacy that they are known by the writers of history. In reality, they are judged, and the process of their being observed and recognised results in their being controlled. When the subject fights back through resistance to authority and power, it justifies the existence of the circulation of power. It is new historicism's aim to make visible the power structures within ideological frameworks that each society has in a particular era. These power dynamics are implicit in texts and discourses, which are ideological constructs used for political and ideological ends.

When power dynamics come into question, it inevitably calls for discourse. Discourse, a term new historicism owes to Michel Foucault as previously discussed, occupies a crucial place in the theory. Discourse is often associated with the term "ideology", which is based on the cultural and economic values of a society. Hence, discourse is the product of the sociocultural conditions reinforced by the authority, and it is inherent in language which puts forth the dominant ideas and characteristics in a society. As the embodiment of social aspects of society through language, discourse contains and reflects power relations in that power is a living organism in every aspect of life. It might fade away, yet it never dies out. Discourse contains several disciplines in various aspects of life. The religious discourse adopted by a king for the continuation of his

hierarchical authority, the discourse of science to justify the new doctrines, or even the discourse of fashion to keep up with the age exemplify the importance of discourse for the influence of power circulating all around us.

Contrary to traditional history which puts emphasis on the wars, heroes, and leaders, new historicism opts for highlighting the disadvantageous groups such as women overshadowed by men, the insane, criminals, and slaves all of whom have been marginalised by the norms and standards of the society. What they all have in common is the negligence they have been exposed to by the writers of history. Drifting away from historicism's ignorance of overshadowing the less powerful ones, new historicism is concerned with the stories of the outcasts in order to give voice to the truth of the less privileged. New historicists, then, seek the truth not as it has been formed, written, and transmitted by the holders of power but as it is displayed by concrete and impartial evidence with no room for interpretation and generalisation.

New historicism employs specific terms and concepts such as textuality, contextuality, and the textuality of history. Critics and philosophers such as Hayden White, Louis Montrose, and Dominick LaCapra put great emphasis on the textuality of history. According to them, in order to obtain historical facts about and knowledge of history, the only means is the texts, which underlies Louise Montrose's emphasis on the "historicity of texts and textuality of history":

...[h]istoricity of texts: the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing-not only those texts that critics study but also the texts in which they study them; and, on the other hand, by its acknowledgment of the textuality of history: the unavailability of a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, that has not already been mediated by the surviving texts of the society in question-those "documents" that historians construe in their own texts, called "histories," histories that necessarily but always incompletely construct the "History" to which they offer access? (1986: 8)

What Montrose aims to highlight with this expression is that history is not an objective construct, so it by no means is reliable. Instead, it is formed like a literary text, with equal importance given to both the context and the meaning. Hence, it is not to be interpreted differently than a literary text as they are complementary bits of one another. Literature in new historicism is a system that is formed up as the ultimate amalgamation of social, political, cultural, economic, and religious power dynamics in a society. New historicists associate literature with history as a witness of the past,

overshadowing its aesthetic aspect. As literary texts are the products of the human imagination, so is history as it passes down through textuality, which entails human creativity on the way to its formation. As a result of this, the nature of history in terms of its reliability becomes open to dispute. New historicists claim that history is not a branch of science. Literary texts that define and describe people and things in specific time periods are then some ways of interpreting history. Literary works are associated with the contexts of the events, which makes it impossible to evaluate literary works outside their social and contextual domain.

In literature, too, new historicism emerged as a device for literary interpretation. Despite the popularity of feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial approaches, it stood out pioneered by a group of American critics according to whom literature serves as a document to support the political formations in a society as long as it contains bits of the social and cultural circumstances and conditions of a historical period. New historicism, thus, pays attention to literary works to unearth the past through the historical contexts presented in them. Literature is part of societal production, so a literary work must elaborately hold a mirror to the conditions of the context in which it is set. Therefore, it is crucial for new historicism to scrutinize any specific detail as an indicator of the social practices the society performs, and thus fashion, belief systems, lifestyles etc. fall within the group of elements that provides the reader with historical and sociocultural details for a relatively more credible sense of truth.

New historicism in literary criticism differs from the former criticisms in that new historicism does not consider literature completely autonomous from history which historicists once claimed to be self-sufficient and objective. This, eventually, implies the priority of history over literature which new historicists strictly refuse. New historicists further pay close attention to the life of the writer due to the belief that the writer's experiences contribute to the construction of the text. As Tyson states, new historicism seeks an answer to the question "[w]hat do the interpretations tell us about the ideological forces in play for the interpreters?" (2015: 268). Hence, the text cannot be evaluated outside the conditions under which the writer has lived. As previously emphasised, context is another key point for the new historicists. As a new historicist, Hawthorn elucidates that a text heavily relies upon the context even though not necessarily on the time and the place (1996: 11). Then, context is what renders literary

works timeless and universal. In the postmodern era, the difference between the text and history seems to be narrowed down since postmodernists tend to define history as a type of discourse made of the interaction of fictional constructions and power dynamics, putting emphasis on their ideological and subjective nature. What new historicism genuinely objects to is traditional historicism's marginalisation of literature, isolating it from history as well as new criticism's divinisation of literature, prioritising it over history. Literature, for new historicists, is under the inevitable effect of the dominant ideology in the period they are yielded in.

In a new historicist analysis of a text, a number of features are of paramount importance. A new historicist literary critic focuses on the highlighted power dynamics in the text. By whom power is wielded to what end is vital in addition to the threat by the marginalised to take possession of the power. They all reflect the historical and cultural events which may have an effect on the text and on what the literary text could reveal about the language, knowledge, and power in the specific culture with the kind of reality and power pattern it sets up. All these points provide a new historicist critic with a relatively reliable account of the past with no privileging of either the centre or the margins.



3. CAROL ANN DUFFY: THE FIRST FEMALE AND LESBIAN POET LAUREAUTE

3.1. Carol Ann Duffy's Era: Reconsideration of the Role of the Woman in Social Conventions

Facets of family life in the United Kingdom have varied primarily due to the changes in “legislation, technology, attitudes and expectations” which resulted in “a massive feminisation of the workforce since the Second World War; widespread contraception leading to deferred decisions about the start of families; and divorce, remarriage and cohabitation becoming much more acceptable” (Jenkins et al., 2016: 5, 28). Women, until the 1970s, were not allowed to realize their individuality. From fertility to domestic life, from political rights to gender roles, and from assigned religious roles to how they were supposed to behave, all were at the hands of men in order to maintain the patriarchal order. However, as time moved on, women rebelled against the established order. Between the 1970s and 1990s, women, including Duffy as a (young) adult, were at the forefront to change the accustomed treatment of women by society, demanding rights to be on equal terms with men. Thus, it is of importance to scrutinize the developments affecting women and Duffy's mindset during the last three decades of the twentieth century in Britain.

3.1.1. Family, Marriage, and Maternity

The institution of family is the basic unit in society with the traditional mindset that women have roles primarily as a daughter, a mother, and a wife. The Caldwells argue that the assigned gender roles function as control over women “[in order] to ensure the operation of the male-dominated, ancestor-oriented, patriarchal, larger family” (1993: 2). It applies to the family structure in Great Britain, as well. Accordingly, unhappy women in unhealthy marriages might result in marital breakdown and dissolution of families. The role of women in a relationship is thus crucial. However, when women are not given the value and appreciation they deserve, they might feel othered and oppressed. It eventually induces them to take action for their rights as in the founding of female organisations. For widening the scope of women's roles in the institutions of family and marriage, the late twentieth century witnessed some innovations.

When the contraceptive pills were introduced in 1961, it was a harbinger of something beyond family planning. That is, to some extent, women could finally control their

reproduction by using birth control pills. Regardless of marital status or age, women were able to have access to contraceptive advice and supplies since family planning services were incorporated into the NHS under a reorganisation on 1 April 1974 (Iglowski-Broad, 2021). Free of charge, the pills allowed women to partly control their preferences in giving birth. With the widespread use of the pills, a decline in childbirth was seen from 1968 to the early 2000s. It might be directly linked to the availability of the pill, in conjunction with improvements in women's social life in terms of education and employment opportunities. Furthermore, women from all classes had free access to contraceptives, and it might have caused either a delay or a decrease in the rate of childbirth throughout the country (Thane, 2010: 11-12).

Correspondingly, the number of divorces dramatically increased in the 1970s throughout England and Wales. The total number of divorces was 23,868 in 1950 while it was 119,025 in 1972. Between 1970 and 1999, divorce rates reached the peak with 165,018 in England and Wales in 1993 (Hughes & Church, 2010: 22). The reason for the increase in divorce rates might have stemmed from the accessibility of birth control pills—since women did not have to continue a marriage solely for raising a child with parents—as well as the rise in women's stepping more into the realm of employment with equal payment. Economically independent, women could direct their own lives with no worry about unexpected pregnancies and/or arranged marriages, which might have been unsettling for the heteropatriarchal order's ostensibly ideal family structure. Thane draws attention to the traditional family life of the UK as a myth, propounding that “[b]y 1993 more than one-third of all births in England and Wales occurred outside marriage” (2010: 12). The idealised conventional family structure seems to be nothing beyond a forced utopian belief to maintain the heteropatriarchal order. Likewise, Carol Ann Duffy's only daughter Ella was born in 1995 outside marriage.

Women were exposed to violence both in and outside the domestic sphere. Being coerced to give birth because of the lack of sufficient precautions can be considered a type of violence, the psychological violence, which was accompanied by domestic violence, as well. Domestic violence was inflicted on the weakest members of a family, that is young female members. Wives suffered from violence with or without the presence of children. Women did not fully rely on the police against domestic violence

since the police was another male-dominated institution. The police did not take necessary measures against domestic violence especially when the female victims stated that they did not want to prosecute the husbands. Women's not pressing charges against husbands for physical abuse out of dismay was linked to insufficient police support and further fear of escalated violence by the husband (Edwards, 1986: 231, 236). Poor evidence of the abuse also compelled the police not to take the reports seriously. The victims were even accused of being "stupid" for getting raped. In most cases, victims doubted themselves due to society's attitude towards them (Medea and Thompson, 1974: 25-26); therefore, they maintained their silence.

As a kind of both psychological and physical violence, rape had been implicit in Britain. As a sub-category, marital rape was another grand issue women had to face. It was not until the 1990s that a wife's getting raped by the husband was declared illegal (Williamson, 2016: 382). It may indicate that when women were trapped in violent marriages, it stemmed from how hard a divorce was, that they were mostly financially dependent on men and would lose custody of children if they got a divorce.

Though not less severe, before the marital rape however, the rape of unmarried women was an issue of concern. As a means of fighting back at rape and its practitioners, the first Rape Crisis Centre was established in London in 1972, and the first Women's Refuge was founded in Chiswick in 1977. It goes without saying that all these woman-favouring organisations were interconnected. With the establishment of such centres aiding women against rape, the number of case reports increased. For instance, the number of officially reported rape cases was 1,334 in 1983 and 1,433 in 1984; however, the number dramatically reached 1,842 in 1985. Police's attitude towards victims was "more sympathetic and understanding" (The World's Women 1970-1990, 1991: 63). With the cooperation of the police accompanied by the victims' determination to report the violations, more cases were reported to the authorities by women.

3.1.2. Politics

The 1970s opened with the Equal Pay Act in the UK, which was enacted with the aim of avoiding sex discrimination in employment. It can be said that the act was an amendment to women's rights in the workplace, and thus its primary focus was the reconsideration of employed women for whom it pursued equal treatment as men in

the same sector. The below quotation highlights the fair treatment of men and women with the same occupation under the act:

(4) A woman is to be regarded as employed on like work with men if, but only if, her work and theirs is of the same or a broadly similar nature, and the differences (if any) between the things she does and the things they do are not of practical importance in relation to terms and conditions of employment; and accordingly in comparing her work with theirs regard shall be had to the frequency or otherwise with which any such differences occur in practice as well as to the nature and extent of the differences (Equal Pay Act 1970).

With the act, women could step into the work area under relatively better conditions and with humane treatments. Thus, they realized that they did not have to financially rely on men to lead a life. The increase in the divorce rates in the decade, then, may be an outcome of the act since women gained the awareness that they were not stuck in a marriage for their entire life because of economic dependency.

As a constitutional amendment, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 provided a firm ground for prohibiting gender-based discrimination in the workplace, giving people the legal right to sue employers practicing sex discrimination. Moreover, it provided pregnancy and maternity rights in the workplace. The rights of pregnant women and women who had just given birth were protected by workplace rights. With the enactment, the prioritisation of unmarried men and/or women by employers over married citizens was prohibited. The act dealt with both male and female discrimination on the grounds of sex or marriage targeting mainly female employees (Walker, 1975: 14-16).

In 1976, the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act allowed women to obtain a court order against abusive male partners. Without the necessity of divorce proceedings, women were finally protected by the law against domestic abuse. The Act was extended in 1978 with the law's fully restraining men from beating their wives (Thane, 2010: 7, 11, 12). Civil partners as victims of domestic violence, with no legal bond to tie them as couples, were also protected under the auspices of this act (Scott, 1980: 29).

The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 was just the initial step of basic precaution for domestic abuse and the protection of its victims. Two decades later, the Family Law Act 1996 was enacted as a crucial one and an improved version of the existing protective orders for the victims of domestic violence under

civil law. With the passing of the act, divorce became more like an official process rather than a cultural event. Due to the increase in divorce rates, it aimed to provide the partners with some time to reconsider the marriage. In the case that the marriage was not to be saved, then the act provided the couples with a conciliatory approach to the divorce (Freeman, 2021). Thus, women did not have to put up with an abusive husband, being frightened by the consequences of getting a divorce.

The Family Law Reform Act 1987, enacted during the Thatcher Era, narrowed down the gap of legal distinctions between married and unmarried couples. The concept of illegitimacy was abolished in the eye of the law (Gilbert, 2018: 90). Thus, a child with unmarried parents was brought under constitutional protection. Consequently, the myth of a traditional woman figure as a wife and a mother was distorted. Women, at least, were legally allowed to give birth to a child outside of marriage. It demonstrates that the rights of women, especially those of queer women, had been secured to some extent in the closing of the twentieth century.

Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013), The Iron Lady, served as the first female Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1990. A grocer's daughter, she had been the leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990. She held a turbulent place in the history of politics. Often criticized for not being woman-friendly in politics and known for her strict adherence to the masculine codes of politics, she was disliked by a multitude of women. Her legacy to Britain is said to be the privatization policy, whose purpose was to ensure that "power [was given] back to the people" (Coman, 2013), which is repeated in her memoir as "the state's power is reduced and the power of the people enhanced" (Thatcher, 1993: 676). In fact, its effectuation has been controversial. She has been claimed to not leave any legal legacy for women except for the values of hard work and self-discipline, the characteristics which made her climb up the ladder of men (Purvis, 2013: 1015-1016). Her celebration of Victorian values and demonstration of a housewife figure were harshly criticised by critics in the year she died. She was alleged to use her femininity only when needed: "She irritatingly played the feminine card whenever it suited her purposes" (Murray, 2013). Likewise, it was believed that she took an approving stance on power and principles of patriarchy, adopting patriarchal norms (Campbell, 2013). As a female leader, she did not meet the expectations of women by not embracing more women in the cabinet. Instead, she

pursued power which she fully enjoyed and secured a firm place in history just like any other man. She “[had] done nothing to advance the cause of women” and thus she was a woman but not a sister for many feminists (Wilson, 1987: 199). In a speech on women, giving away her admiration for the prevalent patriarchy, she uttered:

The battle for women’s rights has been largely won. The days when they were demanded and discussed in strident tones should be gone forever. And I hope they are. I hated those strident tones that you still hear from some Women’s Libbers’ (Thatcher, 1982).

As such, despite women’s efforts to gain power and the same civil rights as men even during Thatcher’s premiership, women seemed to be disappointed with her as the first and only female prime minister with no support for the feminist cause or the advance of women. Still, it did not pose an obstacle to women for demanding equal rights as men since women maintained their campaigns after the Thatcher period just as they did before Thatcher started her first term.

3.2. Sexual Politics in the 1990s in Britain

I think gay, straight, whatever, relationships are just a banal fact of life. They’re just straight facts. I was very surprised: it made me see that the country I thought I lived in wasn’t the one I lived in.

—Duffy, *Guardian*, 1999

The United Kingdom, with England as the epicentre of British traditionalism, has been overwhelmingly conservative in any aspect of the country in history. The conventional mindset, though in a liberated way to keep up with the contemporary world, manifests itself anywhere and everywhere. In the same manner, whatever was outside the traditional spectrum was either subordinated or punished by the state through their treatment as marginal. The UK, not surprisingly, pursued heteronormativity for people to accommodate their life accordingly, which posited heterosexual relationships as the “normal”. Suppression of marginalised people because of their untraditional sexual orientations resulted in an uprising through their adopting active roles in the country’s social and political areas to undermine the subordination they had been exposed to. The decade 1990s witnessed a multitude of changes in the way the governmental bodies as well as the communities perceived queer people. As a queer herself, Carol Ann Duffy published *The World’s Wife* at the very end of the mentioned decade, which

may indicate that the influence of the social and cultural movements accompanied by some events of the decade discussed below had unquestionable effects on her poetry.

A group self-named OutRage! pioneered by lesbian and gay activists were founded in 1990, in the wake of the murder of Michael Boothe, a homosexual man found dead in an open area mostly visited by gay men. Insufficient actions taken by the police against homophobic violence were thought to have facilitated this brutal crime (Hamilton, 1994). The group became active in defending open gay relationships and fought for their counterparts to have equal rights to those of heterosexual citizens. In order to protest the police who arrested gay couples kissing in public, the group members organised a “kiss-in” at the statue of Eros, Piccadilly Circus, London (Mattsson, 1990). OutRage! thus served as a pioneer in defending homosexuals’ rights. The group’s efforts to stand up for sexual minorities’ civil rights proved rewarding since the rate of gay men’s conviction for gay behaviour fell by two-thirds between 1990 and 1994 (Vesey, 2014: 58). The insufficient police support and sympathy towards homosexuals had an incitive effect on homosexual police officers who suffered from the public pressure and homophobia in the workplace, too. The instinctive need to contact other homosexual police officers to minimise the psychological pressure they were under paved the way for such an organisation which is still active in Scotland. Thus, the Lesbian and Gay Police Association was founded as a homosexual campaign dating back to 1990. Despite the limitations of the era in order to spread the scope and aim of the association, the members managed to establish a network through word-of-mouth propaganda to move collectively against homophobic attitudes and environment, especially in the workplace (Colvin, 2020).

1992, too, features as a crucial year for homosexuality in the decade. Homosexual inclinations had been thought to be indicators of a mental illness by the World Health Organization by that year. The year marked the removal of homosexuality from the WHO’s list of psychiatric disorders. By then, homosexual people had been exposed to detrimental treatments to be cured (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2014). Medical abuse of particularly gay men included electroshocks and aversion therapy through electric shocks when they were shown erotic photographs of men to associate the pain with homosexual tendencies. Drug-induced nausea was also conducted to avert the sexual pleasure from naked body parts of men (Peter Tatchell Foundation, 2014).

June 1994 witnessed the formation of London Lesbian Avengers, which was founded against lesbophobia by some former members of OutRage!. Today, too, they are widely known for their propaganda near Buckingham Palace, which intended to eradicate the Queen Victoria Monument for her alleged assertion that lesbians did not exist. In the following year, eight Avengers invaded the Sunday Times and handcuffed themselves to the editor's desk to protest the published article written on them which asserted that the group members loathed all men (Lesbian Avengers, n.d.).

Mermaids, a charity that described their target population as “transgender, nonbinary and gender-diverse children, young people, and their families since 1995” has become one of the leading LGBTQ+ charities in the UK. Their initial aim was to provide emotional and financial support for gender-diverse young people and their families until their twentieth birthday. Individual support for self-esteem and coping with emotional and mental distress has been the linchpin of the charity (Mermaids, 2022).

A group of men convicted of offences of gross indecency came to be known as The Bolton Seven in 1998 when a copy of their consensual group sex tape was handed to the police. They were put on trial because one of the participants, Turner (seventeen and a half at the time), was below the age of consent for homosexual activities which was amended from 21 to 18 in 1997, and despite the presence of consenting adults, homosexual acts were legal only if solely two people were present in the course of the sexual activity (Dearden, 1999: 318). For heterosexuals, on the other hand, the age of consent was 16 as stated in Part I of the Sex Offenders Act. With the prosecuted men's applying to the European Court of Human Rights, the charges against them were dropped (Wintour, 2001). Concordantly, the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 equalised the age of consent for both homosexuals and heterosexuals, lowering it to 16 in Britain.

The 1990s showed genuine determination and mobilisation regarding homosexual rights to create a gender-diverse community. Likewise, views on homosexuality and amendments in legal legislation accelerated considerable progress in the decade. At the end of the 1990s when Duffy remarked that she thought “gay, straight, whatever, relationships are just a banal fact of life” (1999), she might have implied the redundancy of the challenges the gay and lesbian people had to encounter only because they did not serve the ideals of heterosexual mindsets. By legislating against sexual

minorities, the British government had prompted them to be marginalised. Acceptance of diverse gender roles is then required for a healthy community. Recognition of unconventional gender roles also implies a diversity of sexual activities, which may ensure the integrity of an amicable community. After all, the sex drive, sex as a basic physiological need, must be met for a healthy state of mind (Maslow, 1943: 381). The efforts to keep sexual minorities under control do not go beyond the denial of their existence, and groups that are not legally allowed to meet their sexual desires may tend to cause more trouble in the event of being bereft of their basic needs; hence the rebellious activities against the authority with a sense of frustration.

When Adrienne Rich elucidates that “[l]esbians have historically been deprived of a political existence through ‘inclusion’ as female versions of male homosexuality”, she draws attention to the marginalisation of lesbians by homosexual men (1980: 649). Considering homosexual women as “female gays” creates just another inferiority of the state of being a woman. Despite all the advancements in the 1990s, homosexual women were not as active as their male counterparts in campaigns for equal rights among genders. Furthermore, the groups and associations established with the aim of defending sexual minorities’ rights were predominantly referred to as “gay” by the media and authorities. This double marginalisation then brought about multifaceted otherness in lesbians’ lives. The split of the two subbranches of homosexual identity eventually led to the isolation of female homosexuality through activist groups such as the direct-action group Lesbian Avengers. The consideration of lesbians as female versions of gay men stimulated feminist and lesbian organisations to put an end to the inferiority of such women, which might be one of several reasons for Duffy to present lesbians as protagonists in various poems in *The World’s Wife*. By creating female homosexual narratives, she alters the way history tackled lesbians.

