Lessons for Life: The Theme of Education in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy

A thesis submitted during 2020 to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Ph.D. degree in the Department of English.

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Monica Kanga T**, hereby declare that this thesis titled "**Lessons for Life: The Theme of Education in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy**" submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Professor Anna Kurian** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this university or any other University or Institution for the reward of any degree or diploma.

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Further the scholar has the following publications before the submission of her thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of her research.

"Putting Myths Straight: Education through Retelling in the Poetry of Duffy". *Dialog: A bi-annual peer-reviewed Journal*. No. 33 (SPRING/AUTUMN 2018). ISSN: 0975-4881 https://dialog.puchd.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Monica-Kanga-Putting-Myths-Stright-converted.pdf

The scholar has also undertaken the following course as part of the mandatory coursework to fulfill the UGC criteria for PhD Submission for a total of 14 credits.

1. Course: HE-801 (July-December 2015)

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   Instructors: Professor Anna Kurian and Professor Pramod K Nayar.

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   Course Title: Feminist Theories – Credits 4

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2. University of Madras, Chennai. **International Conference on Multipli'city of Spaces: Religion, Culture and Urbanity**, 21-22 February, 2019. Presented paper on: "Spaces of Belonging: The Poetry of Indian Women Poets".

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Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation examines the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy (1955 -), the first and only woman Poet Laureate of England, through the lens of education. Duffy's oeuvre has demonstrated variety in both form and theme through the years since 1985, when her first volume of verse was published. *I demonstrate that it is possible to read nearly all of her work via the theme of education*: there are poems in which the characters learn something; others in which teaching acts occur, and nearly all of the poems can be read as teaching the readers ways of being, thinking and living. Carol Ann Duffy shows the reader how to approach and see the everyday and the quotidian within the family, the school, and the community anew, conferring on them the possibility of seeing old, familiar structures differently, with a generosity of spirit and a degree of compassion that makes it possible to see past divisions and barriers.

Her work has achieved the rare and consistent distinction of being popular and critically acclaimed, simultaneously. She became Poet Laureate in 2009 though she was first considered for the honour in 1999, at which time, the then Prime Minister of England, Tony Blair preferred the less controversial Andrew Motion to her, fearing a possibly adverse reaction from the press and the public due to Duffy's sexual orientation. Katherine Viner states, "Duffy became a caricature – the lesbian single-parent, with a black partner, from a Scottish working-class background – rejected in favour of Andrew Motion – similarly caricatured as a public-school, Oxford-educated, married, white male toff" (unpaginated). There were reports of unhappiness over the appointment of Motion for "Carol Ann Duffy had been regarded by many as the best choice, but two factors may have counted against her – her outspokenness and her sexuality. A lesbian, she was unwilling to write poems for the royal family" (White and Gibbons,

unpaginated). When Duffy finally became the Poet Laureate she continued to stick to her previously enunciated stand, “I will write what needs to be written … I wouldn’t write a poem if it felt forced” (Higgins, unpaginated).

This Introduction is divided into four sections: it begins with a brief outline of women poets and their role in English Literature, as seen through the lens of the poet laureateship of England; in the next section I give an overview of Carol Ann Duffy’s poetic career; I move on to review the scholarship that has emerged on Duffy’s poetry and in the final section I offer a summary of the frameworks through which I will study Duffy’s poetry and the chapter scheme for the dissertation.

Women and Poetry

The naming of Duffy as the Poet Laureate in 2009 ended a long wait for women poets, one which began in Victorian times when Elizabeth Barrett Browning was originally considered for the honour but it was given to Alfred, Lord Tennyson. After the death of Tennyson, Christina Rossetti’s name was proposed, but she was not appointed either, although there was no suitable male contender and as a consequence the post of Poet Laureate was left vacant for four years.

When Duffy turned 17, *Outposts* magazine published Duffy’s poems, written when she was 15, which she acknowledges gave her confidence, energy and validation. By the time she compiled her first volume of verse, publication was no longer as easy: she went to every major publisher in England, but could not find a publisher for *Standing Female Nude* (1985) before Anvil took it. Poetry has largely been the domain of male poets and from early times, English women poets have written about the nervousness caused by the very thought of being published. This is exactly what poets like Margaret Cavendish (1623-1973), Anne Finch (1661-1720) and

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1673) went through[1]. To write in verse was seen as an act of presumption on the part of women who were seen as unwelcome intruders in the sacred domain of poetry, a man's preserve. Even before women could write, judgment has already been passed on them as can be seen when Virginia Woolf quotes the statement made by Dr. Johnson in *A Room of One's Own* that "a woman's composing is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all" (Woolf, 71).

Anne Finch in "The Introduction" talks about the misjudgments meted out to women by men, that a woman's work is received under three categories: "insipid, empty, and uncorrect" (Finch, 168). Regardless of the quality of writing, male poets and critics were usually bent on finding fault in the work of women. There are those who dismissed the work as "dull and untaught" (168) and others censured it because it lacked wit or for the mere fact that it was "by woman writ" (168). Women were constantly reminded that in the act of writing poetry they were virtually unsexing themselves. Men discouraged them from wielding the pen and instead they recommended "fashion, dancing and dressing" (168) as their proper domain, according to Finch.

What do women write about? Anne Bradstreet tells us in her poem "Prologue" that she certainly cannot write an epic about wars, and such themes because women have never been to wars to be able to write about them. Women can only write about things that they are familiar with. And given the routine situation of women being discriminated against, in every walk of life, it is not surprising that even aristocratic women like Lady Winchilsea (1661-1720), Margaret of Newcastle (1623-1673) and Dorothy Osborne (1927-1695) wrote about melancholy and solitude. It is with the same fear that Bradstreet states, "If what I do prove well, it won't

[1]Margaret Cavendish's "The Poetess's Hasty Resolution", Anne Finch's "Introduction", and Anne Bradstreet's "Prologue".

advance, / They'll say it's stolen, or else it was by chance" (Bradstreet, 84). Even in the 19th century, it is not surprising that one continues to encounter the same demeaning and belittling remarks that were rampant in the 17th century. According to Judy Simons in her book *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf* (1990), "Nathaniel Hawthorne pompously asserted in 1830, 'a certain impropriety in the display of woman's naked mind to the gaze of the world'" (Simons, 6). Sharon Bryan in her introduction to *Where We Stand: Women Poets on Literary Tradition* writes, "I had come across a passage in one of his [Keats] letters to a close friend. Fatigued by his own obsessive labors, he confides that he "sometimes can't help envying women, because they have no imagination"…for a moment it took my breath away, as if someone had thrown cold water in my face" (Bryan, unpaginated).

The Bronte sisters published a slim volume of verse in May 1846, titled *Poems*, which while "quite kindly received" sold only two copies, and due to "the complete failure of the poems", the two main women poets of the nineteenth century were Elizabeth Barrett and Christina Rossetti (Winnifrith and Chitham, 9). As mentioned earlier they were each considered for the Poet Laureateship but neither had the honour conferred on her and nor did the twentieth century yield any women poet laureates. This was not due to any dearth of women poets, as witnessed by the work of Charlotte Mew, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Stevie Smith, Elizabeth Jennings, Sylvia Plath, Anne Stevenson, Eavan Boland, Carol Rumens, Denise Riley, Grace Nichols and, of course, Carol Ann Duffy. The undervaluing of these poets has been consistent with the traditional bias in literary history and it was in the last quarter of the twentieth century that this bias began to shift, slightly, as more and more women won prizes and received recognition as significant poetic voices.

Ruth Padel in her introduction to *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* (2004) reports that the best of contemporary poems come out of the margins, the commonwealth writers, and women. Yet, she goes on to state that "though the number of women poets has risen sharply (thanks to Bloodaxe Books), if you look at the way poetry is published in Britain and see who makes the decisions, you would not think Britain had ever heard of feminism" (Padel, 37). The plight of Duffy's Eurydice when she says about her work for Orpheus, "I'd done all the typing myself" (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 59) remains a reality for in "some publishing houses the male poet editor has a woman assistant who does a lot of work but does not get to choose what to publish" (Padel, 37). What is more alarming is the fact that women poets and editors are brought up short at the finishing line because the emphasis is always on male leadership:

> In 1997 the imbalance could have changed overnight. Labour came to power just as Faber (England's most powerful poetry publisher) was about to replace its poetry editor. The new government was about to appoint a new Poet Laureate. It was possible there might be, simultaneously, a woman Poet Laureate and a woman as Britain's most important poetry editor. But in each case the choice fell on a man. No complaint – these men are excellent at their jobs; and none of this is complaint. It is reportage. The imbalance may be coincidence, but I bet it is not. The decisions of these two male establishments reflected a cultural bias which for some reason is particularly strong in poetry. Poetry chat rooms on the web are dominated by men, too. (Padel, 37-38)

So, in 2009 when Duffy was finally named the first woman Poet Laureate of England, it brought hope not only to women poets but to poetry itself. Jeanette Winterson declared in "Can you move diagonally?" that "Carol Ann Duffy is the nation's favourite poet after Shakespeare" and

that “When the news came that she had smashed through 341 years of male bardship, it was an incredible moment for women, as well as for poetry” (Winterson, unpaginated). Charlotte Higgins, the chief art writer in *The Guardian* states with relief, “At last: 341 years after Charles II named John Dryden the first poet laureate, a woman has been appointed to the most prominent literary position in Britain” (Higgins, unpaginated). Judith Palmer, director of the Poetry Society, affirms that Duffy “won the National Poetry Competition in 1983, in an era when women poets were still being described condescendingly as ‘poetesses’. Her work helped open up possibilities for generations of women. Her appointment is a triumph on so many levels, and it will be exciting to see how she develops the role” (Higgins unpaginated). In her first year of Laureateship, Duffy performed poetry gigs across the United Kingdom with fellow poets, Gillian Clarke, Simon Armitage, Grace Nichols and John Agard. Duffy also donated her annual Poet Laureateship prize money to Poetry Society, for a new poetry prize. Duffy tells Winterson,

> “‘It’s wonderful isn’t it? What I want to do with my laureateship is spread poetry around – it isn’t about me, it’s about poetry – and so I’m going to bring in all kinds of different poets, bring them to people’s attention, use the influence that comes with this appointment to commission and encourage, but most of all, to show people what we’ve got, because there’s enough poetry out there for everyone.’”(Winterson, unpaginated)

Duffy brought out multiple anthologies during her term as Poet Laureate, bringing poets together especially women, commissioning poems. She stated, “I hope after my 10 years are up, there will be another woman laureate, then another, for 300 years” (Higgins, unpaginated). Duffy’s hope of another woman Poet Laureate after her nearly fructified when Imtiaz Dharker was approached for the post in 2019, but she declined, making headlines in newspapers: “Hunt for next poet

laureate still on as Imtiaz Dharker says no to job" (Flood, *The Guardian*); "Imtiaz Dharker Turns Down Britain's Poet Laureateship" (*The Wire*).

Carol Ann Duffy: her work and its reception

The first volume of verse published by Duffy was *Standing Female Nude* for which she could not find a publisher and Jane Dowson in her book *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times* quotes Duffy saying from *Second Shift* (1994), "I'd been to every major publisher in England before Anvil took it" (Dowson, 8). It was published in 1985, and it introduces readers to what would constitute Duffy's strengths in verse, poetry dealing with relationships, childhood, women's issues but also questions of war, poets and poetry. Duffy has brought out ten major volumes of poetry since then. *Selling Manhattan* (1987) deals with the subject of loss alongside betrayal and desire, and speaks of oppression, displacement, subjugation, and reflections on death, art, and nostalgia. *The Other Country* (1990) which could be considered one of her most politically charged volumes of work, explores a wide range of identities and related issues which include race, immigration, class, national identity, the limits of language, lost time and recovery. Michelis and Rowland concede that in the poems in *The Other Country*, "memory and nostalgia (are) … intertwined with those dealing with the search for the meaning of home and belonging, but they also crop up in relation to language and the genre of poetry" (19) and that "(w)hereas *The Other Country* offers a balance of political, personal and satirical poems, the 1993 volume *Mean Time* focuses on the plight of the self" (21). *Mean Time* presents the doubts and struggles of growing up, trying to find moments of grace, in memory, love and language in the difficult intricacy of life. In 1995, Duffy was included in a poetry collection *Penguin Modern Poets: Volume 2* along with Vicki Feaver and Eavan Boland, which presents representative poems, chosen by the poets themselves to showcase the richness and diversity of contemporary poetry.

The World's Wife (1999) is a collection of poems that retell myths, legends and tales, all of which focus on women. Katharine Viner writing in *The Guardian* acclaimed the book as "a joyous, exuberant book of poems about women usually excluded from myth and history … women usually defined by their men … and retellings of old stories in which the lead changes sex" (Viner, "Meter maid" unpaginated). In the Afterword to *The World's Wife*, Duffy states: "I wanted to celebrate them, in a way, but also find a truth which hadn't been amplified previously" (77). Michelis and Rowland opine that "*The World's Wife* is certainly committed to feminism, but not one based on a politics of binary opposition" (25). *The World's Wife* and *Feminine Gospels* (2002) are the most overtly feminist volumes within the Duffy oeuvre, both of which highlight issues that are otherwise seen as insignificant and over-rated. The latter includes poems which are about the female experience of being beautiful, with all the negatives which accompany that state and give us insights into how women develop personality disorders such as shopaholism or anorexia. It is the "most undervalued volume, perhaps because several poems demand more commitment from the reader, due to their longer length and densely de-familiarizing symbolism" (Dowson, *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times* 12). Elaine Feinstein in her review of the book, "A casual kind of confidence," concedes that,

> She (Duffy) moves through the lives she invents with a kind of casual confidence which her characters sometimes briefly share, like the shopaholic who 'purchased a hat with a brim / walked with a suitor under its shadow, ditched him.' It is hard not to find that assumption of freedom heady. (Feinstein, unpaginated)

Duffy brought out *New Selected Poems* (2004), which included poems from her six acclaimed volumes *Standing Female Nude* (1985) to *Feminine Gospels* (2002), and another eleven poems, made available for the first time. *Rapture* (2005) celebrates a romantic relationship in its entirety,

from its fragile, heady beginnings to the point where it ends and remains alive only in memory. Ruth Padel in her review "*Rapture*, by Carol Ann Duffy," proclaimed *Rapture* to be a "book of wonderful love poems (which) is also a love poem to poetry itself; to writing love, as well as making it." She also says that "Duffy is supremely sophisticated in making sound and form match sense and context. Talk of "Fifty ways to leave your lover": here are 50 ways to break, disguise and celebrate your sonnet. And through the sonnet, your love" (Padel, "*Rapture*, by Carol Ann Duffy" unpaginated). In the collection *Love Poems* (2010), Duffy included several older poems from previous volumes of work, starting with "Correspondents" from *Selling Manhattan* and ending with "New Vows" from *The Bees*. It also contains "Twin" which was not previously published. Duffy writing in *The Guardian* on the volume said:

> Unlike the poems in *Rapture*, not all the poems in *Love Poems* are wholly autobiographical – some of them, as though at the Venice Carnival, are wearing a mask. The first poem, "Correspondents", is written in the voice of a respectable Victorian wife who is having an affair ("I read / your dark words and do to myself things / you can only imagine"). It appears alongside "Warming Her Pearls", a lesbian love poem in the voice of a lady's maid who fancies not the mistress's pearls but the mistress herself. I think what I was interested in at the time of writing these poems was in finding a language and imagery for the erotic and the hidden or secret. The pearls warmed by the pining servant's skin are, of course, a metaphor for her desire; but a poem is also like a pearl – a language-jewel provoked into existence by the grit of feeling or revelation. (Duffy, unpaginated)

The Bees (2011) is a volume of poems dealing with environmental concerns, loss and longings. Liz Lochhead in her review of the volume for the Guardian "The Bees by Carol Ann Duffy," states:

> Here's a mixtermaxter of every kind of Duffy poem: angry, political, elegiac – elegiac about every endangered or disappearing thing in the natural world or the individual psyche – witty, nakedly honest, accessible, mysterious. Here are the willed, the skilled, the passionate ecological pleas and exhortations, the other voices – though less frequent than before – the lists and litanies, and, above all, the lovely lyrics of longing and loneliness and sorrow laced with ephemeral moments of almost-acceptance, lightness and grace. (Lochhead, unpaginated)

On the other hand, Kate Kellaway, also writing for *The Guardian* is less laudatory and writes that "the book has a honeycomb structure. But it becomes apparent that this is an ambitious miscalculation: the metaphor cannot take the weight of what it is being asked to carry" (Kellaway, unpaginated). *Ritual Lighting* (2014), published halfway through Duffy's Laureateship, contains public poems celebrating the nation and its rituals, some of which were commissioned, alongside others which were spontaneous on her part, accompanied by beautiful illustrations by Stephen Raw.

In 2015, Duffy brought out *Collected Poems*, a compilation of all the poems from her volumes along with her Christmas poems. From *Standing Female Nude* (1985) to *Ritual Lighting* (2014), *Collected Poems* brings together thirty years of one of Britain's favourite poets. Duffy's *Sincerity* (2018), as the final volume to appear during her term as Poet Laureate, is a more political and angrier volume by far. There are poems on bereavement, but also poems on Trump

and Brexit, and a poem for her successor as Poet Laureate. In an interview with Lisa Allardice, Duffy stated, “with the evil twins of Trump and Brexit … I don’t remember ever having felt such a kind of lowering abstract stress coming from the political aura. It’s just so demoralising. You feel powerless … There was no way of not writing about that, because it is just in the air” (Allardice, unpaginated).

The enormous popularity achieved by poets such as Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti in Victorian times is a precursor to Duffy’s position in today’s England. Duffy’s poetry is loved by both children and adults and “her poems have long been on exam syllabuses at GCSE, Advanced and Scottish National and Higher levels” (Dowson, *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times* 2). Katharine Viner in “Metre maid” commented:

> In the world of British poetry, Carol Ann Duffy is a superstar. Highbrow and lowbrow, readers love her: from critics such as Sean O'Brien, who calls her "the representative poet of her day", to students who study *Mean Time*, her majestic 1993 collection, as an A-level set text. Her poems are accessible and entertaining, yet her form is classical, her technique razor-sharp. She is read by people who don't really read poetry, yet she maintains the respect of her peers. (Viner, unpaginated)

It should be clear from these reviews and opinions that Carol Ann Duffy has received critical acclaim and a sizeable quantum of visibility; her position as one of the more significant poetic voices today is assured and deserved.

Duffy is also a writer of fiction for children, a dramatist and a short story writer. She has edited several anthologies of verse, bringing out every anthology with a purpose. In 2001, Duffy

brought out *Hand in Hand: An Anthology of Love Poems*, where she "invited an equal number of male and female poets to contribute a love poem of their own which appears alongside their favourite love poem written by a poet of the opposite sex (Duffy, *Hand in Hand: An Anthology of Love Poems* IX). The anthology celebrates love from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. Similarly, for *Out of Fashion: An Anthology of Poems* (2004), Duffy invited over fifty contemporary poets to choose a poem from another time about dress or fashion, and a poem by the living poet is printed side by side with their choice, bridging not just poetry across different times, but also sartorial taste and poetry - for "A poem, if you like, is the attire of feeling: the literary form where words seem tailor-made for memory or desire" (Duffy, *Fashion: An Anthology of Poems* XI). For *Answering Back: Living Poets Reply to the Poetry of the Past* (2007), Duffy invited contemporary poets (fifty of whom responded) to select a poet/poem from the past and write an answer to it, with the choice of each poet printed alongside his/her own poem written in response. Duffy in her foreword states that "Poetry, the poets here teach us, is language as life; not only a baton-like passing-on of tradition but a way of making the human immortal … the poems here prove that it is not only silence that poetry answers back" (Duffy, *Answering Back: Living Poets Reply to the Poetry of the Past* XII). *To The Moon: An Anthology of Lunar Poems* (2009) runs like a chronological journey, traversing the relationship of humans with the moon, before and after the astronauts first landed and walked on the moon on 21 July 1969, and the association of poetry, moon and humans is encapsulated in the pronouncement that "Poetry, like the moon itself, sheds a unique light on our lives on this earth" (Duffy, *To The Moon: An Anthology of Lunar Poems* XIX). Duffy brought out *101 Poems for Children: A Laureate's Choice* (2012), with illustrations by Emily Gravett. An anthology of funny and sad poems, mysterious and familiar poems, including some of Duffy's childhood favourites, in the

foreword Duffy states that she "put together a poetry book that a child can live with for a long time" (Duffy, *101 Poems for Children: A Laureate's Choice* XVI). *Jubilee Lines: 60 Poets for 60 Years* (2012) marks the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II and in the words of Duffy the anthology "explores these sixty extraordinary years with a newly commissioned poem for each year, and in doing so brings together sixty UK and Commonwealth poets" (Duffy, *Jubilee Lines: 60 Poets for 60 Years* IX) and the sixty poems are a reflection on "who we were, where we have been, and what we have done" (Duffy, *Jubilee Lines: 60 Poets for 60 Years* XI). In 2018, Duffy brought out *Armistice: A Laureate's Choice of Poems of War and Peace* to commemorate the centenary of Armistice which was signed on 11 November 1918. The hundred poems travel from Ancient Greece to post-Vietnam for "The laying down of arms at one time and place is all too soon followed by conflict elsewhere" (Duffy, *Armistice: A Laureate's Choice of Poems of War and Peace* IX).

Literature Review

There is a substantial body of work on Carol Ann Duffy now, examining her as a woman poet, as a lesbian poet, as a feminist, among other concerns.

Danette Dimarco in her essay "Exposing Nude Art: Carol Ann Duffy's Response to Robert Browning" published in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* (1989), discusses Duffy's poem "Standing Female Nude" as a revolutionary poem in comparison with Browning's "With Francis Furini" that postulates and perpetuates the tradition of nude painting and "draws attention to aesthetic politics" (36) whereas "Duffy's resituates the artist and the model in a real world of power dynamics" (36).

Eavan Boland in the section "Making the Difference" in *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (1995) discusses Duffy's "Warming Her Pearls" as a poem that rewrites the "old fixities of the sexual and erotic" (220) where the "speaker is powerless, while the object of her affectations has a power which puts her well beyond possession by either desire or expression" (226). Boland studies Duffy's pearls alongside Keats's pearls in "The Eve of St. Agnes" and concludes that thought Duffy's pearls are

> … flawed, wounded, ironized erotic of the traditional poem, but this time held in common between women, rather than perceived as a fixed object, distanced from the speaker. In addition, they have a human warmth—they are milky, heated—which removes them once again from the glittering and unmortal objects of the traditional love poem. Just as the poem disassembles elements of the traditional love poem, so the subject-object relations come apart as well. The pearls are part of the disassembling. Where Keats's pearls happen at a great distance, these are heated, dangerous and ambiguous. (Boland, 226-7)

Ian Gregson in "Carol Ann Duffy: Monologue as Dialogue" in the book *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement* (1996) argues that Duffy gives a voice to the voiceless, and notes that "Duffy's feminism is most accurately seen as part of a wider political protest against how representation "programs and precedes us"" (104). He also argues that the power of Duffy's works comes from her ability to depict the distortions in representation and condemn the distortions at the same time as in "Standing Female Nude."

Carol Ann Duffy (1999) by Deryn Rees-Jones, in the "Writers and their Work" series from Manchester University Press explores Duffy's poetry as experimental rather than following

mainstream poetry in its use of language, making it accessible to a wide readership and also as dealing with a range of themes including sexism, racism, immigration, domestic violence, love etc. Rees-Jones also highlights the influence of literary figures such as Pablo Neruda, Wordsworth, Browning, Larkin, Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, T.S. Eliot and the Liverpool poets on Duffy's work. Organized into four chapters "Beginning," "Masquerades," "Love Poems: A Place Called Home" and "Mean Times," Rees-Jones explores the growth of Duffy as an original poet and thematically analyses Duffy's poetry. The first chapter "Beginning" situates Duffy as a Scottish, feminist, political, working-class, dramatic and lyric poet. "Masquerades" talks about "knowing who we are, and finding a way to tell ourselves" and the "difficulties of knowing the self through otherness" (17). Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue is analysed as a technique that allows the speakers to "repeatedly present themselves as both self and other, subject and object; to speak in ways and about subject matter deemed, because of gender and/or class inappropriate not only for art but for representation within a public forum" (26). "Love Poems: A Place Called Home" discusses how Duffy's love poems explore new ways of negotiating relationships between the subject and the object of desire which ranges between a beloved, home, language and so on. "Mean Times" reads *Mean Time* through the lens of loss.

Liz Yorke in her essay "British Lesbian Poetics: A Brief Exploration" published in *Feminist Review* (1999) investigates and identifies a lesbian poetics. Yorke takes up Duffy's "Girlfriends" and "*from* Mrs Tiresias" and examines signifiers of lesbian identification in poems like "Girlfriends" where the lovers are placed at the centre of lesbian experience and its "joyful celebration of the consummation of lesbian desire" (85). In contrast, Tiresias after his transformation into a woman, much in the manner of Mrs. Tiresias's lesbian lover, paints his nails and wears sparkling rings but "never quite gets being a female right, and this poem enjoys

its mocking feminist edge" (87). Liz Yorke also looks at how "Mrs. Tiresias" is presented through the process of becoming the other, and allows several political codes to volley around what femaleness is, from several perspectives.

Eleanor Porter in ""What Like is it?" Landscape and Language in Carol Ann Duffy's Love Poetry," published in the journal *Neohelicon* (1999), examines how Duffy's love poems are packed with distances and space. The author argues that the separation of the mother and child in "The Way My Mother Speaks" is also a celebration of freedom which "separation allows and the love she can feel for her mother because she is distant enough to hear her mother's distinct voice" (78). The author also states that in "realising an image of "What like it is" Duffy finds herself "homesick, free, in love"" (79) and that" love registers the loss of home, the distance which permits freedom but also need" (79) where the speaker yearns for the absent lover in solitary landscapes "full of borders and distances" (82).