3.3. Carol Ann Duffy

3.3.1. Carol Ann Duffy’s Biography

Carol Ann Duffy (1955-) was born in Glasgow as the eldest child of five and the only daughter of Mary and Francis Duffy. Both parents were of Irish Catholic descent, as the mother Mary (often called May) was Irish, and the father Francis (Frank) had Irish roots inherited from his grandparents. When Carol Ann Duffy was six, the Duffy family moved to Stafford, and their migration is told in her poem “Originally” (1990).

She started Roman Catholic primary and middle schools and then attended Stafford Girls' High (Dowson, 2016: 6-7).

An ardent admirer of poetry from a very young age, Duffy initially published her poetry in magazines. Her passion for literature resulted from the profound influence of her early English teachers as she acknowledges in an interview:

I grew up in a bookless house – my parents didn't read poetry, so if I hadn't had the chance to experience it at school I'd never have experienced it. But I loved English, and I was very lucky in that I had inspirational English teachers, Miss Scriven and Mr Walker, and they liked us to learn poems by heart, which I found I loved doing (Moorhead, 2011).

A subsequent influence on her was the poet-artist Adrian Henri with whom she moved to Liverpool when she was sixteen and lived together for eight years. She once said he gave her confidence, poetry, and sex during their relationship (Langley, 2009). As for her college years, she received a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Liverpool in 1977.

As a prolific poet with tremendous success, she received prestigious awards. She was granted an award for the National Poetry Competition in 1983, which foreshadowed her becoming the future Poet Laureate, and the Eric Gregory Award in 1984, which brought her into prominence as a conspicuous poet. In 1995, she had a daughter called Ella whose father was the poet Peter Benson. In 1996, she became a lecturer in poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she later was appointed to the position of Creative Director of the Manchester Writing School (Britannica, 2022). In those years, her partner was the feminist, coloured author Jackie Kay with whom she had a 15-year relationship and raised Ella together. In 2009, Duffy was appointed as the first woman, the first openly lesbian, and the first Scottish Poet Laureate.

It is obvious that her literary career dates back to her early life and is accompanied by literary figures, especially poets, among whom she has spent a great deal of time that might have shaped her world perspective. The impact of such intellectual people on her self-development has been conspicuously massive. However, perhaps, it has been her family roots and sociocultural background that have inspired her to yield outstanding works of literature. That is, she is the amalgamation of British culture since she was born in Glasgow to parents of Irish roots yet spent most of her teenage years in England. To an extent, the traces of her childhood manifest themselves in her

doings and the ideas she stands for. Though a “benign atheist” (Independent, 2007), the religious education she received and the fluidity in her sexual preference, for she is bisexual, inevitably contributed to her progress in and shaping of her writings, as well. Thus, before touching on her masterpiece *The World’s Wife*, it is crucial to tackle her background which holds up the mirror to the sociocultural dynamics in Britain in the last three decades of the twentieth century, her most fruitful years in terms of the initial preparation for her literary success.

3.3.2. Carol Ann Duffy’s Background

Carol Ann Duffy comes from a mixed social background. Her early years and the dynamics which have contributed to the emergence of her artistic success have been overwhelmingly influenced by the sociocultural and political events of the time in Britain. As a Scottish person with Irish origins, she received education in convent schools, which might have shaped her early personality and point of view towards life and the production of her literary works.

The Duffies moved from Scotland to England when the father Frank, “a trades union activist” (Dowson, 2016: 6), found employment at English Electric (now GEC). Frank, one of the strongest figures of influence on Carol Ann Duffy’s life, “has always been very involved in politics” as she utters in an interview (Viner, 1999). She further implies that Frank, as a Labour Party Councillor, had always stood for his sociocultural background, specifically during the elections when Thatcher was rising to power with her party. Given that The Falklands War broke out and came to an end in 1982 with tremendous British success, the elections mentioned above refer to the ones in 1983, ending with the overwhelming percentage of Thatcher’s Conservative Party with a 42.4 per cent share of votes against Duffy’s father’s Labour Party with a 27.6 per cent (House of Commons, 1983). That is, being an ardent member of the minority in the parliament, his father was a dissident, too.

Her grandfather was also very political as he was put behind bars for sedition by Churchill. At an advanced age, however, he became Deputy Lord Provost of Glasgow due to the respect he had earned for fighting for the benefits of his union (Viner, 1999). It is obvious that her family had been innately political which was handed down from one generation to the other, taking action as active participants in politics to have a say for themselves and their kind that belongs to the same sociocultural class. Despite her

family's active role in politics, she has approached it from a different path. When she mentions her opinion that "the kind of energy politics would take has gone into poetry" (Viner, 1999), it ought not to evoke the idea that she has not been political. On the contrary, it may indicate that it is her poetry and the power of her meticulously chosen words that are political by nature. The inherited interest in taking sides with the marginalised, less powerful parties in politics runs in the blood, and she discloses this concern in her lines.

Furthermore, before the Thatcher Era, the focus of her poems was primarily personal rather than political:

Then, for a while, the world around me sort of forced me to be more political. It's swung back again since, but I'm grateful that it also prompted me to use the dramatic monologue. Telling poems in the voices of other people, perhaps people who had been marginalised, was a breakthrough that led me to *The World's Wife* (Wroe, 2007).

As she elucidates above, Thatcher's premiership as the first and only female prime minister in Britain's history became an inspiration for her to write *The World's Wife*. Though not completely political, her poetry had always contained "a public element, particularly during the Thatcher years" since she believes it to be the writer's responsibility to "have a finger on the national pulse" (Wroe, 2014).

Duffy's father did not consider being a poet as a "job", yet Duffy says "he became very supportive" as she "proved him wrong" in time (Stephenson, 2016). Compared to her relationship with him, Carol Ann Duffy had even a stronger bond with her mother May. In an interview, Carol Ann Duffy herself does not say much about the mother when the reporter Viner asks her if Mary has "an untold story". She receives the answer that Mary "was largely looking after [them]" (1999). Duffy clarifies May's meticulous care for the education of her children because she "had to leave school at 14 and she regretted it so much" (Mirror, 2009). Duffy further expresses her mother's influence on her poetry saying, "[s]he was entrancing, fantastic at making up rhymes and stories. I think it was her Irish syntax and voice music that started my love of words" (Mirror, 2009). May passed away in 2005 due to cancer. Perhaps she gives voice to her mother in her poems through the embodiment of her protagonists with the mother and wife identities.

As to her intimate relationships, her love affair with Jackie Kay is quite unconventional, especially for a woman from a Catholic family. She defines her parents as “very loving” and “not judgmental”. These affectionate and open-minded parents, as she claims, would act on their instincts and go further to not turn her in even if she “murdered someone” (Viner, 1999). Thus, it gives the implication that her sexual orientation is not judged by her parents since their love for her prevails over the norms of conventional morality. When she was appointed as the Poet Laureate after a 10-year delay, her gender-fluid identity was finally officially recognised, too. As Langley puts it, “[a]fter 350 years of male dominance, the new royal poet is a Glaswegian lesbian [...]. Ten years ago she was passed over, but now her time has come” (2009).

What denied her the new position of the Poet Laureate in 1999 was declaredly the then prime minister’s attitude. The British media asserted that Prime Minister Tony Blair had concerns about her sexual orientation, which, he claimed, the citizens would not welcome (Brown, 2009). Describing Duffy as “a working-class lesbian with militantly Leftist credentials”, Langley, speaking for Blair, ascribes the adjectives to him as, from Blair’s lens, she is not to be embraced in the conservative state affairs (Langley, 2009). Ultimately, a decade later, succeeding Andrew Motion upon his voluntary retirement, she started to hold the Poet Laureate position. When she remarked “I think we’ve all grown up a lot over the past 10 years” (Garnham, 2009), she might have drawn attention to her being accepted as an openly lesbian after a decade of wait.

This brief account of her social background may point out a few reasons, if not all, why she embodies the characters of marginalised people in her poetry and writings. As an individual “living in the twentieth century in Britain and listening to the news every day and [...] reading the newspapers every day and meeting people who’ve had wonderful or horrifying experiences” (McAllister, 1988: 70), Duffy naturally has tackled the sociocultural issues in her poems, including *The World’s Wife*. With a working-class heritage, she investigates matters from a socialist lens. She takes sides with the oppressed or the weaker one who is forced to fit into the capitalist world to survive. Thus, a struggle against the powerful is always an issue in her writings.

Secondly, when merged with the Catholic belief system, her working-class heritage seems to be affected even more by the Protestant British oppression. Being raised

Catholic in Stafford with Irish origins, it is posited that Carol Ann Duffy has felt inferior in Protestant England. Furthermore, born in Glasgow, she is also officially Scottish with no trace of a Scottish accent, yet it renders her even more alienated in the English world. Thirdly, sexual fluidity as another characteristic of the people on the margins of society may have prompted her to take sides with the marginalised people and stand up for them in her writings. Even though she had had heterosexual relationships in the early stages of her life, she had a girlfriend, a person of colour who was not appreciated by the British for a long while due to racist bias.

Finally, she is a feminist and has always been one, which clashed with the country's long-standing conservative moral norms and values. Therefore, feminist manifestations lie at the core of her poetry. Regarding this, she once said in an interview: "I have never in my life sat down and thought 'I will write a feminist poem.'" (McAllister, 1988). Though she has never strived to write with the intention of feminist activism, a feminist cry has revealed itself in the way she has put her observations into literary production.

Consequently, her individuality and experiences which have culminated in her feeling like an outsider and acting like a dissident may have had an inspiring effect on her *The World's Wife*, too. Within the scope of contemporary matters such as social inequality, oppression, and alienation, she humorously constructs a kind of reality in her poems through language. It is her background that has impelled her to sympathise with the historical and mythical characters included as protagonists in *The World's Wife*, and in order to give voice to their untold concerns, she embodies them in fictionalised personas. Thus, she achieves her goal regarding poetry, which is "present[ing] it, as it is" since "poets are recording the human experience" (McAllister, 1988: 72).

4. NEW HISTORICIST ANALYSIS OF THE THEMES OF LESBIANISM, VIOLENCE, AND MISANDRY IN *THE WORLD'S WIFE*

The World's Wife, a poetry collection that contains thirty poems, consists of the subverted rewritten versions of some mythological tales and historical events by female narrators from female perspectives. Consisting of dramatic monologues, the book presents well-known, celebrated literary works and historical characters in a novel way, remaining true to the originals. *The World's Wife* as a faction, a form of narrative based on historical figures and/or events that are woven together with fictitious elements, alludes to mythology, history, and sociocultural events with the suppressed, inferior individuals such as women with mother, wife, and/or lesbian identities. Duffy's aim was to celebrate the original stories the poems are based on by finding a truth in them "which hadn't been amplified previously" (Wood, 2005) as a unifying concept. Thus, the poetry collection allows such women to reconstruct history whose objectivity the new historicism theory substantially doubts.

Duffy completed her work about the spouse-voice of famous males from history in five years (Smith, 2000: 16). For her, *The World's Wife* is "quite an autobiographical work" unlike its merely ostensible appearance as a "popular entertaining book" (Wood, 2005). She, in fact, prefers her work to be considered "a hidden, personal narrative" (Wood, 2005). This is the reason why the book starts with "Little Red-Cap" and ends with "Demeter", respectively alluding to her teenage years as a poet-to-be and her motherhood with her daughter's entrance into her life. Understandably, *The World's Wife* is dedicated to her daughter Ella as well as her mother May and then-partner Jackie as mentioned in the beginning of the book.

As for the title of the collection, it refers to the former unvoiced women who can now individually express themselves through lines, creating an overall collective voice. The satirical title also evokes George Eliot's definition of gossip which is associated mainly with women's coalescence: "Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender—not the world, but the world's wife" (Eliot, 1996: 490) as Lanone quotes (2008: 4). Considering gossip as a public opinion, or a women's discourse, Eliot subverts its negative connotation and presents it as a means for women to speak out. It may indicate that both Eliot and Duffy, through satire, criticise women's having recognition in relation to their husbands.

Duffy, in an interview, remarks that the poems' composing a collection was not deliberate. Essentially, it was "an organic process rather than a project" (McGowan & Webster, 2019). She further states that the process of writing the collection started with her retelling Ovid's metamorphosis of Midas, which she "very much enjoyed doing" (2019) and continued with rewriting the story of Tiresias from Mrs. Tiresias' point of view. In a former interview, the way she comments on her writing the collection can be associated with the scope of new historicism as what urged her to yield the poems was rewriting the historical truths from the oppressed minorities' voice with references to her private life as an author and/or to the era she had been part of:

It wouldn't have worked if you'd just gone through a list of favourite tales and revised them. You had to find something hard and truthful in the story. [...] Each poem had to be personally honest, and have some kind of autobiographical element in it, whether it had happened to me or whether it was an emotional or intellectual truth (Viner, 1999).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, new historicism necessitates the reading of a particular work in light of the cultural events that have shaped the author's perception of the world as well as the parallel reading of literary and non-literary works. Duffy provides us with *The World's Wife*, a poetry collection which can be analysed in light of the new historicism theory, elucidating her subjectivity in it as she hints at as follows:

What I wanted to do in the book was to look at all the stories—fairy tales, myths, stories from history, film and pop music or whatever, stories of heroes which had informed me as a writer, part of my cultural ancestry (Wood, 2005).

The elements that contributed to Duffy's formation of the renewed versions of the poems in *The World's Wife* range from fairy tales to songs, all of which this study presents as allusions to significant events in the late twentieth century. Such components reveal the core of the then society and culture that shaped Duffy's point of view and thus voice in poetry.

4.1. Lesbianism

The period between the 1970s and 1990s was a turning point for lesbianism in Britain. On October 13, 1970, The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was founded at the London School of Economics by a couple of students with radical demands to be met. The GLF encouraged members to stand for themselves and fight for social change as they were aware of the power of collective voices to change the world (British Library, n.d.). The publication of Sappho, a magazine aiming to "educate society about the true

facts of lesbianism, support lesbians and women's causes" (Redchidgey, 2009) in 1972 was another ground-breaking event. In the same year, the first official Gay March, the UK Gay Pride Rally was held on July 1. In 1974, Maureen Colquhoun was elected as the first out lesbian Labour MP. Sex Discrimination Act 1975 is yet another important event for the evolution of lesbianism in Britain. Chapter 65 of the act explains it as

[a]n Act to render unlawful certain kinds of sex discrimination and discrimination on the ground of marriage, and establish a Commission with the function of working towards the elimination of such discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity between men and women generally; and for related purposes (Sex Discrimination Act 1975).

The year 1977 is also of significance due to the first conference on the workplace rights of homosexual people held by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), for which Duffy wrote a poem titled "In A Perfect World" later in 1999 (Viner, 1999). The 1980s witnessed an advance for lesbians, too. Having been acknowledged by other homosexuals, lesbians affiliated with gay men for getting the rights which heterosexuals had always had yet homosexuals had been deprived of. In 1982, The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre requested funding from the Greater London Council for being able to afford counselling through a helpline and other resources such as a library. It was only in 1985 that they received funding from the council, and the council got abolished in 1986.

In March 1987, AZT –short for Azidothymidine–, which was the first promising medication for treating AIDS, became available on prescription in the UK. In the following year, Section 28 of the Local Government Act imposed a ban on the promotion of homosexuality in schools and education materials. In reply to the legislation, actor Sir Ian McKellen discussed the issues about the section on BBC Radio 3. In 1989 he co-founded Stonewall "to tackle legalised homophobia" in his own words (Stonewall, n.d.).

4.1.1. "Queen Herod"

"Queen Herod" is based on the historical figure King Herod and his polygamy. Queen Herod, the narrator of the poem, is assigned to be one of the ten official wives of King Herod, who was the Arabic-born Semitic king of Judaea between 37–4 BCE. For more autocratical power, he divorced his first wife Doris and wedded Mariamne, a Hasmonaean princess, to end the conflict between his dynasty and hers. Due to his

mental instability and the suspicions cultivated by his sister Salome about Mariamne, he turned blind to the events around him and went with the flow of intrigue, which resulted in the murder of Mariamne whom he was fond of (Perowne, 2022). In fact, this is only one version of what history tells about the king. There is no mention of the queens except for the intrigue stemming from the alleged affection of the king for Mariamne. No voice of any of these queens in history has reached up to the present.

In “Queen Herod”, however, queens demonstrate solidarity instead of conflict with one another, and it serves as an essential subversion. The poem contains four queens including the narrator and three others that might be the attributed wives of Herod in recorded history. The capitalised letter “Q” in the word “Queen” is prominent throughout the poem, which represents the attempt of the queens to come to the forefront, not overshadowing the king but being on equal terms with him to give voice to their silenced concerns. One of the most significant points in the poem is that no male is given the ground to express himself. Instead, only the queens speak, and it is mostly to each other, partly in an erotic tone. Conversations that are solely among these women hint strongly at lesbianism, which is one of the most salient themes in the poem.

Female homosexuality in “Queen Herod” begins to manifest itself in lines 13-16 upon Queen Herod’s cry for help and reliance on the queens mentioned at the beginning of the poem:

“with everyone fast asleep, save me,
those vivid three – till bitter dawn.
They were wise. Older than I.”

What Queen Herod desperately requests the queens to save her from is the king’s sexual sovereignty since both her royal position and status as a wife impel her to satisfy the sexual needs of the king. Thus, the “vivid” outlook and appearance of the queens seem promising to Queen Herod for salvation. The adjective “vivid” is of high importance since it is defined as “producing a strong or clear impression on the senses” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). The impact of the physical appearance of the other queens on the narrator implies her inclination to be sexually stimulated as her senses are also moved. The vividness of the queens is elaborated by Queen Herod in the ensuing phrase in the line where she focuses on the bitterness of the “dawn”. Dawn

symbolises not only hope and the beginning of something new but also birth (Protas et al, n.d.). It sheds light on the narrator's unwillingness to have sexual intercourse with the king because it may result in pregnancy despite her sexual unattraction to men.

In line 16, the emphasis shifts to the characteristics of the queens who are defined as "wise", which the narrator associates with old age. Duffy, upon her sixtieth birthday, mentioned that she liked getting older and that it was interesting since one gets "more experience" and feels "more comfortable" (qtd. in Stephenson, 2016). Furthermore, according to Kathryn Betts Adams, age is often thought to be inseparable from wisdom as "wisdom is associated with empathy and compassion for our fellow human beings based on having experienced similar events or feelings oneself" (2013). This may also account for Duffy's expectations from her relationship with Jackie Kay, who had already been experienced as a mother unlike Duffy.

The appeal of wisdom associated with old age for the Queen, thus, stems from either her fondness for physically mature women or her being of the opinion that those three queens have gone through the same hardships on a similar path to hers. In Duffy's case, it seems more likely to be the latter. When she met Jackie Kay, Kay had already had a son, and during their relationship, Duffy got pregnant with Ella. That is, the queens in "Queen Herod" might be the reflections of Jackie Kay in Duffy's life as she already experienced motherhood, which Duffy prioritises in life (Wood, 2005). Moreover, on the issue of women's late-found-out interest in relatively older women, Kirkpatrick asserts that "[m]iddle age for some heterosexual women opens the possibility of finding a new intimacy with a woman, an important option considering the diminished availability of male partners at later ages" (1989: 89). This may be the case with Duffy, who met Jackie Kay in her late thirties after ending a long relationship with Adrian Henri (Stephenson, 2016).

Furthermore, the queens' old age and wisdom may be an allusion to the lesbian-supporting charity called "Mermaids". Founded in 1995, the main objective of the charity has been providing financial and emotional support to gender-diverse children and their families (2020: 2). Correspondingly, the queens function as the administrators of the charity, giving emotional support to the Queen and her newborn by keeping the male baby away from her (line 34). It may further suggest that Queen

Herod's baby can be gender diverse, and in order not to be forced to a future heterosexual relationship with a prince (line 67), the lesbian queens help her and her mother.

In lines 25-27, Queen Herod depicts the queens with their physical features such as "the tallest Queen", "the Queen with the hennaed hands", and "the black Queen". Crucially, she does not utter their names but refers to them through descriptions of their physical features which can reveal what she finds attractive in women. The use of henna is often attributed to Asians and the black skin pertaining to people of African origin. Henna can be considered as fashion under the category of Body Art (the 1960s-80s), which is a significant indicator of a ritual-based social life. Henna is also a form of body art through which people, women, in particular, express their own style and understanding of life. According to the tone of the narrator of the poem, the hennaed hands of the Queen catch her eyes, which she finds sexually attractive. The narrator's intimacy with the black Queen may indicate Duffy's interest in women of colour like Jackie Kay, who is of Nigerian origin.

The sexual attraction between the women is brought into sharper relief in the way Queen Herod and the black Queen stare at one another as described in line 30: "Queen to Queen, with insolent lust." In lines 43-45, the physical attraction between the black Queen and the Afrophile Queen Herod is demonstrated as follows:

"and the black Queen scooped out my breast, / the left, guiding it down/ to the infant's mouth."

The intervention of the black Queen in the act of breastfeeding does not seem to be accidental. It is her sexual impulse that encourages her to touch the Queen's breast now that she has an opportunity. The Queen's seductiveness stemming from the charm of her breasts appeals to the black Queen. It may be an allusion to the upbringing of Duffy's daughter Ella, whom she raised with Jackie Kay (Scottish Poetry Library, n.d.). Since they were cohabitants, it is very likely for Kay to have witnessed and perhaps become involved in Duffy's breastfeeding of Ella as Kay was already experienced.

In the following section of the poem, the lines "No man, I swore, / will make her shed one tear. / A peacock screamed outside." (46-48) feature as a demonstration of the prejudice against the heterosexual relationship in which Queen Herod is unsatisfied.

The scream of the peacock then symbolises the discomfort of heterosexual men who are uneasy about lesbians, lesbians' relationships, and even their marriages which were not legal in the UK until the enactment of the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013. Peacock in Greek mythology is often associated with Hera, the goddess of maternity. Having trapped her watchman Argus into the tail of a peacock, Hera could witness her husband Zeus's sexual activities with other beings (Claus, 2023). Similarly, in "Queen Herod", the peacock serves as the all-seeing being that seems to be disturbed by what it has just seen. For the most part, it signals the extramarital intercourse between the lesbian queens that is not going to lead to reproduction, an essential token of heterosexual marriages. Because of the biological impossibility of impregnation between a lesbian couple, Duffy too tried a baby with the author Peter Benson when she was living with Jackie Kay (Scottish Poetry Library, n.d.).

In the conversation with Barry Wood, Duffy admits herself to be the persona behind several characters in *The World's Wife*, including Queen Herod:

[...] although I'm wearing the mask of Queen Herod or Mrs Beast I'm not lost in my own place, my own life. It might be that it is autobiographical in that it might be true to my imaginative life or my emotional life but not necessarily true to the actual details of my life (Wood, 2005).

As clarified above, the poem might contain elements that are directly based on her life. Consequently, the newborn in the poem and the narrator's efforts to protect the baby with the help of the other queens could be accounted for in terms of Duffy's relationship with Jackie Kay when Duffy became a mother.

In the lines "I watched each turbaned Queen / rise like a god on the back of her beast" (58-59), Queen Herod's sexual desire for women is evident as she comes across "turbaned" Queens whom, once again, she depicts through their physical appearance. It is a way of subversion in that Duffy herself mentions the queens as if they were objects, disregarding their emotional state just as done in fashion magazines. Duffy seems to emphasise the sex discriminating concept of fashion magazines with her publication "Out of Fashion: An Anthology of Poems" (2005) where she compiles some contemporary poets' favourite poems written on fashion. Thus, she does not only satirize the fashion magazines such as *Vogue* that objectify women's bodies but also wittily creates a work of literature in the same subversive way in which she characterizes Queen Herod.

Covers of the magazines in the 1970s in Britain showed turbaned women to promote turban fashion. The photograph of Marie Helvin as a turbaned model shot by her husband David Bailey was published in the February 1976 issue of *Vogue* with the subheading “News in Colour” (Crazy About Magazines, n.d.). The cover demonstrates news on various topics including “News from the sex revolution”. On the one hand, it may refer to gender since homosexuality had come into vogue in that decade. On the other hand, it might be foreshadowing the sex positions. In the poem, too, the description of the queens “rising like a god” on the back of camels may indicate not only the way Queen Herod reflects her admiration for the elegance and self-confidence of these women due to their body posture but also a sex position which might arouse her.

“We do our best,
we Queens, we mothers,
mothers of Queens.
We wade through blood
for our sleeping girls.” (90-94)

Towards the end of the poem, the narrator speaks on behalf of all lesbians. They have suffered and overcome hardships and challenges for the benefit of their “sleeping girls” who stand either for the lesbians who passed away or for the ones who do not have enough courage to go public about their sexual preferences like Maureen Colquhoun (1928-2021), the first openly lesbian MP did.

In relation to this, known for their first action which was about their attempt to eradicate Queen Victoria’s monument for her alleged statement that lesbians did not exist, the London Lesbian Avengers founded in 1994 against lesbophobia (Lesbian Avengers, n.d.) can be the source of inspiration for the above lines. Compared to gay organisations which were first formed in the 1970s, lesbian-based ones were established in a later period. Thus, “sleeping girls” might refer to the lesbians who lived in the decades with neither collective force nor voice.

In parallel with this, a 70s advertisement about Inter-City (Dunn, 2018), the name of a brand given to the passenger services of the long-haul express by British Rails, bears both verbal and visual elements in it (Science Museum Group, n.d.). The singing-along

female passengers outnumbering males are the central characters in the video footage. Still, the transcription of the song is more crucial. The lyrics are as follows:

“We travel Inter-City like the men do.

Away from the boring kitchen sink, I need you out.

We are leaving behind the daily random common task.”

The first impression the song leaves on the listener might be its being a campaign for feminism. However, when scrutinised in light of the events and actions in the early 1970s such as the first official Gay Pride Rally in the UK (1972), the commercial appears to be propaganda about lesbianism. The call for going out “like the men do” is a way of encouraging homosexual women to come together and collectively perform their own marching like gay people who overshadowed female homosexuals back in the decade.

The message in the above lines of “Queen Herod” then is not any different than this advertisement of the 70s. Furthermore, it seems to prove effective as Maureen Colquhoun was elected as the first openly lesbian member of Parliament in 1974. Unlike queens and their support for Queen Herod in the poem, Maureen Colquhoun did not receive enough support from women since “there were very few women MPs” (Dawson, 2021) at that time, and she was deselected in 1977 by the male-dominated party for her “obsession with trivialities such as women’s rights” (Cowell, 2022). By creating a fictional Queen Herod aided by three other queens, Duffy, subverting history, mirrors her ideal 1970s if homosexual women unified and supported each other, which in the 1970s, most women including Maureen Colquhoun as the first openly lesbian MP lacked.

4.1.2. “*from Mrs Tiresias*”

Tiresias holds a place of great importance in Greek Mythology owing to being gifted with foresight, which renders it possible for him to know “the will of the gods” (Hamilton, 2012: 55). The poem is based on Ovid’s version of the myth since Carol Ann Duffy “was asked to contribute to Michael Hoffman’s collection of translations of Ovid” (Wood, 2005) as she articulates in a conversation. Ovid’s Tiresias is cursed by the resentful Hera with being transformed into a woman for seven years by virtue of disturbing a female snake copulating with a male one. It is further claimed that he

was asked by Zeus and Hera whether women or men would get more sexual pleasure in the act of making love. The answer was that women gain more pleasure than men do, which Hera had denied, and inevitably, he was punished with blindness by her yet gifted with knowledge of the future by Zeus (Ovid, 2004: 102).

The poem “*from Mrs Tiresias*” captures solely the beginning of Tiresias’ journey as a woman, who is claimed to have lived for decades. It is the probable reason for the use of “*from*” in the title since his whole lifespan is not encompassed in the poem. The narrator, as in all the poems in Duffy’s collection, is the wife. It is highly significant that she starts the poem with a denoting introduction as a partial statement, which appears to be the explanation for not taking responsibility for the credibility of any of the events she is going to relate next: “All I know is this:” (line 1). As a female narrator, she provides an account of past events through a subjective story to rewrite history. Furthermore, it points out her awareness of the sidedness of stories (re)told by people from their specific points of view with no claim to universal objectivity.

The poem is divided into four parts by the poet, each tracing a stage of the effectuation of Tiresias’ lesbianism. The first part crudely accounts for the return of Tiresias back home as a woman. The first encounter of the husband and the wife is the end of this part where it reaches the climax with Mrs Tiresias’ fainting out of shock. Her reaction to the female Tiresias is of high importance. She, not surprisingly, is startled by what she sees in front of her. The first thing she realises in him is the eyes, yet she moves on to the breasts in a flash. She puts it this way:

“The eyes were the same.

But in the shocking V of the shirt were breasts.” (lines 31-32)

Duffy, in a conversation with Wood, utters that while writing this poem, she was under the influence of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, in which Eliot describes Tiresias with “female dugs” (line 228), referring to breasts. Due to her Scottish background, Duffy thought “dugs” meant “dogs”; hence the inclusion of a “dog” (line 5) in “*from Mrs Tiresias*”. In “*Mrs Quasimodo*”, however, she uses the word “dugs” (line 96) with the meaning of breasts. In this poem, breast fetishism comes to the front with Mrs Tiresias’ reaction.

Moreover, in a New York Times article, Charlesworth describes the power of female breasts as limbs that “can lure its beholders to untimely demise” (1994). Charlesworth, in her statement, does not ascribe the sexual appeal of female breasts to a specific gender. Instead, she leaves the door open for both heterosexuals and homosexuals with no specific sexual orientation as the target. In the same manner, the unsubstantiated rumours about the Wonderbra advertisements in the 1990s have spread even up to today, which claim that the photoshoots of the model on billboards distracted drivers, resulting in several traffic accidents (Independent, 2011). The fainting of Mrs Tiresias right after she realises Tiresias’ breasts and his altered voice goes hand in hand with the effect of the visuals of female breasts in popular culture. The emphasis on breasts indicates the sexual appeal the female breasts carry among lesbians, Duffy herself being a potential admirer.

In the second part of the poem, the narrator strives to get used to the new version of Tiresias, accepting him as a new person rather than another version of the person she has been married to. Her attempts at being mild and gentle with him with the interwoven “sisterly” purports the need to restrain her affection for her:

“sisterly, holding his soft new shape in my arms all night.” (line 44)

The elaborate use of the relatively positive and moderate adjectives in the description of the soft, delicate ways Mrs Tiresias treats Tiresias is further highlighted. She refrains from any behaviour that may potentially hurt him since she is in love with her husband. According to Duffy, “if you love someone, whether it’s a woman loving a man, or a woman loving a woman, or a man loving a man, what’s important there is love.” She further propounds that “[Mrs Tiresias] will now enter into a lesbian relationship with him because love is love” (Wood, 2005). It may once again be an allusion to her relationship with Jackie Kay after a heterosexual relationship with Adrian Henri as she embraces love regardless of sexual orientation.

Similarly, in a 1980s soap commercial, two women wrapped in a bath towel have a conversation on the advice the mother of one of them gave the daughter. In the very beginning of the advertisement, the topic of the advice is not mentioned, it is cast wide and open to interpretation. After the girl remarks “Well, she was pretty big on purity. And gentleness. And mum really stressed mildness... That’s all she said you needed in a soap”, the advertisement comes to an end with a male-voice saying “Velvet bath

soap. Pure, mild and gentle” (Dead on Arrival, 2012). This advertisement, though not directly promoting lesbianism, reveals the expectations of partners from one another. Being both romantic and erotic, the ambiance clearly demonstrates what kind of a relationship a woman would prefer. Moreover, it clarifies the significance of “pureness, mildness, and gentleness” for women to be sexually aroused as in Mrs Tiresias’ holding the new “soft” shape of Tiresias.

Mrs Tiresias’ ongoing desire to kiss Tiresias does not originate from her fondness for his older version but from his new female look, which is the implication of her late-realised sexual inclination. The response of Mr Tiresias is noteworthy as, neutral in tone, it does not put forth whether he takes kindly her affection for him or not. Even so, he desperately restrains his homosexual tendencies as he is aware of the image of lesbians projected in public:

“The curse, he said, the curse.

Don’t kiss me in public,

he snapped the next day,

I don’t want folk getting the wrong idea.” (lines 56-59)

His referring to lesbianism as “the curse” arises from his guilty conscience with his superego acting as a regulator over the tendency. Knowing that homosexuals are not looked on with favour by the people, especially in public spaces, he feels obliged to not only deny but also act against any kind of hint that can give away his homosexual tendencies. Duffy herself comments on him as “a conventional suburban man” (Wood, 2005) who is prejudiced against a homosexual relationship.

Nevertheless, he is not completely disturbed by being kissed by the narrator. Instead, in a safe place, he wants to persevere in the act of making love as two people in female bodies with a female school of thought now that he has experienced and got used to living like a woman. A 1981 documentary on lesbianism called *Gay Life* begins with a street interview on the meaning of lesbianism with the presenter Alison Hennegan. Most heterosexual people in the street define lesbianism fundamentally as the act of “two women making out to each other”, ascribing solely sexual meanings to it. In the following parts of the documentary, the lesbians draw attention to the emotional dimension of their sexual orientation since some of them prioritise the conversations

and friendship with women as well as working with each other “in getting away from the domination that [they] suffer under as women” (Feminist vhs archive, 2021). Anne Bond, a feminist lesbian, avers that she realised her homosexual desires when she joined a women’s group and “felt attracted to those women probably physically as well as admiring them for their strengths” (feminist vhs archive, 2021). In the same manner, Tiresias reduces lesbianism to a close physical relationship, disregarding its emotional aspect while Mrs Tiresias accepts love as it is.

Likewise, in an episode of the TV show *Seinfeld* (1989-1998), where two women talk to each other on the subway, the one who is the best man of a lesbian is holding a wedding present for the couple. The woman next to her overreacts when she comes to know about the wedding being a lesbian one. The seemingly traditionalist woman in her mid-40s loses her senses and reproaches, “My luck I don’t talk to a soul on the subway for thirty-five years, I get the best man at a lesbian wedding”, and the best man replies in panic: “No no you don’t understand, I’m not a lesbian. I hate men, but I’m not a lesbian” (1989). It is clear from this scene that even though the woman is not directly referred to as a lesbian, the implication of being displayed as a lesbian is considered an insult in the late 1980s. Thus, the social pressure homosexuals must have felt is evidenced by the heterosexual people’s concern about the possibility of being labelled as homosexual, which, once again, is in relation to Mr Tiresias’ consideration of homosexual acts in public. Moreover, it was established by the Thatcherian Local Government Act 1988 Section 28 that “promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material” was prohibited:

(1) A local authority shall not—

(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;

(b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship (Local Government Act 1988).

The enacted clause avoids the direct ban on homosexual activities; however, despite its primary focus on informing people in the field of education, the oblique law renders it an invisible force yoked to the whole society regardless of the medium. For this very reason, even though homosexuality was not illegal, the perception of being assumed a lesbian posed a problem regarding one’s image in the public eye just as denoted by

Mr Tiresias in line 59: “I don’t want folk getting the wrong idea” as he associates it to being cursed and is “trapped in his own conventions” in Duffy’s words (Wood, 2005).

In the last part of the poem, the narrator switches between the pronouns “him” and “her” to refer to the husband. As stated in line 78, the narrator now concedes that she is more contented with his new version which is in the shape of a woman with female attributes:

“And this is my lover, I said,”

The narrator gains awareness of her sexual preference by appreciating Tiresias in the female form. The realisation primarily takes its source in the “violet eyes” (84), “blaze of her [Tiresias] skin” (85), “the slow caress of her hand on the back of my [the narrator’s] neck” (86) in addition to “her bite at the fruit of my [the narrator’s] lips” (89), resulting in the narrator’s “red wet cry in the night” (91) with allusions to erotic moments with red lips and wetness stemming from female ejaculation. As Irigaray puts it, “morphologically, [woman] has two mouths and two pairs of lips” (1993: 11). The “bite at the fruit of Mrs Tiresias’ lips” thus carries erotic connotations since the lips might refer to the labia and the fruit to the clitoris. Furthermore, the line is reminiscent of Jeanette Winterson’s 1985 novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* which was banned from the stocking libraries due to Clause 28 (Sommerlad, 2018). It is, in fact, ironic that the promotion of lesbianism through education was counted as an offense whilst the television programmes dealing with lesbianism were broadcast. It might have stemmed from the Thatcherian government’s not being at total odds with the lesbians in the minority as they were cognizant of the collective power of such people uniting against the law that may disregard them.

The poem concludes as follows:

“as she shook his hand
saying How do you do;
and I noticed then his hands, her hands,
the clash of their sparkling rings and their painted nails.” (lines 92-95)

The narrator depicts the scene as the acquaintance phase of two women, one of whom is Mr Tiresias. It is evident that he has utterly become a lesbian as he shows up on a

date with a woman. On May 23rd, 1988, in protest of Section 28, a few women sneaked into the BBC studios during the streaming of 6 o'clock News. Not giving a break to the stream, the broadcaster Sue Lawley got through reporting the news, putting an end to it saying, "I do apologise if you're hearing quite a lot of noise in the studio at the moment. I'm afraid that we have rather been invaded by some people who we have to be moving very shortly" (BBC News, 2018). Her calling these women invaders results from the disturbing feeling she has as a conservative heterosexual woman. In the poem, through the mention of "how do you do", lesbians highlight their very existence in the conservative world of Britain just like the female protestors entering a male-dominated state building. "His hands" and "her hands" in the poem then may be a reference to the men and women who are prejudiced against lesbians as in the people in 1988-BBC studios. "The clash of their sparkling rings" then might refer to heterosexual people who could legally get married, unlike homosexuals. By introducing themselves ("saying How do you do") to the heteronormative realm, lesbians break the habit of fitting into the heteronormative world and obtain recognition despite the bias of the superior heterosexual mentality.

4.1.3. "Mrs Quasimodo"

Quasimodo is the grotesque protagonist of Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) and the movie adaptation (1939) with Charles Laughton starring as Quasimodo. He is often perceived as a deformed supernatural being with notorious physical characteristics with no alluring aspects. The narrator of Duffy's poem is Quasimodo's fictional wife-to-be, who does not appear in the original narrative. Quasimodo in Hugo's novel is not physically appealing to women; however, in Duffy's poem, he is depicted to have various affairs with women after he gets married. He constantly cheats on his wife, and, thanks to it, she realises the essence of her sexual orientation. Mrs Quasimodo principally narrates her own experience with Quasimodo, elaborating on the sexual activity between them. As an attentive observer, she appears to be aware of the reaction of others against their relationship, especially their marriage, which is called "gross". Still, the disdain of others is far from being what undermines their relationship. She implies that they have rushed into a relationship due to the same level of lousiness, and this obliged her to realise her homosexual tendencies later than expected.

The poem, which is another dramatic monologue, includes articulations that hint at lesbian inclinations with Mrs Quasimodo's expressions of her fervent fondness for women even though she does not explicitly refer to it in the lines. Some lines bear ambiguity since they can be associated with religious rings due to Duffy's "catholic upbringing" (Wood, 2005), as well. Still, the homosexual connotations in the poem are salient.

Mrs Quasimodo's journey begins with her false idea that she is required to wed in order to be accepted by society, the same society which labels her and her spouse as "gross" (line 57). In the poem, there is no possibility of a non-heteronormative couple being welcomed by society. Similarly, same-sex couples had not been allowed to get married in Britain until 2003. Consequently, it was imposed on women, Mrs Quasimodo included, that they could consider marriage only in "heterosexual matrix" (Butler, 1999: 68) which serves the societal norms and expectations.

"Mrs Quasimodo" initially hinges on the conservative notion that heterosexual marriage is the ultimate step to a fulfilled life, yet it evolves in the undermining of the marriage institution. The Quasimodos get married, yet, in a short while, Mrs Quasimodo finds out not only Quasimodo's relationships with other women but also her being sexually attracted to them. It hints at the relationship Duffy also had in the past as it was not until she met Jackie Kay after a 12-year relationship with Adrian Henri that she explored her sexual arousal for women (Stephenson, 2016).

In a 1981 documentary on lesbianism called *Gay Life*, the 87-year-old Sybil Morrison remarks that even before the occurrence of the label "lesbian" in the era corresponding to her teenage years, "everybody was supposed to get married" to somebody from the opposite sex. She further elucidates that the emphasis in a woman's life was on marriage prospects, which legitimated heterosexual relationships. Comparing the extent of the vehemence lesbians used to experience in the early twentieth century to that day in the 1980s, she further adds, "I think everything's much easier for people today." It is in line with the concept of lesbianism in the poem since the narrator's masked sexual identity is replaced by the overt sexual acts at the end of the poem.

Likewise, Mrs Quasimodo's awareness of her former undisclosed taste for women is made clear. Still, as the narrator grows older, she finds herself in a relatively evolved culture and society with more tolerance towards homosexuality. Correspondingly,

Duffy thinks the same way about the progress made in lesbians' lives as she says, "I think gay, straight, whatever, relationships" are "just straight facts" making a pun between "gay and lesbian" through the word "straight". She continues, "I was very surprised: it made me see that the country I thought I lived in wasn't the one I lived in" (Viner, 1999) making a reference to her not becoming the Poet Laureate because of the government's prejudice against her sexual orientation in 1999. However, the progress is obvious as she was also supported by several women all over Britain despite the non-supportive authorities.

The opening of the poem remarks the narrator's confession of being sexually attracted to women as a homosexual woman opens up about her sexual orientation, which is also parallel to Duffy's being the first open lesbian Poet Laureate:

"I'd loved them fervently since childhood.

Their generous bronze throats

gargling, or chanting slowly, calming me –" (1-3)

The specific emphasis on the "throats" with the word "bronze" demonstrates the popular taste in women with bronze skin tone both in the poem and in Britain. In the 1970s, women would yearn for a bronze skin colour to look sexually more appealing, which resulted in the sun cream and lotions being advertised. In a 1978 poster for an advertisement, the focus is on three women in bikinis holding a Coppertone brand lotion for getting a tan. The slogan written below the poster is "Whoever you are, you'll get a beautiful tan and beautiful skin." The use of "whoever" is of paramount importance as it embraces all people regardless of their sexual orientation. The inclusion of only women unlike most of the other advertisements with both men and women on the posters makes it even more sympathetic for lesbians who, inevitably, pay attention to the closely situated female models almost holding hands whilst promoting the product. Namely, the poem responds to this cultural trend of putting on tanning lotions.

The above lines may have further implications related to AIDS. When it first broke out, AIDS was referred to as a disorder whose source was unknown and was called by researchers as "A.I.D., for acquired immunodeficiency disease, or GRID, for gay-related immunodeficiency" (Altman, 1982). The throat is also associated with

sexuality as “gargling” is among the ways of protection from infections that might be transmitted during oral sex (Roberts, 2016). Consequently, the mouthwash, “gargling” in the lines, is something relieving for the narrator.

Moreover, the adjective “generous” emphasises the functionality of the throat. She attaches equal importance to both “gargling” and “chanting”, both originating in the throat with the former having a physical and relatively sexual connotation and the latter having a political one, referring to the lesbians’ activism as in the first official UK Gay Pride on July 1st, 1972 with their “strident tones”, which Thatcher “hated” (Thatcher, 1982). Duffy, through the character of Mrs Quasimodo, takes sides with those on the margins of society and subverts history through playing on words by means of ambiguity.