The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy: 'Choosing tough words' (2003) edited by Angelica Michelis and Antony Rowland, is a collection of essays centering on issues, motifs, and themes such as gender, race, class, national identity, memory and language, disruption, fragmentation and silences in Duffy's poetry. In the essay, "Duffy, Eliot and Impersonality," Neil Roberts makes a comparative study of Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Duffy's "Warming Her Pearls," "Standing Female Nude," "Foreign" to name a few and draws an analogy between Prufrock's desire for certainty and the desire of the maid in "Warming Her Pearls" where the object of desire is absent, the problem of representation in "Standing Female Nude," and the "shifts between hearing your own accent as foreign to others and imagining that you have an accent that is foreign to yourself" (42) in "Foreign". In, "Female Metamorphoses: Carol Ann Duffy," Jeffrey Wainwright elucidates how "Duffy puts to use that quality of recognition,

and the stripped, elemental character of folk tale and myth in poems that might be said to inhabit the ground evoked in the phrase from the opening poem of *The World's Wife*, 'Little Red-Cap': 'At childhood's end'" (48) and how masculinity is mocked throughout in *The World's Wife*. In, "Love and Masculinity in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy," Antony Rowland examines how *The World's Wife* marks a departure from her earlier poetry where men and masculinity come under attack as "neglectful, male partners" and leans towards more "homoerotic relationships between women" (56) which also sometimes means rejecting the male. In the essay, "'Me not know what these people mean': Gender and National Identity in Carol Ann Duffy's Poetry," Angelica Michelis looks at Duffy's theme of displacement and the idea of the foreigner by placing them in relationship to gender identity as linked to the politics of Thatcherite Britain and its "politics of exclusion" (80). Other essays include: Avril Horner's "'Small Female Skull': Patriarchy and Philosophy in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy" which argues that Duffy's work engages with the "central tenets of western philosophy and culture" (99).The remaining four essays: Jane Thomas' "'The chant of magic words repeatedly': Gender as Linguistic Act in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy", Stan Smith's "'What like is it?': Duffy's *Differance*", and Michael Woods' "'What it is like in words': Translation, Reflection and Refraction in the Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy" and "'Skeleton, Moon, Poet': Carol Ann Duffy's Postmodern Poetry for Children" by Eva Muller-Zettelmann all deal with the linguistic aspects of Duffy's poetry. Published in 2003 the book discusses the six major volumes published till then.

Ruth Padel in her book *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* (2004), talks at length about the new path that Duffy is forging for poetry, and the politics of poetry that have trapped women poets for centuries. Padel applauded Duffy for tackling "contemporary abuses of power" (21) for questioning the maleness of literary tradition in conjunction with femaleness, which becomes the

central point in her work. In her close reading of the poem "Prayer", Padel acclaims Duffy as the "Queen of the eighties renaissance, whose poems combine scouring feminist wit, social anger, dramatic originality with a clear, gentle lyricism" (Padel, 166).

Deryn Rees-Jones in *Consorting with Angels: Essays on Modern Women Poets* (2005) discusses Duffy in her chapter "Myth, Fairytale and Feminism after the Women's Movement" and speaks of how Duffy identifies with "ordinary" people and considers *The World's Wife* as a "revisionary strategy of myth" placing "powerful, vengeful women whose assertiveness, violence and aggression parodies stereotypes of male behaviour" (158).

Jo Gill in a section on mythology and fairytale in the chapter, "Experimentation and Form", in her book *Women's Poetry* (2007) discusses the use of the dramatic monologue by Duffy and other women poets such as Vicki Feaver and Jo Shapcott.

Stan Smith in "'What Like Is It?' Carol Ann Duffy's *Differance*" in *Poetry and Displacement* (2007) talks about the displacements in Duffy's poetry, of the self, culture, relationships, language, narrative, home and so on, often situated in the transit between past, present and a future "something" in Duffy's poetry, for something that cannot be articulated, caught in the displacement of translation.

Jane Dowson's *Carol Ann Duffy: Poet for Our Times* (2016) is the most comprehensive study of Duffy's work to date. It is a thematic study of Duffy's poetry. The chapter, "Poet of Our Times", deals with the life, career and writing of Duffy. "Lyrics of Love, Loss and Longing" discusses Duffy's earlier love poems as depicting "strangeness". Dowson sees *Rapture* as being about "finding the words for the sheer intensity of love's seasons from falling in love, through desire, mutual passion, mundane companionship, delight, suspicion, separation, reunions and

finally ending" (62), and how while the earlier poetry explored sexual love, the later poetry as in *The Bees* "advocates love between parents and children and the milk of human kindness" (80). Dowson's third chapter, "Voices from the 1980s and After," contextualizes Duffy's poetry set in and around Thatcherite England and Reagan's America, and Duffy's engagement with issues like AIDS in poems such as "Dream of a Lost Friend" from *The Other Country* where "Some of our best friends nurture a virus" (36), homosexuality in "Words of Absolution" from *Standing Female Nude* and class matters in "The Dummy" from *Selling Manhattan*. The chapter "Words Between Women" explores Duffy's poems which register "sixty years of social change surrounding gender roles and their intrinsic sexual politics" (123) starting with a poem set in the 1950s, "A Clear Note" from *Standing Female Nude* where Duffy speaks of "The dreams/ of women which will harm no one" (31) to the poems in *The World's Wife* which is considered "the most radical book of poetry to be published for years in that it systematically undermines the myths by which masculinity has been sustained for millennia" (140) and the *Feminine Gospels* where Duffy "deconstructs the 'gospel' truth about femininity as it pervades myth in seemingly ineradicable forms" (144). "Poetry and the Public Sphere" looks at how Duffy also writes about issues of general interest, engaging with public and political concerns, such as her poem on David Beckham, "Achilles." The last and the shortest chapter, "Poetry About and for Children" places Duffy's poetry *for* children alongside her poetry *about* children and examines how in "Duffy's poems, childhood is a 'country' from which we necessarily, if reluctantly, emigrate yet one that shadows relationship and subjectivity throughout our adult lives" (189-90) and how "the normal journey from a sleeping babe to speech, to sexual awakening, and then to the psychological complexities of adulthood, is reinforced not blurred" (197) in poems such as

"Model Village" from *Selling Manhattan*, "Boy" from *The Other Country* and "The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team" from *Mean Time*.

Frameworks and Chapterisation

My work on Duffy's poetry draws upon one primary idea: that poetry is a "revelation, information, a kind of teaching" as Adrienne Rich states (Rich, "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet" 505), and I will read Duffy's poetry as offering different ways of learning and teaching. I study Duffy's poetry through the lens offered by G.H. Bantock (1914-1997), an educationist, who channeled the reform in literary studies fostered by F. R. Leavis into the stream of education and wrote extensively critiquing 'discovery methods' and teacher education, and promoted drama, dance and music as part of the curriculum. Peter Cunningham states, "Bantock described himself as an educationist, resisting classification as either an English scholar or a philosopher of education" (Cunningham, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 731). Bantock fostered the view that educationists should look to literature in order to widen and deepen their understanding of human behaviour because "there is much educational investigation which can be assisted by the sort of imaginative insight into people's behaviour fostered by good literature" (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 4).Bantock drew inspiration from D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot and wrote positively of Matthew Arnold and Cardinal Newman with regard to their ideas of education. For Bantock, "The literary tradition is one which is rooted in an awareness of social and individual complexities such as any educationist needs to be aware of" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 8), yet, there is often a lack in the "awareness" due to certain shortcomings. Bantock makes very clear the role of artists in the overall education of the human, in terms of both the emotional and the intellectual, and states, "The artist can, in some respects, take us nearer to what it is to live a culture, than the social

investigator. This is why the insights of literary artists are more informative about some of the crucial problems in education that are those, in general, of the educational researchers" (6). To understand the educational lacuna that the artist draws attention to, close attention will be paid to the tradition of teaching and learning, and also, the call for reformation in both formal and informal education as seen in Duffy's poetry.

I read Duffy's poetry as educational, within home spaces and relationships as seen in the various poems which engage with mother-daughter, sibling, and romantic relationships and marriages, especially poems which depict the wives of mythic, historical figures. In Duffy's verse women who have hithertofore been invisible, or marginally present, are rendered vibrantly alive, their clear voices speaking out their selves in ways which render them as interesting and powerful as their romantic partners or husbands. Maud Bodkin in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* makes clear the recurrent pattern of women who are represented by men in their literary tradition as Muses, lovers, mothers, temptresses etc. The clarion call that contemporary women writers send out is to break this pattern and tell the other side of the story. Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" speaks of retelling as re-visioning, an "awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness" where "we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (Rich, 1982); and in Helen Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" women are asked to write about themselves, about women and "don't make of her what men have made of her" (Cixous, 882). Duffy's poetry does just that, as she tells stories of characters learning from lived experiences, of and from the past and redefining women in myths and literature by breaking the centuries-old stereotypes and vesting them with a vital voice of their own, at once modern and relevant.

Duffy does not preach at her readers: her teaching is via demonstrations, as incidents and events are presented to us and we are invited to consider the troubling aspects of those histories. There are no morals or lessons drawn out explicitly for the reader, but as one reads the poem, is immersed in its world, one becomes aware of the truths it lays bare. As Robert Frost explained it in his talk at Amherst College, "We like to talk in parables and in hints and in indirections—whether from diffidence or some other instinct" (Frost, "Education by Poetry" 78). Poetry teaches via those "parables" and "hints" and "indirections" and Duffy offers her readers master classes about various aspects of life in all her verse.

This thesis offers a close reading of select poems from Duffy's 10 volumes of poetry, published between 1985 and 2018.

In the first chapter "Going to School: Formal Education" I demonstrate how Carol Ann Duffy evaluates and questions the old-fashioned educational system, showcases the often-seen failure of education because it proceeds along lines drawn either by school traditions or the teacher's personal principles, and shows the readers the repeated transformation of happy children into disappointed adults. In doing so, Duffy nudges the readers towards the need for reform in education. According to Bantock, "The whole of social life, the whole of living needs to be constantly freshened by a continual influx of new and fresh ideas (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 91), but, as we see in Duffy's poetry most educational institutions seem to lack "new or fresh ideas."

A common feature in many school poems, is the need to talk back to a regimented, sometimes strait-jacketed educational system, the need for freedom of speech and expression, freedom from repressive school regimes; overall Duffy indicates the need for a reformation to a

faulty and unproductive school system. Thus, in a poem like “The Laughter of Stafford Girls’ High” from *Feminine Gospels* Duffy shows a rebellion propelled by the natural and harmless means of laughter. The poems studied in this chapter show us various processes of learning that come through school education, through the shift from childhood into adulthood, from innocence to experience, from happiness to anxiety, from subject lessons that are being taught in schools. The poems call for learning and education to connect with real life, rather than memorising dates and names, just to pass exams and graduate into nothing worthwhile in life.

The second chapter “All in the Family: Education within the home” looks at parent-child, sibling and wife-husband relationships and the lessons that can be learnt from these representations. Even as I examine various relationships, both happy and unhappy, *my primary argument is that Duffy in her poems about family life teaches us how familial relationships while essentially power-driven are also spaces that can help an individual achieve her fullest potential.* Divided into two sections, the first section looks at parents and children: parents who are always careful, monitoring the overall well-being of their children and finding delightful moments of grace; the role reversal that takes place when children parent their aged parents; the conventional learning that families impart regarding gender roles or the use of “bad” language; parents who are not quite truthful with their children; sibling revelry and rivalry, and single parenting.

The second section looks at romantic love relationships and marriage: the terrible consequences that marriage could often have for women; the price they pay for their determination to terminate traditional practices, paving a better life for their daughters and grand-daughters. This section also looks at the poems in which the wives of mythical, legendary and historical figures are bestowed with narratives of their own where they not only acquire an aura of agency and liberation but speak to their target audience to unlearn the basic, stereotypical

assumptions which undergird the gendered world and learn, in their stead, new, clear eyed ways of seeing and thinking.

The third chapter "Living in a Community: Social education" studies various issues, such as displacement and immigration, social ills, disgrace and atrocities, highlighted by Duffy in her poems. *I argue in this chapter that Duffy educates her readers to be wary of conformity, and of the politically expedient and instead shows them the need to see clearly, past the glitz of the image-making industries, while fostering and strengthening community ties, wherein communities are inclusive and compassionate, rather than exclusionary and biased.* The first section looks at poems connected to displacement and immigration which are directly or indirectly the result of the two Worlds Wars, colonisation and migration. The sense of displacement smites children and adults, nature and animals, and apart from political problems such as ethnic cleansing, deportations and purges, personal conflicts between people to food, appearance, language, accent, culture and even a certain level of displacement in one's own country, are laid bare by Duffy in her poems, without giving a particular geographical location, making it local and global at once.

The second section examines poems which depict various social ills, several of which are gendered such as sexual objectification and the commodification of women, as well as ills related to poverty, the materialistic culture of the world, and imbalances of power.

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Chapter Two

Going to School: Formal Education

In her poetry Carol Ann Duffy presents the reader with pen pictures of ways of learning and systems of education as seen in schools. If the school is a place where the tongue with the wrong accent sheds its "skin like a snake" and the "voice / in the classroom" begins to "sound(ing) just like the rest" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 1), it is also a place of learning, whether of gossip and everyday news or subject lessons. Duffy's poems are a reflection upon the old regimented education system, and, in a call for reformation, they suggest new ways of learning and teaching. In the act of teaching through poems, it is not just lessons about life that are imparted but a lesson on the nature of poetry as well.

This chapter argues that in Carol Ann Duffy's poems she evaluates and questions the old-fashioned educational system while demonstrating the often-seen failure of formal education. She uses the transformation from happy children to disappointed adults to also highlight the need for reform in education, and presents the idea of combining classroom teaching with life-lessons. Duffy when speaking of her work at the Manchester Metropolitan University (on the university website) speaks of "a department with a real sense of family, achievement and celebration, and an ethos of nurturing and innovation" (Duffy, unpaginated) which in the very act of describing her workplace, clearly indicates how an education system should be. One of the strongest influences on Carol Ann Duffy was her Catholic upbringing, and having been schooled at Catholic institutions, her experiences there are strongly reflected in her poetry. Thus, in most of her poems that speak of formal education, Duffy wages a war on the regimented, straitjacketed, one-way communication form of education. She looks at the old school systems and demonstrates their shortcomings, following it up with an element of rejection. G H Bantock

in *Freedom and Authority in Education* highlights the value of literary artists writing on education because,

> The artist can, in some respects, take us nearer to what it is to live a culture than can the social investigator. This is why the insights of literary artists are more informative about some of the crucial problems in education than are those, in general, of the educational researchers. (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 6)

In this light Duffy can be perceived as an influential critic of education systems, as seen in her poetry. This chapter is divided into two sections: in the first section we see teachers and figures in authority who are unable to offer a fresh new vision of education and who, in the process, cause unhappiness to their students and themselves. We also witness children rebelling and resenting Authority, while the latter half of this section offers us portrayals of students who have been damaged by this education. In the second section, Duffy offers modes of making learning fun and provides possible solutions to teaching and learning through poetry.

School Heads and Teachers

Duffy in "Welltread" from *Mean Time* showcases repressive schooling systems where everything about the school causes fear and a sense of entrapment, as depicted by Mr. Welltread, the Head of the school whose "face was a fist" (10), suggesting physical violence and abuse, almost as though his face could punch and smash. He is an authoritarian teacher, and the poem evokes a sense of dread around Mr. Welltread, as he controls the "children(who) ran shrieking in the locked yard" the moment he rings the "big brass bell / dumb on his desk till he shook it" (10). The absence of mental freedom is extended by the metaphor of physical entrapment as they are

within the “locked yard.” The enclosed spaces of the school are all governed by Mr. Welltread, his control over the children is complete and further consolidated via corporal punishment. Duffy takes us back to the 1960s when even well-meaning adults were either inarticulate or disciplinarians in the ways in which they interacted with children. At that point in time, feelings were largely left unspoken by parents and care was demonstrated through attention to cleanliness, even if it was via spitting “on hankies and rub(ing) you away” (10). Welltread stalks around and collects “thruppenny bits in a soft black hat” and “looks like a gangster” (10), an image and a quality which is unlikable in an educationist, the opposite of an archetypal educationist. Mr. Welltread also has few words to speak, and fits into the times, being a stern disciplinarian and someone who is unable to sift through lies and falsehood.

The statement “we prayed for Aberfan” is juxtaposed with the harsh discipline that the speaker was made to put up with. It situates the events of the poem in 1966 when the collapse of a slag heap in the Welsh village of Aberfan killed 116 school children and 28 adults. Duffy locates the specific historical association of the tragic event within the poem as part of a man-made disaster. Juxtaposed with the memory of this tragedy is the child’s memory of being punished for a “trite crime”: “My socks dissolved / two grey pools at my ankles, at the shock of my name / called out” (10). The weakness at the knee in a traumatic situation is neatly worked out in a school uniform metaphor which suggests a repressive school system. So vivid is the memory of the incident that the very thought of it brings the adult speaker to her “feet / as a foul would. The wrong child for a trite crime” (12). It is for a negligible wrong, “a trite crime” that the child was pulled out, scapegoat-ed and caned.

The child’s only defense is a feeble “No” which goes unheeded; caned on the palm and still “there was no cause for complaint” for it is understood that neither parents nor teachers

could have rescued her. The excruciating humiliation is deeply etched in the mind so that even as an adult the "smouldering" pain is felt in her palm. On the brighter side, the speaker acknowledges that morally and ethically Mr. Welltread has "hurt himself / more than he hurt me" (12). But the trite line also points to the age-old defense of corporal punishment which is encapsulated in that line: it hurts the perpetrator to cane the child but he must do so, for the child's good. Duffy captures the easy cruelty of school systems which pinpoint blame inaccurately and believe in the efficacy of corporal punishment even as there is little justice or truth within the system.

In a similar manner the teachers in "The Good Teachers" are "virtuous women," "snobbish and proud and clean and qualified" (Duffy, *Mean Time* 12) and they can size "you up from the front row." Duffy, in this ekphrastic poem works with a formal school photograph, where the students and teachers are posed in lines, with the teachers in "the front row" from where they look out and are still able to "size you up". Sizing is suggestive of sorting and segregating the students according to the size, race, class, attitude and aptitude.

Carol Ann Duffy shows us the erstwhile student looking at a school photograph and remembering individual teachers, and the subjects they taught. But in the final stanza the narrator turns the tables: instead of the teachers being the ones in control we are shown the students escaping from the tyrannical teachers:

> … you roll the waistband
> of your skirt over and over, all leg, all
> dumb insolence, smoke-rings. You won't pass.
> You could do better. But there's the wall you climb
> into dancing, lovebites, marriage, the Cheltenham
> and Gloucester, today. The day you'll be sorry one day. (Duffy, *Mean Time* 12)

Just as the school in “Welltread” has a “locked yard” and the girls in Strafford are “like birds in a cage” (36) this school too seems barricaded for the girls climb over the wall to freedom. If the girls in “The Laughter of Stafford Girl’s High” buy their freedom from educational oppression with laughter, the girls here do so by rolling the waistband of their “skirt over and over, all leg” and “smoke-rings.” The “you” in the poem who is the long-ago child remembers the school and the teachers as repressive and exerting control over the girls, trying to keep them in line by telling them, “You won’t pass”. A common sentence, it evokes a common experience with a resonance of Calvinistic predestination that has been articulated by teachers to students universally. Duffy here echoes the intellectual verdict that teachers pass on students, based on their own assessments of their students’ intellectual and moral aptitude. But rather than face the unending condemnation of the teachers, the speaker chooses to climb over the wall to where the good things of life are: “dancing, lovebites, marriage.” The speaker is wise enough to have escaped from the discipline and education that the photograph evokes. But the “you” has absolutely no regrets though she has been told, “The day you’ll be sorry one day.” But that has not happened yet and “one day” like someday is unspecified and may never really happen.

The title “The Good Teachers” is ironic because the teachers do little good to their students, and instead due to their puritanical attitude, cause them to break rules and drop out of school. Meanwhile there is hope and salvation in teachers like Miss Pirie, the English teacher who though “serious, passionate” has a “kind intelligent green eye” alongside a “cruel blue one” and is loved by the speaker. Similar sentiments of appreciation and love, animate Duffy’s poem “Death of a Teacher,” where the English teacher is again someone who instills an abiding love of poetry and reading in the speaker (discussed from page 57 to 58 of this chapter).

"The Laughter of Stafford Girls' High" from *Feminine Gospels* is a poem about a rebellion, that then ushers in a revolution, where suddenly the school bursts into life with laughter. Laughter here becomes an instrument of reform, a means to talk back to a regimented educational system and acts as a metaphor for freedom of speech and expression, freedom from repressive and suppressive school regimes; in a manner that is natural and harmless. Duffy's displeasure at the repressive school system is expressed in many of her poems, and becomes especially marked when linked to a religious angle or institution. The note that started the contagious and epidemic laughter was "torn from the back of the King James Bible," a jibe at the church's oppressiveness, but also gesturing at the collusion of the various ideological state apparatus (in Althusserian terms), as embodied in the Church and educational systems, which work to leech out all joy from life.

The laughter of the girls takes various metaphorical forms. The first laugh is presented as a liquid laugh, "a gargle, a ripple, a dribble, / a babble, a gargle, a plash, a splash" (35) invested with the character of water flowing, gushing, and falling freely. Yet, the simile "like a sudden jackpot leap of a silver fish / in the purse of a pool" (35) situates and likens the state of the girls with that of the silver fish. The fish, a free water being is held captive in a man-made pool, but that doesn't prevent the fish from leaping up. In the same manner the girls are laughing their way to the jackpot of freedom. Then the girls "snigger or snicker or titter or chuckle / or chortle" (36) resulting in the class "boil(ing) in brothy mirth" (36) evocative of home science classes (or the culinary chores of women in the kitchen) being taught at school, all of which is laughed at by the girls in complete comprehension. The girls graduate from one form of laughter to another, from yodeling, hooting, howling to the point where "clumps of laughter / sprouted among the row upon row of girls" (44). The seeded laughter has not only scattered among the girls but has found

ground, formed roots to grow and flower into other forms of laughter (revolt). The winter in the school with ice enveloping the campus is ironically juxtaposed with the blooming of the girls and their bursting forth to live as metaphorical flowers in a garden.

The weather outside, where winter does its job of tearing the clouds, gets translated into tearing up "a rule book" (41) and "snow iced the school like a giant cake" (42); this paradoxical image of the dreadful cold ice, placed alongside the gastronomical image of a giant cake which is at once pleasing and tempting to the eyes and the palate, is a metaphorical movement towards the impending trials Ms Bream will have to put up with and the fun the students are about to have. The poem self-reflexively includes in its cast of characters "the poet Ursula Fleur," an alumni of the school who famously wrote "A good laugh … is feasting on air" (41) and this becomes the beacon of inspiration for the girls.

The laughter spreads from one class to the other and unable to control it, the teachers look for the culprits: "Miss Fife, Head of Maths / whose cold equations of eyes scanned the desks / for a suitable scapegoat. Stand up, Geraldine Ruth," a girl who looked like a "first draft to be crumpled and crunched / and tossed away like a note" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 36) and the Head of the school, Ms. Bream pulled out Nigella Dawn, who is "made to stand / on a chair on the stage" (45). But scapegoating does not deter the girls from laughing for they begin to find everything funny: the laughter among the girls keeps spreading through the school.

The laughter is looked upon by the teachers as "foolish behaviour", not "admired or desired" at Stafford and a hindrance to "grow to be / the finest of England's daughters and mothers and wives" (42) at which the girls unanimously stamped "the floor with their feet in a rebel beat" (42). That the purpose of education is to become proper daughters, wives and

mothers is an ideology propagated by women to other women, but in the service of patriarchy. Duffy's verse tries to eliminate this tendency as the girls declare "*All for one! … And one for all*" (42). The mirth in the school begins to change the life of the teachers too, so that they too begin to question what they really want in life. Thus, instead of subjecting themselves and others to oppression and feminine training, they choose to liberate themselves and live their own life, as they want to. Miss Dunn, and the captain of sports, Diana Kim, composed of the "stuff of heroines", are going to "climb to the Mother / of Earth" (48), Mt. Everest and the other staff follow suit, to pursue their dreams:

> the staff resigned – to publish poetry, to live in Spain, to form
> a tennis club, to run a restaurant in Nice, to tread the boards,
> to sing in smoky clubs, to translate Ovid into current speech,
> to study homeopathy. (50)

With nothing left to prevent the school from shutting, Ms Bream writes to parents stating that "The school was to close at the end of the term / until further notice" (52) and her last words are "*you girls have laughed this once / great school into the ground*" (52) and as the Head and teachers leave, the girls burst into song "*Till we / have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land*" (53) from William Blake's "And did those feet in ancient time" where Jerusalem stands for the second coming of Christ and for universal love and peace; in Duffy's poem it indicates freedom from the oppressive and regimented school system and a call for a newly reformed school. After the shutting:

> The empty school creaked and sighed, its desks the small coffins
> of lessons, its blackboards the tombstones of learning. The books
> in the Library stiffened and yellowed and curled. The portraits
> of gone Headmistresses stared into space. The school groaned,

> the tiles on its roof falling off in its sleep, its windows as white
> as chalk. The grass on the playing fields grew like grass
> on a grave. (53)

The school is enveloped in the images of death but death in nature is seasonal and includes the possibility of being born again. Bantock states that, "educationists suffer …that restriction of view that is one of the misfortunes of democracy, where 'every one shuts himself up in his own breast, and affects from that point to judge the world'" as a consequence, the "lame and footsore, those worn out with usage and ripe for retirement might well be put to hospital, and there either nursed back to life or provided with decent burial" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 19). In similar fashion, there is hope for Ms. Bream, who is sent to hospital, where "Postcards / and get well soon messages from the staff were pinned to the wall". And there is the possibility of the school being nursed back to complete health for Ms. Bream in her hospital room is looking out of her window "to the clear night sky" (54) and thinking of the welfare of another person, Mrs Mackey, for the very first time.