Mrs Quasimodo is aware of her unattractiveness; however, due to her low self-esteem, she exaggerates the lack of allurements in the physical appearance of others, which is also called the Quasimodo Syndrome. By insulting women with words defining their physical forms like hers, she degrades other women. Still, she seems to be confused about women as it is clear in both positive and negative connotations of words. Thus, she changes her mind and focuses on the bright sides of them by calling them “sweet-tempered” and “good at needlework”:

“the village runt, name-called, stunted, lame, hare-lipped;

but bearing up, despite it all, sweet-tempered, good at

needlework;” (4-6)

In Patterson’s interview, Duffy says her “great angry days were in the Thatcher years” (1999). By these lines, Duffy evokes Thatcher’s dilemma concerning the role of women during her premiership. As stated by Beatrix Campbell, Thatcher promoted the mother and wife roles for women though she avoided her own domestic life (2015: 45). She “had escaped from domesticity as a way of life whilst she consigned other women exclusively to that domain” (46). By articulating the roles of women as wives and mothers and confining them in domestic areas, she promotes heterosexuality, and that is what is subverted in “Mrs Quasimodo” by the abandonment of heteronormative values.

In effect, it is ironic as Quasimodo strives to equalise the unalluring aspects of women through mentioning their so-called “good” behaviour. Nonetheless, in so doing, she satirises the beauty standards of lesbians, now that they are female too, constructed by society which she touches upon as follows:

“banging your ugly head against a wall,
gaping in the mirror at your heavy dugs,
your thighs of lard,
your mottled upper arms;
thumping your belly” (97-101)

The above lines are critical of the general beauty standards imposed by patriarchal society on women not only in the late twentieth century but also at present. Accordingly, the first Stonewall anniversary parade in 1970 provides us with a couple of photographs of an unidentified woman holding a large sign saying, “I am a lesbian and I am beautiful” (Gornstein, 2021). In fact, in the 1970s phase of lesbianism, lesbians were unambivalently believed to have masculine attributes. Because of their less feminine looks, they were often thought to be relatively unattractive “dykes”, a specific type of lesbian outlook with the attire of “boots, jeans, ‘men’s’ shirts, as well as short hair” (Faderman, 1992: 581). Duffy was in a relationship with one of those dykes, Jackie Kay, who had a dyke phase in her teenage years. Jackie Kay seems to be a follower of the dyke fashion at the age of 16 as illustrated below in the clothes usually worn by men:



Image 1.1. Jackie Kay, on the right (Random Acts, 2017).

In the following section of the poem, Mrs Quasimodo alludes to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, calling it “an ugly cliché” primarily due to the appearance of a straight couple in all versions: “an ugly cliché in a field / pressing dock-leaves to her fat, stung calves” (7-8) Moreover, it is the first time she uses the pronoun “her” to refer to Quasimodo.

Pressing leaves to the limbs is biblical while it also refers to the literal use of dock-leaves to get rid of the nettle sting. As a practice of herbal medicine, dock leaves are used against stings through “rubbing [them] on stinging nettle rash” (Plant Lore, 1999) “while chanting ‘Dock come in, nettle go out’” (Plant Lore, 1998). In the poem, Duffy establishes a parallelism between phallic penetration and the stinging nettle rash, the remedy for Adam’s penetration (stinging) of Eve being the use of dock-leaves which were used originally to cover the signs of sexual intercourse. The act of phallic penetration, “the brutal separation of the two lips by a violating penis” (Irigaray 1985: 24), is depicted here as an agonising act which requires a cure rather than as one which gives pleasure to women especially if they are not sexually aroused by men.

“But once,
one evening in the lady chapel on my own,
throughout his ringing of the seventh hour,
I kissed the cold lips of a Queen next to her King.” (64-67)

The above lines tell Mrs Quasimodo’s first sexual activity with a female though inanimate being. Except for its religious connotations, “lady chapel” refers to a place where only women gather together like clubs or groups where lesbians get the chance to meet other homosexual women just like Anne Bond who came across several other lesbians in a university women’s group (Feminist vhs archive, 2021). The Artemis Society, started by Sarah Lewinstein in 1978, served the same purpose of creating a place for not only straight but also lesbian women (San Francisco Public Library, 2020). Though not particularly aimed to bring together lesbian poets-to-be, the Arvon Foundation was where Duffy and Kay met during a creative writing course (Tomida, 2016: 43). Consequently, Duffy might refer to both men and women in the course by “Queen” and “King” in the above lines.

In the succeeding lines “Something had changed, / or never been.” (68-69), Mrs Quasimodo questions her former feelings for men as to whether those feelings were genuine or not. Women, for a long while, might have hesitated to consider themselves lesbians due to the established cultural opinion that homosexuality was a disease. This cultural opinion was based on and encouraged by some scientific studies researching the biological basis of sexual orientation.

In one such study conducted by Simon LeVay, it was found that the brains of homosexuals may be different from those of heterosexual people, with “the discovery that a nucleus differs in size between heterosexual and homosexual men” (1991: 1036), diverging in the size of zones in their hypothalamus, the area responsible for the exercising of activities including sexual behaviour. Announcements of scientific results, not surprisingly, might have provoked people to associate homosexual inclinations with mental sickness despite the removal of homosexuality from WHO’s list of mental illnesses in 1992.

“I climbed inside her with my claw-hammer,
my pliers, my saw, my clamp;
and, though it took an agonizing hour,
ripped out her brazen tongue
and let it fall.” (113-117)

Next, the poem presents Mrs Quasimodo commenting on the two women called “Marie” and “Josephine” whom Quasimodo has taken a sexual interest in. Her remarks about Marie are of prime importance. In fact, Marie symbolises Queen Victoria since the narrator “climbs inside her”, which is a rough sexual activity pointing to penetration into the vagina, to tease Queen Victoria in a manner not only sexual but also irritant, reaching the top of her so as for them to be on equal terms. In the following lines, she implies torturing her aggressively as Queen Victoria is claimed to have asserted that such a thing as lesbianism had never existed. While the narrator aims to physically hurt her, she also gets pleasure out of it since she seems to bear the role of a man in a relationship as a dyke. Besides, the “brazen tongue” is significant as the tongue is the organ to articulate sounds and make heard the voice of lesbians, about whom Thatcher comments as “I don’t like strident females” (Murray, 2013).

In 1994, however, lesbians made themselves heard. The London Lesbian Avengers, a group of lesbians, predominantly dykes, invaded the Queen Victoria monument near Buckingham Palace for the supposed claim that homosexual women were not mentioned in the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 due to the nonexistence of lesbianism as a sexual orientation (Loehr, 2022: 146). In such cases, it is proven that female homosexuality has been “usually, and, incorrectly, ‘included’ under male homosexuality (Rich, 1980: 637). One of the first members of the group summarised their aim in the description of the photos she uploaded to the Internet, which were taken during the protest in 1994:

“We invaded the Queen Victoria monument near Buckingham Palace, to demonstrate that, contrary to queen Vic’s assertion, lesbians do exist.”



Image 1.2. (Sered, 2007)

Their anger for their visible invisibility is shown on the flashcards which read “VISIBLE AND VICTORIA’S LESBIANS”, “WE ARE NOT AMUSED”, and “OUT FOR POWER”. In the same vein, as mentioned in the above section, Duffy, though she does not provide details on it, has anger for Thatcher, who replaced Queen Victoria as a symbol of female political power during the late twentieth century.

Duffy explains her use of the bells in “Mrs Quasimodo” as follows: “[T]here’s a church at the end of the road where I live here, and they have bell-ringing. So it’s a constant part of my life here” (Wood, 2005). The ambiguity in the beginning of the poem through the bell metaphor is made clear towards the end where Mrs Quasimodo associates the woman with a bell:

“Then Josephine,
his second-favourite bell,
kept open her astonished, golden lips
and let me in.” (118-121)

Josephine’s letting Mrs Quasimodo in refers to the oral sex between the two women, which supports Sybil Morrison’s statement that she believed things to be much easier for homosexual women in the 1980s. The subtle emphasis on bells is noteworthy since the whole poem is hinged on Christian symbols and metaphors. What had inspired Duffy for writing Mrs Quasimodo then is not only Hugo’s novel and William Dieterle’s movie (Wood, 2005). It is also the culture which Duffy has had an effect on, and, in return, she has been part of.

4.2. Violence

Violence has been present all over the globe even before the recorded history. It has been directed mostly toward women and children as the vulnerable and physically less strong beings. According to the NHS, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in addition to threats and intimidation are all types of domestic violence (n.d.). Controlling and coercive behaviours are also encompassed in domestic violence (Strickland & Allen, 2018: 5). However, the definition of violence seems to have changed until the present. People, especially wives, have not always had awareness of the nature of violence and its subcategories. For instance, it actualised with the passing of The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 that abused spouses were finally under the auspices of the British law against domestic violence. In patriarchal cultures, the belief of women to be disregarded has perpetuated the idea that wives are inferior to husbands, and thus women have been exposed to violence by men, especially husbands, in domestic, physical, and emotional terms. With legislations against violence and establishments of women’s organisations, the twentieth century witnessed and yielded perhaps the most advanced progress in women’s conditions with regards to coping with violence.

In Britain, the 1970s can be said to herald the beginning of the concern of violence perpetrated to women. Not surprisingly, the period corresponds to The Second Wave Feminism, the movement which raised the awareness of women in terms of equal rights in any social, cultural, and political aspects ranging from employment to private

lives including the issue of rape and domestic violence. With the advances in women's lives, the politicisation of domestic violence also escalated (Coleman, 2022). Inevitably, it brought along various feminist organisations, campaigns, and centres for the visibility of the violence women were exposed to and for the safety of women (Summers & Hoffman, 2002: 36).

In 1971 Chiswick Women's Refuge was set up with a subsequent focus on women's safety threatened by men (Godfrey et al., 2020: 3). The establishment of the refuge centre paved the way for Women's Aid in 1974, a national organisation for the future safety of women. In 1973 the first UK Rape Crisis was formed within the body of the government in England and Wales as a network with the aim of providing coordination and support to its members in order to build dawning awareness of sexual violence. In 1976 Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act was enacted. The precautions taken for the female victims of violence were significant, yet what was more groundbreaking was the feminists' violent activities as a way of standing out. In 1970 the Miss World Protest was lodged with flour-bombs at the contest against the alleged objectification of women.

As to the 1980s and 1990s, Shakti Women's Aid was set up in 1986 by Edinburgh Black Women's Group. The primary goal of the organisation was to support all women including black and those of minority ethnic groups suffering from domestic abuse. In 1992, rape in marriage was recognised as an illegal act. The Family Law 1996, with the specific Part IV, came up as an answer to the weak civil justice system which had not been able to provide the victims of domestic violence with protection under the auspices of political rights (Burton, 2008: 33). As for the crime rates committed against women, according to the data demonstrated by Lacey in the graphic "(d) violence against the person", the number of women offenders found guilty of violence between 1900-1960 does fluctuate in percentage with a slight rise, yet it reaches the peak in 1980 with a steep change between the years 1960-1980 as an acceleration in the recorded crime (2018: 139).

Moreover, according to the historical crime data for England and Wales of Official Statistics, the rape of a woman was not recorded until 1995 (4,986), yet it seems to have sharply risen by 1998 (7,132). Concordantly, the reported indecent assault on a woman in 1970 was 12,609 while it reached 19,524 in 1998 (Criminal Statistics, 2001:

53). The records might not give the exact numbers since, in Britain, the rate of the reported domestic violence until the late twentieth century does not seem confidential as the police would pursue unofficial means to punish the abusers off-record since domestic violence was not treated as real policework (Edwards, 1986: 1989). Still, the progress and women's ensuing trust in the law is salient. Under the light of it all, this chapter will cover the exact opposite situation of violence between partners in the late-twentieth century as subverted by Duffy.

4.2.1. "Queen Kong"

Queen Kong is perhaps one of the most intriguing poems in *The World's Wife* as, unlike most (fictional) characters from mythology and history, it is based on a character from the movie King Kong, one of Duffy's favourites (Viner, 1999). Several adaptations of the movie have been made; however, Duffy's poem is based on the 1933 version with the tender King Kong and her possessive love for the Fay Wray character (Wood, 2005). Unlike the movie in which a colossal ape, in love with a woman, terrorises the New York City, the poem centres upon Queen Kong, the fictional wife who is a strong, passionate, and violent lover.

It is of importance that the gender roles seem to be subverted in the poem through both the behaviour and the physical outlook of Queen Kong. Queen Kong presents herself as an enormous gorilla with a dominant personality unlike the "small, little" Kong who has no voice in the poem. It is incontrovertible that the lines correspond to the cultural codes imposed on men and women during the late twentieth century since a man chases a woman and acts in a forceful way to be with the woman under the name of love. The reversed situation in Duffy's couple may evoke the idea that Duffy must be sarcastic to highlight the violent actions of men against women as she would not be taken seriously at the time with a poem written with complete transparency about the toxic relationship between partners. The domestic violence between the couple, only inflicted by Queen Kong, is thus salient in the poem. In fact, it is a kind of rebellion against the domestic violence exercised by men towards women to direct the attention to the situation of women suffering from men, particularly their husbands. In line with the notion of violence that erupted during the late twentieth century in the UK, Duffy holds a mirror to the sociocultural dynamics of her era in an ironic manner through

“Queen Kong” as she thinks poems to be “looking for the missing truth, rather than accepting the way we’ve been taught” (Viner, 1999).

To begin with, as mentioned above, the narrator Queen Kong is the only possessor of voice throughout the poem since the dead King Kong cannot utter any words either in or out of favour of Queen Kong’s claims. The poem begins with a memory she recalls from their first days together. Even though it initially seems innocent, she implicates stalking him by “peeping in at his skyscraper room” (line 1). In the late twentieth century, it was predominantly men who were notorious for stalking women as a way of violence. However, in the poem, it is the woman assaulting the man, with the aim of raising awareness for the situations women had gone through even though Duffy calls the poem a “great love” (Wood, 2005).

According to a post by New York Times, women were stalked mostly by their exes either they once dated or were married to. Brody draws attention to its being potentially dangerous due to most of these men’s notion which is “if I can’t have her, no one else will” (1998). In line with this, stalking as a mode of violence gets off the ground. Queen Kong, similarly, strives to establish superiority over King Kong resulting in a Panoptic³ effect on the prisoners in addition to women’s being controlled through the gaze. The discerning point in this instance is not a woman yet a man’s being stalked. In a study of mental conditions of the abusers in stalking cases, Dr Mullen arrived at the conclusion that, though a minority, some of the stalkers were suffering from a mental disorder called erotomania, which is manifested primarily by the “intimacy-seeking” stalkers with the delusional concept of these perpetrators’ misplacing love which they firmly believe to be reciprocated (Mullen et al., 1999: 1248).

Queen Kong’s forced intimacy as in the lines “He liked me to gently blow on him; or scratch, / with care, the length of his back with my nail.” (66-67) is overshadowed by Kong’s reluctance to have Queen Kong around as clarified in the lines “[...] But then, heartsore as I was, I set to work. He would be pleased [...]” (73-74). Queen Kong’s tone in the poem suggests that “it was absolutely love at first sight” (line 14), yet it is not known if it was a requited love since Queen Kong is an unreliable narrator, holding the power.

³ Bentham, J. (1995). *The Panopticon Writings*. New York.
Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish*, New York, 195-228.

Stalk is a type of violence now, yet it has not always been so. The reason for this is that it was mainly women who were exposed to this type of violence by men, with the lack of precautions or preventions for the safety of women who had been neglected. Giving the opposite incident of a stalk case among genders, Duffy relates to the insufficiency of cultural codes and political regulations for women's protection back in the era when the poem was written.

In line 2, she calls him her man, just like men who had claimed rights on women. This smothering, suffocating way of referring to another human being as if a possessed object is yet another type of violence, which has been accepted by society as normal until women started articulating possessive phrases. In fact, the uses of "my man" (lines 9, 34, 55), "my little man" (line 2), "he was mine" (54) serve as the focus of attention since it is now a woman who belittles a man by objectifying him by means of the powerful domain of language.

In a conversation with Duffy, Wood touches on Queen Kong's being possessive of King Kong unlike Duffy's claim that it is a love story:

"There's an ambiguity about the whole thing, isn't there, because it's both a powerful expression of an obsessive love but it does also reverse those ideas about who's strongest in a relationship" (2005).

Duffy answers him with another question: "If you loved Queen Kong, do you think you could go and live with her?" Wood continues to explain his point by commenting on the end of the poem, where he believes the poem to be about "a love based in unfulfilled desires and yearnings". Duffy answers "yes" and moves on to another poem. Duffy's vague reply regarding the poem may indicate that the poem is in fact based on a toxic relationship. She may, through making a male interviewer question the essence of the poem, provoke men to question the very nature of the feelings they believe to be about love, which results in "a strong affectional tie" developed under "persistent maltreatment" (Dutton & Painter, 1981: 140). It can be a reason behind Queen Kong's "little man" being physically present by her side.

Duffy's music taste is based on the bands and singers such as the Beatles and Elvis Presley from the 1970s (University of Lincoln, 2020). A member of the Beatles back then, John Lennon's hit "Imagine" with several political messages is also against violence with a criticism on materialistic possessions as reflected in the lyrics:

“Imagine no possessions / I wonder if you can”. As an ardent fan of the Beatles back in the 1970s, Duffy might have been influenced by the song or the same events that might have inspired Lennon to write the lyrics. Moreover, while writing the song, Lennon is said to be “heavily influenced” by Yoko Ono, her wife (History, 2019) as many other figures from history whose success had been assisted by the wife.

The poem continues with Queen Kong’s meeting the husband for the first time when she finds him by himself:

“in a clearing, scooped him up in my palm,
and held his wriggling, shouting life till he calmed.

For me, it was absolutely love at first sight.” (lines 12-14)

In the above lines, the narrator refers to herself as a massive being in comparison to the “small” yet “gorgeous” (lines 17-18) man who could be King Kong unlike his well-known physical depiction in movies. In fact, through this reverse analogy, Duffy handles the situation in which women were treated in her time and even before; small in size, little in thoughts, and worthless as beings just as the MP Mitchell’s referring to Thatcher as a “brave little woman getting on with the woman’s work of trying to dominate the world” (Bowman, 1989). The “clearing” also holds vital importance since it can be interpreted as men’s not being limited to the houses unlike women pushed by men to the domestic sphere. Thus, the reason she grasps him in “a clearing” is a challenge to the patriarchy which has made women feel as if they have been in a jar bell by restricting them to the household. Though not the same in meaning, “clearing” also evokes the same vast, green environment as the word “garden”, Duffy’s favourite place to write her poems as “there are no distractions” there (BBC Maestro, 2023).

The lines further imply a potential rape or a rape attempt in which the man cannot reject Queen Kong due to her physical superiority: “held his wriggling, shouting life till he calmed.” Husbands, calling it love, could force their wives to have sexual intercourse with them even without the wives’ consent. In fact, rape within marriage was not a crime in the UK until 1992 with the ancient mindset first formed by Sir Matthew Hale, a former chief justice of the Court of King’s Bench, argued as “by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind to

her husband which she cannot retract” (1800: 629). It was still the predominant mindset concerning marital rape in Britain until the 1990s. In 1990 during a marital rape case, however, the then judge Simon Brown dismissed Hale’s assertion:

Were it not for the deeply unsatisfactory consequences of reaching any other conclusion upon the point, I would shrink, if sadly, from adopting this radical view of the true position in law. But adopt it I do. Logically, I regard it as the only defensible stance, certainly now as the law has developed and arrived in the late twentieth century. In my judgment, the position in law today is, as already declared in Scotland, that there is no marital exemption to the law of rape. That is the ruling I give (qtd. in *The Law Reports*, 1992).

The judge sees it as compulsory to have an amended version of the law because of the necessity to adapt to the late twentieth century, until when women had fought for their rights for decades. Moreover, as stated in “Criminal Law Rape Within Marriage”, the then government rejected to agree to the view of the Criminal Law Revision Committee (CLRC) whose “(narrow) majority” did not include marital non-consensual intercourse to be as serious an offence as rape outside marriage (*The Law Reports*, 1992: 8). Even though marital rape became illegal in 1992, it still had a long way for the people to acknowledge. Consequently, the rape implication in the poem may be a criticism of those people having the same notion as the CLRC to not consider a forced sexual relationship in marriage as rape. Marital rape was also the final trigger of the Bobbitt case’s⁴ arising, which Duffy closely followed.

Likewise, until 1992, under the name of spousal immunity, women could be raped by their husbands as they were immune from prosecution for the wife’s rape. In the poem, too, because it is inhumane to have a criterion for the justification of rape, Queen Kong optimistically manipulates the rape and displays it as an act of love. Duffy once said that “if a woman gorilla had fallen in love with a man, she’d have been much more subtle about it” (Viner, 1999). Concordantly, Queen Kong thrives to be subtle about words by recounting their memories, yet her actions seem to be obsessive instead of subtle.

Violence on the husband perpetrated by Queen Kong is salient throughout the poem. In lines 32 and 33, she indirectly threatens the husband asking a rhetorical question:

⁴ After the repeated disputes and fights between the Bobbitt couple and despite the restraining order for John Bobbitt, he comes home drunk one night and allegedly rapes his wife, Lorena. Lorena Bobbitt cuts off his penis, and it goes missing until she confesses where she has placed the amputated penis (John Wayne and Lorena Bobbitt Trials: 1993 & 1994).

“Didn’t he know I could swat his plane from these skies like a gnat?” She continues: “But I let him go, my man.” Both the threat and the feeling of grace function as psychological and emotional violence. In the social and historical context of the poem, the first line points out to the physical power of the battering men threatening women and even committing violence towards them while the following line indicates the ostensible debt of gratitude women must feel for the husbands.

In the following section, the emphasis is put on financial abuse:

“Next day, I shopped. Clothes for my man, mainly,

but one or two treats for myself from Bloomingdale’s.” (lines 55-56)

Financial abuse is defined by Appleford as “[...] withholding of finances and/or the necessities of living, trickery, fraud, theft, misappropriated or misused funds or management of property in a manner that benefits the abuser and is not in the best interest of the abused” (1989: 6). As in the mentioned lines, men might idly have boasted about buying women basic needs such as clothes. However, men might misuse and mismanage the income by buying luxury clothes for themselves from shops such as “Bloomingdale’s”. Duffy with a working class background might have satirised women’s greed for luxury as she would spend her money earned at the hairdressers’ on “Hirondelle rosé” (Wroe, 2007), a wine that was ‘smooth’, ‘easy to drink’ and ‘of exceptional quality’ (Vieira, 2017), which was not preferable by the upper classes.