Mrs Mackey like all the other teachers who walked out into life, walks into the sea due to a loveless marriage:

> By dawn, at John O'Groats, Mrs Mackey has finally run out of land.
> She wrote her maiden name with a stick in the sand then walked
> into the sea, steady at first, step by step, till the firm waves lifted her
> under her arms and danced her away like a groom with a bride.
> High above in the cold sky the seagulls, like schoolgirls, laughed.
> Higher again, a teacher fell through the clouds with a girl in her arms. (54)

These last moments of Mrs. Mackey are reminiscent of the number of women who have swum into the ocean of freedom like Edna Pontellier who "went on and on … she did not look back

now, but went on and on" (Chopin, 152), or like Virginia Woolf, who walked into a river to free herself from the shackles of patriarchy and life. It is in the dying of Mrs. Mackey that the school's hope of resurrection rests. With Mrs. Mackey's final breath, she sees and hears a vision of seagulls laughing like schoolgirls and a teacher falling "through the clouds with a girl in her arms" alluding to the possibility of a new beginning, built on the hope of freedom and a better student-teacher relationship.

Carol Ann Duffy works many layers of witnessing into this poem, as we, the readers witness the collapse of a school but also the achieving of freedom by the teachers of that school; the teachers and especially Ms Bream witness the laughter of the girls as the one event that leads to the collapse of the school. The vision that Mrs. Mackey witnesses as she walks into the ocean becomes also a future to which many may, one day, bear witness. Via narrative, Duffy in this poem, sets up a series of events and shows us how laughter can be something that sets people free to be themselves, to live and do the things that they would like to do, rather than live in a constrained and repressed fashion, and cause others to do so too.

The Head of English in the dramatic monologue with the eponymous title from *Standing Female Nude* has a fixed idea as to what a poet is, and what poetry is too. A poet is invited to the school but the Head is crystal clear about the dos and don'ts. Her views regarding education are much in the manner of Thomas Gradgrind from *Hard Times*. Just as Cecilia Jupe is "never to fancy" but is "to be in all things regulated and governed" (Dickens, 7), the Head regulates and governs the way the students think and act, what they are to remember and how they are to make sure that the forty pounds being paid for the poet's visit are not wasted. The Head's dominant interest is the reputation of the school; therefore, detailed instructions are given out: "Notice the inkstained fingers girls," "show your appreciation / by clapping. Not too loud," "sit up straight

and listen," "Those of you with English Second Language / see me after break," "Take notes but don't write reams," "Run along now girls" (12) etc.

The Head reveals herself as old-fashioned and quite indifferent to fresh ideas. When she says, "Today we have a poet in the class. / A real live poet with a published book" (12) she juxtaposes dead poets against a live poet, almost suggesting that only dead poets make it to school syllabi, poets such as Kipling, for she teaches him in the "Lower Fourth" and Keats. The Head is quite dismissive of the visiting poet and turns the poet into a museum-like exhibit when she tells the girls to "notice the inkstained fingers" (12). The Head is an outdated teacher who devotes entire classes to "assonance" and is sad that "not all poems … rhyme these days" (12).She teaches poetry in a manner reminiscent of Robert Frost's dismissive statement regarding the teaching of poetry in American educational institutions, "treat all poetry as if it were something else than poetry, as if it were syntax, language, science" (Frost, 75-76). She believes in the conventional and traditional notion of invoking "the Muse" and does not want "winds of change about the place" (12)[2]. Duffy, via the Head of English shows us that poetry is morphing whether one likes it or not; she wants people to see poetry in a new light, inspire them to try something new and is gently critical of old-fashioned teachers who cannot see the value of innovative poetry. Ironically, the students are asked to write an "essay on the poet's themes", thus reducing the poet's visit to just another routine classroom exercise. The Head, convinced of her own range of knowledge, states just before the poet's talk "Convince us that there's something we don't know" (12), almost as if there's nothing she doesn't know. Stan Smith in *Poetry and Displacement* states,

[2]"Winds of change" echoes the speech made by the then British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan on 3rd February 1960 in Cape Town where he stated that a wind of change is blowing whether one likes it or not and it is a fact.

> "If the overly articulate 'Head of English' patronizingly challenges the visiting poet to 'Convince us that there's something we don't know' in the poem of that name … it is clear that her very self-assurance guarantees her exclusion from what she calls 'an insight to an outside view'" (Smith, 156).

Thus, the Head's reaction after the talk is rather dismissive:

> Well. Really. Run along now girls. I'm sure
> that gave an insight to an outside view.
> Applause will do. Thank you very much
> for coming here today. Lunch
> in the hall? Do hang about. Unfortunately
> I have to dash. Tracey will show you out. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 12)

Poetry establishes a personal relationship between the poem and the reader; does not conform to a single or straitjacket interpretation; looks for an alternative perspective and is always protean. The talk by the visiting poet is not given or shown in the poem, but what the readers witness is that the poet's views are unacceptable to the Head, and the poet is seen as disappointing. The Head is convinced of her own superiority and confident of her knowledge of poetry and she seems piqued by the poet's presence. Her ignorance and lack of knowledge of modern poetry does her harm in the manner of the women in Duffy's "Ash Wednesday 1984":

> In St. Austin's and SacreCeour the accents of ignorance
> sing out. The Catholic's spanking wains are marked
> by a bigot's thumbprint dipped in burnt black palm.
> Dead language rises up and does them harm. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 14)

Just as the “spanking wains” are stuck with their orthodox beliefs and “dead language”, possibly Latin, which they don’t understand and yet continue to sing in “the accents of ignorance,” the Head of English continues to bask in her ignorance, her narrow range of thoughts, and Kipling. Ruth Padel in *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem: A Poem for Every Week of the Year* comments:

> Free verse blew English-language poetry wide open. It was a technical way of being radical, of saying, ‘Poetry doesn’t have to do what people say, doesn’t have to bow to old conventions.’ It was a new point of exploration, freeing you to say new things in new ways. (Padel, 15)

In stark contradiction, the Head has no interest in “say(ing) new things in new ways” and leaves the poet to be shown out by a girl, the Head preferring to shift her attention elsewhere. It is in a similar spirit that Robert Frost in “Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue” stresses the importance of acquiring the knowledge of contemporary poetry or else one would lose out on cognizance “when they are being fooled by a metaphor, an analogy, a parable. And metaphor is, of course, what we are talking about. Education by poetry is education by metaphor” (Frost, 77). The Head is swimming against the current of what Bantock says should be the flow of education, “The whole of social life, the whole of living needs to be constantly freshened by a continual influx of new and fresh ideas” (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 91).

And now, the students

The protagonist in “The Cliché Kid” from *Mean Time* sees a psychiatrist because of being ignored all his life by his parents, teachers and friends; his mind filled with the sense of not being wanted, “This kid so unpopular even my imaginary friend left me / for another friend. I’m

screwed up, Doc, jumpy" (14). He sees himself as alone and with neither peers nor mentors, muddled and confused, his life meaningless in its entirety. In a similar manner, the speaker of "Education for Leisure" from *Standing Female Nude,* has been ignored and rejected at every stage in life, "I have had enough of being ignored" (15) ignored probably by parents, teachers, friends, etc.

The poem "Education for Leisure" opens on a dramatic note "Today I am going to kill something. Anything" (15). The violence in the speaker seems like an outcome of an uncontrolled, untapped energy which could prove constructive if focused in the right direction. The poem unfolds the schooling background of the speaker and gradually moves with progressive inevitability towards the dramatic concluding line, "I touch your arm" (15). Among Duffy's most famous poems, this one echoes both Biblical myths, and traditional canonical English literature. The memories of Shakespeare as taught in school resurface at leisure and being unemployed the speaker is out to "kill something" out of sheer boredom. He does not have a specific object to kill, but just about "anything" will do. Therefore, having taken the cue from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' gods; / They kill us for their sport" (4.1. 234) he declares, "I am going to play God" (15) as the destroyer:

> I squash a fly against the window with my thumb.
> We did that at school. Shakespeare. It was in
> another language and now the fly is in another language.
> I breathe out talent on the glass to write my name. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 15)

The speaker is at once a wanton boy and a god, and since he has mastered the art of squashing flies, he, rather ironically, considers himself a "genius" based on his flawed understanding of

Shakespeare, while his "talent" is reduced to just killing anything. Jane Thomas states that "Duffy frequently uses the metaphor of "talent" to describe this untapped, sometimes negative and destructive potential in the subject" (Thomas, 134). The squashing of the flies brings to mind both King Lear's "wanton boys" and D. H. Lawrence's "Snake" where the speaker throws a stick at the snake that has come to drink water. The speaker in the "Snake" blames the education that has conditioned him into performing such an act, "The voice of my education said to me / He must be killed" (953). But unlike Lawrence's speaker who "missed [his] chance with one of the lords / of life" (954), the protagonist in Duffy's poem is devoid of remorse for his act.

The speaker then shifts his attention to the goldfish and flushes it "down the bog" and he saw "that it was good." This statement reestablishes what has been stated in the first stanza when he declares, "I am going to play God" and in the manner of "God saw that it was good" (*The Holy Bible* Gen. 1:10), after each destructive act, the speaker finds his design and act "good," neatly capturing the speaker's completely delusional state. As long as there is something to kill in the house, the speaker continues to play god. The cat that avoids him and the panicky budgie are probably killed too for the speaker confesses that "there is nothing left to kill". Birds and animals kill for food, for survival, but the protagonist kills because he is bored. Duffy hints at the possibility of change in the speaker when he states "I could be anything at all with half / the chance," and this "chance" could be proper education, employment, social integration, a change for the better, but sadly, this chance is denied him; so he declares, "today I am going to change the world. / Something's world" (15). This statement appears right in the middle of the poem as it functions as a cue, alerting the readers to its central point. If the speaker commits a murder, the world of the victim and their family, and the world of the speaker would change once he is

convicted of murder. But what remains to be answered is whether the education system would change at all?

Thus, having run out of ways and means of seeking people's attention he becomes paranoid and resorts to violence: "I get our bread-knife and go out. / The pavements glitter suddenly. I touch your arm" (15). Just as the speaker says "We did that at school" with the reference to both reading *King Lear,* and squashing/swatting flies, a universal activity, he strikingly uses the possessive pronoun "our" for "bread-knife." It is the "bread-knife" that connects the speaker to the victim. The victim is nobody in particular but a random person on the pavement or it could even be the reader. The violence in the speaker is not the inherent violence in nature even though the speaker speaks with much clarity and exactitude, almost in the manner of Ted Hughes' hawk. It is the violence of suppressed rage, personal conflicts, of social and economic disparity. Thus, even as the poem is about the failure of education, it draws the reader's attention to economic and social inequality.

That the speaker understood the comparison of boys' sport and the actions of the Gods in *King Lear* in its literal sense, is in itself a failure of the teachers to disseminate learning or, given the "ignored" background of the speaker, he might have understood everything literally. Quite coincidentally, Mrs. Schofield understood the poem in the manner of the speaker, and had it removed from GCSE, "In 2008, her (Duffy) Education for Leisure, a poem about violence, was removed from the AQA examination board's GCSE poetry anthology after a complaint about its reference to knife crime and a goldfish being flushed down the toilet" (Moorhead, unpaginated) even though Duffy had maintained that the poem was "anti-violence." Stan Smith states:

> The school itself, as the product of a conflicted history of educational reforms, is not the impartial, all-embracing space where all these narratives meet, but a politically disputed arena, a place of division and unreconciled multiplicity where, it may be, *every* thing is 'true' because *no* thing in particular is. (113)

It is this evasive politics that is apparent in "Translating the English, 1989" from *The Other Country,* where Duffy hints, that England as a country takes pride in its tradition of great poets and writers like Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Dickens, placed on parity with "fish and chips", the Royal family, history, Empire, soap operas, football, Channel Tunnel etc., where "All this can be arranged for cash" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 6). Even as they represent England's commercialised high art and culture, Duffy hints that these are only a select projected version of the country, and satirically draws out the other side of England, the side where "Many thrills and high interest rates for own good. Muggers. / Much lead in petrol. Filth. Rule Britannia and child abuse. / Electronic tagging, Boss, ten pints and plenty rape" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 6). By handling out a catalogue of drugs, alcohol, theft, pollution, child abuse and rape, Duffy is not only making a comment on the hypocrisy of society but acting against select representations, and shows and educates the readers with the truth about England's hideous culture.

"Mrs. Schofield's GCSE" is Duffy's response to the removal of the poem "Education for Leisure" from the GCSE syllabus, and in it, Duffy lists a series of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies that are bloody and murderous *and* prescribed for study, texts that Mrs. Schofield has no issue with. Works such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar* are linked together via the violence contained therein. When Duffy quotes "*You must prepare your bosom for his knife*" from *The Merchant of Venice*, "*Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*" from *Hamlet*, and "*Nothing will come of nothing; / speak again*" (Duffy,

The Bees 15) from *King Lear*, Duffy is using traditionally privileged, canonical texts to speak out against the faulty educational system in England. But she is also voicing her resistance to a system that permits violence such as a husband "insane with jealousy" who kills a wife (and the other examples cited above) to feature in school syllabi, even as it removes a poem such as "Education for Leisure". The critique is of a system that is blind to the terrible violence embedded in the national poet's plays, even as more contemporary everyday examples are said to foster further violence. Such a blinkered view of education is mocked by Duffy as she shows us that violence has been a constant in school syllabi: the failure of school education is in not teaching students better, not in prescribing texts such as these.

The protagonist in "Education for Leisure" is out with his bread knife because education has not prepared him well enough to be able to earn a living and therefore, in response, Mrs. Schofield must prepare her bosom for his knife (of criticism), for her narrow-mindedness, for her lack of vision and intelligence. That something is rotten in the educational system in England is made clear and that nothing comes from nothing, therefore, think again, rectify and speak again. The poem is in a series of questions, as if from an examination, questioning not just the credibility of Mrs. Schofield but also the credibility of the education department for taking the decision to ban a poem that exposed the lacks in the prevalent education system. Duffy in the poem "Politics" mocks the way politicians score points by, and in the name of, promoting education. She mimics Tony Blair who in his 2001 campaign said, "Our top priority was, is and always will be education, education, education" (Blair, unpaginated) when she states, "*politics* – to your education" (Duffy, *The Bees* 12). What has been remains to be so, as Bantock states, "It is always the next generation which is to pull the chestnuts out of the fire ('we look to youth…', words in the mouth of every prating politician); all that is needed is the necessary educational

opportunity" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 55). Thus, Duffy takes on the negative impact politics has on the holistic education system unabashedly, forthrightly, and sure-footedly.

And then the good news

While a selection of Duffy's poems shows us the problems with formal systems of schooling and education and how faulty educational spaces and systems make for unhappy children, others among her oeuvre, offer us a counter to that bleak viewpoint. In several of her poems, school becomes a space where children are happy, they shine and excel, enjoying their studies and relationships and the poems show us the shifts that take place as these children encounter other situations and places which threaten their fragile confidence and security. Several of Duffy's poems move from happy childhoods to a rather unhappy adulthood, as their lives change from innocence and ignorance to knowledge and experience. The speaker, in these poems, is often at the cusp of childhood, entering into adolescence, or a nostalgic adult, looking back at a more idyllic time. "In Mrs. Tilscher's Class" the child's memory of the security provided by Mrs. Tilscher is contrasted with the uncertainties that arrive with growing into adolescence. In a similar manner, the adult speaker of "The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team" longs for the time when he was at the top of the world, topping the class, captain of a quiz team with answers at the tips of his fingers for everything; all of which is contrasted with his adulthood where there are no straight answers to questions anymore.

In the poem "In Mrs. Tilscher's Class" from *The Other Country*, the memories of childhood are concentrated around the classroom where Mrs. Tilscher makes the classroom so very interesting to the children that the speaker says it "was better than home" (2). The speaker

remembers her geography by the tactile imagery of Mrs. Tilscher's fingers that "could travel up the Blue Nile" (2) and across countries and regions "Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswan" (2) which remains vivid in the inner eye and the chalk "rubbed into dust" (2) serves as a memory aid for the great Pyramid. Recess is remembered for the "skittle of milk" where game and fun are associated with the taste of milk and "the classroom glowed like a sweet shop. / Sugar paper. Coloured shapes" (2) a cluster of happy images of learning. Taste, smell, sight, sound and feeling are all evoked via the images as we see the children live via all their senses in the security of the classroom. The "bell" that beckons the children back to the classrooms is likened to a "laugh" that is "swung by a running boy" (2). There's a "good gold star" by her name and the child is elated but this rapture is slowly lost, via the careful sharpening of a pencil. "The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved" brings forth a sharpened sense in the speaker so that "a xylophone's nonsense heard from another form" (2) becomes a nonsensical sound, rather than music. As the speaker notices tadpoles morphing into frogs and "commas into exclamation marks," simultaneously there are changes taking place in her perception of people around her especially when "a rough boy / told you how you were born" (2). Changes take place "from commas into exclamation marks" and the pleasant pauses of innocent childhood are replaced with the surprising and shocking revelations of sex followed by an individual quest for answers. The uneasy awakening of sexual knowledge in the speaker is portrayed by images of being feverish, "taste of electricity," "tangible alarm," "hot, / fractious under the heavy, sexy sky" (3) which translates itself into thunderstorms after Mrs. Tilscher fails to answer the basic question, "You asked her / how you were born and Mrs. Tilscher smiled, / then turned away" (3). The growth of the speaker is documented, and the happy learning ambience in the school is appreciated, but the poem also indicates the absence of sex education in schools. The teacher's failure to give an

answer is not because she does not have one; she prefers not to answer, or deems it inappropriate at this young age. However, the lack of an answer also casts a blight upon the child's hitherto idyllic school life and as she leaves school, as summer begins, she is "impatient to be grown" (3). The perfection of school life that we have witnessed ends with this impatience and the child becomes kin to the girls in "The Good Teachers", eager to grow up, to learn the truths of life, truths that are, sadly, unavailable in Mrs. Tilscher's classroom.

Similarly, in "The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team" the titles of popular songs: "*Do Wah Diddy Diddy, Baby Love, Oh Pretty Woman*" (Duffy, *Mean Time* 3) help him fix the month and year, October, 1964, associated with the special event of appearing in a quiz show. The confident boy is bubbling with "fizzing hope," "clever smell of satchel" and has the answer to every question at the ready, from when the Nile rises to the nature of how the "humming-bird's song is made by its wings," and "knew the capitals, / the Kings and Queens, the dates" (3). The boy is certainly intelligent and has a terrific memory but as Bantock says,

> The treatment of subjects at the elementary level was often quite unsophisticated, usually constituting little more than lists of facts which those with good memories acquired without any understanding of relevance and, indeed, without having in any meaningful sense been initiated into the disciplines… History, for instance, was the dates of kings and queens of England – it was often as simple as that. (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 58)

There is an echo of Bantock's observation in Duffy's own account of her schooling, given in an interview with Barry Wood, "The school I went to we had a huge amount of facts drummed into us, the names of capitals, the defenestration of Prague, the Diet of Worms, the Field of the cloth

of Gold, all this factual knowledge … all this useless information" (Wood, unpaginated). The education that the protagonist of "The Captain of the 1964 Top of the Form Team" had is no different. Thus, the speaker with a larger-than-life attitude, free as "a cowboy" looking towards the distant horizons, riding a bicycle with "no hands, famous, learning" and emulating famous singers such as Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones (and others), is in some ways unable to connect education with real life, which is responsible for his not-quite-happy adult life. Antonio Gramsci while addressing the different kinds of intellectuals, states that school becomes an instrument for elaboration of various intellectuals and that the "mode of being for the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator …" (Gramsci, 10). The boy who was once Captain of the team, while he may have been an expert at quizzes at school finds himself unable to cope with what Gramsci calls "active participation in practical life", precisely because of the educational systems and what they privilege.

The speaker's success as a child is encapsulated in his mother placing his "mascot Gonk" on the TV set and he is proud of his own photograph where he looks brainy in a blazer, badge, and a tie. The sexual awakening in the child is alluded to economically in his observation of "convent girls" and "pink pavements / that girls chalked on" (3). As the boy moves through streets named after famous people like Spinney, Churchill and Nelson he makes his impression by stamping with "pawprints of badgers and skunks" which are printed in the soles of his shoes in the mud "My country" (3), probably with high hopes of having a street named after him someday. It is this childhood country and the captain in command of everything that the speaker of "The Captain of 1964 *Top of the Form* Team" wants back. The shift into adulthood is

disappointing and the speaker continues to hanker after his glorious childhood, which he tries to regain by quizzing his “stale wife” and “thick kids.” He remembers himself smiling “as wide as a child who went missing on the way home / from school.” He is stuck in that past, as is the smile of the missing child; a smile because it intensifies the impact of abduction by predatory adults, but also because children who are abducted are kept frozen in the moment of the photograph that is used to try and trace them: they are forever in just that moment when the photograph was taken. His adulthood has abducted his childhood and it is lost forever, never to be regained except in a shredded collage of memory. It also reminds the reader of “Brady and Hindley” of “In Mrs. Tilscher’s Class” where the protective and loving teaching of Mrs. Tilscher is juxtaposed with the heinous acts of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley who tortured and murdered five children between July 1963 and October 1965, of which four were sexually assaulted. This episode of Brady and Hindley “faded, like the faint, uneasy smudge of a mistake” and the child “In Mrs. Tilscher’s Class” was snug in the security provided by her teacher. But it comes back to haunt her the moment Mrs. Tilscher fails to answer her adolescent question, for life is a palimpsest and the “uneasy smudge” marks its eternal presence, transporting one to a totally different country. Like Yeats does not provide an answer to “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” quoted by the speaker in ““The Captain of 1964 *Top of the Form* Team” (Duffy, *Mean Time* 4) there are no easy answers to adulthood anymore. Just as Rhodesia has changed into an independent Zimbabwe, the passage from childhood into adulthood is no different from tadpoles morphing into frogs and “commas into exclamation marks” (Duffy, *The Other Country* 2). It is against this background that Bantock’s statement, “... in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries what is essentially a new situation has arisen ... The education they provide is primarily cognitive – it pays little attention to the education of the emotions” (Bantock, *The Parochialism*

of the Present 104) gains importance as an astute comment on the failings of the entrenched systems of education. Thus, due to the lack of much needed emotional education, the horizons of the speaker of "The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team", have not expanded as he grows older, but declined into an adult life of a separate country with complications, disappointments and uncertainties. The childhood/original country is lost in emigration and only memories remain, of past triumphs. Antonio Gramsci alludes to these lacks in the educational system when he writes:

> In fact between *liceo* and university, i.e. between the school properly speaking and life, there is now a jump, a real break in continuity, and not a rational passage from quantity (age) to quality (intellectual and moral maturity). From an almost purely dogmatic education, in which learning by heart plays a great part, the pupil passes to the creative phase, the phase of autonomous, independent work. (Gramsci, 31-32)

What Duffy shows us in poems such as "The Captain of the 1964 *Top of the Form* Team" is that what Gramsci called "purely dogmatic education" is *not* succeeded by a "creative phase" and hence some students such as the eponymous captain are forever stunted, stranded in another country than the one of adulthood, in which they ought by rights to be.

Duffy makes the point that educational institutions seem to have occasionally produced happy children, but they grow up into unhappy adults even though the purpose of education is to "produce happy adults rather than happy children" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 64).

Subject Lessons

Duffy's verse shows the need to make learning interesting, innovative and fun, especially for the learners. In "The Laughter of Stafford Girls' High" laughter invades every class,

> through every hymn or poem, catechism,
> logarithm, sum, exam; in every classroom, drama room
> to music room; on school trips to a factory or farm; from
> First to Sixth Form, dunce to academic crème de la crème. (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 49)

As already noted, Duffy is critical of the absence of fun for children in schools. Ms. Bream is traumatised that "Laughter, it seemed, was on the curriculum" (48), and that is Duffy's primary focus where education is concerned, to make learning enjoyable. The accepted view of academic activity as serious business is voiced through the teachers who initially agreed that laughter was "foolish behaviour" (39) except for Mrs. Mackey. Laughter in the poem stands for reformation and that the girls "found everything funny…at the slightest thing" (48) calls for a revamp of everything in school. Duffy craves fresh ways of learning "to bring education into relationship with life" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 16). In an interview with Joanna Moorhead, Duffy opens up about her vision for introducing innovative learning in schools:

> What I'd like to do is create anthologies for other school subjects—for history, for geography, for maths … I think poetry can help children deal with the other subjects on the curriculum by enabling them to see a subject in a new way. So you'd have a maths lesson, and the teacher would hand out a poem about mathematics. Poetry is a different way of seeing something and seeing a subject in

> a different way is often a very good tool to better learning. (Moorhead, unpaginated)

Duffy in her own poetry has focused on several of the subjects taught in schools. “Death of a Teacher” hails an English teacher who helped poems come alive and taught the students the real essence of poetry. The title “Death of a Teacher” heralds a requiem or an elegy but the poem is a celebration, of gifted teachers; of the impact they have on their students and how they can make magic happen, for after all “Teaching / is endless love” (Duffy, *New Selected Poems* 142). In “The Good Teachers,” Miss Pirie has taught the students so very well that “You are making a poem up for her in your head” (Duffy, *Mean Time* 12) as a token of love and appreciation. In the same manner “Death of a Teacher” is a poetic tribute to the teacher who transformed poetry into fresh thinking. The impact that the teacher made on a thirteen-year-old was so deep that even after “three decades”, the speaker vividly remembers her English classes, and on getting to know that she “died yesterday”, the “big trees outside” were peopled into playing “poker games again, / shuffling and dealing, turning, folding, their leaves” (142). The speaker is transported to a time when the teacher read “a poem by Yeats” and was so smitten that her “heart stumbled and blushed / as it fell in love with the words” (142), not love at first sight, but a love relationship with a proper introduction and understanding of “words.” Words begin to take flight from the pages so that the speaker “saw the tree / in the scratched old desk under my hands, heard the bird / in the oak outside scribble itself in the air” (142). The mundane old desk is endowed with a new lease of life, and along with it a changed perception in the beauty around; nature has become art; the bird “scribble(s) itself in the air”, its song no longer naturally wordless but scripted and transformed into art. In the learning of “poems by heart, spells, the lists / lovely on the learning

tongue, the lessons, just as you said, / for life" (142), the speaker has not only learnt the art of reading poetry afresh, but also a love of language, for life.

In the act of paying tribute to a great teacher who has instilled a love for poetry in her student, Duffy also teaches the reader how to read poetry in new ways. Once begun, this relationship with poetry has no end but remains "a page of a book, precious, waiting to be turned" (142) again and again, and the importance of poetry is highlighted as the healing powers of words.

In the poem "History" from *Feminine Gospels* Duffy talks about history by drawing a comparison between an old woman and history:

> She woke up old at last, alone,
> bones in a bed, not a tooth
> in her head, half dead, shuffled
> and limped downstairs
> in the rag of her nightdress,
> smelling of pee. (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 27)

The physical condition of the toothless old woman reduced to just bones, and half dead, is suggestive of the skeletons of truth, of illness, of being silenced, voiceless and speechless, and existing in just the physical state of being, devoid of the qualities of pity, peace and love of humanity. She has

> witnessed the wars,
> the bloody crusades, knew them by date
> and by name, Bannockburn, Passchendaele,
> Babi Yar, Vietnam. She'd heard the last words
> of the martyrs burnt at the stake, the murderers

> hung by the neck … (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 28)

Just as this old woman has no one to look after her and bears the brunt of human cruelty in poverty, loneliness and ill health, history too is rife with cruelty illustrated by historical records of the Roman crucifixions, the Crusades, the World Wars, the Battle of Bannockburn fought between England and Scotland in 1314, the Battle of Passchendaele fought between the Allies and the German Empire in 1917, Babi Yar, the massacre of 33,771 Jews in Ukraine in 1941, and the Vietnam war of 1955-1975. Apart from wars, history is also filled with "murderers / hung by the neck," "martyrs burnt at the stake," it tells us how Hitler "blew out his brains, how the children waved / their little hands from the trains" (28) on their way to the gas chambers and so on. And the old lady becomes history itself, "She was History" for the cruelty she faces from multiple sides:

> Bricks through the window now, thieves
> in the night. When they rang on her bell
> there was nobody there; fresh graffiti sprayed
> on her door, shit wrapped in a newspaper posted
> onto the floor. (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 28)

Duffy, by presenting the old woman as the metaphor for history, makes history immediate to the reader as we witness the old woman's life, and makes it novel and interesting to learn while at the same time she educates the readers by making a connection between the present and the past and shows how today's events become tomorrow's history.

In addition to the subject of history, through this poem, Duffy speaks out strongly against the atrocious treatment meted out to senior citizens who are left to die on their own, unattended and uncared for. And as though that is not enough, the old become extremely vulnerable to those

who are callous enough to have fun at the expense of the weak, the old and the needy. Even as the poem talks about the formal discipline of history, Duffy also educates the readers about the qualities of care and love for the aged. The brutality against the old woman is no different from the cruelty of historical wars and other public persecutions. The historical perspective regarding History and its morphing role is articulated by Bantock as:

> … even history has in some degree changed its role. In former times conceived of as a moral energising force, a source of *exampla* and traditional wisdom, as guide or warning to the present, it has itself become, in the fullness of time, objective and 'scientific', concerned to emphasise the reconstruction of former actuality rather than as serving any *direct* function of enlightenment. (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 2; emphasis in the original)

Since history is historians' history and because literature plays a huge role in educating the readers, Duffy's verse can be seen as doing what Bantock suggested, when he wrote that "it is time we recovered a sense of history; and within a resuscitated awareness of historic process, it is time we recalled a literature as a central energising force in the examination of our social and moral problems" (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 1). Duffy, thus sees within the present, the conditions that created the possibility of historical atrocities and points us, the readers, to an understanding of history as exemplar and warning.

Duffy's concern with new ways of learning and teaching is evident in the way she draws connections between education and life. In the poem "Nostalgia" even as the speaker talks about the mercenaries' longing for their native land, she also informs the reader about the origin of the word 'nostalgia' and its medical history:

> Those early mercenaries, it made them ill –
> leaving the mountains, leaving the high, fine air
> to go down, down. What they got
> was money, dull crude coins clenched
> in the teeth; strange food, the wrong taste,
> stones in the belly; and the wrong sounds,
> the wrong smells, the wrong light, every breath –
> wrong. They had an ache *here*, Doctor,
> they pined, wept, grown men. It was killing them.
> It was given a name. (Duffy, *Mean Time* 6)

The poem talks about the journey from the mountains "to go down, down" physically and then their loss in terms of their selves. The early mercenaries found almost everything wrong: "wrong taste," "wrong sounds," "wrong smells," "wrong light," "every breath wrong" which made them ill, "killing them" and "It was given a name". The name was "nostalgia"[3].Nostalgia also known as "the Swiss disease" was

> "First coined in 1678 by Johannes Hofer of Basel, the word nostalgia … was meant "to signify the pain which the sick person feels because he is not in his native land." Cullen in 1772 classified nostalgia as an abnormality of appetite, alongside bulimia and polydipsia. In England it was considered an illness that principally affected foreigners. (Reid, 496)

[3]The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "nostalgia" as "Acute longing for familiar surroundings, esp. regarded as a medical condition; homesickness," or "Sentimental longing *for* or regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime; (also) sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past," or "Something which causes nostalgia for the past; frequently as a collective term for things which evoke a former (remembered) era" derived from the Greek root, *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (pain).

In the guise of storytelling, Duffy thus guides us into the world of medical education and etymology, even as she talks about the universal experience of nostalgia. The pain of nostalgia is not only felt for the native land but also for the memories the early mercenaries have left behind, "the music of home – the sad pipes – summoning" which could be a reference to the songs or music which reminds them of home:

> But the word was out. Some would never
> fall in love had they not heard of love.
> So the priest stood at the stile with his head
> in his hands, crying at the workings of memory
> through the colour of leaves, and the schoolteacher
> opened a book to the scent of her youth, too late. (Duffy, *Mean Time* 6)

On the flipside of nostalgia, people who stayed back are no happier than those who left. In fact, they are nostalgic not for a place, but for the chances in life they have not taken, for the failure to live life to the full. Duffy brings out the truth that love too is to be learnt and told for there are people who have "not heard of love." The priest is "crying at the workings of memory / through the colour of leaves" where the leaves could be of the leaves of trees that change colour, a sign of autumn, and the schoolteacher opens "a book to the scent of her youth" but "too late." Though the priest and the schoolteacher are traditionally seen as shaping society, Duffy does not automatically give them that status. Given her other poems such as "Confession," "Ash Wednesday 1984," "The Good Teachers" and "The Laughter of Stafford Girls' High," priests, nuns and teachers in her poems are often disgruntled people who, having been denied a full life, take their frustrations out on students or other young people and do "them harm" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 13).But those who have taken life in their stride and ventured out, return with new perspectives:

> It was spring when one returned, with his life
> in a sack on his back, to find the same street
> with the same sign on the inn, the same bell
> chiming the hour on the clock, and everything changed. (6)

The wrongness that overcast everything in a foreign land in the first stanza is now replaced by the sameness of everything on their return: one of the mercenaries returns having experienced life elsewhere, ready to resume life in his old home, where everything is the same and yet finds that "everything changed".

Duffy, in this poem educates her readers not only about the essential characteristics of nostalgia but introduces them to the power of words. Whether people stay or go they are all susceptible to nostalgia, which may be for a place, for some, or for a time, for others. Once the "word was out", it afflicted everyone and Duffy warns her readers about the impossibility of attempting to recapture what one was nostalgic about, because "everything changed". This is a recurrent concern in Duffy's poetry as we can observe in "Away and See" where she says, "Nothing's the same as anything else. Away and see / for yourself. Walk. Fly. Take a boat till the land reappears, / altered forever, ringing its bells, alive" (Duffy, *Mean Time* 19). Experience and awareness of the new, the unfamiliar or a fresh gaze directed at the previously experienced are seen as important and essential, but also as inevitable, as one cannot return to a static world. As she makes clear in "Nostalgia", "everything changed".

Duffy in "War Photographer" teaches the readers about the realities of war through the depiction of a photographer in his studio developing pictures taken during a war. The poem juxtaposes the feelings of the war photographer, as he works at developing the photographs and

as he remembers the events memorialized in the photographs, and those who view the photographs:

> In his darkroom he is finally alone
> with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.
> The only light is red and softly glows,
> as though this were a church and he
> a priest preparing to intone a Mass.
> Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 51)

The phrases "darkroom," "spools of suffering set out in ordered rows," and "light…red," are certainly about the photo-developing room and at the same time they are suggestive of the dark times in a world beset by wars: "Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh" naming specifics but also showing the reader the geographical spread the photographer covers. Referencing religious and ethnic cleansing wars, Duffy also makes clear that it doesn't really matter where and how and when, the effects of war are the same at all times. Duffy jibes at the church for allowing wars to happen; Belfast, between the Catholics and the Protestants; Beirut, between the Christians and the Muslims; and the mention of a church where a priest is "preparing to intone a Mass" indicts the church for its complicit role in warfare. The church, in the act of supporting war, turns against its own tenets. The phrase "All flesh is grass", with its Biblical antecedent is suggestive of the bodies of fallen soldiers that have been buried and now have grass growing atop them. But the phrase is also in the nature of a homily reminding man that he will return to dust. At the same time, it is also expressive of the failure in the pastoral ministry of the priest, which not only affects the congregation of people but also the destruction of landscape and nature in the name of god. The images of grass, fields, and running children are familiar, invoking pleasant times and

the activity of children, but the image is rendered uncanny, defamiliarized as the pastoral scene is turned into a killing field, and we move from the bucolic calm of "Rural England" where "fields don't explode beneath the feet / of running children" to the pain and "nightmare heat" of the killing fields where "blood stained into foreign dust".

Duffy employs the word "solutions" ironically when she says: "Solutions slop in trays / beneath his hands which did not tremble then / though seem to now" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 51). Poignantly, while there are photographic chemical solutions, there are no solutions to war. That the photographer does not give in to fear while at work in a war-zone but is trembling now, is indicative of PTSD, the recognition of trauma induced by witnessing horrific events in war-zones. Or could it mean that the war zones are so horrendous and gruesome that humans are stripped of all emotions? Or has excess pain numbed the photographer beyond feelings for he trembles at home in "ordinary pain"? The protagonist is haunted by the pictures he has taken: "of children running in a nightmare heat," "a half-formed ghost…the cries of this man's wife," and "the blood stained into foreign dust" (51), vital imagery which is at once present and from the past, the convulsion, the turmoil of war and historically repeated occurrences. These images provoke the reader to identify with, and witness at second-hand, the soldier in his hour of death and the agony of his wife. Life and death co-exist as the photographer begins to see the features of the dying soldier and then he remembers the cries of the soldier's wife. The stress is not on men's mortality, but the lack of shared responsibility and our own sense of being alive which presumably should haunt not just the photographer but the public in general, including the readers of the poem and the imaginary viewers of those photographs. The "stranger's features" of a "half-formed ghost" are more alive than the general public who are as good as dead because

"they do not care", and the half-human and half-ghost will continue to haunt and live on in photographs.

While Duffy cannot be called a war poet, like Siegfried Sassoon or Wilfred Owen, for her certain iconic war pictures are epiphanic. The poem "The Falling Soldier" with the epigraph "*after the photograph by Robert Capa*"[4] talks about bereavement, the medals, flag and bugle, but the moment that Duffy captures in a picture is the falling moment: "The shadow you cast / as you fall / is the start of a shallow grave" and "The shadow you shed / as you fall / is, brother, your soul," and "The shadow you throw / as you fall / is the shadow of death" (Duffy, *The Bees* 13-14).The sad reality is that the protagonist of the poem is not known by his name even after the posthumous adorning of medals of commendation and a state funeral. What stays forever is his "final breath", captured by Capa's camera, forever to be known as "The Falling Soldier" nameless, cannon-fodder, one of those "who die as cattle" in the words of Wilfred Owen. Such is an image that the photographer captures and develops "A hundred agonies in black and white" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 51). Black and white is the photographic quality, yet, it also suggests the ideas of right and wrong, a mental battle, and even an image of soldiers marching in the snow. Talking about war photography, Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* states that the "photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb" (Sontag, 22) and that "The photographer's intentions do not determine the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it" (Sontag, 39). Out of the hundred images the "editor will pick out five or six/ for Sunday's supplement" (Duffy,

[4]Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* records that "the most famous photograph taken during the Spanish Civil War, the Republican soldier "shot" by Robert Capa's camera at the same moment he is hit by an enemy bullet, and virtually everyone who has heard of that war can summon to mind the grainy black-and-white image of a man in a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves collapsing backward on a hillock, his right arm flung behind him as his rifle leaves his grip; about to fall, dead, onto his own shadow" (22).

Standing Female Nude 51) and they will not make headlines or be on the front page of newspapers for these images will not change the public perception of war for "they do not care." And the state, the church, the public and the readers are all included in the "they", as is the photographer, as he "earns his living". Even as the poem talks about war, by the time we come to the last line "they do not care," the poem has almost shifted to the collective consciousness which seems to have disappeared and calls for a new war, not a literal war but a war against the loss of humanity, where in Yeatsian terms "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity" (Yeats, 680) or as Sontag states,

> Reports of death of reality – like the death of reason, the death of the intellectual, the death of serious literature – seem to have been accepted without much reflection by many who are attempting to understand what feels wrong, or empty, or idiotically triumphant in politics and culture. (Sontag, 110)

Thus, even as Duffy educates the reader about the horrors of war, be it a world war, civil war, or religious war, she also indicts each of us for our indifference which makes these horrors possible.

All these poems show us various processes of learning that come either through school education, through the shift from childhood into adulthood, from innocence to experience, from happiness to anxiety, or from subject lessons that are taught in schools and call for a connection to real life rather than just learning by rote and having no connections to the lived life. Duffy educates her readers via a process of witnessing, wherein through her words we perceive situations, people, events, and learn to see them with new eyes as she mediates our vision with her words.

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Chapter Three

All in the Family: Education within the home

This chapter examines teaching and learning in Carol Ann Duffy's poetry as it takes place at home, paying close attention to how Duffy teaches her readers via her representations of parent-child and husband-wife relationships. *In this chapter my primary argument, across sections and relationships, is that even as Duffy does not romanticize the family or familial relationships, nor does she jettison it in its entirety. She demonstrates the possibilities inherent in all kinds of families even as she calls out the power imbalances and the many negative features that inhere in the family as it is perpetuated in the world, across time and space.* Divided into two sections, the first section explores the lessons which children are taught at home, an aspect of teaching and pedagogy that cannot be compared to school education. G H Bantock clearly states that "A teacher is not simply a substitute mum or dad" (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 61) for each has a specific role in space and time, to play in the upbringing, and teaching, of the child in their own capacities. What a child learns from home is extremely important, and Duffy explores many kinds of education that are given and received in the space of the home: from parents who are positively vigilant about their child's wellbeing, development of language and manners; to parents who are lackadaisical in their parenting, or those who try to straitjacket their children, and also the difference that characterizes families formed with a single parent. This section will also look at how children learn not just from parents and adults in the home, but also from their siblings and from sweet and bitter experiences, and finally at how a child at some point in life takes on the role of parenting one's own parent.

The second section of the chapter analyses education in, and via the home, as we, the readers see it in Duffy's poetry, by studying the depiction of various adult relationships,

especially the pros and cons of marriage. It studies how some women are victims of bullying, physical and/or sexual abuse by their spouse(s) but continue to stay in the relationship, trying to make sure the same does not happen to their daughters. Duffy explores the experiences of women by giving a voice to the voiceless, picking up on the brokenness and making sure these voices are heard, which in turn serves as a lesson for others. The education that we read about is within the poems, for the characters therein, but it is also for us as readers: the poems turn the spotlight on exploitative, ruinous relationships and as we read them, they caution and educate us. This section of the chapter will also analyse how through retellings Duffy creates lively modern characters in the wives of mythic, legendary and historical figures and gives them a voice of their own, and through the telling of their life experiences passes on knowledge and lessons about life.

Children in the home

In "The Light Gatherer" Duffy's speaker portrays the mother-child bond in images of light even as the child grows in, and into, the light. The poem begins with the image of the child's cupped palms holding a "candlesworth … enough light to begin" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 59), just the right amount of light, not too much and yet not too little. The use of the metaphor of the candles is suggestive of romantic love but also the birth of Christ which in the church is indicated by the four candles of hope, peace, love and joy, sentiments that the poem's speaker finds in the presence of her child. Every experience of the child's growth is observed and cherished by the mother-speaker with epiphanic delight. The mother celebrates each and every emotion in her child, seen as the light gathering in her, and at the same time the light varies, from candle light, to spotlights, glittering and glowing light, to lamplight and moonlight. The child's eyes are compared to two clear raindrops which are linked to the warm pearls in her ears and the light of her smile after a good cry. Raindrops are evocative of renewal, blessing, regeneration

etc. which the speaker finds in her daughter. Each of the images underscores the relationship that is shared between the mother and the daughter. As the child learns the ways of the world from the mother, the mother also learns and grows with the child, emotionally and mentally.

The mother kisses the feet of her child almost in the manner of Christ kissing the feet of his disciples, setting an example of servitude during the last supper, "Your kissed feet glowed in my one hand, / or I'd enter a room to see the corner you played in / lit like a stage set" (59). Even as the mother reenacts the kissing of the feet, the child is also seen as the protagonist of a play: the corner where the child plays, becomes a stage with the spotlight on the head of the child forming a crown, reminiscent of a halo. As the child acquires language, her speech "glittered like a river, / silver, clever with fish" (59), an image in which the child's speech is not linked to the babbling of the river, but loaded with fish, silver and clever, gesturing towards the unwitting wisdom in children and also the joy that leaps in the mother's heart.

The mother watches the child even as she slumbers and the fall of light on the arms of the child is compared to "the whole moon held in your arms for a night light / where I knelt watching" (59). The image is theatrical, the child being the actor and the mother a keen spectator and yet, in the act of kneeling, the mother too takes the stage with the daughter and it is this kneeling that conveys a certain sacredness about the duo. This is also an indication that all the changes and growth taking place in the daughter are under the mother's surveillance, making sure the daughter is guided through them all.

The advent of the daughter is referenced through a number of different lights: candle, lamp, spotlight, moon, star, and the light of the sun reflected in water, lights ranging from those within homes, to stages and the outdoors with light from the heavenly bodies. The child is looked upon as one that fell from a star into the mother's lap, and the child mirrored the light of the soft

lamp. The child always being in the light implies the child being unharmed and untouched by the dark forces of the world. This is made clear when the speaker says, “you shine like a snowgirl, / a buttercup under a chin, the wide blue yonder / you squeal and fly in” (60) where the child might seem cold like the snow but she is also pure and immaculate, snow white and brightly yellow like a buttercup and finally in due time, the child is out flying into the wide blue world, on strong wings.

The speaker has brought up the child, cherishing her and teaching her so that she is well prepared to face the world of sexual relationships, not to be abused and violated but to be treated like a jewel which is implied by “jeweled cave, / turquoise and diamond and gold” (10) where the cave is suggestive of the female genitalia and that in that journey the child finds precious joys, gems and diamond and gold. Thus, the child’s life that begins with light, in the poem, ends with light too “at the end of a tunnel of years” (60). The glowing images of light that pervade the poem enable childhood to be seen as a glorious period, almost akin to Wordsworth’s pronouncement regarding childhood when we come from God, “trailing clouds of glory” (Wordsworth, 262), except here the glory is not heavenly, nor is it from God, but in the deeply felt affection and security of the mother-daughter bond. Thus, there are two strata at which education works within the poem: the child is educated by the mother, taught and molded by her, but simultaneously, we the readers witness the growth of the child and in that witnessing, we learn as well.

A mother’s sorrow due to the absence of the daughter and the joy of seeing her return is explored in the poem “Demeter”, from *The World’s Wife*. The poem is based on the mythical figure Demeter and her daughter Proserpine, yet, the feeling is universal:

> Where I lived – winter and hard earth.
> I sat in my cold stone room

choosing tough words, granite, flint,

to break the ice. My broken heart –
I tried that, but it skimmed,
flat, over the frozen lake. (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 76)

The two stanzas reference the inevitable presence of death in the world. Demeter has lost her daughter to Hades, the god of Death, for to marry Death is to die. Demeter is engulfed in the coldness and hardness of earth, her room, her words and her heart. Even the water which is used to cleanse, purify, and renew, is frozen in her world without her daughter. It is as though everything in nature is militating against the narrator who is seen sitting in her "cold stone room/ choosing tough words," words like "granite" and "flint" that adequately convey the condition of her "broken heart." The loss of a daughter is very real for many mothers, a loss through marriage, or literal death, to unworthy husbands, to being abducted into all sorts of trafficking, and so on. And as we, the readers, watch Demeter's sorrow, rendered alive and distinct in Duffy's poem, we learn that even as sorrow, while it lasts, can be and is, devastating, it subdues the joys of the world, but that joy is still reclaimable, even if only for a while. Even as Demeter believes that never again will her daughter return, permanently to her mother's house for, she is now death's mate, yet, there is a moment when the daughter comes, walking,

in bare feet, bringing all spring's flowers
to her mother's house. I swear
the air softened and warmed as she moved,

the blue sky smiling, none too soon
with the small shy mouth of a new moon. (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 76)

As the daughter approaches her mother's house, she ushers in the season of spring with flowers blooming in every field, and new life burgeoning everywhere, and by implication the return of the daughter lights up Demeter's home, shifting it from the cold hard winter to blue skies and smiles. The abrupt change, the complete thawing of Demeter's feelings at the advent of her daughter, changes her cosmos from stony ice to flowering fields, warm softened air, smiling skies, and the impending new moon, and is a true reflection of the love between the mother and daughter. This reunion, this elation, like the mourning of the mother, is not to last forever, but like the flowers that come along with the daughter, will fade, change and revert to cold hard winter once more. The poem teaches us that no matter what, a separation between parents and children is bound to take place at one point or the other in life and the pang must be endured, for it cannot be cured. Yet, the good news is that out of this separation comes a reunion, much in the manner of nature's seasons. The concluding couplet which rhymes precisely with "soon" and "moon" provides the sonnet with an emphatic and joyous closure – the union of the mother and daughter. The poem highlights the bond between a mother and daughter and it is this bond that is vital to domestic felicity and joy, the joy of togetherness rather than the suffering of separation, it also underlines the truth that children cannot always be kept tied to their mothers.

Loving and caring for an utterly dependent person such as a child is only one part of family relationships and Duffy shows the obverse when the daughter has to care for her own mother in old age or sickness, forming a full circle of care, as is portrayed in "Water" from *The Bees*. In the poem, three generations of women, the speaker, her mother, and the speaker's daughter, are all connected by the most essential element, water:

> Your last word was *water*
> which I poured in a hospice plastic cup, held

> to your lips – your small sip, half-smile, sigh –
> then, in the chair beside you,
> fell asleep. (Duffy, *The Bees* 33)

This simple everyday element is at the heart of the love, care, warmth and security of the poem as it focuses on reverse parenting; a departure from much of the contemporary world where children don't care for their aged parents but conveniently leave them in old-age homes. The tenderness with which the speaker tends to her mother reflects the manner of a mother caring for the needs of a child, and thus we see depicted the second childhood of the parent when she is taken care of by the grown daughter. The speaker falling asleep in a chair by the side of the mother is indicative of the fragility of the mother's health which calls for constant attention and the daughter's devotion and dedication. The speaker awakens thirsty after three hours and hears and sees a magpie, herald of the dawn. The speaker drinking from the mother's "still-full cup" suggests continuities and connections, repetitions of the same act, water and the bringing of water to a thirsty person providing the link between generations while also gesturing towards the nurturing roles women play (towards each other).

The mother asking for water brings to the speaker's mind the times when she did the same as a child in the middle of the night,

> Water. The times I'd call as a child
> for a drink, till you'd come, sit on the edge
> of the bed in the dark, holding my hand,
> just as we held hands now and you died. (Duffy, *The Bees* 33)

It is with an immense sense of gratitude that the speaker nurtures her mother and, in the process, revisits her childhood memory. The speaker emulates her mother in giving care and this is where

education in the family is centered: the ethics of learning to give and take, the demonstration of qualities of love, care, and selfless sacrifice for the good of the other. Thus, in a repetition of what the mother has done for the speaker as a child, holding hands in the dark, the mother breathes her last. The speaker cries and mourns the passing of her mother, yet, the very act of bringing water to her daughter in the middle of the night to quench her thirst in turn acts as a therapy to her grief, "What a mother brings / through darkness still / to her parched daughter" (33). It is also suggestive of the assurance in the mother that the child would repeat the same act in due time. Water then, does not only quench thirst but also acts as a metaphor for the mother-daughter relationship, the bond, the confidence, the security, the sacrifices, the healing, the renewal and so on, and is an element that is repeated in the seasons of human life.

The happy parent-child relationship as seen thus far is mother-daughter based. It might stand for any family relationship unmindful of the assigned gender specificities, yet, it is also indicative of a reality that single mothers can do equally well in bringing up their children with no lack whatsoever. The traditional and conventional family system is done away with and replaced with one without the father figure.