According to the study conducted by McCloskey in 1996 with a total of 365 female participants of whom approximately the half stated to be victims of abuse by their spouses (Socioeconomic and Coercive Power within the Family, 452), violence against women escalates as the income gap between the partners narrows down. The less disparity in income paves the way for domestic violence perpetrated by the husband toward the wife (457). In other words, women were abused either financially or physically by their husbands’ mismanagement of the money because of earning more than the husband. In Queen Kong’s case, it is the first since she does not need money as humans do and lives happily in her natural environment.

“[...] let him dangle in the air between my finger

and my thumb in a teasing, lover’s way [...]” (59-60)

In the following section, the narrator plays with the husband, wrapping him with her fingers around him which she calls a “lover’s way”. Moreover, she forces him to move in with her even though the overall interpretation suggests that he is happy away from her.

In the same manner, in a letter to Abigail Van Buren, a woman nicknamed “Black and Blue in Louisiana” mentions her relationship with her husband, claiming that her husband treats her well, loves her, meets her financial needs yet “manhandles” her through slapping or kicking her under the name of “love” (Deseret News, 1989). As it is seen clearly, the notion of the toxic love is the same in both the poem and the letter with one difference that Duffy embodies the situation in a reversed man-woman relationship to unveil women’s mortification.

“Twelve happy years. He slept in my fur, woke early
to massage the heavy lids of my eyes...” (lines 64-65)

The word “twelve” is included in six of the poems in *The World’s Wife*. The reason behind that can be that “twelve” has been one of Duffy’s favourite words since her childhood (BBC Maestro, 2023). Moreover, her relationship with Adrian Henri lasted twelve years (Stephenson, 2016). Consequently, it may be an allusion to her relationship with Henri although there is no mention of physical abuse between them except that he was unfaithful in their relationship as he believed “poets had a duty to be unfaithful” (Langley, 2009), which can be categorized as emotional violence.

“When he died, I held him all night, shaking him
like a doll, licking his face, breast, soles of his feet,” (71-72)

The above lines are of significance as they evoke necrophilia. Queen Kong, considered a necrophile, does not let him rest in peace even after death since she is sexually aroused by his corpse due to her appalment “by sadism and entranced by the sight of a dead body”. Similar to Nilsen and Dahmer, who were charged with the murders of multiple people whose corpses they had sexual activity with, she follows the same pattern indicated in the above lines. Nilsen, as confessed to the police, “masturbated over or beside the corpse”, while Dahmer admitted that he had “oral sex” with the dead bodies of the victims more than once (Vanity Fair, 1991). Likewise, Queen Kong licks his “breast, soles of his feet” which can be considered erogenous zones. All in all, in

the poem, Duffy puts emphasis on violence against women in the late-twentieth century through the division of power between male and female lovers and within the relationship of the eccentric Kong couple interposing the nature of the man and woman relationship back then.

4.2.2. “The Kray Sisters”

“The Kray Sisters” is based on the notorious life of the identical twin brothers Ronnie and Reggie Kray who were terrorising the streets of East End of London in the 1950s and 1960s. They were charged with crimes such as murder, armed robbery, arson, and sex scandals. The name of these underworld icons was also mentioned with celebrities such as Frank Sinatra and Judy Garland. In 1969 they were finally found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment (Bellotti, 2022). Looking at their photographs, it is obvious that the twins would keep up with the fashion of their era in suits and ties despite their brutal nature. Violence as profession was attributed to them due to their prolific career as criminals, and thus they were appealing to the media.

“The Kray Sisters” replaces the brothers with fictional sisters who are related not by a blood tie but by the sense of forming solidarity. The poem portrays them to commit crimes to the end of not fame and money but providing protection for women. Duffy’s “sado-feminist” Kray twins “police their area [the East End] and make sure feminism is adhered to and anyone who doesn’t adhere to it is well-sorted” (Wood, 2005). Thus, violence as the main theme in the poem is accompanied by feminism, as well.

The poem contains several allusions to the lifestyle of the Kray Brothers such as the “Savile Row” as the place of their “tailored” clothes (line 3). The speaking persona of the poem is the jointly speaking twin sisters. They narrate the first instance of violence in line 9 when they mention London as a town to “swagger around” and “be driven at speed”. The mention of “Austin princess” (10), “a club” (11), and “Garland” (12) all refer to the poem’s being a compilation of the real-life elements in a parallel universe of the Kray Brothers whom the sisters impersonate through violence for power.

The first tangible example of violence in the poem takes place when the narrators allude to the suffragette Emily Davison “who’d knocked out a Grand National horse, name of / Ballytown Boy, with one punch, in front of the King,” (16-17). Emily Wilding Davison as one of the pioneer suffragettes was fatally injured when she stepped out in front of King George V’s horse in 1913 (Nelsson, 2013). It has been

still controversial to determine the reason behind her approach to the King at that time. On the one hand, she was claimed to have stood for the suffragette movement, trying to come closer to the King for propaganda. On the other hand, she was labelled as an “irresponsible anarchist” who stumbled and accidentally died (Thorpe, 2013). The poem, expectedly, subverts the event. Instead of her being killed by the King’s horse, the horse is “knocked out” by her. The victory against the King in the poem also symbolises the event of Margaret Thatcher’s coming to power in 1979 since she owes a lot to the suffragettes in terms of political rights women gained. In so doing, the impediment to women’s right to vote seems to be removed. As for the twin sisters, their propensity to violence is made clear in the poem since they incline to resort to violence to gain ground for themselves as Davison did.

The poem continues with further references to the Suffragette Movement this time with the suffragettes Vera Lynn and Emmeline Pankhurst who were “the birds who fought for the Vote” (23). The particular emphasis laid on the right to vote may point to Maureen Morfydd Colquhoun, the first openly lesbian MP in the UK during 1974-1979 whose radical feminist stance ended her parliamentary career (Langdon, 2021), and Thatcher who was the first female Prime Minister of Britain in 1979. There is no clear mention of either Davison or Pankhurst in the poem, yet Duffy says that she mentions the Pankhursts, which must be in the line “Emmeline’s Army” (Wood, 2005). It can still be concluded that the supposed suffragette in the poem kills to the end of gaining political rights, which culminates in a victory of women, a female martyr for the good of the people of the same gender.

The emphasis on the Suffragettes further correlates to the fact that Thatcher had the chance to be elected as the first female Prime Minister in 1979. In parallel with the physical violence committed by the suffragette in the poem, in real life, too, the words of the former Prime Minister Leonard James Callaghan state bits of violence as he claimed Thatcher to give way to “a tremendous moment in the country’s history to have a woman occupy that office” (Apple Jr., 1979). The word “occupy” itself arouses controversy for it has a negative connotation since it is often used for “control by force” as well as “official position” (Longman Dictionary, n.d.). Consequently, the killing of a suffragette in real life is subverted into women’s action of killing in the poem, and it stems from the sense of revolting against the authority embodied in the horse of the

King. Considering the word “occupy” uttered by Callaghan on Thatcher’s election as the Prime Minister, it is deduced that the narrators’ deliberate use of the words “knock out” (16), “a punch” (17), and “fought” (23) results from men’s preference for words that have brutal connotations to take control of power.

In the following part of the poem, the narrators mention the dreams they wish to realise as they would like to become fearful, ruling over the streets of London:

“[...] We wanted respect for the way
we entered a bar, or handled a car, or shrivelled
a hard-on with simply a menacing look, a threatening word” (28-30)

In fact, the insistence on looking tough may stem from the association between masculinity and violence leading to power. The twin sisters who have not had the chance to be respected for what they are finally reach the conclusion that they have to imitate tough men. It goes hand in hand with Thatcher’s adopted attitude of masculinity. Wilson & Irwin in their article question the motive behind Thatcher’s not acting more like a woman than a man in politics (2015: 21). They quote Holmes and Meyerhoff who propound that one is more successful when they manage to acquire “the shared repertoire, or assimilated the goal(s) of the joint enterprise, or established patterns of engagement with other members” (1999: 176). In this case, what Thatcher did was to choose among the predominantly masculine elements in the repertoire to achieve the success of the previous politicians. The tendency to adopt masculine behaviours is persistent in the following lines by referring to women’s softness as “mistakes”:

we made our mistakes in those early years. We were soft
when we should have been hard; enrolled a few girls
in the firm who were well out of order – two of them
getting Engaged; a third sneaking back up the Mile End
Road
every night to be some plonker’s wife. Rule Number One –
A boyfriend’s for Christmas, not just for life. (41-47)

“Plonker” (46) is an instance of verbal abuse that is used for men. Verbal violence is supported by emotional violence through referring to the existence of a boyfriend in one’s life for a short period of time as if an object and/or physical matter to use and then get rid of for eternity. It is further assisted by what the narrators consider the first

rule: “A boyfriend’s for Christmas, not just for life.”, the subverted version of the slogan “A dog is for life not just for Christmas” coined by Clarissa Baldwin in 1978 warning people about not getting pets as Christmas presents with an impulse (May, 2019). Duffy’s fondness for Christmas is salient with her publications about Christmas such as “Frost Fair” (2019) and “Another Night Before Christmas” (2005), which might inspire her to subvert a famous slogan for campaign related to dogs as Christmas gifts at the time. In “The Kray Sisters”, the narrators pave the way for the emotional abuse of men through affiliating with them for a short while with no commitment to these inept, insufficient men who are meant for meeting women’s sexual or emotional needs for the given time.

“in the first of our clubs, Ballbreakers, just off
 Evering Road. The word got around and about
 that any woman in trouble could come to the Krays,
 no questions asked, for Protection [...]” (50-53)

“Ballbreakers” likewise serves as an insult to refer to men, reducing them to vulnerable and sensitive sexual organs. One can sense the implication of threats in the lines upon closer inspection. As for “protection”, The Kray brothers are known to run a protection company even when they were behind the bars. Famous people including Frank Sinatra were said to have recruited bodyguards from the Krayleigh Enterprises in 1985 (Allen, 2010). Duffy also refers to Frank Sinatra as a celebrity who had “criminal connections” (Wood, 2005). “For Protection” in the poem thus implies the precautions and enforcements through ferocity against domestic violence to break the testicles of abusive spouses or partners. Duffy comments on the sisters’ violence on such men who do not adhere to feminism to be “well-sorted” (Wood, 2005).

“Prickteasers. We admit, bang to rights, that the fruits
 of feminism – fact – made us rich, feared, famous,” (57-58)

Likewise, “prickteasers” is offensive language to show their dissatisfaction with abusive men. What is crucial in the above lines is the parallelism between feminist movements and the underground works of the Kray twins modelled on the Kray Brothers in the sense that both use violence to the end of gaining power. “Bang to rights” is implicated to be gained through brutality just like men who appear to be the

owners of the streets and the underground. Both the underground world and feminist movements hinge on an action, an act of rebellion against authorities to survive.

In the following section of the poem, the narrators flaunt their power, putting forth the letters sent by women all over London to express their gratitude to the sisters in terms of safety:

“Dear Twins, them were the Good Old Days when you ruled
the streets. There was none of this mugging old ladies
or touching young girls. We hear what’s being said.” (65-67)

Horrific events such as stalk, bag-snatching, and assault of girls in the streets were not extraordinary at the time. Such brutality seems to be solved through violence in the poem. It stems from developing masculine behaviours due to the male supremacist policy suggesting men to have been the occupiers of power. However, the solidarity among women is of notice. The Rape Crisis Centres in the 1970s were active throughout Britain. According to Eileen Scott from The Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre, the centre reached the conclusion that the annual number of rapes and sexual assaults in Edinburgh was between 400 and 800 in the 1970s (Maitland, 2009: 25). In 1994, too, Laurie Matthew as a worker at Dundee Rape Crisis Centre elucidated:

I’d been doing support for a long time and everything I was hearing, all these women were telling me it was the same thing, you know? They were assaulted in their childhood, this had happened when they were children (Maitland, 2009: 55).

As stated above, Matthew as an active participant in the centre exalts the very same idea in the line 67 where young girls are claimed to be exposed to sexual assaults. Despite even the autocratical efforts to prevent such sexual violence from the 1970s, things do not seem to change in the 1990s, and thus is the longing for the “Good Old Days” under the control of the fervent and ardent propagandas of feminists in their early stage of development.

Furthermore, as the Kray Sisters received letters from all around the country mentioned in the line “Look at the letters we get –” (64), Duffy “got scores of letters from women saying do it, do it, do it” (Viner, 1999), referring to the laureateship when the press wrote about her nomination for succeeding Ted Hughes (1930-1998). Thus,

Duffy intertwines her own life experience, receiving encouraging letters in this case, with the important news of her era in a subverted way in “The Kray Sisters”.

“Remember us at our peak, in our prime, dressed to kill
and swaggering in to our club, stroke of twelve,
the evening we’d leaned on Sinatra to sing for free.” (68-70)

The following section of the poem gives ground to the first and last mention of the word “kill”. The sisters’ roaring success is in times they kill, once again, in pretentious clothes as those of the Kray brothers. The sisters’ club “The Ballbreakers” reiterates their excessive indulgence in violence as the centre or homeland of any kind of abusive work they undertake.

The Kray brothers’ collaboration with Frank Sinatra in real life (Pearson, 2010: 130) suggests the line 70 might be referring to him, yet it would be misleading. As the altered version of the scandalous brothers with feminist sisters in the poem, Duffy’s Sinatra in fact is the female one: Nancy. The lines, despite the ostensible female solidarity, display Nancy to be harassed. The reason for this is her being forced to sing without getting any payment by other women who are the embodiment of the gangsters. It is deduced that the power acquired through the wrong mentality may cause problems. As uttered by Thatcher in an interview, the power one takes must be “the power to reduce the power of the government” (Thatcheritescot, 2013), government symbolising the power in the hands of authority. However, she did not abide by her statements, and thus the similar attitude of the Kray Sisters may indicate the core of the same inconsistency.

“These boots are made for walking, and that’s
just what they’ll do. One of these days these boots
are gonna walk all over you. Are you ready, boots? Start
walkin’ [...]” (80-83)

As for the ending of the poem, the narrators quote in italics the lyrics of “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’” (1966) by Nancy Sinatra to whom they allude in the previous lines. Duffy considered the song as the Kray Sisters’ “theme tune [...] which is sort of triumphant and also sexy” (Wood, 2005). The lyrics suggest not only feminism but

also violence as “boots” often evoke the military practices and thus brutality. It can be seen in Plato’s *Republic*, too, where he mentions the ideal state dividing the citizens into three groups among which the lowest class is the artisans, who produce and nourish the upper classes by serving as boots (2013: 124-125). Not surprisingly, women were treated as among these third-class people, too. However, it is of paramount importance that these servile people, women in this sense, may revolt and take over control instead of carrying the burden of the upper classes. In fact, the lyrics fit in the poem so well as the song was released in 1966, preceding the initialisation of the feminist movements in Britain.

4.2.3. “Mrs Beast”

“Mrs Beast” is the subverted poetic version of the fairy-tale “Beauty and the Beast” written by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve in 1740 and then rewritten by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756 under the name of *La Belle et La Bête*. The tale has many versions all over the world, yet the themes are shared. Envy, rejection, unrequited love, and physical affection are existent in all versions (Pookpress, n.d.) including Carol Ann Duffy’s “Mrs Beast”.

A prince punished by a wicked fairy with ending up as a monstrous beast who demands physical approval from others, particularly women, is what Duffy utilises to give voice to the concerns of sexual abuse women have been exposed to by men. Using the passive beast with no voice, Mrs Beast meets her sexual needs, which holds a mirror to women’s being used as sex objects by men in real life. The sexual abuse is prominent throughout the poem where the wife does not reveal any emotional intimacy with him. This evidently gives clue about men’s conception of women’s roles in Duffy’s era. Thus, Mrs Beast is introduced as a dominant wife figure who has absolute control over the spouse, utilising his sexual appeal.

Duffy recalls memories from her childhood about her mother’s being good at “making up rhymes and stories” (Wroe, 2007). Duffy’s tackling of this story may have also stemmed from the release of the 1991-Disney movie adaption of it which achieved enormous success at the time, available for families to watch altogether with no “sex” and “vulgarity” (Ebert, 1991). However, the particular emphasis laid on the sexual abuse of a male creature by a female one in the poem functions as irony to draw attention to women’s assumed role concerning sexuality back then.

The poem begins with a direct allusion to the women both fictional and real-life such as Helen, Cleopatra, Queen of Sheba, Juliet, Nefertiti, Mona Lisa, and the actress Greta Garbo (lines 3-6). According to Duffy, these women “haven’t been dealt with yet” (Wood, 2005), highlighting their being disregarded by history. “Think again” (6), the narrator says, to urge to reader to reconsider the situation of these women and many more from a different angle. At last, women unite against the bad image of themselves in public, taking an approach different from the previous ones to consider the roles and codes imposed on women, the ones with a tragic end in these instances. By calling the poem “a sort of elegy”, Duffy commemorates such women from history in “Mrs Beast” (Wood, 2005).

The mention of these women in solidarity can be interpreted as an organisation, a group, or even as a parliament. Duffy prefers to call it “a constituency” of women (Wood, 2005). Concordantly, according to the study about the relationship between leadership and genders carried out by Eagly & Johnson, women display tendency to adopt a style more “democratic and participative” than an “autocratic and directive” one which is attributed to men, and the mentioned researchers noted it to be due to women’s intuitive sense (1990: 247-248). It further suggests then that if the poem is thought to be the Parliament with these women as members, the narrator being the leader is after forming a democratic sphere in which the members can have ground to give voice to their concerns; hence the reason why the narrator mentions several names. It might have the Thatcher’s Era as the influence on the poem as Duffy says “the world around me sort of forced me to be more political” for a while (Wroe, 2007). For this reason, even though the mentioned women are left in history, Duffy does her best to create a just atmosphere in the poem with those women as participants.

Another influence on Duffy’s creation of “Mrs Beast” might have been Geoffrey Chaucer’s poetry. In 2013, Duffy published “Chaucer’s Valentine”, a poem written in the form of the Middle English poetry, imitating both Chaucer’s style and the medieval literary traditions. Chaucer’s *The Parliament of Fowls*, which is often considered the first Valentine’s poem and his “primary Valentine poem” (Jost, 1999: 56), might have been the inspiration on Duffy’s previously mentioned poem. Likewise, influences of Chaucer’s poem, where various birds are given even ground to speak up, are seen in the lines of Duffy’s “Parliament” (2011). Furthermore, Duffy’s references to the

historical, mythological, and literary women in “Mrs Beast” is reminiscent of what Chaucer did in *The Legend of Good Women*. The just environment by means of an imaginary parliament with several characters to speak up can be seen as a parallelism between the poems of Chaucer and Duffy. It indicates that Chaucer’s influence on Duffy’s poetry is profound, and Duffy might have had his two poems in mind while composing “Mrs Beast”.

The narrator begins with a tale since the poem itself is based on a fairy tale. The first instance of violence in the poem occurs with the mention of “The Little Mermaid” who,

[...] slit
her shining, silver tail in two, rubbed salt
into that stinking wound, got up and walked,
in agony, in fishnet tights, stood up and smiled, waltzed,
all for a Prince, a pretty boy, a charming one
who’d dump her in the end, chuck her, throw her overboard. (6-11)

The initial example of violence seems to be physical due to the Little Mermaid’s cutting her tail into two for a ravishing prince who, according to the narrator, will eventually abandon her. The words “chuck” and “throw” also evoke a sense of violence. In fact, the main message deduced from the above lines is that The Little Mermaid becomes selfless though “in agony” for the sake of a man to whom she dedicates herself. This appears to be the widespread social phenomenon until the late twentieth century. The dynamics in a family were constructed in the way that the husband was the head of household while the wife was the subservient member responsible for the well-being of all family members.

It seems to be the same when the Duffies had to move to England due to the father Frank’s new vocation (Scottish Poetry Library, n.d.). Consequently, women in the poem, just like The Little Mermaid, formed themselves into the male-expected version in a mould though it was against their will. They relinquished their own standards “in agony” albeit standing up smiling. Accordingly, in issue 158 of *New Internationalist*, de Silva asserts:

Transcendent love may lead to service and sacrifice, but selfish love leads to bed. It’s this selfless transcendent sort of love that many women have, rightly, begun to suspect as one of the more powerful means by which they are oppressed. But in questioning the slavish nature of transcendent love, weren’t

they in danger of losing many of its benefits - and of repudiating selfish sexual love completely? (The Longing to Belong, 1986).

In the lines above, de Silva puts emphasis on the dilemma between women's awareness of the nature of selfless love and the relationship's "benefits" of which they could be deprived in case of a separation. Though de Silva looks for a way to prove herself right by asking rhetorical questions, being an altruist, which has been expected from women in a marriage, is stated in the quotation as a reason for getting oppressed. Though Duffy does not mention anything negative regarding her relationship with Henri, she could be under a detrimental influence as Roger McGough asserts that Henri clearly had an influence on the young Duffy during their relationship (Forbes, 2002).

The selfish love overweighs in Duffy's lines. Mrs Beast's assumption that "they're bastards when they're Princes" (13) also demonstrates her awareness of the situation since both husbands and princes hold the power and manipulate intimacy. In order to avoid further emotional violence stemming from sexual intimacy, it is required for the victim to take issue with the abuse, and it is the narrator in this poem to take the lead through giving a brief summary of *The Little Mermaid* and the way she is manipulated by a husband figure.

The poem moves on with Mrs Beast's instance of her own private life, the moment when she encounters the Beast for the first time as a woman "knowing" her "own mind" with her "own gold stashed in the bank" (17) and her "own black horse at the gates" (18). Through this description, Mrs Beast seems to be self-sufficient with financial independence, signalling being free from the financial and psychological violence that might have stemmed from the economic dependency on men, especially until the enactment of Equal Pay Act 1970 in England which heralded no less favourable conditions for any of the sexes. Similarly, the indirect emphasis on economic freedom constitutes a ground for women to leave if they are to experience abuse through "one wrong word" (19) and/or "one false move, one dirty look" (20) by men.