Learning: language and womanhood

In Duffy's poetry, education within the family is seen from various angles, depending on the speaker of the poem and her unique experiences relating to learning, time, and memory. The nuances of language and language-learning are explored in Duffy's "The Way My Mother Speaks", a love poem for her mother. As the speaker journeys "down England" on a "slow evening" by train, most probably from Scotland, she repeats her mother's phrases in her head, "*The day and ever. The day and ever*" (Duffy, *The Other Country*, 52) and those phrases become

her companion during the journey. A sense of nostalgia fills the speaker as she is physically removed from the place, space, time and language of her mother:

> For miles I have been saying
> *What like it is*
> The way I say things when I think.
> Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent.
> *What like it is.* (Duffy, *The Other Country* 52)

There is a mental tug of war that takes place between two languages and worlds, and even as the poem questions the sense of belonging and ownership, it conforms to the fact that the language one thinks in is from one's mother. Martha Collins in her essay, "Reclaiming the Oh" states, "Our tongue is the mother tongue: we learn it from our mothers … mothers are the bedtime storytellers, after-school listeners. Father-activities were mostly physical: rough-housing, piggyback, talk was left to Mom" (Collins, 31). Amy Tan in "Mother Tongue" opines that what is often described as the "fractured", "broken" or "limited English" of her Chinese immigrant mother is the "language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk" and that "the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child" (Tan, 7). Duffy's speaker, in the act of thinking about her mother, moves into, and out of, childhood feeling "homesick, free, in love" while also tracing the roots of thinking and talking. According to Eleanor Porter,

> The linguistic/intellectual journey mingles with the physical – the train itself "browses for the right sky", the poet thinks "for miles." The journey south through England away from her mother is a journey towards recognition of herself and her own possibilities … Duffy is homesick for the time before the

> child separated from the mother, yet she also celebrates the freedom which separation allows and the love she can feel for her mother because she is distant enough to hear her mother's distant voice. (Porter, 78)

Similarly, when Red Riding Hood axes the wolf "one chop, scrotum to throat" she finds "the glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones" (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 4) to which Jeanette Winterson in her introduction to *The World's Wife* remarks, "The skeleton of language is female. Deeper, it seems, than our mother tongue" (Winterson, xi). Duffy is educating her readers and taking them on a journey into the roots of thinking and language, and nudging them towards paying more attention to the making and learning of language.

The informal education that is given at home, often based on strict and unfair social norms and codes, is another prominent theme in Duffy. For example, the nature of language is the cause of embarrassment for the women in the poem "Litany" from *Mean Time*. They balance everything according to social conventions almost akin to those of the Victorians. The child speaker is taught a certain code of conduct: "This was the code I learnt at my mother's knee, pretending / to read, where no one had cancer, or sex, or debts, / and certainly not leukaemia, which no one could spell" (Duffy, *Mean Time* 5). There is a certain degree of informal learning that takes place in the child, even as the women talk by spelling words and not pronouncing them and the child is "pretending to read" but pays close attention to whatever is being spelled and realises that "no one could spell" leukaemia correctly. The inability of the women to spell leukaemia correctly also hints at the kind of education they must have had, something the child speaker notes. Duffy focuses the reader's gaze upon the awareness of the child speaker, an awareness that notes details about the women, their physical appearances, their interests, and conservative hidebound lives. It is from within this intense awareness that the child looks out and

ruffles the surface placidity of the women who sit around chatting in her mother's lounge, ruffles it with her inappropriate use of language.

One day the speaker after returning from school, reports that "*a boy in the playground*" told her "*to fuck off*" (5).Social and family values cannot control what children learn from school and this clear enunciation embarrasses the women, tension engulfs the "air like an accident" and the child, after extending apologies, is made to wash her mouth with soap. Bantock is of the opinion that "the child cannot be responsible for himself. The need to keep the soap out of the child's mouth makes self-expression a dishonest farce" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 171). When we see the child being made to wash out her mouth with soap, we also see how the child will grow up stifling her modes of speaking, if only because of the "need to keep the soap out . . .". When Bantock writes that "in schools we give too much liberty to children to express themselves without giving them any of the tools with which they can discipline their expression" (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 91) we are given a prism through which to understand what happens within the poem: the boy has not learnt the modes of speaking in public that are instilled into the girl by washing her mouth out with soap. Learning language is very much a part of growing up and like any other aspect of a society situates a person. In the case of the child speaker, the washing of her mouth with soap is also to do with gender roles and norms, for the speaker does not confine herself within the acceptable range of language that women use. The women are not surprised that a boy said it in school but that a little girl should say it, and at home, in polite company. The process of discipline takes over and the child is made to apologize, "*I'm sorry, Mrs Barr, Mrs Hunt, Mrs Emery, / sorry, Mrs Raine*" (5) and is made to wash her mouth with soap for language is also fashioned after the culture and practices of a particular place, space and time. As Bantock says, "It has to be admitted that even in the most

liberal view the development of the individual is bound to be restricted by the preconceptions derived both by the teacher and the taught, partly from the limitations of the individual mind, and partly from the influence of the environment" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 37).

In the same manner the speaker of "Mouth, With Soap," from *Selling Manhattan* discovers that learning the use of language is a perilous venture, especially when it comes to the use of certain words, "She didn't shit, she *soiled* or *had a soil* / and didn't piss, *passed water*" (44). According to the Bible it is the power of "The Word" that created the world and everything in it but in Duffy's work the world did not stop there for "in the beginning was The Word and, close behind, / The Censor, clacking a wooden tongue" (44). One of the distinctions that sets human beings aside from animals is the ability to speak and use language. But when words are censored, human beings are no more than animals suffering from "wooden tongue," a disease that disables the animals from any tongue involved activities. Or "wooden tongue" could also mean wooden language which implies the use of vague and ambiguous words.

Since the protagonist of the poem could speak only in wooden language, she becomes a "deadly assassin as far as/ words went" and "she bleached and boiled the world" that was created by "The Word". Decorum in language usage is maintained "no Fs or Cs, / Ps and Qs minded." Thus, if words like fuck, cuss, cunt, and cancer are used, one is made to "*wash out / your mouth with soap*" whereas words like 'please' and 'thank you' are a must. The protagonist would or could not utter the word cancer, but unfortunately there is "The Big C, growing" inside her because of which there is a "constant drizzle in her heart" and she becomes the "living death" (44) along with the words she kills. The sanitized words of the speaker are the result of life's learning and experience, an understanding of a polite society that censors almost everything in

life and the domestication of, and decorum in, the use of language. The child speaker of "Litany", having learnt to mind her tongue and be euphemistic in her choice of words could well be the grown woman who is the main character in "Mouth, with Soap", a woman who has "the tight vocabulary of living death" (44). Poems such as these two by Carol Ann Duffy show us how language is used as a way of hedging in the speakers and limiting them; the environment within which they grow, curbing their natural modes of expression and making them straitjacketed in their use of language. Duffy also demonstrates how effectively one can be limited and hedged in, if one's language is limited and censored by those around.

If the lesson on language sanitisation is imparted by parents in all seriousness, similar training is also directed towards behaviour. In the poem "Sit at Peace" the "you" is trained as she is told to "*Sit at peace, sit at peace*, all summer" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 4) and made to shell peas. The act of shelling peas is compared to "opening the small green envelopes / with your thumb, minding the queues of peas" which Duffy has neatly placed to suggest the care one needs to apply while shelling peas or opening envelopes, at the same time "minding the queues of peas" with the careful play of words to indicate "Ps and Qs minded" (44) as presented in the poem "Mouth, with Soap" from *Selling Manhattan*. The poem gestures towards the figure of the big brother; watching all the time for the child, the "you" is told again and again to "*sit at peace*" even when "mouth open, soundless / in a cave of pain, you ran to your house" (4) after being "thwacked" by Muriel Purdy; probably a neighbour bully, the "embryonic cop". In order to make the speaker "*sit at peace*" a comparison is drawn between the restless speaker and the domesticated animals, "Nip was a dog. Fluff was a cat. They sat at peace / on a coloured-in mat, so why couldn't you?" (4), an understanding which should be easy-to-comprehend for a child, yet indicates clearly that femininity is not a choice but an absolute requirement, and the child is

to be tamed and domesticated. The answers to the whys of feminine training are not easily given, therefore, “your questions were stray snipes over no-man’s-land, / bringing sharp hands and the order you had to obey” (4). The child speaker’s questions are met, not with suitable answers but with beatings and the ever-repeated, perpetual reminder, to “sit at peace”.

The speaker is disinterested in, and indifferent to the “Jigsaws you couldn’t do or the dull stamps / you didn’t want to collect (which) arrived with the frost” (4); the frost here even as it references the cold weather also implies the speaker’s cold attitude towards the act of collecting stamps or even the lack of warmth in the relationship between the authority figures and the child. The lack of freedom and the child’s preference of one activity over the other is portrayed when she says “You would rather stand with your nose to the window, clouding / the strange blue view with your restless breath” (4) where the “strange blue view” could indicate the increasingly constricted world which the child is made to inhabit, an outside made strange by the storm inside her heart. But everything changed with her fall from a tree,

> But the day you fell from the Parachute Tree, they came
> from nowhere running, carried you in to a quiet room
> you were glad of. A long still afternoon, dreamlike.
> A voice saying peace, sit at peace, sit at peace. (Duffy, *The Other Country* 4)

The fall from the tree could be her fall from obstinacy to obedience, from rebellion to submission, or a symbolic fall where the child learns and realises the essence of love and discipline after a hard, undesirable fall. Love remains, even though the child refused to pay heed to the parents, for when she falls, they come running to her rescue and make sure she is given the best attention and care. The poem shows us the education of the child, an education the child finds difficult and restrictive, even as it shows the child learning and understanding that her

parents care about her and are protective in their care of her. As the child learns, we, the readers also learn, about the ways in which love may be expressed, often what is seen as restrictive and constricting might be an expression of care and protection too. However, Duffy's virtue lies in showing us both sides of the story as we are also made to see how the child needs more stimulus than what is made available by being told to "sit at peace".

These examples of parent-child relationships in Duffy's poetry present neither idealistic versions nor deeply flawed versions of such relationships. What we are invited to witness is the everyday, the quotidian: small events, the happenings of the everyday that cast long shadows, these become a mode of showing the reader the nuances and the depths of ordinary relationships that might otherwise not be recognized by us. In illustrating these via the narratives of her varied poetic persona, Carol Ann Duffy teaches us to look afresh at the relationships that are all around us.

Brothers and Sisters

The bonds between siblings are also examined in some of Duffy's verse. Thus, in "Brothers" the fairy tale world of "once", when there was a strong sibling bond dims into the remote "one day" of a possible reunion. Beginning with the word "once" situates a flashback, a time when the siblings, the speaker and her four brothers were young, innocent, and asexual, "slept in a bed" and acted in a play. "Once" echoes the beginnings of fairy tales, reminding the reader of the world of fairy tales with their happy ending, but fairy tales are also the worlds of witches, evil stepmothers, ogres and giants. The growing up of the siblings is manifested by the loss of common interests and the emergence of individuality, "what was possible retreats and shrinks" (Duffy, *Mean Time* 8). Even as the speaker tries to visualise her brothers with her inner

eyes in the absence of their photograph, “they shrink to an altar boy, a boy practicing scales, / a boy playing tennis with a wall” (8) each anchoring individual undertakings, leading to isolation, seclusion and separation. They grow up and away, out of childhood but “a random quote from the play we were in, *There’s no way / in the creation of God’s earth*” (8) is followed by the “grin and nod” of the brothers registering the memories that situate them back in their childhood. Adulthood not only banishes childhood, but also creates an immense rift in sibling bonds as presented in “Brothers.” It becomes quite clear that as adults they don’t often talk to each other anymore and that the only time the speaker gets to speak her brothers’ names is “occasionally, when people ask, I enjoy reciting their names. / I don’t have photographs, but I like to repeat the names” (8). She doesn’t keep their photographs because either she has them in her “other eyes” or she doesn’t want to. And the reason why she enjoys reciting their names is explained when she says, “My mother chose them. I hear her life in the words, / the breeding words, the word that broke her heart” (8). It is clear that the only binding force between the siblings as adults is the mother, not only because she gave them life but she also named them, bred them and gave them “breeding words”. “The word that broke her heart” takes on the religious tone of the Virgin Mary and Christ, elevating the mother figure to a form of divinity. Ironically, the children here are not saviours of the world but children of the world who grew upto be “thieves and businessmen, / fathers and UB40s” (8) and the word that broke Christ’s mother, Mary’s heart, and their own mother is the same; children. Thus, the heart of a mother is the same, irrespective of whether one is the mother of god or of humans. Quite strikingly, there’s no mention of the father figure in the poem.

The children having grown up and moved out, into their own spaces and trades of life, share nothing in common and “have nothing to say of now” except one standing common thing

that “time owns us” (8). In spite of the distance between the siblings there’s one impending moment that will bring them together, the death of the mother. The four sons though they are not expected to pay for the coffin are expected to be present at the funeral to shoulder the mortal remains of the mother as a reunion takes place, “One day / I shall pay for a box and watch them shoulder it” (8). The poem, thus, starts with life and ends in death, beginning with “once” and ending in “one day” and the cycle continues. The dry-eyed realism within the poem does not romanticize sibling bonds even as the poem shows us unexpected moments of affection, the realization of what keeps them minimally bound together, even as they live very separate lives.

The distance and the conflicts between siblings are further explored in the poem “Elvis’s Twin Sister” from *The World’s Wife*. Madonna proclaimed “*Elvis is alive and she’s female*” and this is used by Duffy as the epigraph to the poem, alongside a line from an Elvis song, yet, the Elvis who inhabits the poem is mediated by Elvis’s sister, a nun:

> In the convent, y’all,
> I tend the gardens,
> Watch things grow,
> pray for the immortal soul
> of rock ‘n’ roll. (Duffy, *The World’s Wife* 66)

Though a nun, Duffy’s version of Elvis’s sister demonstrates the strong influence of their common origins in the way she speaks and prays; the use of words like “y’all”: typical of the southern states of the USA; and praying for the soul of “rock ‘n’ roll” which merges the Catholic ritual of praying for the souls in purgatory, with pop music, which is often disapproved of by the church. And yet, for fans their love and devotion to Elvis is well-nigh religion, and it is this aspect that comes across clearly in this portrayal of Elvis’s sister. Duffy also talks back by

debunking the archetypal nuns who are always seen as serious and in prayer, by depicting Sister Presley's predilection to move her hips in the manner of her brother and the Reverend Mother "digs" it. The reference to the Gregorian chant "Pascha nostrum immolates est…" which refers to Christ as the sacrificial lamb becomes a metaphor for the way Elvis was manipulated by people around him for commercial and fiscal gains leading to an early death brought on by substance abuse. Dressed in a habit, a wimple, a rosary, and sturdy shoes, she tends the garden and happily watches things grow unlike her brother with his celebrity lifestyle and his fans, who go to watch her brother's performances. Sister Presley is happy having chosen the nunnery "I think of it / as Graceland here, / a land of grace" (66) which is rather ironic, when one keeps in mind the fact that Elvis's mansion in Memphis, Tennessee, now a museum, was called "Graceland" and Elvis did not achieve either peace or grace in his life, and died young. Sister Presley declares,

> I'm alive and well.
> Long time since I walked
> down Lonely Street
> towards Heartbreak Hotel. (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 67)

This last stanza again foregrounds the comparison between the lives of the siblings. Sister Presley is happy and alive, whereas Elvis died at forty-two, his life marred by prescription drug abuse and associate ills; she is at peace with herself ever since she walked away from "Lonely Street" and "Heartbreak Hotel" which are both titles of Elvis's hits. She has found herself in the company of other nuns and nature, whereas Elvis is suspended in loneliness and pain; she nurtures herself and the convent gardens, working with plants, he is self-destructive, out-of-control. She is frugal and he is indulgent, she has left behind her previous life of loneliness and

heartbreak, but he lived and died with it and hence the epigraph, Elvis's famous line "*Are you lonesome tonight?"*(67).

Unlike most of the poems in *The World's Wife,* Duffy chooses a sister to speak for Elvis, instead of a lover or a wife. While Elvis had a stillborn twin brother, Jesse Garon, he had no sisters and thus Duffy's choice of giving him a sister – and one who makes a contented life for herself, far from the electric atmosphere of Elvis's life, highlights the personality and character differences of siblings. The lesson we learn is about the possibility of one sibling from a family being happy and contented with life, whereas another may be distraught and self-destructive. It also highlights the fact that siblings, in spite of common interests, can have different vocations where both look for contentment/happiness despite their vastly different ways of doing so. Duffy also seems to point to the fact that happiness and blessings are found in the simple things of life.

On the other hand, "The Kray Sisters" are look-alike twins and speak in one voice. The poem is fashioned after the Kray brothers, Ronnie and Reggie who were infamous, ruthless gangsters in London, while Duffy's invention, the Kray sisters are united for the cause of women's rights, even though they are also gangsters. Their similarity is so acute that "No one could tell us apart, / except when one twin wore glasses or shades" (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 63) which is suggestive of a common interest with the same aim. Brought up and looked after by their grandmother who was a strong suffragette, since their mother "died giving birth / to the pair of unusual" girls, they have imbibed much of their grandmother's strength, know what their vocation is, and they "wanted respect" (64). That grandmothers too have a great role in educating their grandchildren and that, very often in the absence of the mother, they play a double role: being a grandmother and mother at the same time, is strongly emphasized.

They studied the map and knew every nook and cranny of London. This cartographic and geographic knowledge is suggestive of their knowledge of the routes by which they can attain the respect they want, a difficult task for women. On their twenty-first birthday they installed their first club and "the word went around and about / that any woman in trouble could come to the Krays" (64). The sisters are united in not just protecting themselves and earning respect for themselves, but also stand for all women, as they say "that the fruits / of feminism" made them "rich, feared, famous / friends of the stars" (65) which include the famous women of the 1960s such as Germaine Greer, Yoko Ono, Diana Dors and so on. The Kray sisters became so famous, and powerful, that they could even get Sinatra to sing for free, and of course the Sinatra here is not Frank, but his daughter Nancy Sinatra singing her hit song "These boots are made for walking" which becomes the sisters' and their club members' anthem song, "One of these days these boots / are gonna walk all over you. Are you ready, boots? Start / walkin'…" (65) which is resonant of the freedom movement of women, walking free over men. The poem seems to suggest that when siblings are united, there is nothing that can deter them from a cause they undertake, allowing them to become successful and become beacons of hope and inspiration for others as well. As opposed to the other two poems about siblings discussed here, "The Kray Sisters" is marked by camaraderie between the sisters, strong determination and a steady movement forward through the streets of London. The use of London scenes and locales is further intensified by the use of Cockney rhyming slang within the poem, which makes it initially puzzling but also humourous as it weds language to location.

These positive parent-child and sibling relationships are countered in other poems where Duffy portrays the bleaker side of the family unit, giving us snapshots of marriages and parenting, which cause grief, pain and anger.

Family truths, half-truths and untruths

Duffy proposes that it is not just the "normal" human family that leaves childcare to the mother: "The Virgin Punishing the Infant" based on Max Ernst's painting by the title "The Virgin Spanking the Christ Child (1926)" is spoken from the point of view of the ordinary villagers, those who live around the holy family, who find the family puzzling, different. The account of the spanking as narrated in the poem begins with "He spoke early. Not the *goo googoo* of infancy, / but *I am God*" and when other children around them crawled, he walked. The frustration of the mother is piled high as the mother of God is unable to handle the divine infant because "Joseph kept away, carving himself / A silent Pinocchio out in the workshed. He said / he was a simple man and hadn't dreamed of this" (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 42). Joseph keeping away from helping rear the child is suggestive of the man being piqued, having had no contribution in the creation of the child, and therefore, he would rather carve his own wooden child even though this wooden child too may not pass as his progeny. It is also suggestive of Joseph wanting nothing to do with the divine child, him being a carpenter and therefore, instead of putting up with a child that proclaims himself to be God, he would rather handle a wooden child. That Pinocchio tells lies adds another layer as we are asked to juxtapose the knowledge that Pinocchio lies, with the statements that the child Jesus makes, which sound like lies, impossibilities; but are held to be truth. Yet, it also suggests Joseph's easy escapism from a responsibility just because it is beyond normalcy; the making of an easier choice: to wash his hands off just because one "hadn't dreamed of this", leaving it all in the hands of the mother.

Mary's anxiety at having to single handedly parent Jesus is implied when she stares at the stars calling "*Gabriel? Gabriel?*", but this time round there is no Gabriel to rescue her like he did when she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit and Joseph had to be talked into taking

Mary as his spouse. It could even be that the gods desert one when faced with problems, or the divine child being Emmanuel, the situation did not need Gabriel's interference/help. Another problem comes with the wagging of the village tongues, "Our wives were first resentful, then superior" and Duffy underscores the very human trait of belittling all that is different "Mary's child / would bring her sorrow … better far to have a son / who gurgled nonsense at your breast" (42). Duffy indicates that humans are short-sighted and very often fail to see what lies beneath the surface or on the other side of the mountain. Mary knew that her son was special and yet she, being human, could not handle the child, and therefore, she finally takes it out on the child and spanks him. The painting shows Mary with her hand raised to bring it down again on the child on her lap, the child's buttocks turning red, the halo having fallen off his head. It is this sound of smacking that made the three men curious enough to peep and they see that it was "commonplace enough. But afterwards, we wondered / why the infant did not cry. And why the mother did" (42). The weeping of Mary is indicative of both: of what most mothers do after not having spared the rod in a fit of anger but it could also be that she cried for what she had done, whereas the child, being divine, knows his future and is able to retain his calm self-possession. By telling a story connected to the Bible, and making it endearingly human, Duffy also showcases familial relationships at levels, other than those in contemporary Britain, and in doing so she also demonstrates that family truths remain constant: children need to be disciplined, parents have to be responsible for their children and people, whether divine or human, retain human characteristics.

The beautifully educative and protective child-parent relationship that we have seen in the above poems is not sustained in other poems, and some of them are rather disturbing. "Girl Talking" the first poem from *Standing Female Nude* portrays a vague relationship that exists

between children and parents. The story of Tasleen is told solely from a child speaker's perspective and the voices of adults, Tasleen's mother and the Holy Man are muffled or merely reported. The poem begins,

> On our Eid day my cousin was sent to
> the village. Something happened. We think it was pain.
> She gave wheat to the miller and the miller
> Gave her flour. Afterwards it did not hurt. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 7)

The child speaker makes it very clear at the very onset of the poem that her cousin did not go to the miller on her own but that she was sent and "something happened" which is pain. The poem raises several questions: Was Tasleen sent to the village against her will? Did her mother know what was to happen to her? Was Tasleen sent to the miller for his sexual gratification? If yes, was the family too poor to afford the miller's charge for milling wheat to flour? We don't really know, but, the initial pain which did not hurt afterwards is suggestive of something sexual. Life went on with Tasleen making chapatis out of the flour and others planting melons and spinach until Tasleen felt sick in her stomach while playing with her friends. The friends were the only witnesses to Tasleen's pain and "Tasleen told them to find help" (7). There is no implication of a doctor being called to attend, instead, "She made blood beneath the mango tree" and "Her mother held her down" (7). The "(making) of blood" gestures towards a miscarriage or an abortion which led to Tasleen's death within the hour. Tasleen not being taken to hospital even as she lies dying, can help us infer that the financial status of the family is precarious. The speaker says "We take each other money" (7) which could imply borrowing, lending and being in debt. The absence of the father figure is obvious and the poem does not in any way portray the

mother as being cruel or abusive. The hopelessness and grief of the mother is encapsulated in the sentence “Her mother cried” (7). And then,

> They called a Holy Man. He walked from Dina
> to JhangChak. He saw her dead, then said
> *She went out at noon and the ghost took her heart.*
> From that day we were warned not to do this.
> Baarh is a small red fruit. We guard out hearts. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 7)

The “they” here could be Tasleen’s parents or relatives and neighbours. That they call a “holy man” rather than a physician also speaks about the kind of society that the narrative poem is located in. The mention of Dina and JhangChak situates the poem in the Jhelum District of Punjab in Pakistan. The holy man gives a very unscientific reason, the cause of Tasleen’s death being a ghost that took her heart. The poem is as mind boggling as “Baarh is a small red fruit” (7).

The real reason behind the death of Tasleen is rendered invisible by superstitious beliefs and bizarre explanations which have very little to do with facts. The irony in the poem is that the children are warned about a ghost that takes hearts, and not about men who are sexual predators. Tasleen’s mother is completely silent and the narrator within the poem says she “cried”, which goes on to explain why her daughter becomes such easy prey to the miller, a sexual offender against whom no charges are laid. Thus, the mother loses her child due to poverty, which makes her susceptible to sexual predators. Having said that, there are a few unanswered questions that continue to linger: does poverty prevent one from protecting a child? From fighting for the sexual safety of one’s child? Does it lead one to allow the rich a free hand even at the expense of losing not only one’s dignity but life as well? To what extent does religion or superstition

replace, if not destroy, rationality in practicality? Thus, Duffy even as she questions certain parenting styles educates the readers about the existence of such parenting plights. However, by setting it in Pakistan and by making the story about Tasleen, a Muslim child, Duffy also locates the horror outside the safe and Christian environs of Britain and in a community which lacks education and is blighted by poverty and ignorance.

"We Remember Your Childhood Well" too talks about a child being sexually assaulted and the parents try desperately to erase the incident from the child's mind:

> Nobody hurt you. Nobody turned off the light and argued
> with somebody else all night. The bad man on the moors
> was only a movie you saw. Nobody locked the door.
>
> ……..
>
> Nobody forced you. You wanted to go that day. Begged. You chose
> the dress. Here are the pictures, look at you. Look at us all,
> smiling and waving, younger. The whole thing is inside your head. (Duffy, *The Other Country* 20)

In the poem there is the drowning or muffling of the child's narrative, silenced by the parents' narrative, and yet, the other side of the story is implicitly present in the poem, we read both, like a palimpsest. If one replaces the stress of "nobody" with somebody we get the story that the child is trying to enunciate: that somebody hurt her, that somebody turned off the light, that the bad man on the moors was not a movie she saw, that somebody locked the door, and so on. The child is made to feel responsible for all that happened to her and the parents happily disavow all knowledge of the matter, not only refusing to acknowledge it but also denying the child her memories and her truth. Even as they talk, the speaker, the parent tries to pitch his or her voice

over the child's "Your questions were answered fully. No. That didn't occur" (20), yet the repression by the speaker appears to cause the child to be more assertive, aggressive. The parent-speaker tries to bury the awful memory in the child with a photographic memory that is caught suspended in time "smiling and waving, younger." The speaker claims that the child's memory is of a movie she saw but when that tactic fails the speaker gets a little more real and refers to photographs, to smiling pictures, insisting that the child is, or was, hallucinating, that these things didn't happen. The pictures too fail and the adult speaker becomes more coercive by using the police metaphor. The irony is that the police are supposed to enforce justice, law and order and the parents here are using the same metaphor, of the police, to enforce an alternative fact, "we have the facts. We called the tune. / The secret police of your childhood are older and wiser than you, bigger" (20). But by invoking the secret police the adult speaker betrays himself, suggesting that there is something wrong and the "Boom. Boom. Boom" further underscores that. The attempt is to make the child believe the adults' truth, irrespective of who is right and wrong just because they are bigger and older, if not wiser. The attempt is to drown out the child's voice with the booming sound.

That the child did not move an inch and stands her ground is clearly seen when the speaker says "Nobody sent you away" (20) which is indicative of exactly what they did. The parents take the side of the people who sexually assaulted or allowed the sexual assault to happen to their daughter just because "they were firm, there was nothing to fear / There was none but yourself to blame if it ended in tears" (20). The one thing which is clearly revealed, is that the sexual assault happened away from home when the child was on a holiday with family, friends, and/or relatives. Duffy educates her readers about the issue of child sexual abuse, where often it is perpetrated not by strangers but by known people – sometimes with the parents' complicity, or

if not their complicity, with their refusal to acknowledge it. It also raises a huge question as to how a child can be held responsible for something as serious as sexual abuse.

The last stanza of the poem makes clear that no matter the explanations given and tactics used by the parents the child is adamant and stands by her own understanding of what happened, her own memories. “What does it matter now?” (20) is infuriating because the parents seem to have no sense of the mental, emotional and spiritual consequences which the child suffers. The questioning of the child on spiritual matters which is suggested by the statement “no, nobody left the skidmarks of sin / on your soul and laid you wide open for Hell” (20) is suggestive of the mental and spiritual trauma the event has caused for the child from then on. “Hell” here even as it references eternal damnation after death, is also to do with the hellish experience that the child underwent as a sexual abuse survivor, and also the hellish time that her parents are putting her through by refusing to accept her version and instead enforcing their version upon her. The parents find themselves thwarted as the child pays scant attention to their lies and by the end of the poem all they can utter is “You were loved. / Always. We did what was best. We remember your Childhood well” (20). Given the fact that the parents have denied the child’s statements, discredited her truth and laid all the blame at her door, their love for the child becomes suspect. Yet, for what is worth, perhaps the parents did do what was best for the child, and maybe they were only trying to help their child live a better childhood minus the remembered sexual violence. If that is so, Duffy seems to question this very nature of telling white lies, done with the intention of helping the other person. The intention of the parents in telling an alternative fact could be their only way to help their child, to help her come out of it. Or it may be the only strategy they have to cope with the horror of what happened to their child, and their guilt and sorrow at having failed to protect her. But there may also be a side effect to what the parents are

doing to their child: they could lose the trust of the child and the child could also grow up learning to trust no one. Duffy tells a cautionary tale in "We Remember Your Childhood Well", one which shows the readers the circumstances within which child sexual abuse takes place and which keep the perpetrators safe even as the child is isolated, alone and abandoned. The poem moves into the realm of the horror story as we see the child unable to claim her experiences as truth, her parents gaslighting her, manipulating her memory and her reality. Education can be said to happen at various levels, where this poem is concerned: the child (and the reader) is educated about the cruelty of the world but the readers learn what not to do and say if ever they are faced with such a moment and they are also taught, as in all Duffy's poems, about the small and big betrayals that are integral to love, family, relationships.

"A spinning world": Marriage in the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy

Even as Duffy celebrates togetherness, love and understanding in all familial relationships, she also acknowledges the facts of unhappy marriages, dissecting unequal power relationships within marriage, examining how some are held hostage by marriage with no way out. "Alliance" from the volume *Standing Female Nude* portrays the bitter reality of husband-wife relationship. Alliance is a word common to both French and English, only used and pronounced differently, which Duffy deploys to imply a marriage between two individuals of these nationalities, a Frenchwoman and an Englishman. The poem addresses the problems of marriage, of marrying into another culture, another nation which is at once personal and universal. The speaker puts forward the cost of marriage that a woman pays, "What she has retained of herself is a hidden grip / working her face like a glove-puppet. She smiles / at his bullying" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 26). The poem uses the phrase "like a glove-puppet" to raise several issues and ideas; the protagonist's control over her face, even as it indicates her

agency over her facial expression, it implicitly also suggests the speaker being treated like a puppet. The power play between the two is intense and huge: if the husband has his "hidden grip" over her, so does she over him, for she knows the ways of her husband and has learned to retaliate the best way possible, by smiling "at his bullying." That in every relationship the beginning is always glossy, yet, slowly and gradually the fairy tale world of love fades away, to be replaced by clear revelations, is made clear:

> She is word-perfect. Over the years he has inflated
> with best bitter till she has no room. *Je t'aime*
> isn't in it. One morning she awoke to a foreigner
> lying beside her and her heart slammed shut. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 26)

The ambiguity and placement of the sentence, "She is word-perfect" soon after the acknowledgement that the husband bullies her, belittles her nation and its people, underlines her efforts: is she word-perfect in English, understanding the nuances of her husband's denigrating words? Love goes away, "*Je t'aime*" becomes a thing of the past, yet, the very fact that the protagonist chooses to use the French term for "I love you" is indicative of language barriers, or the love and attachment one has for one's mother tongue, or even to imply the changing times: courtship in French and marital life with all its negativity in English. The dimming and dying of love is translated into geographical and political boundaries that automatically come into play, for the speaker finds herself lying next to a foreigner in her husband, leading her to shut her heart. Even as Duffy teaches her readers about the realities of relationships that turn sour and bitter with the passage of time, she also makes abundantly clear the fact that women, though they put up with conventional and traditional abuse within marriage, learn ways to retaliate in

appropriate ways, or at least to protect themselves from further hurt. Thus, the protagonist's husband's selfishness is responded to by the shutting of her heart.

The speaker also addresses the one reason that makes the protagonist stay with her husband, in spite of love having been lost, "the youngest lives at home. She stays up late / to feed what keeps her with the father" (26) clearly indicates the price the protagonist pays for having, and loving the children. The enormous sacrifices she makes in order to hold the family together because it involves children, even at the cost of being held as a "hostage in the garden" (26). It is in this garden that the protagonist sits and reflects upon the thorns of her life, what her children have cost her and dreams about a holiday "in another language with a different name" which is, in all probability French and not English. She dreams and hopes for what is not, yet, while nothing stops her imagination, her dreams of going on a holiday are juxtaposed with "He staggers in half-pissed / and plonks his weight down on her life, hates her / for whatever reason she no longer lets him near" (26). That's the price she pays, and instead of understanding and affection, there is an incomprehensible invisible wall. Even as Duffy presents the situation from the wife's point of view, she also shows us the befuddled confusion of the husband who is left puzzled by his wife's rejection of him. The poem teaches us about the complexities of human relationships; of love found and love lost and the consequences of such love, of the price one pays after considering all the pros and cons of familial life with children as a priority. But it also allows the reader to think about the petty insults that can cause the ruin of a marriage, and how once distance sets in between a couple, there is no meeting ground possible.

If "Alliance" is about a marriage from a woman's point of view then "You Jane" from *Standing Female Nude*, is presented from a man's perspective. The plot is similar, marriage and children, and while the wife toils her life out, the husband can see only his own perspective. The

wife is nothing more than a sex object, a birthing automaton and a housemaid according to the speaker. The wife is introduced as one "who snuggles up to me after I've given her one / after the Dog and Fox" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 34) whereas he "farts a guinness smell" against her which is suggestive of a total disregard for the spouse and complete entitlement. The speaker is only interested in his own sexual satisfaction and cares very little for his wife. To enjoy life to the fullest he has kept himself fit "It's all muscle. You can punch / my gut and wait forever till I flinch. Try it. / Man of the house. Master in my own home. Solid" (34). The physical prowess of the speaker which keeps him in command of himself and his wife, is extended into being the master of the house which speaks of how he keeps his wife under his complete control.

The speaker is so entitled and full of himself that even when he talks about his wife, it is only from his own point of view and with his needs and comforts kept paramount:

> Look at that bicep. Dinner on the table
> and a clean shirt, but I respect her point of view.
> She's borne me two in eight years, knows
> when to button it. Although she's run a bit to fat
> She still bends over of a weekend in suspenders. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 34)

If the first stanza talks about the wife as a mere sex object, in the second she is a mother figure and a housemaid, carrying out her culinary and laundry chores to perfection. That the husband and wife do not always see eye to eye is made clear by the speaker's statement that he respects her point of view, but it also comes down to the speaker's priorities and needs once again: sex, clean clothes, food on the table and he should be fit, sexually satisfied and able to live his own life, a drink "with the lads, a laugh, then home to her". The title of the poem gives us a clue as to what Duffy is getting at: "You Jane" refers to the line from early Tarzan comics and movies

where the ape-man would say, “Me Tarzan, you Jane”, and here while the couple is located within a civilisation far removed from the jungles of Tarzan’s world, the ape-man continues to exist, within the trappings of civilization and civility. For him, women have very limited roles to play and he has a fixed, unchanging idea about the roles and spheres that men and women occupy in life. Duffy does not mince words in this educational project and while she does show women what they could have, the possibilities that life may hold out for them and what holds them back, she is as, of not clearer, in indicating the shortcomings of men. If women need to be educated, to learn to be more than they have traditionally been then the men in Duffy’s poems often need to learn even more, to overcome conservative, traditionalist viewpoints, to be more generous, and to treat women, not as subservient but as equals.

That the speaker is a fitness-freak, strong as an ox, has no problem with drinking, are all suggestive of the speaker’s life not having changed in spite of marriage and children. He drinks and has fun outdoors while his wife labours at home, looks after the children and cooks and cleans for him. For all the muscles on his body the speaker does not seem to have much of a mind or even a heart,

> She says, Did you dream love? I never
> dream. Sleep is as black as a good jar.
> I wake half-conscious with a hard-on, shove it in.
> She don’t complain. When I feel, I feel here
> Where the purple vein in my neck throbs. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 34)

The complete oblivion of the speaker in sleep is reflective also of his oblivious blinkered life, wherein he lives physically but has little or no emotional or mental life. When the speaker answers that he never dreams, it could be indicative of his living a fulfilled life, the only feeling

he has is in his jugular vein which throbs. The speaker's complete physicality is close to the animal nature of his life, which in turn connects to the title: he is Tarzan-like, almost an ape. If the speaker's wife has dreams of her own, what could those be? It is these dreams of women that will be explored in the next poem.

"A Clear Note" placed after "Alliance" in the volume *Standing Female Nude* explores three generations of women, Agatha, Moll, and Bernadette, and their dreams about their life as a woman. Agatha, the mother of Moll and grandmother to Bernadette, feels the burn of having married the wrong man, moved out of Ireland to Glasgow (to her the wrong country), and experiences the negligence and uncaring ways of her husband. Her life is clearly demarcated into before and after marriage; one that is free, fashionable and attractive in "long auburn hair," "glorious with a new frock and high hopes," famous for her hats and with a voice of her own, all evocative of living a vibrant life, to the full[5]. In contrast, life as a wife and mother for Agatha is gloomy and bleak.

Agatha had borne eight children, "worked as a nurse / tending the dying. Four kids to each breast" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 27); an image of children eating away at the mother almost literally. Agatha, like Jane (the protagonist in "You Jane"), is again a sex vessel and birthing automaton, but unlike Jane who doesn't complain, Agatha dies several deaths in each act of sex or child birth:

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[5]The massive transformation after marriage and kids is also addressed by Duffy in the poem "Before You Were Mine" from *Mean Time* where the mother when young is wild and free with her friends, attending "ballroom with the thousand eyes" (Duffy, *Mean Time* 9), going to the movies, wearing a "polka-dot dress" in Marilyn Monroe's style, where the speaker's mother "sparkle[d] and waltz[ed] and laugh[ed]" (9) ten years before the arrival of the daughter, which have all become things of the past and the "high-heeled red shoes" have become "relics" (9). The employment of the word "relics" suggests veneration and endearment, yet, it also implies something old, bones, a skeleton of the former self, death, etc which connotes the dead of the protagonist's former self, and what remains are a few objects.

> *Kiss me goodnight* – me weeping in our bed.
> The scunner would turn away cold, back rigid,
> But come home from work and take me on the floor
> With his boots on and his blue eyes shut. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 27)

The little acts of care and concern that go a long way are what Agatha craves, but their conjugal relationship seems to be completely void of emotions. There is utter disregard and disrespect for Agatha, her spouse takes her whenever or wherever he feels like it. Marital rape is suggested and the use of the word "scunner" is loaded with much loathing and disgust. There is an element of a bestial brute in Agatha's husband: he is not only insensitive to her, turns away from her tears, gives her a cold shoulder, but forces himself on her with his boots on. The use of 'boots' suggests the character of the man, and at the same time, the boots, the floor and the shut eyes, all indicate the proprietorial mode of functioning of the man: his needs alone matter even if what he is subjecting his wife to is sexual abuse and marital rape. Agatha, in contrast, remembers how,

> … all my life I wanted the fields of Ireland only
> and a man to delight in me
> who'd never be finished with kisses and say
> *Look at the moon. My darling. The Moon.* (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 27)

These are the dreams, in Bernadette's words "of women which will harm no one" (31) and yet, they are denied to her grandmother. The moon is free, cool and calm and on the contrary, the speaker is seething with regret, hatred, and is caged. Just like the unnamed protagonist in "Alliance", Agatha too, having married a Scottish man, found "long years of loathing / with the devil I'd married. I felt love freeze / to a fine splinter in my heart" (27). Would life be different had the French protagonist in "Alliance", and Agatha, married their own countrymen? Have they

made wrong choices in life by marrying into a foreign country? Does national origin determine masculine character? Or are they just pining for what should have been and what is not?

Agatha's life is regulated by birthing child after child, and we see her agony in the statement,

> Again and again throwing life from my loins
> like a spider with enough rope
> spinning and wringing at its own neck. And he
> wouldn't so much as hold me after the act. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 27)

Joyless sex in conjunction with labour pains, and Agatha feels reduced to a spider spinning enough rope with which to wring her own neck. There is a total lack of emotional support from her husband that even after sex "he wouldn't so much as hold" her, and there is no joy in bringing forth new life into the world (27). She does not see her role as a mother: she sees herself as trapped, and choking to death. The very act of bringing forth a new life becomes a symbol of death for the mother. Both sex and birthing suffocate her, and the tragedy is inescapable as she sees herself as the one who spun the thread that now winds around her throat, made the ruinous choices that are now suffocating her.

Far worse than the labour pains and her dreary life, is the anger and hopelessness that Agatha feels because of the loveless, abusive marriage in which she is trapped. She knows it will continue and there will be no change until death do them part. Therefore, her last wish is "Don't bury him on top of me. Please" (27) the hope encapsulating all her anger and agony and the hope that at least in death she could be free of him. But the tragedy is that "they buried him on top" for "What does it matter, they said, now she's dead?" (31). The web of sexual violence in which she is trapped stretches to the grave and complicates the sequence: home, which was to unite the man

and woman, rendered them separate because he treated her as just a body, available for his use; the grave which was to separate the two in death, brings them together again. In both cases there is an absence of feeling: he did not express an emotional connection with her when they were alive and making love, and now even in death, there is still no getting away for her.

That Agatha had been muted by her husband is made clear, resoundingly, when she states that "I had a voice once, but it's broken" (27) and she is no longer heard but only made to listen. The "broken" voice and "unspoken words" become her own state of being that along with her abused body, her dreams to reach for the "moon", her language, all break and disappear beyond "recall." Marriage becomes a place where her sense of self is ruined or lost, and the loss of the voice and the language she once used is a symbol for the loss of self. When language is extinguished, her self is extinguished. Even her dying wish was disrespected, for within a month they buried him on top of her, since it really did not matter "now she's dead" (31).

Agatha, not having managed to live her dreams leaves a clear dream map for her daughter and grand-daughter, but for her, "the starved body began eating itself" (28), maybe a reference to reproductive cancer, the image of the children eating her, and the cancer eating her body, all of it clearly exploitative and destructive. Her daughter Moll learns from Agatha and in turn educates her daughter Bernadette to "*Never have kids. Give birth to yourself*" (29) which is exactly what Bernadette does.

For Moll, the memories of her mother's troubled marriage and life "turn up / like old photos and catch at the throat / somehow" (28) and though in a better position, when compared to her mother, she too feels stifled in her marriage and is hemmed in by various forms of imprisonment, physical and mental, which haunt her. She is not permitted to work even though

"The job pays well" and there's "freedom" (29), because her husband is against it. Moll is not only denied the right to work and financial independence but the ability to talk to somebody at work, to have something to talk about and to be able to keep up with her husband and children. Moll is handled like "gold leaf" by her husband and sons, yet, she thinks of leaving "Sometimes I think I'll walk out the door / and keep right on walking" (29), her desire to be free and her knowledge of her own wasted life constantly nagging away at her. Moll's statement that she is treated like "gold leaf" indicates much: her men folk thinking of her as delicate and fragile, but also as a rare and precious object, and it also implies lifelessness and being someone else's possession. If Agatha's dreams were to be kissed, to be called darling and to be told to look at the moon by her husband, Moll's dreams are to be allowed to work, to ride a bike by the seaside, to be able to travel to her daughter alone, all of which are made impossible because of a jealous and suspicious husband for if she were to do the last, "there'd be fights for a month. He broods on what I'd get up to / given half the chance" (29). She acknowledges that her husband loves her but one cannot survive on love alone, and it is in the name of love that Moll is reduced to being a housemaid, utterly divorced from what she aspires to be. Stripped of the freedom that she needs, she creates an inner space within herself, "I've been drained since twenty, but not empty/ yet. I roam inside myself" (29).The mother and daughter both suffer within the institution of marriage, in very different ways: the former in a loveless marriage, wishing to be cared for, loved, while the latter is loved and cherished, but desires freedom, the very love that the mother hankered for, now suffocating the daughter, as even love can stifle and prove a constraint.

Bernadette, as her mother describes her, was different from conception, a "wild wain, with an answer for everything" (29) and unlike her four sons Moll could read Bernadette like a book, like the back of her hand, Bernadette who made her sing "*The stars at night are big and*

bright" (30). Moll carries within herself the dreams of her mother Agatha, and her own dreams, "The dreams / of women that will hurt no one" (31) and with those unfulfilled dreams she teaches Bernadette to reach for the stars: which is what Bernadette does.

Bernadette noticed that the day her grandmother died: "Someone burnt the diary she wrote" (30) and she speaks of her mother, Moll who thinks she "saw him bend over the coffin to kiss her / and half-thought the corpse has flinched" (30). That Agatha kept a diary is again something that works at various levels: that she could only speak of her sense of self, her feelings, anger, etc., in the pages of a diary, never having the possibility of sharing her emotional truths with anyone; that the diary if read, by anyone else would indicate the sham that her marriage had been, that the husband's neglect and cruelty would be exposed and thus it is burnt, killing off Agatha's truth, not allowing it to be known and thus enabling the preservation of the façade of a marriage. But fragments are known, extracts "whispered at the wake" and then it slips into the past. It is rather ironical that all her life Agatha longed for a kiss and she only gets it after her death. The flinch Moll thinks she sees, clearly focuses the reader's gaze on the fact that even though the husband tries to camouflage the truth about their marriage it is a truth known to her daughter and she recognizes Agatha's revulsion and fear, even in death. The advice that mothers leave daughters is to live and travel, "The hopes of your thousand mothers / sing with a clear note inside you. *Away while you can, and travel the world*" (31); the musical note of physical and mental freedom, of seeing things for themselves that a thousand mothers have crooned and sung to their daughters. It is Bernadette who gets to live this "clear note" which is the title of the poem, holding the dreams of thousands of women, "Bleak decades of silence / and lovelessness placing her years away / from the things that seem natural to us" (31). This poem chronicles the lives of three generations of women, the struggles they have endured, fettered and

shackled by patriarchy, and how with careful comprehension and understanding, they make way for a change in the next generation and next. The learning that comes from the experiences of the previous generation in conjunction with the changes that have been brought about with time is clearly noted from Agatha to Moll to Bernadette. Thus, Bernadette is free, her own person, and puts into practice the lessons learned from her mother and grandmother and it is through them, and for them, that she travels and as the flight takes off "For Moll / the life goes streaming back in tune. / For Agatha, from Bernadette, the moon" (31), giving their dreams wings. Bernadette lives the dreams of the thousand mothers. Duffy educates women through Agatha, Moll and Bernadette on what marriage can do to destroy a woman's life where many suffer, either caught in abusive, repressive marriages or the only-a-housewife syndrome, and she contrasts it with the freedom and joys of being one's own person in Bernadette. However, all Duffy's poems on marriage are not as bleak: she gives us pictures of content, loving partnerships, as well as of uneasy relationships where there is a constant jousting for ascendancy. The volume *The World's Wife* gives us access to various versions of marriage, from the loving partnership of the Shakespeares in "Anne Hathaway" to the sly mockery of both Mrs. Aesop and Frau Freud. The next section examines some of these poems, where we witness the marital lives of famous figures from myth, history, literature and legend and see the often-invisible partner taking centre-stage.

Telling my story, my way

In her poetry, Carol Ann Duffy deals with those myths, legends and stories that have been in circulation since time immemorial, using them to illumine gender roles afresh. Maud Bodkin in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* states that in the literary tradition, the recurrent presentation of women is "woman as mother, and woman as desirable maid" (Bodkin, 176) such

as Achilles' Thetis, Aeneas' Venus, Dante's Beatrice and so on and some as temptresses like Eve and Delilah. Duffy's poems in *The World's Wife,* in retelling many of these stories is an attempt to rescue these women who are "entrapped in myths" which rob them of their "independent being and value" (Rich, "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet" 508). She does so by breaking the stereotypes commonly associated with them: some placed on a pedestal and as in "Eurydice" addressed as "Dearest, Beloved, Dark Lady, White Goddess, / etc.," (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 56), others seen as witches and monsters or as nurturing figures. Or women as they appear in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot": participation in the outside world takes place only through the reflection in the mirror and the moment she steps out to partake actively in affairs of her own she meets her death. The other side of the story, where women played vital roles not only as daughters, lovers, wives and mothers but also as painters, writers and story tellers is usually absent from myth, history, and literature and it is rare for such characters to appear. It is in recognition that many of these stories have been told from a one-sided perspective that Duffy adapts them, retelling them from a woman's perspective for "... myth is instructed by history, although the tradition is full of poets who argue the opposite with force and eloquence" (Boland, 174). Adrienne Rich in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" speaks of retelling as re-visioning, an "awakening of dead or sleeping consciousness" where "we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" 1982). The mythic and historic characters in Duffy's poems break this hold of the past by not only rejecting it but also by setting forth a new state of being where women "don't denigrate woman, don't make of her what men have made of (them)" (Cixous, 882) and with or without their husbands, they learn to be content. It must be kept in mind however that Duffy's

retellings are often humourous, tongue-in-cheek, good for some laughter and not just angry, one-sided polemical discourses.

"Mrs. Midas" from *The World's Wife*, is introduced as a typical upper-middle-class wife with "a glass of wine", looking through the window at her "garden" as she cooks. She is "relaxed," comfortable, and completely at ease in her kitchen. Yet, everything changes with the entrance of Midas and terror begins to unfold:

> I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob.
> With seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich.
> He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then the knives, the forks.
> He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand,
> a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched
> as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank. (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 11)

It soon becomes clear to her that whatever he touches is at once transformed into gold – be it the knives, the forks or the spoons. When he picks up the goblet in which Mrs. Midas had served him wine, it is also transformed into gold, permitting him to eat or drink nothing. Mrs. Midas therefore imparts the lesson that she has learned because of her husband: gold "feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes / no thirst" (12). Midas's dream of wanting to become rich is fulfilled, but it is at the expense of, initially, the everyday pleasures of food and drink, and later the breakdown of his marriage and home life, and eventually the loss of his life. He gains materially, but is denied other human privileges such as the simple pleasure of touching other human beings, including his own wife. There is nothing that Midas could do to undo what he has brought upon himself and his wife.

Exclusion and inclusion within the home becomes the focus of the poem and Mrs. Midas becomes very particular about what is to be locked out or in. The transition is immediate, nostalgic, vital and fatal. Mrs. Midas says "I made him sit / on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself" and "Separate beds. In fact, I put a chair against my door, near petrified" (12). Mrs. Midas' petrification is juxtaposed with Mr. Midas's ostracization from his own home. According to Diane Ackerman "Humans, like primates, are obsessed with touching and attachment" (Ackerman, 178), and in Midas and Mrs. Midas the fundamental foundation of a couple is broken and cannot be mended. Being banished from her bed is the beginning of his being confined to himself alone. Home is no longer a place where Midas fits in and his presence everywhere spells death for him and others who may, inadvertently, touch him. Mrs. Midas is quite clear about this when she speaks of "his honeyed embrace, / the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art" (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 12) and her heart to gold. Parting is the only way for survival. This anguish and understanding is shared by Mr. Midas: "he sank to his knees" (12) at the realization of the consequences.

As the poem progresses Midas is made a guest in his own home, evicted from the couple's bedroom and instead made to occupy the spare room: "turning the spare room / into the tomb of Tutankhamun" (12). The image of Tutankhamun is ironically juxtaposed with an image of a new born in the mind of Mrs. Midas so that she dreams of having his baby even as she acknowledges his fatal touch which can only lead to death. Mrs. Midas, denied any form of physical relationship with her husband resorts to memory where she relives their "halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly, / like presents, fast food" (12).