In the following section of the poem, the emphasis is on Mrs Beast's sexual abuse of the husband. The roles are reversed for women to rise to hold the pen to write "her" story. The Beast's having a soft spot for Mrs Beast is salient in the lines where he appears to be worshipping her "on his knees" (21) with an "erection" which he does

not hide. In the ensuing lines, she mentions a bottle of Château Margaux '54 (28), which she opens “before he lifted a paw” (29), referring to both her self-sufficiency and the potential physical violence that could be used through battering which she seems to precede and prevent. Likewise, being a poet, for Duffy’s father, was not a job. Duffy asserts that he never considered it a job for a living though she proved him wrong (Stephenson, 2016). Duffy thus may be alluding to her economic freedom as a woman in this section of the poem.

“[...] I had the language, girls.

The lady says Do this. Harder. The lady says

Do that. Faster. The lady says That’s not where I meant.” (33-35)

The following section of the poem continues with psychological abuse. Mrs Beast strives to dominate the Beast through language and discourse. Each utterance functions on different levels. So does her patronising attitude. Generally, the ways of speaking not only signal but also create “the relative status of speakers and their level of rapport” (Tannen, 1995), which Duffy demonstrates in a two-dimensional way as she maintains the lead firstly through her own voice and then that of Mrs Beast. Thus, they turn upside down the use of language in favour of women to lead and change the unchangeable once written and implemented by men.

The poem further contains examples of verbal abuse through the resemblance between the Beast and wild animals. The following lines signal negative connotations of the Beast who is resembled to creatures often described as strong yet physically unappealing:

“Here was a bit of him like a horse, a ram, / an ape, a wolf, a dog, a donkey, dragon, dinosaur.” (45-46)

The abusive language is further reinforced with behavioural abuse resulting in emotional vulnerability as the Beast was “kept out of sight” on her poker nights (48) due to his deformity. It is in line with Foucault’s concept of the gaze since Beast’s very existence throughout the poem serves as “a perceptual act” sustained by Mrs Beast’s idiosyncratic “logic of operations” that are “pure of intervention” (Foucault, 2003: 109). Subversion of what is exposed on men and women can be seen in this instance, too. In the beginning of the poem, the narrator boldly says, “gaze into my eyes”,

breaking free from the male gaze, yet this time, she treats the husband as if a being worthless of even being under scrutinization. Furthermore, the gaze creates a certain form of behavioural pattern on the Beast as he behaves according to the way imposed on him by the wife. Her hierarchal observation of the husband is further embodied in her discourse as she continues to throw deliberate insults at him with no intervention in his way of behaviour: “The sheepish Beast came in / with a tray of schnapps at the end of the game” (78-79)

As a keen gambler who loves poker, Duffy deliberately includes “a great set-piece poker game in the middle of this poem” (Wood, 2005). Consequently, Duffy, mingling her passion for poker with violence, displays the psychological abuse the Beast is exposed to as he serves “the Woman who Married a Minotaur”, “Goldilocks”, and “the Bride of the Bearded Lesbian” (49-51), respectively alluding to a myth, a fairytale, and a contemporary women’s movement. She emphasises the “very tense” (Wood, 2005) poker game in the line, “I watched those wonderful women shuffle and deal” (52), which can be considered an admiration for women with the lesbian identity and the passion for poker.

In line 83, the narrator refers as “bad girls” to herself and her female fellows served by the Beast. Even though the reason on the surface for their gathering was playing poker, they mourn their dead, “tragic girls” in Mrs Beast’s head (85). Perhaps one reason for the word choice of “bad girls” and “serious ladies” (83) is to make a reference to the collective voices of women back in the late twentieth century. Like Mrs Beast and the other female characters from history, it probably was inevitable to spark off reaction by the initiators of organisations such as Chiswick Women’s Refuge (1971) to violence inflicted on women. These path-breaking women include Kate Kay who was publicly labelled and considered “bad” owing to the “the energy, passion and constant discussion within the collective”, which, in her own words, helped them create their own voice and “felt as if we [they] could change the world” (Isaac, 2014).

It is towards the end of the poem that Mrs Beast seems to leave aside all the seriousness and bitterness now that she is in solitude. Unlike Thatcher with “a flight from femininity and from the world of women and yet an absolute adherence to its appearances” (Campbell, 1987: 242), Mrs Beast ultimately demonstrates her sensitivity without worrying about the femininity she has appeared to take on. Again,

unlike Thatcher, Mrs Beast creates an amicable atmosphere among the women with no hesitation.

“[...] And I made a prayer –
thumbing my pearls, the tears of Mary, one by one,
like a rosary – words for the lost, the captive beautiful,
the wives, those less fortunate than we.” (88-91)

The sentimentality in the above lines originates from her mourning “the lost”, “the captive beautiful” and “the wives” whom she asserts to be “less fortunate” than her and the women in her time. This correlates closely with the late nineteenth century women who owe a lot to the women having fought for their rights such as the suffragettes, and the lesbian and feminist organisations. It further complies with Duffy’s consideration of the poem as an elegy (Wood, 2005).

“I turned to go back inside. Bring me the Beast for the night.

Bring me the wine-cellar key. Let the less-loving one be me.” (94-95)

Duffy reverses Auden’s “Let the more loving one be me” (1960: 31) and turns it into “Let the less-loving one be me”. Mrs Beast, for Duffy, does not want “anyone to be hurt by love” (Wood, 2005). However, the kind of love the poem is hinged on is a toxic one with emotional abuse. Mrs Beast’s giving orders as in the above lines are the outcomes of the imposed masculine behaviours on her. Throughout the poem, she objectifies the Beast, which is blatantly obvious in the last two lines in which she commands to have him for meeting her sexual needs, neglecting his emotions and thoughts on the matter.

In 1970, some feminists protested the Miss World Contest, which they believed objectified women, by throwing flour bombs and vegetables at the organisers and contestants on the floor. After half a century, Sue Finch comments on the protest, “Violence against women hasn’t changed, and, in a way, that’s what our protest was all about. If you treat women as objects, it’s easier to rape and kill them” (Moorhead, 2020). Thus, in the poem too, the objectification of the Beast exhibits sexual violence to cause havoc and take revenge by women in history who could not stand for themselves.

4.3. Misandry

I feel that ‘man-hating’ is an honorable and viable political act...

—Morgan, 1973: 178

Misandry, often seen as a type of sexism, is defined as “dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men (i.e. the male sex)” in The Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Its first known use dates back to 1898 (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Misandry inevitably encapsulates women who were primarily fighting against the inequalities and sex discrimination they experienced by most men as well as women under the influence of radical masculinity. To that end, various women’s organisations were established, and among their members, some went to extremes to disregard men much the same as women held in contempt by men. With the rise of feminism in Britain, misandry arose in the 1970s and has been high on the agenda since then (Bergeron, 2015). In comparison to misogyny, misandry as a systematic attitude is relatively new, and it can be argued to have transpired as a reaction against the dominant misogynist culture until the twentieth century.

As a result of the cooperative reactions of women’s organisations, steps concerning the amendments in the UK legislation were taken. In 1970, The Equal Pay Act was enacted. In 1973, universal adult suffrage was carried out for the first time in a local election in Northern Ireland. In 1975, with the Sex Discrimination Act coming into force, women were legally held equal to men in the eyes of employers.

Media in the 1970s, however, strived to teach ostensible morals to women who dared to deviate from traditional feminine roles. The talk show of Michael Parkinson in the 1970s promoted inequality in gender. Likewise, in a 1977 hit film “Looking for Mr Goodbar”, the lead character Theresa, who seeks one-night stands, confronts a tragic death as a dissuasion from such acts for women with similar mindsets. The clitoral orgasm was highlighted in manual books throughout the 1970s with the “reevaluation of female embodiment and sexual pleasure” (Ward, 2015: 124), which resulted in men’s being put in a spot of bother with the self-doubt of women’s roles as wives to meet husbands’ sexual needs. Similarly, Peter Sutcliffe from Yorkshire who recently died was convicted of 13 murders of women between 1975 and 1980, and these reinforced the message for women not to behave differently than the established female image (Kavanagh, 2022).

Furthermore, before the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 passed, women were not allowed to apply for a loan or a credit card without the consent of a man such as their father or husband since the signature of a male had been required. Some retailers, despite the act, still necessitated male guarantors (Bates, 2016). Until 1992, marital rape was still legal. It was only in 1993 that violence against women was finally recognised as a crime. Perhaps what most women were discontent with was the then (1979-1990) prime minister Margaret Thatcher's stance in a contrived masculine manner than a feminine one. Moreover, contrary to what was expected, most of the amendments to women's rights were made in the years Margaret Thatcher was out of office. This might have upset the women living in the Thatcher Era. As Wilson and Irwin argue, she adopted a masculine identity for being "a politician first and a woman second" (2015: 26). All these approaches and attitudes, among many other discriminations, to women's rights and nature, must have paved the way for the beginning of misandry as a means of revenge in some poems in *The World's Wife*.

4.3.1. "Mrs Aesop"

Aesop (mid-6th BCE) is a controversial figure in history as the details concerning his life were not elaborately recorded by historians. Additionally, the records of when he actively wrote and where he lived are in contradiction with the information recorded by other historians. In fact, the mere authentic information of his existence can be found in Herodotus' *The Histories* where he is mentioned as a slave as well as a "fable-writer" who was murdered (2013: 153). As mentioned by Herodotus, he was murdered for his fables' allegorical connotations since they were interpreted as oratorical weapons targeting the tyrants of his time (Compton, 2006: 63). Moreover, in Aesop's fictional biography by an anonymous writer (c.a. 2 BCE), he is described as "potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped", and his speech disability is highlighted with the focus on his wittiness and the talent in rhetoric which rewarded him with regaining his speech ability (Gibbs, 2009). Likewise, Duffy remarks in a speech that she could not find many details about Aesop except that he was a slave and physically tiny compared to the people of his era (The Lost Lectures, 2014). His physical depiction is also in line with the oil portrait by Velázquez, in which he is depicted as an unattractive person with physical deformities resulting from being a hypophysial dwarf (c.a. 1640). By

providing insight into universal morality, Aesop's fables convey allegorical messages. As a child, Duffy enjoyed the fables and stories with animals though she was "disappointed" by "the moral tacked" at the end of Aesop's fables, which, she believes, "never seemed to be truthful" (The Lost Lectures, 2014).

In "Mrs Aesop", the narrator is Aesop's wife. Aesop, though famous for his oratory skills, has no voice in the poem. The tone is offensive and ironic as Mrs Aesop strives to humiliate him by making use of his own lines and proverbs from fables by questioning the very nature of the morals in them. Misandry is salient throughout the poem as it is directed at the husband through whom she humiliates the male sex. By means of anachronism, the poem opens with a blasphemous allusion to Christianity which Mrs Aesop reproaches: "By Christ, he could bore for Purgatory..." (line 1). Through this line, Duffy seems to criticise the Church, a male-dominated institution where men have held higher positions. Aesop's preaching of religious morals in his fables seems to be the reason behind Mrs Aesop's intolerance of him. This mainly stems from the androcentric nature of Christianity which has bestowed favours on men to the detriment of women.

Despite the time difference between Aesop's age and Duffy's cultural history, the same attitude seems to have prevailed. This is evidenced by the words spoken by Patrick Cormack during a session of the Commons Sitting of 29 October 1993 on the ordination of women:

[...] it is not possible for a woman to be a priest. In using the word "possible", I ask those hon. Members of the female sex to accept that it is a question not of equality, but of difference. I do not believe that a woman can be a priest any more than she can be a father. To me, it is as simple as that—[Interruption.] My hon. Friends may mutter in disagreement, but that is a view which is held by the vast majority of practising Christians in the Church. If we want to be tolerant of people's beliefs, we must recognise that fact (Priests (Ordination of Women)).

Cormack's belittling of women in the religious domain is obvious in the lines above. Unsurprisingly, the members were all male except for the "Madam Speaker", the moderator of the sitting. As in Duffy's introductory line, all the male members were gathered to "bore" the rest of the members to the end of Christianity, which had not promoted women's ordination until then. Moreover, even if the women finally had the chance to step among men in religion, men's allegations of women's incapacity to

become a religious authority dominated the whole session, which, eventually sharpened women against men.

“By Christ, he could bore for Purgatory. He was small,
didn’t prepossess. So he tried to impress...” (lines 1-2)

In the same line, Mrs Aesop refers to Aesop as “small” as a way of mocking him for his physical appearance, the size of his genitals, and intellectuality which he “didn’t prepossess”. The relationship between power and height is unquestionable in the poem. The height by which Mrs Aesop humiliates Aesop serves as a negative attribute in Duffy’s era, too. On the findings of a survey about height and career success relationship, Quinn elucidates (cited in Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986: 199):

[...] Our day-to-day vocabulary has an apt phrase for describing a very short man who, burdened from often an early age by his little-valued and sometimes deprecated shortness, invests extraordinary energy in demonstrating that he is at least equal to, and possibly better than, any taller man (1978: 17).

In order to compensate for his being physically unappealing, Aesop strives to exceed other men though solely in one field: storytelling, and this is the same motive behind a man successful in his career as stated above. While compensating for his short height, he neglects his wife and their marriage. Consequently, he is constantly belittled by Mrs Aesop for not putting effort into their relationship. Even in their intimate moments, such as an evening stroll which Mrs Aesop expected to be rather romantic, he pauses and takes note of the animals they pass by in order to use them as materials in a story (lines 14-15).

“didn’t prepossess. So he tried to impress. *Dead men*,
Mrs Aesop, he’d say, *tell no tales*. Well, let me tell you now” (2-3)

The narrator admits Aesop’s efforts in impressing others through tales, yet the way she puts it gives the sense that she, by no means, is impressed by him. The inexistent romance between them is further implied in Aesop’s referring to her as “Mrs Aesop” instead of the love words couples tend to use. It is also indicated that Aesop is well aware of Mrs Aesop’s opting for the moment he is no longer alive. Moreover, Aesop’s dead men who do not tell lies allude to the authors behind grand narratives, victors of history, with little or no place for women.

Upon Aesop's implication about the dead men being the holders of power, writing history, Mrs Aesop is very likely to wish him dead out of detestation as the tension is increasing with her words "let me tell you now". It might have a parallelism with the crime against men committed by women in the late twentieth century since Duffy was "living in the twentieth century in Britain and listening to the news every day and going out every day and reading the newspapers every day" (McAllister, 1988).

The news Duffy received presumably included the murder of men by women as spouses or partners. In 1992, the sex worker Aileen Wuornos, who was convicted of multiple murders, seven confessed, of men during the 1980s, was sentenced to death on an electric chair. Her explanation for these killings was "self-defence" because the random men went to extremes, being abusive towards her (Crime and Investigation, n.d.). Mrs Aesop, too, has the potential to murder her husband and call it "self-defence" on behalf of women overshadowed in history.

The increased rate of crime committed by women influenced Duffy's characterization of Mr Aesop as Duffy also refers to the Bobbitt case in an interview (Wood, 2005). As an act of covert begging, Aesop, through his storytelling ability by which Mrs Aesop has not been impressed, strives to convince her to not kill him. However, the bluff does not seem to work out as she rages even more. She takes back the ownership of the story as she starts to tell her story:

"that the bird in his hand shat on his sleeve,
never mind the two worth less in the bush. Tedious." (4-5)

Her abusive language while addressing his own fables is prominent in the above lines. The mentioned lines are based on Aesop's proverb "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." The bird which "shat on his sleeve" refers to the narrator as she is rebelling against his authority now while the other two are other women referred to as less worthy. Thus, Aesop's disdain for women is made obvious, and it leads to the utter disdain Mrs Aesop feels for men.

Additionally, the bird referring to the woman in the household, "the bird in the hand", also connotes the women caged by the hands of men due to their lack of financial independence. The economist Richmond Trapp once acknowledged in an article about the increasing number of working women that they were "good at domestic relations,

[...] But you could never put two women working together. Most of them are short and they have these squeaky voices” (Dullea, 1977). In parallel to these statements in which Trapp humiliates the female sex through the example of two women in the workplace, Mrs Aesop criticises the proverb ascribed to Aesop by emphasising women’s worthlessness in the eyes of men; hence her tone which is both offensive and sarcastic.

The following section of the poem (lines 8-13) alludes to the moral lessons some of Aesop’s fables strive to teach. Mrs Aesop juxtaposes the animals “a shy mouse”, “a sly fox”, “a swallow”, and “an eagle” from his moralistic fables with the instances of such animals’ actions mentioned in the fables. Mrs Aesop mocks the inconsistency between his doings and the so-called morals drawn from his fables with the phrase “according to him” (10-11). By so doing, she underestimates the overestimated stories as she implies to not agree with him to the points he makes in those stories.

In lines 14-19, the retelling of an evening memory that she does not seem content to recount, once again, refers to one of Aesop’s most famous fables, perhaps the best-known: “The Hare and the Tortoise”. The allusion to this specific fable in the poem indicates that the narrator criticises the nature of marriage and the potential calamities (e.g., domestic violence, divorce, and/or murder) it might bring along for women in particular. The pronoun “he” in line 15 may indicate the male gender and patriarchy with claims of superiority over women as the creators of the present which eventually will be history. However, they do not take any actions to ameliorate the current situation; hence women’s loathing of men.

“On one appalling evening stroll, we passed an old hare
snoozing in a ditch – he stopped and made a note –” (14-15)

As stated in the above lines, Aesop stops to take notes on whatever he witnesses without intervening in the process to change the given situation. When interpreted metaphorically, “snoozing” may refer to women who had been inactive in terms of gaining their rights to be on equal terms with men. However, instead of either helping or supporting women to overcome this inertia, men solely record the events from their own point of view. To demonstrate, in the trilogy “The Hite Report”, Shere Hite questions other women about female sexuality with the aim of compiling a report. One of the contributors states that she is part of this questionnaire as she wants to obtain a

compilation of “authentic” records of female sexuality and feelings. She further asserts, “I get annoyed at all, these men who write about women and how we should or shouldn’t feel. They can’t possibly know how we feel” (1981: 48). The criticism here, as in Aesop’s case, is directed at men who write about women yet ignore the challenges women face.

One reason Mrs Aesop is annoyed by Aesop might be that he writes about things on his account without asking for her advice or opinion which Duffy also criticises in “Mrs Darwin” and “Mrs Sisyphus”. Aesop’s general attitude towards Mrs Aesop reflects the way he considers women in society. It can be determined that men are indifferent to the unjust treatment of women in society as in the case of Aesop’s mere notetaking of the snoozing hare instead of writing about it to give voice to it. One crucial example of it is that the final publication of Hite’s trilogy “Women and Love” features a New York Times article written by yet another woman Arlie Russell Hochschild (1987) on female intimacy and love. In Duffy’s era, it was overwhelmingly women who wrote about women’s feelings with an empathetic voice instead of harsh criticism. Consequently, in the poem, what Duffy’s Mrs Aesop seeks in her relationship with Aesop is more effort put into their marriage as “[s]he’d like less stories and more passionate love. She wants him to stop strutting about and being big-headed and spend more time on their relationship” (Wood, 2005). The lack of intimacy and care in their marriage results in Mrs Aesop’s misandry.

“and then, about a mile further on, a tortoise, somebody’s

pet,

creeping, slow as marriage, up the road. *Slow*

but certain, Mrs Aesop, wins the race. Asshole.” (16-19)

The above section of the poem stresses poor marriage prospects by establishing a parallelism between the tortoise from the fable and the institution of marriage. The mere focus of Aesop appears to be on marriage in which he finds steadiness and comfort coupled with the monotonous nature of matrimony. The insult “asshole” concluding the stanza signifies the wife’s dissatisfaction with the marriage, arousing the sentiment of hatred for men in general. It further alludes to the slow-paced

relationship of Duffy and Henri since Duffy always wanted to have a baby with him, yet “he was too bohemian to want a baby” (qtd. in Carpenter, 2009).

The poem continues with rhetorical questions asked by Mrs Aesop, once again, making a reference to Aesop’s fables and the ostensible morals they attempt to instil (lines 20-21).

“I could barely keep awake as the story droned on
towards the moral of itself. *Action, Mrs A., speaks louder
than words.* And that’s another thing, the sex” (22-24)

The lines above carry connotations of cynicism since, even though Aesop argues for the importance of taking action, he does not seem to practice it. Instead, he perseveres in storytelling. Despite reiteration, he does not apply the moral principles, which portrays him as a hypocrite. In line 24, the narrator asserts that he is deeply occupied with sex, in which she implies to be dissatisfied with his performance. She mentions sex as briefly as possible, which is an indicator of her frigidity.

In the following line, she refers to sex as “diabolical”, which questions the morals to be drawn from his fables. His loose morals are also clarified by his use of the religious word “Christ” in the opening line of the poem, yet he does not behave concordantly. The discrepancy between the first line and the twenty-fifth, thus, displays his hypocrisy as his actions and words do not correlate by any means:

“[Sex] was diabolical I gave him a fable one night
about a little cock that wouldn’t crow, a razor-sharp axe” (25-26)

The ending of the poem is striking as the narrator threatens to kill the husband as in the spousal homicide examples from the 1980s and 90s. According to the findings of research conducted in 1994, most spouse murders in the house of the couples tended to be committed at night (Associated Press, 1994). It is in accordance with the (evening) time Mrs Aesop tells a fable to Aesop, following which a murder might occur. The castration implication of Mrs Aesop through giving a fable about “a little cock” has indeed a dual meaning. It both refers to her inclination to kill the husband and to not have sexual activity with him due to the small size of his penis.

"I'll cut off your tail, all right, I said, to save my face. / That shut him up. I laughed last, longest." (28-29)

In the final lines, Duffy alludes to the "Bobbitt case where the wife cuts the husband's penis off" (Wood, 2005). In the Bobbitt Case which occurred in 1993, Lorena Bobbitt cut off John Bobbitt's penis with a carving knife and hid it until she told the police its location. She testified that she had been exposed to marital sexual assault by John, and the rape at 3 a.m. was the final straw (Encyclopedia, n.d.). Correspondingly, under the influence of the worldwide news, Duffy uses the word "tail" as an alternative to the penis as they both hang down the thighs. The homonyms "tail" and "tale" thus create a pun referring to "penis" and "story" (Wood, 2005). Remarking and mocking the notion of literary patriarchy as in the "pen and the penis" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 4) metaphor, Duffy also criticises the literary power men have had.

On the other hand, in the poem, by threatening Aesop, Mrs Aesop takes revenge of an unfulfilling marriage. She could either literally kill the husband or dismantle his "small" penis out of his body. All her frustration and loathing stem from how deeply she loves Aesop since "she's still married to him, she hasn't left him, she's still making love to him, she's just disappointed" (Wood, 2005). With her intimidation, Mrs Aesop eventually feels fulfilled against men for finally being of the gender that silences the oppressive even though it has caused her extreme hatred for men in general.

4.3.2. "Mrs Darwin" & "Mrs Sisyphus"

As a five-line poem, Duffy's epigram "Mrs Darwin" concordantly follows "Mrs Aesop" in *The World's Wife*. Similar to the former poem, as tackled above, "Mrs Darwin" hinges on the use of animals in fables by which Duffy expresses the social image of men through the lens of women; hence the capitalisation of "z" in "Zoo".

"7 April 1852.

Went to the Zoo.

I said to Him –

Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds me

of you." (Duffy, 1999)

Though “Mrs Darwin” is “a very tiny poem” about which Duffy humorously says that she “stole [it] from the diary of the wife of Charles Darwin” (Emory University, 2015), it is sharply critical. It highlights women’s ignored contributions to history. Duffy, thus, implies that it was Emma Darwin who inspired Charles Darwin to come up with the theory of human evolution. The poem, written in a diary format, begins with the specific date April 7, 1852, some years before the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Like many other spouse-supporting wives, Emma, too, is neglected in history by the very same history she might have contributed to. The theme in the poem thus is negligence of women, which, in turn, provokes Mrs Darwin to call her husband a “chimpanzee” as a means of insult.

When Duffy avers that “[...] if we were able to go back through history we’d find many, many moments where the wife came up with the idea and the husband took the credit” (Wood, 2005), she also implies one reason for the systematic misandry: women’s not getting the appreciation they have deserved. In the below excerpt from a letter written by Darwin to his daughter, it is evidenced that Mrs Darwin was a bright person who could have inspired Darwin on his works:

[...] Well it is an awful & astounding fact that you are married; & I shall miss you sadly. But there is no help for that, & I have had my day & a happy life, notwithstanding my stomach; & this I owe almost entirely to our dear old mother, who, as you know well, is as good as twice refined gold. Keep her as an example before your eyes [...] (Letter to Henrietta Emma Darwin, September 4, 1871).

The excerpt from the letter clearly states the importance of Mrs Darwin for Darwin. However, she is reduced only to the mother identity stripped of her individuality. It can be concluded that Mrs Darwin’s anger in the poem stems from her being suppressed and overshadowed by the husband whose accomplishments and success she shares to some extent.

Similarly, in the succeeding poem “Mrs Sisyphus”, which is another Ovid-based poem, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to roll a boulder uphill and then roll it back down to the bottom forever in a vicious circle (Ovid, 2004: 133, 371). The reason for his punishment, incurring Zeus’s wrath, was that Sisyphus betrayed him for attempting to help the river-god Asopus to find her daughter Aegina, who was carried away to an island by Zeus disguised as an eagle (Hamilton, 2012: 321). The parallelism between Ovid’s Sisyphus and Duffy’s Sisyphus is that both suffer from patriarchy as

the dominant ideology in their era. In the former, Zeus holds the authority while in the latter Sisyphus overworks for “perks” (line 6) in a capitalist world. Sisyphus’ diligence disturbs Mrs Sisyphus and creates a sense of deep contempt for men in general. Duffy speaks of the poem as follows:

This poem to me was about men (or it could be women, because it could apply to women as well) who just spend too much time working. And leave their relationship, and don’t work on their marriage. And again in this one I’ve got that slightly Irish-Scottish voice, with words like “feckin”, which I take from my own family (Wood, 2005).

In this quotation, Duffy mentions the effect of her cultural background on her word choice, especially through “a kirk”, a type of church architecture used in Scotland. The poem begins aggressively with a direct reference to Ovid’s myth: “That’s him pushing the stone up the hill, the jerk. / I call it a stone – it’s nearer the size of a kirk.” (lines 1-2) As mentioned in Duffy’s quotation, Mrs Sisyphus too elaborates on the negligent spouses who do not have time for their family. In the following section, Mrs Sisyphus continues to highlight the very same point:

“What use is a perk, I shriek,
when you haven’t the time to pop open a cork
or go for so much as a walk in the park?” (7-9)

The rhetorical questions serve as a technique Mrs Sisyphus adopts to justify herself. As a disappointed wife, she does not hesitate to express contempt towards Sisyphus through words such as “the absolute berk” (4) and “dork” (10). Beside the offensive tone, Mrs Sisyphus’ hatred for him is obvious in the line “I could do something vicious to him with a dirk” (line 5) alluding both to the likelihood of murdering him and to Ovid’s myth by the “vicious” circle he is trapped in.

When Sisyphus is away for work, Mrs Sisyphus lies “alone in the dark” (25), comparing her feelings to those of “Noah’s wife” (26) and to the composer Bach’s wife (28), whom as female counterparts have also been erased from history, like Mrs Darwin. It is argued by Jarvis (2007) that Anna Magdalena Bach can be the composer of some of Bach’s best works. There seems no connection between Jarvis and Duffy, yet it proves that Duffy predicted what Jarvin revealed. Besides, Jarvin also published “Written by Mrs Bach” (2011), a book with a title similar to the poems in *The World’s*

Wife. It indicates that the silenced and once ignored women have been coming up to the surface, which has been Duffy's aim.

“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.” (29-32)

In the last lines, Sisyphus is sharply rebuked by Mrs Sisyphus for being extremely work-oriented. In an interview, Duffy describes her past relationship with Adrian Henri to be all about “[...] poetry and sex, very heady, and he was never faithful. He thought poets had a duty to be unfaithful. I’ve never got the hang of that” (Langley, 2009). Since Henri prioritised his occupation as a poet at the cost of damaging their affair, the poem might be inspired by the then relationship between him and Duffy.

Moreover, unlike Mrs Sisyphus' uneasiness, Sisyphus seems to be content with all the extra work, and it evokes the idea put by Albert Camus that “[t]he struggle itself [yearning for money in the poem] toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (1969: 123), and knowing that he is happy with his avarice, Mrs Sisyphus becomes even more hostile as she feels lonely in their one-sided relationship.

4.3.3. “Mrs Icarus”

Icarus, the son of Daedalus the “Inventive Genius”, is best known for his disobedience to his father in Greek Mythology (Fox, 1916: 64). For helping Ariadne and Theseus with escaping the Labyrinth which Daedalus once created, Daedalus and his son Icarus are punished with being put in the Labyrinth, which even its creator cannot escape without any hint. Still, there is no such thing as a dead end for this perspicacious man since he comes up with a solution that is flying past the walls utilising artificial wings made from waxed feathers. Daedalus warns Icarus not to fly too high so that the glue of the wings will not melt. However, full of delirious joy stemming from the sense of flying up and up exultantly, Icarus turns a deaf ear to his father's commands in anguish and is headed for a fall into the sea (Hamilton, 2012: 144). As for his age and outlook, Icarus is often painted as an adolescent boy with blonde curly hair as in Henry Campbell's painting entitled “Daedalus and Icarus” (1979). The myth of Icarus as in

most Greek myths aims to teach a moral lesson through dramatized struggles. The primary message to be derived from this myth pertains to arrogance of power.

In “Mrs Icarus”, too, Duffy deconstructs the mythological story. Subverting the male-subject position, she gives voice to Mrs Icarus and her narrative of the myth. Duffy, while talking about the poem, points out W.H. Auden’s “Musee des Beaux Arts” (1939), “a wonderful poem [...] based on the painting by Breughel” (Wooden, 2005), as a source of influence.

“In Breughel’s Icarus, for instance: how everything turns

away

Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may

Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,

But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone” (lines 16-20)

Auden in his ekphrastic poem emphasises the death of Icarus to which people are indifferent, and it is what Duffy reinterprets as men’s indifference to the inequalities women have faced. Thus, subverting the story functioning as a cultural artifact of history, she creates the furious wife Mrs Icarus and lets her speak. In “Mrs Icarus”, the narrator who is Icarus’ fictional wife, bitterly summarises her consideration of Icarus in such a subtle way that without even explicitly complaining, she succinctly expresses her disquieting thoughts about him. This five-line poem full of haughty disdain for and humiliation of men indeed sheds light on the sociocultural dynamics between men and women in Duffy’s active years as a poet. In fact, all five lines could utterly make up a sentence if they were to be juxtaposed in only one line. However, to the end of striking the reader with a deep dramatic ending, the complete sentence is divided into lines with a growing inbuilt tension. In the same manner, the poem opens with a mild tone giving no clue about the contempt for the husband in the concluding line:

“I’m not the first or the last / to stand on a hillock,” (lines 1 and 2)

The pronoun “I” in the above lines represents all women who either publicly or privately have been standing against the inequalities between their own gender and that of men. The preference for the word “hillock” instead of “hill” is crucial. It functions to reflect women’s awareness of the developing stage of their movements so

as to make their dissenting voices heard. In the poem, “standing on a hillock” refers to one of the first steps for women to acquire their basic rights as in the early 1970s with women’s rights movements.

As implied in the poem, by standing on a hillock among many other women, Mrs Icarus evokes the idea of women’s attempt at taking control out of men’s hands, at least in the matters that concern primarily women. In so doing, they could finally realise their potential as individuals in society. The 1985-track by Kate Bush named “Running Up That Hill”, a fragment of whose lyrics are stated below, holds a mirror to the correlation between Mrs Icarus’ concern and the dominant culture it was written in with regard to the reasons behind women’s intense loathing for men:

“And if I only could / I’d make a deal with God / And I’d get him to swap our places

Be runnin’ up that road / Be runnin’ up that hill / Be runnin’ up that buildin’”

Mrs Icarus states that she stands on the hillock while the lyrics above mention the progress women have made as they have left behind the hillocks and now are moving forward to a hill. This, indeed, points to the women’s movements which had made progress in terms of their rights in the eye of law. This progress encompasses the enactment of The Equal Pay Act (1970), The Universal Adult Suffrage (1973), and The Sex Discrimination Act (1975), whose implementation takes at least a couple of years. However, they create a sense of climbing up.

It is also striking in the lyrics that the speaking persona would “swap places” with men, not for only being granted the privileges of being a man, but also for men to experience the challenges women have been posed to. Similarly, Mrs Icarus’ dramatic monologue indicates her boredom as a passive person who is supposed to “stand on a hillock”.

“Is there so much hate for the ones we love? / Oh, tell me, we both matter, don’t we?”

The song also draws attention to the hate women feel for men although they once did or still love them. In parallel to Mrs Icarus’ mild tone at the beginning of the poem, the persona in the song cries for validation to prevent further absolute hate, which was the case in the 1970s for women, especially wives. The negligence and indifferent attitude of men, thus, bring forth misandry.

Mrs Icarus' "standing on a hillock" as a way of showing how far women had come and finally risen up may be in close relation to the economic aspects of the 1970s, as well. As previously mentioned, The Equal Pay Act 1970 and The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 enabled women to gain economic independence more fairly and easily, which might have encouraged them to end unhappy marriages in which they are chained up due to financial issues and/or to have a relatively higher economic status symbolised by "the hillock". With the enactment of these acts, women's increasing level of economic welfare was thought to be the motive behind their intolerance of men. While climbing up the hillocks and reaching higher up, divorce rates were also increasing as asserted by Levitan & Belous, "Divorce rates are climbing; marriage is being postponed, if not rejected" (1981: 26).

"watching the man she married" (line 3)

In line 3, Mrs Icarus draws attention to her marital status. When read in conjunction with the two preceding lines, it is evident that she, on the hillock, watches her "husband" Icarus. The meaning attributed to watching is open-ended. It is more likely for the word "watch" to carry a connotation of "looking after, caring for" as in the phrasal verb "watch over". The narrator's tone has become neutral in this line. It is unclear until the line is comprehended in accordance with the preceding and/or succeeding lines, and when done so, the prevalent tone is obviously not a pleasant one.

Likewise, as mentioned earlier, it may indicate Mrs Icarus's looking "down" on men from "the hillock". The duality in the poem seems to refer to both the myth and the women's sociocultural and political status in the poet's era. Even Thatcher was exposed to belittling by the male members in the parliament as she was attacked "not just as a candidate but as a wife and mother" (Thatcher, 2013: 94) due to the prejudices of having a woman as the prime minister.

In the line "prove to the world" (4), Mrs Icarus refers to giving voice to women's, especially wives', paramount concerns about men's oppression of women in any aspect, particularly economic. In Duffy's subverted version of the myth, Icarus' flying may be associated to his occupation in a capitalist world. However, Mrs Icarus is required to remain where she has been, with which she does not seem too pleased. In "Women and World Development", an edited book compiling seminars and essays on women's economic, social, and cultural development all over the world, Papanek

argues: “Men usually discharge their family responsibilities by employment or self-employment in occupations which have at least some contact with the world outside the household. Women often do not” (Tinker & Bramsen, 1976: 63).

As previously mentioned, all lines, when brought together, make up a sentence, which clearly demonstrates the message that is to be conveyed in the poem. However, they are divided into lines so as to be in a poetic form in order to get rid of the prosaic format. The sentence formation of the poem is as follows:

“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.”

When considered as the sentence above, it can be deduced from the poem that the narrator stands on that hillock not to stare at the husband in its literal meaning, yet, in Mrs Icarus’ own words, to “prove to the world” his vanity and futility. In order to do that, as a woman, she has had to overcome hardships which are to be both before the law and society. The adversity, inevitably, provokes outrage from Mrs Icarus: “he’s a total, utter, absolute, Grade A pillock.” (5)

The gradually built tension in the poem reaches its climax in the final line where Mrs Icarus hurls insults at her husband. “Pillock”, standing out among all the other words in the line, is defined as “a stupid or annoying person” in British slang (Collins Online Dictionary, n.d.). It serves as a dire, explicit way to reveal her antipathy for him even though she could have used another word to insult him brutally. It can be concluded that Duffy created female characters who do not hesitate to insult the husbands as a way of revolt to the societal expectations dominated by patriarchal ideology.

Morley, in his compilation where he gives voice to what husbands expect from their wives for the sake of their marriage, puts forward a suggestion calling out to wives: “As a wife, your greatest contribution will be to help your husband; your greatest challenge, not to embarrass him” (1998: 117). Duffy however creates a wife who refers to the husband as a “pillock”. Though a wife’s great support of her husband is not to “embarrass” him in any way, it does not seem to be reciprocal, and this is what Duffy criticises in the poem through the offensive voice of the woman.

Likewise, towards the end of Thatcher’s service, Austin Mitchell MP in The House of Commons on the Lawson resignation crisis looks for elements in her gender to despise

Thatcher. He refers to her as a “brave little woman getting on with the woman’s work of trying to dominate the world” (Bowman, 1989). Duffy through Mrs Icarus subverts history in which the female Prime Minister is humiliated in public by a man and makes up Mrs Icarus who does not hesitate to proclaim her hatred for men. Consequently, Mrs Icarus, slowly but attentively, chooses words to establish her telling of the story, abandoning a meticulous word selection to refer to men, the idea stemming from the culturally imposed codes upon women.

4.3.4. “Eurydice”

The myth of Eurydice and Orpheus is perhaps one of the most noted myths which mention the tragic end of a married couple in love. Hamilton states that the beginning of the story, which covers the encounter of Orpheus and the Argonauts, is mentioned only by Apollonius while the rest is told by Virgil and Ovid. Apollonius’ massive influence on Virgil is embodied in the rest of the story through the pattern which might have been expected from Apollonius. The similar pattern in the style of both Virgil and Ovid suggests that any of the three men might have written the myth in the same way it has reached the present day (2012: 106).

In “Eurydice”, the narrator often emphasizes poetry and its realm to be dominated by male poets, i.e., “gods” (lines 52-53) of (non)fiction. According to Virgil’s version of the story, fleeing from a swarm of bees in a meadow, the newly wed Eurydice is bitten by a serpent and passes to the Underworld, the realm of Hades. In deep anguish, the wretched Orpheus enters the Underworld playing his lyre in an attempt to get his wife back. Touched by his gloomy music, all creatures and guards in the Underworld overlook his presence there. He could take Eurydice back to earth on the condition that he will not look at her who is right behind him. Defeated by curiosity, once he looks at Eurydice, she vanishes in thin air right after making a pitiful speech about being bereft of life (Maro, n.d.).

“Eurydice”, Duffy’s “least favourite poem in the book” (Wood, 2005) retells the whole story but this time from Eurydice’s point of view. It is noteworthy that her target audience is women as the poem begins with a call out to “girls” (line 1) in a similar vein as a warning about men and their possible harm which was aimed by the organisations to protect women back in the late twentieth century.

At the beginning of the poem, Eurydice vividly depicts not only herself in the Underworld but also the Underworld itself as follows:

“It was a place where language stopped,
a black full stop, a black hole
where words had to come to an end.” (4-6)

The depiction of the Underworld above evokes the idea of male-dominated literature where only the male writers and publishers could determine the fate of literary tradition. Duffy’s focus on and the subtle criticism of grand narratives all written and published by men are emphasised in lines 7-9 drawing attention to the futility of their being either “last” or “famous” words. In so doing, she belittles men, who have been over proud with their superiority established over women yet end up in the Underworld with the very same women.

When Carol Ann Duffy and Andrew Motion were nominated for laureateship in 1999, it grabbed the headlines. Duffy and Motion praised each other as she even said that she liked both him and his poems (1999, Viner). According to Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate preceding Carol Ann Duffy, “[t]here is a sense [in *The World’s Wife*] that as a member of the gender one is under attack but I didn’t feel her face was turned against me” (Forbes, 2002). That is, even though Duffy might not have targeted Motion due their rivalry, it is obvious that the male (literary) figures and publishers are being attacked in some of the poems. Duffy elaborates on it as follows:

It’s transformed totally and continues to transform. Every few years there are more advances and, I suppose, power-taking by women writers. [...] And then there’s a whole range of different women, different ages, different cultures, different classes, writing throughout these islands—England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland—and that has sort of leaked into the male way of writing which has become much more female, so it’s perhaps not fully reflected in the publishing world. So that needs to change (Wood, 2005).

In the following section of the poem, she refers to the Underworld, and thus death, as somewhere “safe” (line 16) for her. However, she is constantly followed by “the kind of a man” (17) who writes poems and calls her “His Muse” (22). It may be a reference to Duffy’s relationship with the poet Adrian Henri since their relationship was based on both “poetry and sex” (Langley, 2009). Eurydice’s being followed can be considered a “stalk” where women, objectified by the stalkers, are assaulted and reduced to objects. De Becker defines a stalk as “a crime of power, control, and

intimidation very similar to date rape” (1997: 198). In “Eurydice”, too, the narrator is under constant pressure stemming from Orpheus’ stalks, which cause quite a gradual stir. Interesting enough, Duffy in her teenage years “was terribly in love” (Stephenson, 2016) with Adrian Henri as she “followed” him and “went to university in Liverpool to be with him” (1999, Viner). Thus, the characterization of Orpheus as a stalker may in fact be a satire on her teenage years when she changed her life for a man with whom she eventually broke up.

“a familiar knock-knock-knock at Death’s door. / Him. / Big O. / Larger than life.” (28-31)

In the above lines, though not directly, the narrator mentions Orpheus for the first time with the capitalised “o”. It is evident that she is bothered by the unexpected visit. It is also implied that she cannot get rid of him even after death as he stands “at Death’s door”. “Him” is used deliberately to refer to all men who bother their wives and constantly remind them that they are there, watching over those women. In the sociocultural context of Duffy’s era as an active writer, it can be said that “Him” refers to the bad influence of Henri, who passed away in the year following *The World’s Wife*’s publication, like a shadow following her. As a witness of Duffy and Henri’s past relationship, Roger McGough defines Duffy as “a strong person, funny and sharp but we’d assumed she was under Adrian’s influence” (Forbes, 2002), which justifies Henri’s influence and inspiration on Duffy.

“Big O”, similarly, is a sarcastic way to refer to Orpheus to represent her belittling of him by calling him “big”. His being “larger than life” may indicate two things; his ability and willingness to reach out what is beyond death through his visit to the Underworld or his being physically large by which she does not seem to be attracted. The narrator and thus Duffy herself refer to the decades before Duffy’s adulthood stage when women did not have enough awareness of the inequalities they faced compared to men. As Duffy says in “Eurydice”,

“Things were different back then.

For the men, verse-wise,

Big O was the boy. Legendary.” (34-36)

The above lines may indicate Duffy's deep anxiety about the laureateship in 1999 when Andrew Motion was appointed to the post. "Things were different back then" since women were the minority, small in poetry and literature, which made them feel inferior to male writers. This, eventually, led women to nurture a grudge against men. Even though Duffy does not seem to hold grudge against Andrew Motion for a decade of her late laureateship, she might also have some enmity towards the system which granted privilege to him as a man.

When Duffy says "[p]oetry now is much more part of the fabric of people's lives than it was, say, 30 years ago. There weren't any women poets around then" (Viner, 1999), she, on the one hand, implies that "things were different back then". On the other hand, she emphasises that the active role of female poets developed compared to the previous decades of the twentieth century, yet it was not "big" enough. Thus, through the lines above, she points to the insufficient number of female writers to occupy such posts as the laureateship or membership in the Parliament.

In the following part of the poem, she mentions the extent to which his poems were appreciated by other creatures and their reactions. She refers to all those beings as "bollocks" since she is aware of the overratedness of his works by all those overwhelmingly male beings. Furthermore, the sexist attitude towards men is at its zenith in these lines. The word "bollocks" in the 1970s was defined as testicles in Oxford English Dictionary (De Jongh, 1977). It is still so, which holds a mirror to women's not being over the psychological inferiority they have had to experience for decades even after being granted with some political and civil rights.