When Midas is shifted out of his home to the forest his wife watches him and the alchemization of the flora and fauna from a safe distance. On Mrs. Midas's visits, Midas's exact

location is discernible by the “golden trout,” the “hare” mistaken for a “beautiful lemon” and his “footprints / glistening next to the river’s path.” (13). After Midas’s death, Mrs. Midas enjoys the wealth that he leaves behind, and though she claims that gold feeds no-one and quenches no thirst, she does not renounce the wealth he leaves in her possession. Her initial thought of having “married a fool / who wished for gold” (12) is replaced with annoyance at Midas for not having considered her situation: “not the idiocy or greed / but lack of thought for [her]” (13). Mrs. Midas has moved on and it is only during a certain light that she thinks of him now, and what she misses most are “his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch” (13) for as Ackerman says, “We are touchoholics, we are attachment junkies, we are affectopaths” (178) and Mrs. Midas too pays a heavy price, an immediate and complete physical detachment from her husband and all her libidinal desires which had to be, compulsorily, pushed away. Yet, it is in the death of her husband that Mrs. Midas gets another life which she didn’t initially think of: in exchange for his touch and the warmth of their life together, she has financial independence. Yet whether this is adequate compensation for what she lost, is left to the reader.

While Mrs. Midas remains a cautionary tale about the pernicious effects of wealth, just as the Midas myth has always been, Duffy’s retelling highlights the selfishness of all individuals: even within a contented, happy marriage the individuals retain their strongly selfish viewpoints and Mrs. Midas’s complaint that what annoys her most is Midas’s lack of thought for her, underscores that perspective. The fact that she enjoys the fruits of Midas’s wish and is still alive to lead her own life, in luxury, is undermined by her focus on her late husband’s selfishness and as the poem ends, we are shown the hollowness within relationships, and neither Midas nor Mrs. Midas emerge from Duffy’s version of the story as anything other than flawed, unenviable characters, each looking out for themselves alone.

It is this bestowing of a modern, contemporary experience upon mythical characters which becomes Duffy's trademark in the volume. For example, in "*from* Mrs. Tiresias" Duffy gives a lie to the myth that Tiresias, the great and wise seer, had pronounced definitively that it is the woman who gains more pleasure from sex, having had the experience of being both male and female. In Duffy's version, though Tiresias changes into a woman, he eschews sex and ironically it is Mrs. Tiresias who takes a female partner. Thus, the bisexual Mrs. Tiresias is the one who gains more knowledge about sex than Mr. Tiresias, because even though (s)he started to hang out with "powerful men" she knew "for sure / there'd be nothing of *that* / going on" (16). This twist in the myth makes the tale very contemporary with the free sexual rendition of lesbian and bisexual women.

Duffy gives the reason why Mrs. Tiresias took another woman as a lover even when her husband had turned into a woman. Mrs. Tiresias is a few steps ahead of her husband when it comes to intuition and knowledge:

> He liked to hear
> the first cuckoo of spring
> then write to The Times.
> I'd usually heard it
> days before him
> but I never let on. (Duffy, *The World's Wife* 14)

Tiresias does not like to be crossed and maintains the traditional mythical belief in men's superiority. That the speaker does not counter her husband's hearing of the first cuckoo might be suggestive of an uneasy relationship, but at the same time, her easy acceptance ends up making a fool out of the bully and shows the speaker as being contented with her own knowledge system. Then came the fateful day when "he went out for his walk a man / and came home female" (14)

with the same eyes “But in the shocking V of the shirt were breasts. / When he uttered my name in his woman’s voice I passed out” (15). Yet, she understands that life cannot come to a standstill just because of her husband’s sex change and she quickly fixes the immediate problem by putting it about that he was her sister-in-law, his twin who had come to stay with her whereas her husband had gone abroad to work.

In the poem, Mrs. Tiresias did all that she could to help him get used to being a woman: “blow-drying his hair” and “lending him clothes” but eventually her patience runs out. Tiresias began to get used to being a woman physically until he started his period: “One week in bed. / Two doctors in. / Three painkillers four times a day” (15) and as though that wasn’t enough, he wrote a letter to the powers “demanding full-paid menstrual leave twelve weeks per year,” (16). The asking for “full-paid menstrual leave” brings to mind Gloria Steinem’s essay “If Men Could Menstruate” where she states that sanitary napkins would be state funded and free and,

> Military men, right-wing politicians, and religious fundamentalists would cite menstruation (“men-struation”) as proof that only men could serve in the Army (“you have to give blood to take blood”), occupy political office (“can women be aggressive without that steadfast cycle governed by the planet Mars?”), be priest and ministers (“how could a woman give her blood for our sins?”) or rabbis (“without the monthly loss of impurities, women remain unclean”). (Steinem, Unpaginated)

As pointed out by Steinem, men have always taken advantage of their circumstances and made them the basis for laws and conventions. Tiresias remains a man in that he then tries to use the fact of menstruation to frame new laws: the norm is always male. Mrs. Tiresias taking a female lover after the split, is partly to do with his change and her “holding his soft new shape in my

arms all night" (15). She continues to observe his activities and even as she finds him in posh restaurants and on the arms of powerful men, she knew that "there'd be nothing of *that* / going on" (16), implying the deep understanding that she has of her husband, and the private knowledge that is shared and understood only between the couple, a hint at his lack of interest in sex.

Duffy through this poem educates the reader about the inevitable changes that can take place between married couples extending to the shocking revelation of their sexuality and the ability to handle such situations. Mrs. Tiresias copes and accepts this in spite of the initial incomprehension, whereas Tiresias hangs on as long as he needs aid, and the moment he has mastered the art of being a woman, he moves on. The poem is far subtler about how entrenched perspectives and modes of functioning are much harder to change than physiques and bodies. Thus, Tiresias remains a bully, hidebound and conventional in spite of his new sex and gender roles, whereas Mrs. Tiresias is able to shed old notions and find happiness without worrying about what the world would say.

Jo Gill remarks that Duffy's poems that retell myth, fairytale and history "ask the reader to pause for a moment, to rethink their lazy assumptions, to look again at what they think they know" (Gill, 189). Thus, Duffy in the act of retelling the myths and legends, frees women from the traditional and customary chauvinistic viewpoints and instead gives them their own voices and views. Duffy's retellings of myths, fables, and history teach the reader to unlearn the basic, stereotypical assumptions which undergird the gendered world and learn, in their stead, new, clear-eyed ways of seeing and thinking. Duffy in *The World's Wife* teaches the readers to not accept one-sided views, to explore multiple story-lines instead, and makes it possible to imagine different stories, liberating both men and women from the entrenched and the conventional.

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Chapter Four

Living in a Community: Social Education

This chapter studies the various ways in which Duffy's poetry presents a medley of characters who, in turn, present their ethnic, cultural, social, and political experiences that together can be said to be constitutive of community life. For Bantock it is the artist who takes "us nearer to what it is to live a culture than can the social investigator" (Bantock, *Freedom and Authority in Education* 6) and Duffy explores vast areas of living: a culture of displacement and immigration, social ills, disgrace and atrocities, and so on. Duffy does not provide straightforward answers and solutions to the questions that community life throws up, and often her poems are thought-provokingly open-ended, leaving it to the reader to learn, think, and decide for herself. Ruth Padel states that "Poems speak outside history, across the barriers of time and culture, but also belong to history: they come from and speak to a specific time and place" (Padel, *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* 19) and the poetry of Duffy forms a conscious part of history by examining the social and ethical problems of a community, at specific points and periods of time, factoring in the diversity extant in Britain in the interactions of her *dramatis personae. I argue in this chapter that Duffy educates her readers to be wary of conformity, and of the politically expedient and instead shows them the need to see clearly, past the glitz of the image-making industries, while fostering and strengthening community ties, wherein communities are inclusive and compassionate, rather than exclusionary and biased.* This chapter is divided into two sections, the first part explores displacement and immigration, not only dealing with humans but also environment and nature as a whole, and the second section studies local and global social ills and disgraces.

Displacement and Immigration

Duffy gives a voice to displaced persons by making them speak about their experiences, presenting issues that history may be/is likely to ignore, thereby providing a means of learning about aspects of displacements that are otherwise not to be found in history textbooks and other official records. Stan Smith states,

> The paradigmatic figure of twentieth-century history is the 'displaced person', a concept which emerged from the vast demographic migrations, deportations, purges and 'ethnic cleansings' that accompanied two world wars, and the destruction and reconstruction of nation-states and the reconfigurations of the global order which those wars occasioned. (Smith, 2)

Even as the poetry of Duffy addresses these politically complicated issues, it also concentrates on personal conflicts between people due to differences in appearance, language, food, instead of focusing on particular geographical locations, times, or spaces. In addition, Duffy in her poetry discusses changes and displacement of fauna and the issues of homelessness and displacement within one's own country.

This sense of displacement tends to occur with immigration, and is felt not only by adults but children as well, as seen in the speaker in "Originally", who is caught between their natal culture and that into which they try to acculture themselves. The challenges of moving to a new country and growing into an adult are rolled into one, "All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow, / leaving you standing resigned, up an avenue / where no one you know stays" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 1). Children grow up with the belief that there will be people and places to connect with, only to realise as they grow up that this is not always the case. In "Originally" the child is doubly displaced: the geographical displacement as a result of emigration with its

cultural, social and linguistic upheavals and the transition from childhood to adulthood which may result in physical, emotional, psychological and intellectual displacements. The immediate and sudden displacements are projected in the form of environment and atmosphere, "corners, which seem familiar, / leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boys / eating worms and shouting words you don't understand" and "your accent wrong." The parents' anxiety is translated into a simile "like a loose tooth," a milk tooth which will fall, paving the way for a new tooth. This feeling of not quite fitting in, in the child comes a full circle when she utters "*I want our own country.*" But like the shift from one country to another, childhood too is not permanent.

Assimilation begins to take place and the hardships faced initially are either forgotten or ignored in favour of change, so that the shock of seeing "big boys / eating worms" now gets translated into "seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only / a skelf of shame." A complete makeover takes place in her accent, for now her tongue has shed "its skin like a snake" and her voice sounds "just like the rest of them." What worries the speaker is the fact that she has "lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first place / and the right place" (1). Though she has completely assimilated into the new country her origins are betrayed by her skin, unlike her "tongue that has shed its skin like a snake". The speaker undergoes a complete transformation with the assimilation evident in her ways of thinking and being, in her speech, however her 'otherness' remains, marked by her exterior, her skin. Displacement then, is not only external, but also an internal process where a casting out of history, culture and language consciously or unconsciously takes place. As a consequence, "*Where do you come from?* / strangers ask. *Originally?* And I hesitate" (1). Does this hesitation arise from the fact that the speaker has no connection with her "first place," her first country anymore? Is she suddenly made to feel a sense

of not belonging to her adopted country where her allegiance now lies? Where, in her mind, is the place she could/should call home? Is it possible for the speaker to put her "first place" behind her, as something that she has outgrown? Is Duffy trying to suggest that in communities, it is the tiny concerns that trigger mighty and existential questions? Or that in today's world there is no clear-cut single identity, that we are all hybrid? Duffy does not provide an answer and the conflict continues to intrigue and haunt the relationship between place and identity, and the questions of national, cultural and social identity.

In "Deportation" Duffy lays bare the modes in which immigration policies curtail the well-being of those who see another country as a remedy to the parent country's woes. The protagonist juxtaposes the parent country and the guest country and critically analyses the difference between the two. What is expected of the guest country is undelivered, for

> They have not been kind here. Now I must leave,
> the words I've learned for supplication,
> gratitude, will go unused. Love is a look
> in the eyes in any language, but not here,
> not this year. They have not been welcoming. (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 59)

The speaker in all innocence has arrived in the guest country with high expectations, so much so that he has even learned the language of gratitude in anticipation of being welcomed and treated fairly but the real outcome has been disappointing, for the people in the guest country do not speak the language of love through their eyes. Even as Duffy seems to hint at the indifference that is prevalent in the host communities without spelling it out, she also indicates the difference between the inviting travel and tourism catalogue, and the journey of an immigrant looking for a better life and livelihood; someone who by default is seen as a stranger posing a threat, and

therefore is unwelcome. The speaker admits that he "used to think the world was where we lived / in space, one country shining in the big dark" (59) and Duffy shows us the error in this, that the world is not as innocent as we think, but divided on various grounds, of religion, race, culture, language, politics and so on, and it would be naïve to think every place would be welcoming. The 'I' and "they" do not share the space of a single sentence in the poem, making it amply clear that there is no space for the foreigner in the guest country and the speaker exists in a limbo of exclusion, displacement and alienation for "Now I am *Alien*" (59). The speaker embarked on his journey with the intention of bettering his economic status because where he came from "there are few jobs, / the young are sullen and do not dream" (59). The statement is matter-of-fact regarding the mother country and its lack of jobs, and observes the young as the victims of the system, embittered by their lack of a future. By contrast, the speaker wanted to be different but their aspirations are hindered and halted by the immigration policies of the host country. Duffy also focuses on the importance of dreams, how hopeful dreams keep life going, and once dreams run out, life begins to dim too. Frustrated the speaker is shoved into the sphere of death,

> … I have felt less small
> below the mountains disappearing into cloud
> than entering the Building of Exile. Hearse taxis
> crawl the drizzling streets towards the terminal. (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 59)

The speaker in a state of semi-existence, oscillates between imagination and reality. He has no other choice but to go back home and so imagines his return:

> Go back. She will embrace me, ask what it was like.
> Return. One thing—there was a space to write
> the colour of her eyes. They have an apple here,
> a bitter-sweet, which matched them exactly. Dearest,

without you I am nowhere. It was cold. (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 59)

Duffy toys with the concept of the apple of one's eye. The bitter-sweet taste of the apple which matches the colour of the speaker's lover's eyes, is akin to the bitter-sweet world of the speaker, in his home country. While there are no jobs, there is human contact, relationships characterized by affection and love. While their love makes life sweet, the bitterness is contributed by the employment situation, the lack of jobs, the impossibility of being able to live a comfortable life.

But the recognition of their love is marred by the knowledge that the only home they can have, will be in each other's arms, that without a job, without incomes they cannot do anything other than "tire each other out". As the speaker ends the poem, he recognizes that he needs his partner if he is to be warm, that without her, "I am nowhere". He is not just nothing but also, nowhere, he cannot occupy a space, be warm, be alive, in the absence of his lover and hence even as the "hearse taxis crawl" towards the terminal and his impending departure from the country he hoped to emigrate to, even as he recognizes the death of his dreams and hopes in this cold country, he also recognizes the need he has for warmth and sustaining relationships. We witness the power a country possesses in being able to turn away an immigrant, but we are also taught about the value and worth of human connections and relationships, and Duffy appears to indicate that while better jobs and lives are necessary, so also are strong, life-giving relationships. The irony is, of course, in the realization that unless singularly fortunate it will always be either one or the other.

The plight of an immigrant worker is explored in the poem "Foreign" from *Selling Manhattan*. Duffy indicates that the drudgery of being an immigrant worker starts when one begins to face social, racial and linguistic alienation, after clearing the political hurdles of

immigration policies. The poem is a direct address to the reader, "you" and begins with the word "Imagine". The speaker takes the reader on the journey of a foreigner, "living in a strange, dark city for twenty years" and still with no connections with the people in it. Displacement is felt within one's dwelling places, on the landings and staircases, in language, "You hear / your foreign accent echo down the stairs. You think / in a language of your own and talk in theirs" (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 47). Language, the one characteristic that sets human beings apart from other animals, that builds bridges between people, at the same time brings about division, segregation, misunderstanding, prejudices and so on. Knowing the language is not enough, accent plays a big role in communication and one is judged endlessly on the basis of one's delivery and articulation, therefore as a consequence, language becomes one of the root causes of displacement and alienation. Duffy also highlights the fact that many people who learn a language different to their mother tongue, live with the duality of the language one thinks in and that which one speaks, with the former being closer to the integral part of being. The inability to bridge the gap between the mother tongue and the language of the new place is made clear when the "you" sits to write a letter home and "the voice in your head / recites the letter in local dialect; behind that / is the sound of your mother singing to you" and one does not know "why your eyes are watering and what's the word for this" (47). Cry is such an easy word but the situation and the emotions leading up to it are beyond words. Nostalgia is treacherous because what is wanted is never made available.

Then "you" are asked to imagine a situation where one takes the "public transport" to "work" which keeps you in contact with the people of the host country on a daily basis while travelling to work (and at work), and then there is a "name for yourself sprayed in red / against a brick wall. A hate name. Red like blood" (47). The particularity of a name in red is suggestive of

a specific target which could be either an individual or a community, and the colour red implies a threateningly angry visual which is supported by the following sentence, “A hate name.” While Duffy does not specify the reason for the “hate name”, she makes it clear that the graffiti is, via words and paint, indicating the possible, imminent violence which might target the immigrant. The choice of going back home, to the place where one belongs does not exist within the poem, for even in the foreign country where work is available there is never enough money as we see when “in the delicatessen, from time to time, the coins / in your palm will not translate” (47). Even as the language unsettles, so too does the money, strange coins, difficult to compute and never enough. Displacement of all kinds is encapsulated when one is asked to imagine where “one of you says *Me not know what these people mean. / It like they only go to bed and dream*” (47). The poem, addressed to readers in general suggests that displacement is felt frequently and by a considerable majority of people. The sense of alienation is summed up in the italicized sentences, implying a repetition inside one’s head or saying it out to oneself, a complete disconnect between “*me*” and “*they.*” There is an element of deliberate choice in the pronouncement, “*they only go to bed and dream*,” that they have a specific space to dream, in “*bed*” which is private and exclusive, and by implication the immigrants have no space in their dream.

Duffy also reminds readers that the sense of displacement, alienation and estrangement is not felt only by immigrants, and one can be made to feel an outsider even in one’s own country. To this end, humans who form society, forget the atrocities meted out to people who pray differently or look different, and previously learned lessons are hardly ever remembered or put into practice when these situations arise. “Shooting Stars” from *Standing Female Nude*, is a Holocaust poem, set in World War II, but thanks to today’s wars and atrocities, and the

disinterest humans display towards suffering, this poem is stark in its relevance. The ambiguous title of the poem seems metaphorical in nature, and suggests a literal shooting of Jews marked with the Star of David either on their clothes or tattooed on their body. The speaker is a dead woman who recounts, to a person she calls sister, her story of the horrific treatment of the Jews by the Nazis. In the act of making a dead woman speak, Duffy resurrects a dead voice and gives it immortality. The poem begins with the image of the Nazis breaking the finger of the protagonist after her death to take her wedding ring. The speaker lists names, maybe those of her children, or of other Jews "Rebecca Ruth / Aaron Emmanuel David, stars on all our brows / beneath the gaze of men with guns" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 56) which suggests that the name itself is enough identification and there is no need for further identification marks to be sewn on their sleeves or tattooed on their forearms. As the soldiers ready to shoot the "daughters", they stand "upright as statues, brave" showing dignity in death but the use of the word statues is also suggestive of being frozen with fear because in that last moment the daughters will not look at the speaker but "wait for the bullet." The speaker appeals, "Remember. / Remember these appalling days which make the world / forever bad" (56). The stress on the word "Remember" is a request for a collective memory to be kept alive to serve as a warning that something of this magnitude should never happen again – even though the speaker is not sure, for she deems the world to be "forever bad", beyond any possible redemption. Duffy implies that the production of suffering is unending, in a world where the past is easily forgotten as the human race perpetuates brand-new atrocities and tragedies, on a daily basis.

In war, and genocide, the most vulnerable tend to be women and children who become the objects of rape and brutality. When the speaker is raped, and a child is shot in the eye, "The soldiers laughed", turning rape and the torture of innocent children into entertainment. The

speaker asks, “How would you prepare to die, on a perfect April morning / with young men gossiping and smoking by the graves?” (56). The juxtaposition of April with grave is ironical because in the Western imagination, April is when Nature is bursting forth with new life. Visceral details such as “urine trickled / down [her] legs until [she] heard the click. Not yet. A trick” (56), the taunting of the soldiers, even as they rape, torture and kill, the prolonging of the fear of impending death, all these figure in the poem. She states:

> After immense suffering someone takes tea on the lawn.
> After the terrible moans a boy washes his uniform.
> After the history lesson children run to their toys the world
> turns in its sleep the spades shovel soil Sara Ezra … (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 56)

Herein we see the ease with which the world returns to normalcy, to domestic details of tea and washing clothes, the boys who “after the terrible moans” wash their uniforms, and in doing so wash off their crimes. The history lesson has no relation with life when what is taught inside the classroom stays put within the four walls, and children run to their toys, and the world goes to sleep as though nothing had happened. Bantock remarks,

> … history has in some degree changed its role. In former times conceived of as a moral energising force, a source of *exempla* and traditional wisdom, as guide or warning to the present, it has itself become, in the fullness of time, objective and ‘scientific’, concerned to emphasise the reconstruction of former actuality rather than as serving any *direct* function of enlightenment. (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 2)

The speaker addresses a "Sister", and asks her to tell her story, to speak of the fact that in that most horrific time, she sang the ancient psalms, and "strong men wept". Duffy invests courage and strength into her protagonist but also shows the futility of resistance and the hopelessness which characterize such events.

The pangs of displacement are not exclusive to humans alone, and so Duffy focuses on the plight of captive dolphins in "The Dolphins" from *Standing Female Nude*. The speaker of the poem is a collective "we," and by giving the dolphins an undivided voice, Duffy spotlights the issues faced by dolphins who are removed from their natural habitat and moved into manmade pools, "We are in our element but we are not free" (58).This acknowledges their watery habitat but also indicates that their movements are controlled and exploited by humans for selfish entertainment. That the dolphins do not talk like humans does not mean they are devoid of feelings, and as such, Duffy anthropomorphizes them and they are quick to mourn thus,

> We have found no truth in these waters,
> no explanations tremble on our flesh.
> We were blessed and now we are not blessed.
> After travelling such a space for days we began
> to translate. It was the same space. It is
> the same space always and above it is the man. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 58)

There is a clear comparison drawn between the before and after of their capture, and from the vastness of the ocean to their constricted lives in a pool: truth and no truth, blessed and not blessed. The dolphins no longer have the space to seek truth and feel blessed within the consequence of repetitive monotonous performance within a space controlled by man. The acute displacement felt by the dolphins is translated in the waters of the pool which "will not deepen to dream in" and "There is no hope. We sink / to the limits of this pool until the whistle blows"

(58). In the ocean the dolphins would dive into the depths, but in the pool, they only sink, leading to a situational, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual sinking where access to natural objects has been denied for the "moon has disappeared" and the music only has a "single note" (58). This curtails not only dreams, hopes, and music, but also turns the once free and wild dolphins into docile automatons, trained to balance a "coloured ball" until "the man has disappeared," leaving them pining and lost, in their "memory of somewhere else" (58). The refusal to name the ocean as the place the dolphins would like to return to and replacing it with "somewhere else" further stresses the acute mental trauma of the dolphins, who are hoping for an escape from the pool, with a strong, painful nostalgia but only a vague memory of their former home.

The reader is made aware of the abusive nature of man and the complete lack of care for animal rights, all for the selfish interest of humans. The dolphins could easily stand in for any victim: animal, or human, abducted and forced into exploitative jobs, with no way out for "There is a man and our mind knows we will die here" (58). The trafficking of dolphins could very well pass as a metaphor for human trafficking or for women trapped in abusive marriages, with the same underlaying themes of manipulation and exploitation. There is no limit to man's exploitation of his fellow humans, and the environment, which is brought home to the reader in Duffy's *Selling Manhattan,* and is clearly spoken of in its eponymous poem. The poem begins with the last words of a coloniser who hoodwinked the Native Americans into parting with Manhattan, part of the modern-day New York City:

> All yours, Injun, twenty-four bucks' worth of glass beads,
> gaudy cloth. I got myself a bargain. I brandish
> fire-arms and fire-water. Praise the Lord.
> Now get your red ass out of here. (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 34)

The voice could be of Peter Minuit, who is reported to have bought Manhattan from the Native Americans for twenty-four dollars' worth of trinkets. What stands out is not just the unreasonable, unfair, and unjust bargain made with the Native Americans, but also the arrogance in the tone of the coloniser which contrasts sharply with the rest of the poem spoken by the Natives in a meditative, tense, but polite tone. The coloniser is not satisfied with only having the land, he has very specific plans of doing away completely with the Natives by means of "*fire-arms and fire-water. Praise the Lord,*" the three powerful tools of colonization placed neatly and interestingly in the same line. Fire-arms reference killing, maybe war, but definitely brutal violence, force, persecution and so on, while fire-water refers to whisky, which was introduced to the native Americans by the colonisers – the consumption of which contributed to the further oppression and destruction of the Natives. The use of "Praise the Lord" even as they pushed the Natives out of their land, indicates the use of the Christian god to subjugate and enslave the Native and the other, a tactic used by the Europeans all over the world. Duffy, in the act of putting forth the truth behind the acquisition of Manhattan, is rewriting history consciously, giving her readers a side to the story that tends to remain suppressed[6]. Duffy allows the reader access to the Native's side of the story where they speak directly to the coloniser,

> I wonder if the ground has anything to say.
> You have made me drunk, drowned out
> the world's slow truth with rapid lies.

[6]Duffy echoes *In Search of April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, where in the History class, the white teacher portrays the Natives as ruthless murderers, "the Indians scalped, tortured, and massacred brave white explorers and missionaries" (53) to which Cheryl Raintree, a Native girl retaliates saying "This is all a bunch of lies" (53) and goes on to say "If this is history, how come so many Indian tribes were wiped out? How come they haven't got their land anymore? How come their food supplies were wiped out? Lies! Lies! Lies! Your history books don't say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. That's all you white people can do is teach a bunch of lies to cover your own tracks!" (Mosionier, *In Search of April Raintree* 54).