"Bollocks. (I'd done all the typing myself, / I should know.)" (45-46)

As for the narrator's typing Orpheus' poems, it can be deduced that, in the poem's context, Orpheus is the boss and Eurydice is the employee who seems to not be able to stand working for him anymore. It is noted in an Irish Senate debate from the early 1970s that men had a wider area of promotion compared to women within the context of jobs that require only one specific gender. While women could not reach a position beyond personal secretary, men could eventually hold a position of authority such as becoming the managing director of the department.

Likewise, as Duffy elucidates, "if she (Eurydice) had her time again, the one thing she might do is write for herself rather than type his poems" (Wood, 2005). It then refers

to the inequality in the work opportunities between men and women where women's career prospects were limited as stated by Robinson: "The 'female only' have a structure of promotion which is entirely limited. You go from junior typist to senior typist to personal secretary, stop" (1973). By considering a second chance, Duffy indicates that Eurydice would fight for what she once did not.

As stated by Robinson, the highest point women could reach in the work field was a "personal secretary", which corresponds to Eurydice's service to her husband Orpheus. In fact, a great number of women were unsatisfied with their job as a secretary back in the 1980s. In an article published in *The New York Times*, Miss Dolson, a 1976 graduate of Boston College who would not be hired in her field, stated that in order to find employment, she had to go to the Katharine Gibbs School, the school whose mission was to raise "well-mannered", conservative-looking secretaries. She complains about the situation asking a rhetorical question: "After four years of college, what was I doing at a secretarial school?" Then she continues, "Why not just kill myself right then and there?" (Charles, 1983).

The very same conditions and the rhetorical questions apply to Eurydice, too. She implies that being a typist is the ostensible favoured work field as a woman back then. It is even more restrictive for Eurydice as she works for her husband. Orpheus, seemingly, is madly fond of her. However, in consideration of Eurydice's not being keen on going back to the earth, it can be deduced that Orpheus' insistence might stem from his using her as an asset. This, eventually, arouses hostility against men both in the cases of Eurydice in the poem and women in Duffy's era.

In the following part of the poem where the narrator is running out of patience against her story's being told by a man, she draws attention to the necessity of her following him to the life where she is a captive. It is the same feeling for women who have felt that they are particularly financially dependent on their husbands:

"Like it or not,

I must follow him back to our life –

Eurydice, Orpheus' wife –" (61-63)

Women inevitably felt obliged to wed for preserving a prosperous life under the shadow of husbands because it was considered normal for a young woman to unite her

life with a man for social and economic protection. However, in time, women gradually stepped into the realm of employment where men had always been present. As argued by Watstein, “Years ago women went to college to find a husband; now they know they are going to work” (Charles, 1983). In Duffy’s case, she left her job “at a hairdresser’s on Saturday” (Preston, 2010) and “went to university in Liverpool to be with him [Adrian Henri]” (Viner, 1999). The change in the mindset about women’s social status and the standards is prominent in “Eurydice”, too. Fed up with having no voice, Eurydice now begins to tell the story in her own words from her perspective:

“Girls, forget what you’ve read.

It happened like this –

I did everything in my power

to make him look back.” (79-82)

Once again, she addresses women as she believes they all need this kind of speech for motivation and the realisation of their potential. She asserts that she “did everything in her power”, drawing attention to the likelihood of not being successful, yet she manages to succeed. In fact, “back” might refer to the past when women were held inferior to men. The deliberate effort to make Orpheus look back is a reference to the progress women had made against men who did not accept women as individuals with their own rights and identity apart from men’s presence.

Duffy comments on Orpheus in “Eurydice” rather as an arrogant husband and a male poet whose “vanity as a poet, his ego, is the one thing that will make him turn round” (Wood, 2005). In fact, Andrew Motion became the first Poet Laureate to retire voluntarily because he spent “10 years feeling quite often that I [he] was being asked to write about things which I [he] had no strong feeling about” (BBC News, 2015). Perhaps, when Duffy did not reveal any grudges against Andrew Motion during all those years of his laureateship, she did what was supposed to be done. Just as Eurydice praises Orpheus in the lines “Orpheus, your poem’s a masterpiece. / I’d love to hear it again ...” (103-104), Duffy also says, “I like him. I have known him for years, I like his poems very much” (Viner, 1999) about Motion. In return, just as Orpheus returns Eurydice’s compliments in the best way, which is an eternal disappearing, Motion

makes incredible comments about Duffy and, instead of keeping the title until he passes away, he voluntarily retires following a decade of laureateship:

Carol Ann Duffy is a very, very bright, appealing, clever, ingenious, approachable and generally heartwarming writer. She's a Good Thing, capital G, capital T, one of the poets I most enjoy reading, and I felt that there was a completely false antithesis created in the press about what we would both do with the laureateship (Viner, 1999).

In both Orpheus and Duffy's cases, the women obtain their goals. At the end of the poem, Eurydice manages to get rid of the imperious husband as she makes him look back through lofty flattery. In order not to sound sexist, the narrator compliments women through a generalisation, calling them "the dead". Concordantly, she indicates that men can be drowned by women at any time as it is a matter of time for women's uniting against men under the roof of misandry.

"The dead are so talented.

The living walk by the edge of a vast lake

near the wise, drowned silence of the dead." (111-113)

The final lines according to Duffy "are the best lines of the poem" since "that's the beginning of her [Eurydice's] own poem." She asserts "the source of poetry" to be utter silence, and a poem functions as a means to "frame silence" since "the dead" and "the vast lake" stand for the very silence (Wood, 2005). Additionally, "the living" symbolises the male poets who can be overthrown by dead yet powerful women. In this poem, too, hostility towards the male sex, which derives from the systematic inequality of men and women throughout history, is voiced.



5. CONCLUSION

History, according to the new historicism theory, is subjected to be conceived partially. New historicism necessitates the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts to reach not an objective and universal truth but a just ground with the voices of people on the margins. With this objective in mind, new historicism, unlike the movements that isolated a text from its context, traces the constructed human subjectivity in literary texts.

Furthermore, as propounded by Foucault, powerholders produce knowledge. In so doing, they eliminate the less powerful ones such as women, the queer, and the minority groups from the record of the past, distorting its authentic image. That is, knowledge of history is partial, and the power necessitates the suppression of the inferior. Knowledge has been transmitted and preserved by the very same producers of power. When Greenblatt established the fundamental tokens of new historicism, he very much depended on Foucault's theories concerning power relations. For both theorists, the existence of power cannot be threatened owing to its incontestability, and thus whoever seizes power is capable of misleading human beings over the record of past events.

The present study has revolved around the poetry collection *The World's Wife*, a literary text that is embedded within the context of the late twentieth century in Britain. The poems are written from the perspective of the silenced women from history, mythology, literature, and real life since history in which their stories were told lacks credibility according to new historicism. Accordingly, Duffy reappropriates irony and dramatic monologue to foreground the women neglected by the winners in history and only recognised in relation to their husbands in the past. Consequently, she has taken her stand on the side of the minorities left on the margins.

It is argued in the present study that Duffy's portrayals of the characters in the poems depend very much on the poet's own experiences of the sociocultural dynamics in Britain. Poems' interpretation within the framework of new historicism has necessitated the biographical study of Duffy since both Duffy and the poems can be viewed as the cultural products and co-texts of their own societies. Duffy is the first female, first openly lesbian, and first Scottish Poet Laureate of Britain. She inevitably was deviant and unorthodox in England under the Conservative rule in the late

twentieth century, which allegedly belated her laureateship for a decade. Furthermore, Glasgow as her homeland, her Irishness by origin, and her Catholic upbringing may justify her feeling of empathy for the marginalised in general. Her sense of not belonging in England is further touched upon in her autobiographical poem “Originally” (1990). The confusion she has been plunged in concerning her ethnic identity accompanied with her being a homosexual feminist might have urged her to take sides with people who have been suffering the same oppression about their gender and sexual orientation at the hands of the patriarchal, heteronormative world.

This study has mainly concentrated on homosexual women, women on whom violence was inflicted, and women’s feelings of hatred for men as a result of the public disdain for lesbians and abuse of women. In light of the poet’s background and within the framework of new historicism, the study has given a detailed account of the attitude towards women in Britain between the 1970s and 1990s and how women reciprocated such an attitude. Neither the literary work nor historical events have been foregrounded. Instead, the works have been examined with no privilege over one another for the authenticity of the past. The new historicist reading of Duffy’s *The World’s Wife* in this study has entailed the use of textual evidence from the mentioned period in Britain with equal importance. In this study, since Duffy is “a very private person” (Flood, 2009), the interviews conducted with her have predominantly provided the textual evidence utilised in the analysis of the selected poems. The institutions of family and marriage in conjunction with politics in Britain have been further scrutinised to manifest the reflection of such dynamics in the poems. To this end, besides interviews, Acts of Parliament, newspaper articles, documentaries, letters, and images have been analysed to acquire a thorough understanding of the era.

The analyses of the selected poems with their protagonists in question have been carried out on three different themes in this study. Each theme serves as a prominent concept that was dominant in the era. To begin with, lesbian propaganda developed in the late twentieth century in Britain with the collective voices and activities of women standing for their rights to be equal to those of heterosexual people. Inaugurated with the gay propaganda for gay rights, lesbian associations were founded to cooperate against sex discrimination. Accordingly, in “Queen Herod”, the sexual tension between Queen Herod and other queens is salient. Such homosexual attraction is

accompanied by solidarity among women for the protection of lesbianism through the female baby who is implied to be a potential lesbian. The emphasis on the experienced, “wise” queens may correlate to the then relationship between Duffy and Kay. Despite being in a homosexual relationship, which was against the norms of the society at the time, Duffy strived for having a baby to experience motherhood which her then partner Kay had already had. Homosexual associations such as the Lesbian Avengers and Mermaids sought the same solidarity among women as the queens do in the poem. Duffy further might have focused on the support Maureen Colquhoun lacked as the first out lesbian MP in the Parliament.

Likewise, in “*from Mrs Tiresias*”, Duffy draws attention to female homosexuality by encapsulating the part where Tiresias returns home physically as a woman and Mrs Tiresias develops a sense of sexual attraction for the new him. The particular interest in female breasts displays not only her but also Duffy’s sexual preferences. Most importantly, the poem sheds light on lesbophobia through Tiresias’ existential crisis in his female body. It indicates that British people in the late twentieth century did not welcome lesbians, which created a sense of self-loathing among homosexual women. It further demonstrates the public pressure on those women and how they were not allowed to embrace their sexual orientation. ‘Lesbian’ as an insult transformed into an adjective to define sexual identity though it was initially challenging since the then government under Margaret Thatcher enacted the Local Government Act in 1988 as an obstacle to tolerance towards sexual minorities. In return, lesbian activists protested governmental bodies such as the BBC Studios in 1988, and such events are projected in the poem as indicators of the cultural traits in the epoch.

“Mrs Quasimodo” centres on a literary character unlike “Queen Herod” and “*from Mrs Tiresias*”. However, their theme is shared. “Mrs Quasimodo” bears the traces of Duffy’s religious upbringing with the bell metaphors through which she reflects lesbianism. Unwelcomed by society due to their unalluring physical appearances, the Quasimodos wed to fit in the heteronormative expectations. Mrs Quasimodo discovers her lesbian identity after the marriage and upon her realisation of her husband’s unfaithfulness. The poem frames a homosexual woman who has had to marry someone from the opposite sex not to give rise to any speculations about her sexual orientation, which was prevalent in the late twentieth century in Britain. The suppressed lesbianism

both in the poem and in Duffy's life concludes with recognition. In Mrs Quasimodo's case, she explores the realms of her sexual identity while, in Duffy's case, she becomes the poet laureate in 2009 after a decade of delay. The poem further carries connotations concerning AIDS and its reputedly "gay-related" (Altman, 1982) nature, which was alleged to be a rumour campaign. The issue of women's physical appearance is also touched upon in the poem since lesbians with masculine looks were often referred to as "dykes" as a way of humiliation. Mrs Quasimodo's sexual activities with women reveal that she has eventually accepted her sexual orientation outside the heterosexual matrix.

In *The World's Wife*, female protagonists incorporate violence as a means to liberate themselves from the suffocating social constrictions of male hegemony. In the late twentieth century, wives and female partners mostly experienced domestic violence in the form of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse in Britain. Correspondingly, The Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act was passed in 1976 as a means of women's legal protection. Moreover, the 1970s witnessed the Second Wave Feminism. Women with more awareness concerning their rights reacted to abusive husbands in domestic spheres, which escalated the rates of domestic violence. In return, women's organisations were established to fight against such domestic abuse. Duffy subverts the abusive actions of men in "Queen Kong", where she embodies Queen Kong as a volatile woman seeking love through pressure. The gigantic gorilla stalks and kidnaps the man of her dreams under the name of love, isolating him from New York City and imprisoning him in her domestic sphere. The irony reveals the core of men's ill-treatment of women in history. In the present instances, however, only the female protagonists' narratives are heard since all the poems are written in dramatic monologues. Queen Kong uses the powerful domains of language by referring to King Kong by means of possessive pronouns such as "my man" (line 9). She further defines him as a "little" man several times, which may be a reference to Thatcher's being called a "brave little woman" (Bowman, 1989) by the MP Austin Mitchell towards the end of her premiership and loss of power. The poem further tackles the issue of marital rape which was legal until 1992 in Britain. Duffy, through Queen Kong's voice, tells the Kongs' story as a love story, yet Queen Kong's sexual actions seem to be no different than the marital rape of King Kong. Duffy thus subverts

history to give voice to the challenges women encountered in the late twentieth century in Britain.

In “The Kray Sisters”, Duffy retells the story of the notorious twin brothers from real life. In the poem, the radical feminist sisters strive to establish female solidarity by resorting to violence. Duffy wittily mentions some of the early feminists such as Emily Davison who was fatally injured by King George V’s horse in 1913 during an alleged propaganda. The suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst is also implied in the poem to give a brief account of the rights women gained. Duffy portrays the Kray Sisters as women who have deliberately abandoned feminine behaviours and adopted masculine attitudes to criticise Thatcher. The verbal violence is predominantly made use of in the poem by means of the man-insulting words such as “ballbreakers” and “plonkers”. The Kray Sisters have received several letters from their fans, supporting their feminist actions. Correspondingly, Duffy received supporting letters from women all over Britain when she was expected to be the poet laureate in 1999. The ending of the poem, however, is consistent with the theme of violence. Duffy concludes it with Nancy Sinatra’s lyrics of “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’” (1966), evoking brutality with radical feminist propaganda in parallel to the events in the given era.

“Mrs Beast” proves how a fairytale can become vulgar by means of subversion. Mrs Beast is depicted as a dominant wife, using the Beast only to meet her sexual needs, attributing no emotional meaning to their relationship. The poem contains several allusions to women in history such as Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and Marilyn Monroe. By mentioning various fictional and non-fictional women from history, Duffy gives equal voice to them, creating an imaginary parliament, which is highly probable to be influenced by Chaucer’s *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Legend of Good Women*. With female solidarity, Mrs Beast uses her power and controls the Beast to her end by means of her patronising language. The verbal abuse and the emotional violence inflicted on the Beast suppress him. Her humiliating him through insulting words such as names belonging to wild animals displays Mrs Beast’s further dominance over him. The poker game, to which Duffy was addicted in real life, serves as a just atmosphere for the women to create a collective image and voice against patriarchy. Depicting the Beast as a servant to the women, Duffy subverts the roles of women in society in the late twentieth century and before with the inclusion of various women from different

epochs. Objectification of the Beast through Mrs Beast's employing psychological and emotional violence towards him is what Duffy aims to tackle concerning the treatment of women in heteronormative societies.

In response to the hostility towards lesbianism and the infliction of violence on women, women's developing a sense of misandry has been inevitable with the rise of feminism in Britain. Consequently, the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act were enacted in the 1970s, yet they were not enough to prevent women's contempt for men. Women were still attributed to roles such as meeting the sexual needs of husbands without women's consent. Moreover, the number of femicides increased. Women still needed an authorial husband or father figure to obtain the same financial opportunities as men. Most importantly, Margaret Thatcher imposed the prevalence of the conventional role of women in domestic spheres, which angered innumerable women in Britain. Due to all these attitudes towards women, misandry has developed as a means of revenge in society and reverberates in some of Duffy's poems in *The World's Wife*. Firstly, "Mrs Aesop" contains bits of misandry, and Mrs Aesop's detestation of Aesop mainly stems from his neglect of the marriage. She insults the fable writer Aesop, who does not abide by what he lectures on religious morals. The hypocrisy of Aesop underlies Mrs Aesop's hatred for him. Duffy further criticises the male-dominated Church's not giving place to and ordination of women in the institution despite the likelihood of some women's being more religious than men. Mrs Aesop further emphasises the physical attributes of Aesop, who is often depicted as short. Making a correlation between shortness and power, she strives to reduce his power which stems from his oratory skills. Mrs Aesop even deeply wishes him to be dead, indicating the intensity of her hatred for him. Parallel to this, men beaten up to death by women such as Aileen Wuornos and the severity of the Bobbitt case whose influence Duffy was under prove the intensity of misandry in the era. The ending of the poem with a reference to Mrs Aesop's metaphorically cutting of Aesop's penis shows a resemblance to the Bobbitt case and indicates her frustration with the unfulfilled marriage.

"Mrs Darwin" and "Mrs Sisyphus" are relatively short compared to most of the poems in *The World's Wife*. "Mrs Darwin" is written in the form of a diary, yet it is striking since Mrs Darwin belittles Darwin and his contributions to history by resembling him

to a chimpanzee which generates the core of his studies. Emma Darwin is one of those wives neglected by history although she helped her husband formulate his theories. The husbands having taken credit for accomplishments result in the theme of misandry in the poem. Similarly, in “Mrs Sisyphus”, the wife has a deep contempt for Sisyphus, which derives from his workaholic nature. Mrs Sisyphus compares her feelings to Noah and Bach’s wives whose success was also overshadowed by the husbands since the studies have shown that Mrs Bach might have composed some masterpieces attributed to Bach. Duffy’s emphasis on work-oriented husbands might have stemmed from Duffy’s relationship with Adrian Henri, who prioritised his occupation over loyalty to their relationship. As a result, women were neglected and silenced in history, with which Duffy sympathises by uncovering them in the poems.

In “Mrs Icarus”, Duffy gives voice to the fictional wife of the mythological character Icarus. The theme of misandry is revealed by Duffy’s employing an overworking husband in this poem, following the same pattern in “Mrs Sisyphus”. The poem explores the realms of women’s rights and advances in women’s lives with political progress such as the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Universal Adult Suffrage in 1973. Intertwining the myth with the sociocultural dynamics in Britain, Duffy posits Mrs Icarus on a hillock to observe all the progress made for women’s political and civil rights in history. With such rights, wives abused by their husbands could get a divorce without exploitation. Icarus the “Grade A pillock” in Mrs Icarus’ words, is the embodiment of the husbands from history who neglected and silenced their wives, having deprived their partners of the intimacy women were seeking. Even though a wife has not been expected to humiliate and embarrass the husband, Mrs Icarus does not abide by this rule formulated by heteronormative society. Through her vulgar word selection, Mrs Icarus belittles the husband and reflects her sense of misandry.

In “Eurydice”, the final poem in this study, Duffy criticises the male hegemony in the world of literary publication through the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus. Despite the interpretation of the myth, in the poem, Eurydice is content in the Underworld by calling it “safe” (line 16). Orpheus, on the other hand, stalks her down to the Underworld to take her back to life, which Eurydice avoids because of his existence in it. The poem might have been influenced by Duffy’s teenage years where she, in a way, stalked Adrian Henri to Liverpool and moved. Henri’s influence on Duffy’s

poetry was noticed by their literary circle back then in a similar vein to Orpheus' shadow over Eurydice in the myth and the poem. Despite the timid portrayal of Eurydice, Duffy does not hesitate to give voice to her by using swear words such as "bollocks" to refer to male writers. It is indicated in the poem that Eurydice has helped Orpheus compose and type the poems, yet he has taken all the credit like some other famous husbands in history. Duffy further draws attention to the secretary vacancy often related to educated women as the ultimate and top position in which they could be employed in the past. Sex discrimination in employment prevailed in some places despite the law, and it aroused hostility towards men who worked in the same position, did the same job, yet earned much more money than their female colleagues. In the poem, Duffy also attacks the male writers and historians who write about women with no empathy. For this very reason, Eurydice takes back the pen, narrates her own story, and manages to send back Orpheus, whom she associates with the shadow of patriarchy.

The results of the present study indicate that just as the themes of lesbianism and violence in *The World's Wife* have resulted in the development of misandry, the same themes were interlinked and formed under the dominant ideologies in Britain in the late twentieth century. The sociocultural and political forces at work in the given era conspicuously shaped Duffy's composing of the poetry collection. Likewise, the poems put forth the power dynamics and circulation of those times. Subverting the past stories and narratives with a wide range of fictional and non-fictional female protagonists in the form of dramatic monologues, Duffy gives voice to the inferior individuals overwhelmed by the power of the oppressors. Consequently, she subverts history for the manifestation of 'her' story. Further studies on the scrutinization of all the poems in *The World's Wife* within a broader scope may yield a better understanding of the power relations with solid examples in Britain.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

Kişisel Bilgiler

Soyadı, adı : AZAKLI, AYŞEGÜL
Uyruğu : T.C.

Eğitim

Derece	Eğitim Birimi	Mezuniyet Tarihi
Yüksek Lisans	Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi	Devam ediyor.
Lisans	Gazi Üniversitesi	21.06.2021
Lise	Güneysu Şehit Kemal Mutlu Fen Lisesi	17.06.2016

İş Deneyimi

Yıl	Yer	Görev
2022-	Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen Üniversitesi	Araştırma Görevlisi
2021-2022	Çayeli Halk Eğitim Merkezi	Öğretici

Yabancı Dil

İngilizce – C2
Almanca – A2

Yayınlar

1. Eylül, 2023
Resistance to
“From Anti to Pro: An Imperious Non-
Heteronormativity in *The Writer*”
Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi, makale yazarı.
2. Temmuz, 2023
“An Inextricable Gender Struggle:
Heteronormativity in *The Writer*”
DIDE2023 Konferansı, sözlü bildiri sahibi.