> But today I hear again and again and plainly see. Wherever
> you have touched the earth, the earth is sore. (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 34)

The coloniser's chicanery is laid out in detail, from the poisoning of the health of the Natives by turning them into dipsomaniacs, to feeding their mind with venomous lies. As it is, the arrival of truth is slow and tedious, the Natives initially do not recognize the truth, but eventually learn the true nature of the coloniser's repeated lies, their destruction of humans and nature, so that the speaker wonders "if the ground has anything to say" and "the spirit of the water has anything / to say" (34). Duffy educates the readers about the very different attitudes of the coloniser and the Natives towards the land, and charts a clear distinction between the two: the colonizer sees the land as belonging to him, he "own[s] the river and the grass … the air," would "poison it" and as a result "the earth is sore," but for the Native, he belongs to the land therefore, he "sing[s] with true love for the land" and shares a connection with the earth beyond life, "My heart is on the ground, as when my loved one / fell back in my arms and died" (34), implying a familial bond that is extended to the land, a home to the heart after death. The Native speaker tells the coloniser, "Trust your dreams. No good will come of this" (34) which could be read as a prediction that nature will find a way to talk back in a fitting manner. In spite of the differences in the perspective towards the earth, the coloniser and the Natives are brought together in death, the leveler, for the speaker questions, "Man who fears death, how many acres do you need / to lengthen your shadow under the endless sky?" (34). A dead body casts no shadow on its own, death strips one of everything and mortality is inescapable, even if one has innumerable acres of land, "under the endless sky". Though the poem specifically talks about Manhattan and the Native Americans, it speaks for all the victims of colonisation across the globe.

The poem "Telling the Bees" from *The Bees* brings environmental crises to the forefront. The poem begins,

> When I went to read
> the bulletin about broken holy beads
> to the bees,
> the beads were the bees themselves… (Duffy, *The Bees* 52)

The "broken holy beads" refers to the holy rosary, a religious artifact connoting both a codified set of prayers in its entirety, as well as a congregational ritual. A broken rosary would mean a disconnect between the divine and the human, a lack of prayerful unity within the community, and a chaotic situation overall, in the context of the Church. Because "the beads were the bees themselves," and the string that holds the holy beads together is broken, a plausible existential crisis is anticipated for the bees and everything that survives on earth. The narration shifts to a different time where the speaker

> … had seen the bees as a rosary, girdling,
> garden by garden, the land;
> or had heard their hard devotional sound
> in the ears of the flowers
> as I barely breathed, beheld
> their bold, intimate touch … (Duffy, *The Bees* 52)

Much like the rosary that connects humans with the divine, the bees are seen as a link between the divine and the garden. The rosary beads are required to be counted over, by the religiously "intimate touch" of the fingers, and Duffy likens this touch to the bees on the flowers, seeing it as a mating touch, putting the garden religiously together, girdling and buckling, propagating whatever grows in the garden and land with diligence, dedication, and devotion. Duffy stresses

the importance of bees in the eco-system where without the bees there would be no fruits and "No honey for tea" (52). The absence of honey, even as it suggests a lack of wellness and sweetness in tea, also implies a lack of sweetness in human dealings with life and nature. Yet another example of Duffy teaching her readers about the environmental crisis is in the poem "Parliament" from *The Bees*, where, birds in the manner of a sitting parliament, discuss their sad tales of survival in the environmental destruction brought about by humans[7].

Social Ills and Disgrace: From the local to the world-stage

Communities exist at several levels, from the small village or town to that of like-minded individuals who may be scattered geographically, to the community of human-kind, and the world at large. Duffy's poetry spotlights the violence and trauma of social ills; the disgraceful practice of sexual objectification; materialism and the disparity that money occasions; the imbalances of power, among others. In the process of doing so, Duffy reminds the readers of the need to not forget these social crimes that may or may not make it to sociology, political science, and history textbooks. She is also critical of the elected law makers who decide the fate of the common people. Ruth Padel writing on "Regionalism, Thatcherism" opines,

> As the divide between rich and poor was knowingly increased, poems increasingly spoke of the inner effects of Thatcherism: economic, educational and social oppression and depression, unemployment, miserable and underfunded care homes, corruption, pollution of the environment, extinction of animal species, and eventually war played out on our own TV screens, which enabled us to exalt in

[7]Where in Chaucer's poem *The Parliament of Fowls* the dominant theme, voiced by the birds, is to do with love and mating, Duffy uses the device of the parliament and the birds' voices to shine a spotlight on the ruin and devastation which man perpetrates on the environment, in every corner of the world.

> the new technologies of mass killing while gazing over the gruesome details. (Padel, *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* 22)

Duffy launches her crusade against these issues that damage people irrevocably via her poetry wherein she gives a voice to the marginalized and the dispossessed. Duffy's poetry speaks for those who are on the margins of society. In doing so, she alerts the readers to the need to sympathize with the 'Other'. The speaker in "Standing Female Nude" from Duffy's volume *Standing Female Nude* based on the painting "Large Nude" by the French cubist painter, Georges Braque, is the model of the painting, a "river-whore" as she calls herself. As the poem progresses, the artistic, monetary, and psychological situations are made known, not only of the speaker but of the painter as well: "He is concerned with volume, space. / I with the next meal," that his name is "Georges … a genius," and "Both poor, we make our living how we can" (46). It is this pecuniary paucity that levels the painter with the model, for just as she lives from hand to mouth, he doesn't have "money for the art [she] sells" though he "stiffens for [her] warmth" and his desires are reduced to "possess[ing her] on canvas as he dips the brush / repeatedly into the paint" (46). This act of possessing the desirable naked woman on the canvas, indicated also by the sexualized, phallic image of brush being dipped into paint, is suggestive of artistic immortality, in contrast to a momentary libidinal gratification, thereby elevating art even as prostitution is shown to be just a trade. The last stanza begins, "I ask him Why do you do this? Because / I have to. There's no choice" (46). We the readers see the connection between the painter and the speaker's nature of art/work because they both have no choice, but this kindred feeling is short lived and her desire for a conversation is clipped for she is told, "Don't talk." Immediately a clear distinction between art in painting and art as a "river-whore" is drawn: "These artists / take themselves too seriously. At night I fill myself / with wine and dance around

the bars" (46) and the speaker's disappointment morphs into a disagreement when she is shown the finished painting that according to her "does not look like [her]" (46).

The speaker is not new to being sexually objectified as a "river-whore" and as a model, for that is the art she sells. The final line, where the speaker says that the painting does not look like her could be because of the artist's failure to represent her realistically, or her inability to comprehend cubism. Her visualization of the painting being hung in great museums with the bourgeoisie cooing and the "Queen of England gazing / on [her] shape. Magnificent" (46), gives the readers additional insights into her wishes, dreams, her imagination, but the fact that the finished painting looks nothing like her unsettles the easy equation that she is immoratlised by the artist and his painting. What the speaker visualised has materialized, the painting is studied even today and is acknowledged as one of Braque's masterpieces, but her side of the story is absent. The subject in the painting is muted and silenced and it is this side of the story that Duffy chooses for her ekphrastic poem. Duffy's concern is not centered on the model alone but she also talks about the plight of artists: most of them being poor, struggling in poverty to do what they must. This art of speaking for others as individuals and artists in their own capacities is succinctly brought out by Duffy in her poetry. If Braque's "Large Nude" presents us with a particular image, Duffy adds many layers to the painting in her poem, all seen through the mind's eyes. The painting may have defamiliarised the model, but her story, as Duffy tells it, becomes real and immediate to ordinary people: people who are in a profession because they have no other choice, those with an inability to connect life with art, the poor, the silenced, the marginalized and so on. Yet, the absence of the speaker's name continues in the poem, even though her story is being told, and she remains the standing female nude, thus giving us a layered and nuanced narrative.

The emphasis on an attractive physical appearance and beauty is a perpetual problem in our world, especially with the price that women pay to fit into the prevalent ideas of beauty. Elaine Scarry in *On Beauty and Being Just* argues that beauty allies with justice, "It is clear that an *ethical fairness* which requires "a symmetry of everyone's relation" will be greatly assisted by an *aesthetic fairness* that creates in all participants a state of delight in their own lateralness" (Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* 114), but Duffy in "Beautiful" from *Feminine Gospels* seems to imply that for beautiful women, beauty allies with tragedy. Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* was first published in 1999 and Duffy's *Feminine Gospels* in 2002, and while we do not know if Duffy has read Scarry, her stance is clearly not similar to Scarry placing the beautiful, animate and inanimate on the same scale and she educates the reader that when it comes to a beautiful woman, very often justice is a farfetched notion.

In the poem "Beautiful" from *Feminine Gospels*[8],Duffy writes about beauty and the price that beautiful women have paid through the centuries, focusing on the characters of Helen, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana. Helen, "born from an egg" as a result of Zeus having had his way with Leda in the form of a swan is "divinely fair, a pearl, drop-dead / gorgeous, beautiful, a peach / a child of grace, a stunner" but also a girl who wins "the heart / of every man she saw" with her "starlike sorrows of immortal eyes" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 8). Ruby Rendell in "'Third cheerleader from the left': from Homer's Helen to Helen of Troy" states that "No legendary figure radiates more star power than Helen. As the most beautiful woman of all time, she exercises supreme erotic power through her blinding impact on men's eyes"

[8]*Feminine Gospels* is a volume within which all the poems are, as the title indicates, to do with women and their lives. And true to the Duffy poetic model, each of them has at its core, a lesson which the reader can carry away. I have analysed some of those which highlight the specific woes of women's lives, as they show us the hazards of beauty, the emphasis on physical appearances, and women's addiction to shopping.

(Rendell, 16), which makes Helen powerful, dangerous, and destructive. When Helen leaves with Paris, leaving "the small coin of her wedding ring … on the bedside table like a tip" the consequence is the launching of "a thousand ships— / on every one a thousand men" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 8) with her name tattooed on the arm of every man, all of it illustrative of Helen's beauty and her charisma, but also of her status as possession, an object which confers distinction on him who possesses it. Scarry states that "Beauty is pacific: its reciprocal salute to continued existence, its pact, is indistinguishable from the word for peace" (Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* 107), Duffy says it otherwise, that beauty is dangerous, destructive and has the power to launch a thousand warring ships. Duffy also describes Helen as "a princess with a common touch" neatly foreshadowing Diana, the people's princess, but also making beauty a public possession.

In the section on Helen in "Beautiful" Duffy shows the reader several of the consequences of being beautiful: objectified "clasped / in a hero's brawn, loved and loved / and loved again" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 9) we never get to know whether Helen desired any of what happened to her; she remains an ideal to all the men around her, all of whom battle in her name. The final stanzas of the Helen section, wherein Duffy makes myths around Helen's end, show us also the impossibility of fixing such beauty: it remains unknowable and shifting, and those who only see her as beauty personified cannot begin to understand or know her, not even to know how she died. Thus, rumours and stories proliferate as to her death, but no one knows for certain what happened to Helen of Troy. That knowledge is left for her maid:

> Her maid, who loved her most,
> refused to say one word
> to anyone at any time or place,
> would not describe

one aspect of her face
or tell one anecdote about her life and loves.

But lived alone
and kept a little bird inside a cage. (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 10)

The only clue we are given is the bird in the cage, the analogy left to us readers to draw, of Helen as a caged bird, with no agency and no freedom. The caged bird is suggestive of the numerous replications, representations, and interpretations which have been made and will be made of Helen, over which she could have no control. Ruby Rendell talks about how Wolfgang Petersen's movie, *Troy* (2004), strips Helen of her power while "Achilles usurps what might have been her story" (Rendell, 8). By casting Brad Pitt as Achilles, "with his blazing star power and overwhelming sexual appeal, (he) is clearly the primary erotic focus of this film" (Rendell, 17), while Diane Kruger as Helen, "slender and waiflike, lacking maturity, dignity and the statuesque quality so highly valued by the ancient Greeks" (Rendell, 14), the movie makes Achilles not "Helen's counterpart but her replacement" (Rendell, 17). Duffy's presentation of the maid, as the person who loved her best, rejects representations of this nature and instead gives to Helen a more human quality, though we are not told if Helen loved the maid, as the latter loved her.

Duffy teases out the terrible consequences of beauty in "Beautiful", where she also shows the readers the dangers of trying to ape beautiful women and speaks about the desperate desire to have the perfect (skinny) body, even if it is by becoming anorexic, or at the expense of physical and mental health as seen in the poem "The Diet" from the volume *Feminine Gospels*. The narrator of the poem introduces us to the "she" within the poem for whom the "diet worked like a dream" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 15) as she denies herself "sugar / salt, dairy, fat, protein,

starch or alcohol" moves on to "skipping breakfast, / lunch, dinner, thinner" so much so that "by the end of the month, she was skin / and bone" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 15). Much like Alice changing size in *Alice in Wonderland*, the protagonist of the poem too keeps changing her size "child-sized, doll-sized, the height of a thimble" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 15) but sadly in the case of the protagonist, the possibility of changing back is absent for she has become "Anorexia's true daughter" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 15). Once she shrinks "seed small", she becomes homeless and finds shelter in a gutter inside an "empty beer bottle" where she "got drunk on the dregs, / started to sing, down, out, nobody's love. Tiny others / joined" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 15). The poem captures the element of the fantastic, and leads the readers into a nightmare world which is connected to the delirious state in which many of the anorexics find themselves, hallucinating and unable to distinguish between reality and the nightmare worlds they inhabit in their starved minds and bodies. The diet, which initially makes the person "thinner", eventually leads to her becoming tinier and "minute". The poem builds up the tension as the third person narrator takes us into the phantasmagoric world of the anorexic who inhabits parts of other people's bodies: their eyes, their nails, etc., until she is swallowed and lands in the stomach of a person. There the nightmare continues, as vast quantities of food are shovelled in, onto the woman who is "in a stomach just before lunch". Even as the woman "chomped and chewed and gorged", we finally understand the image that has her in its power: she is "inside the Fat Woman now, / trying to get out" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 16). The irony is, of course, that however thin she may become, her idea of herself is always of a thin self, trapped in a "Fat Woman", forever trying to get out and be seen for what she is, the *ideal*, her ideal, a thin person.

Duffy does not offer us any solutions but she does show us the dangers of being trapped in images which then erode one's sense of self and destroy an individual. Where, one may ask, is

the teaching in this poem? Duffy does not call out the fashion industry, nor the entertainment industry which sell these body images which destroy women throughout the world, she does not speak about body issues or fat shaming. Instead, what she does is show us, very vividly, the consequences of dieting to these extremes, the possibility of harming oneself irrevocably and the impossibility of ever escaping these images if one has internalized them.

Through the lives of the other three beautiful women Dufy shows her readers the curse that beauty brings with it. Out of Helen of Troy, Cleopatra of Egypt, Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana, only Cleopatra is seen as having some control over her own life. In her case she determines what happens to her and she does it by manipulating those around her, whether it is Caesar, or Antony, or Antony's soldiers. By using her body and her intelligence she outwits the men around her and is able to control their fates, something neither Marilyn Monroe nor Princess Diana is able to do.

Monroe's life declined into a substance-abuse nightmare, as her maid "painted the beauty on in beige, / pinks, blues", she turned into an automaton who "couldn't die when she died, / couldn't get older, ill, couldn't stop saying the lines / or singing the tunes" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 13). The beauty that made her famous was only an appearance created for a camera, and this truth is recognized by the policeman who watches her being zipped into a body-bag after her suicide

> The smoking cop who watched
> as they zipped her into the body-bag noticed
> her strong resemblance to herself, the dark roots
> of her pubic hair. (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 13)

The loneliness of beautiful women as exemplified by Helen of Troy and Marilyn Monroe is further underlined by Duffy's myth-making regarding Princess Diana, in the final section of the poem where she says "Beauty is fate" and shows us, the readers, Princes Diana's public face. The Princess Diana we see here is an "empty head", someone with beautiful bones but not the Diana who was the people's princess, at the time of her death. As we know from the many academic works on Princess Diana, she was able to craft an image of herself and was far more than just a pretty face; she used the media and by projecting a certain image of herself she won the hearts of the people of England, as also much of the world. Seen from that perspective, Duffy also feasts on the beautiful, using them for her purposes, and that could well be the lesson we are offered by "Beautiful": that no one owns beauty, rather it depends upon the individual's use of beauty, whether it is the person herself or those who consume her.

In *Feminine Gospels* Duffy tackles a multitude of themes and several of the poems offer us new perspectives on issues that are relevant in the contemporary world. Thus in "Loud" we are shown how the daily news, whether in newspapers, the television or the radio dehumanizes one, inuring us to the horrors that are perpetrated on humans all over the world every day of our lives. But Duffy does not stop with alerting us to the fact that we have closed ourselves off from these truths, instead she shows us how the News can consume a person and overpower all else, filling every corner of our lives with terrible stories of negativity, destruction and death.

Duffy also focuses her readers' gaze on the labour performed by women, labour that is often ignored, rarely valued or even seen and recognized. Thus in "Work" we are given lists of jobs that are done, so that children may be fed: from taking in "washing, ironing, sewing" to going "on the night shift" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 20), to where she "dug underground, tunnelled, / laid down track, drove trains" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 20) until in the end she

"sickened, died, lay in a grave, worked, to the bone, her fingers / twenty-four seven" (Duffy, *Feminine Gospels* 21). As one reads the poem, we see how women have always worked, and even as Duffy collapses Nature and women together, we also see how there is no mention of anyone being grateful for what has been provided; there is just incessant labour until finally she lies dead, her fingers worked to the bone. Whether we think of the poem as being about Nature or about women in general it serves as a call to recognize the enormity of the labour that has been performed over the years and to acknowledge it, rather than not see, or see around it.

Another social ill that Duffy writes about is substance abuse. Duffy's poems show us many versions of social disgrace, whether self-inflicted, or inflicted by a family member, consciously, sub-consciously or unconsciously. "Someone Else's Daughter" from *Standing Female Nude* presents the problems of substance abuse which, in turn, lead to a series of other socially frowned upon issues. The title of the poem is suggestive of the parents' unwillingness to accept the shame brought upon them by their daughter and therefore a wistful desire: if only it had been someone else's daughter. The poem starts with "Scratching at the air (*There's nothing there*)" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 59), words suggestive of an unfulfilled dream, a hint at the fact that substance abuse might occur due to feelings of inadequacy and failure, but also indicating the hallucinatory world that drugs offer the user. After the protagonist starts to chip "at her smooth, white arms with needles" (59) her former self slowly disappears and personal dissociation takes over:

> Beneath the skin, small volcanoes sigh and draw in fire.
> She covers them with make-up, itches, slopes out.
> Herpes and hepatitis set off on their journey
> from the mind to elsewhere. No surrender.
> Cunt and liver erupt as the thin hand shoplifts. (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 59)

Depression is all it takes to lead to a series of other problems all of which are socially unacceptable. The scars on her skin are compared to tiny volcanoes which are suggestive of a deadly destruction, something that consumes and destroys everything around it. That she has taken to the streets and has acquired sexually transmitted diseases like “Herpes and hepatitis,”, “cunt and liver erupt”, that she starts stealing and that she has become quite numb to pain, all these connect her mental and physical state, both ruined and teetering on the edge of disaster. Duffy makes it appear as if the girl in the poem is the sole author of her situation and that the situation is hopeless, she is quite unable to recover from it. She is taken into custody, and someone who could be a social welfare worker or police personnel, interrogates her, “This could be your last chance. *I know*. / Why do you do this? *I don’t know*” (59), and the answer “*I don’t know*” is disturbing for she seems to no longer be in control of what is happening with/to her and it appears that she doesn’t really care anymore. That she is not going to get any better is implied for “She smokes / a trembling chain of cancer cells” (59). She becomes the ouroboros, a snake eating itself, tail first. The snake eating itself symbolises regeneration and renewal, yet, in the poem this renewal is bleak for “One day there will be nothing left for those / who love her” (59) and the protagonist shrinks to a mere memory, “a childhood snapshot” (59). Duffy demonstrates the slow disintegration of an individual that takes place as a result of substance abuse. The main persona in the poem is eventually caught in the societal safety net, but by then the possibility of her being helped and cured is minimal. The tension of the poem lies in the fact that in the context of a world where family ties are deemed important, where individuals are seen as valuable and unique, we are shown an easy replaceability with “someone else’s daughter” who might one day take over the same role and devour herself. The poem does not preach, but it also indicates quietly, intensely, the possibility of this story repeating, of parents finding it easier to relegate

their children to memories in the face of their failure, so much so that it is bound to repeat again and again, for there is already "someone else's daughter" ready to move into the squat.

Duffy addresses the monetary and materialistic concerns that bring about the fungibility of humans; physically, morally, and socially. "Making Money" from *The Other Country* explores the many and varied ways of making money, the extent to which humans can go to earn some money, the risks they take and the degradation they endure, all for money. Thus, there are people for whom money is extremely hard to come by, like "an Indian man in Delhi … who squats by an open drain for hours, shifting shit / for the price of a chapati" and "His hands / in crumbling gloves of crap pray at the drains / for the pearls in slime his grandfather swore he found" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 13). The suggestion of the protagonist's willingness to do anything in order to earn a pittance to survive is overshadowed by the implication that Indian society in the manner of Calvinism is pre-ordained and pre-destined, subjugating a certain caste/community to scavenging, and much like the hope of finding pearls in excrement, the hope of going up in society is farfetched. And in Bergama, Turkey,

> … The boys from the bazaar
> hide on the target-range, watching the soldiers fire. Between bursts
> they rush for the spent shells, cart them away for scrap.
> Here in the catch. Some shells don't explode. Ahmat
> runs over grass, lucky for six months, so far. So
> bomb-collectors die young. But the money's good. (Duffy, *The Other Country* 13-14)

Duffy lays bare another hazardous and dangerous form of making money and yet, even with the assured knowledge that death could take place anytime, young boys continue to run after shells, even those that "don't explode" just because there's good money in this line of work, making

war a money-making business, volunteering for death as if being killed in cross firing is not enough. Whereas in places where "The economy booms" people after a tedious day at work, "pause / in the square, where a clown makes money swallowing fire" (14). The image of swallowing fire to make money offers the reader the perspective that making money can well become a self-destructive activity because like the clown swallowing fire, money can go up in flames, destroying not just its value but also the person entirely. Duffy educates her readers that money is made for humans and not humans for money, in a world where money is looked upon as the answer to everything about life.

The effects of money on a personal level could be fatal and Duffy often appears to be of the view that money has become the world's curse. The protagonist of "Debt" from *Standing Female Nude* spends a sleepless night "over money" as "Impossible scenarios danced in the dark / as though he was drunk" (33) and one is not sure why money should worry him so, if not for the title of the poem, the money he owes someone. The tension is so great that the protagonist becomes suicidal, "He left himself and drew a gun he didn't own" (33), where the gun could be metaphorical or a real gun that he has borrowed from someone. The protagonist's nature is further revealed in the second stanza:

> He won the pools: pearls for her and ponies
> for the kids. The damp bedroom was an ocean liner
> till the woman farted, drifted on, away from him.
> Despair formed a useless prayer and worry an ulcer.
> He bargained with something he could not believe in
> for something he could not have. *Sir* … (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 33)

The protagonist's gambling is contrasted with the despair he now faces. If winning the pools made it possible for him to buy gifts for his wife and children, losing the bargain now is tearing

his guts apart. The insecurity that he feels at his wife physically turning away from him in bed is suggestive of what she might do if she learns of his doings. The protagonist of the poem sees "Through the wallpaper men in suits appeared"[9] and "They wanted the video, wanted the furniture. / They wanted the children" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 33), literally whatever he owned, he is panic-stricken and "There was nothing he would not do. There was / nothing to do but run the mind's mad films" (Duffy, *Standing Female Nude* 33). The protagonist writes "*Dear Sir* … his ghost typed on" and this repeated address to an unnamed person "*Sir*" is ambiguous and unclear whether it is a suicide note, a letter of negotiation or even a letter confirming a bargain for something, but before he could write and send the letter out "A letter came" and we are not told what letter, yet, it could easily be a letter confirming the worst fears of the protagonist. Duffy through this poem shows us, the readers, the hazards in dealings with money and how uncalculated and irrational risks such as those associated with gambling can lead to losing everything in life, even one's own life.

The true nature of money is laid out clearly in the poem "Money Talks" from *Selling Manhattan*. The persona of the poem starts off by proclaiming, "I am the authentic language of suffering. My cold, gold eye / does not blink" (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 33). The speaker tells no lies, it is straight forward and has no qualms talking about its ugly side. To be "the authentic language of suffering" is suggestive of the cause and also the remedy of suffering; one suffers because one does not have money even as another can have his problems solved and illness cured with money. Money's "cold, gold eye / does not blink," stripped of emotions, can buy fair-weather friends, corrode intimate relationships and human values, and replace the things money

[9]This is similar to Gilman's protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" who sees a "great many women" (Gilman, 356) behind the wallpaper with "strangled heads and bulbous eyes" (Gilman, 358) creeping out of the wallpaper, which gets her "angry enough to do something desperate" (358),

cannot buy with the cold, golden laws of supply and demand. Money manipulates, tricking humans into wanting the unnecessary, advertises alluringly, “Mister, do you want nice time?” or “Do you fancy me, lady?” for the job of money is to “buy and sell the world” (33), turning humans into commodities, replacing affection and trust and letting money take control, to seduce and abuse, consensually. Duffy seems to imply that in today’s world, people are willing to part with priceless things such as love, loyalty, honour, morality, and values., for money at the drop of a hat for the “million tills” that “sing through the night” (33).

Money sets a price on dreams and leads humans by the nose, fashioned in the manner of a god:

> See me pass through the eye of a needle! Whoopee,
> I cut Time dead with my sleek facelift. I travel
> faster than $-sound. Don’t give me away; after all, no one
> can eat me. Honey, I’m a jealous God, $-stammering
> my one commandment on the calculator. *Love me*. (Duffy, *Selling Manhattan* 33)

Money turns the tables on the Biblical God, both of the Old and the New Testament and blends the two: Moses who stammered and conveyed God’s message to the people, “for you shall worship no other god, because the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (*The Holy Bible*, Exodus. 34.14), gets overwritten by “I’m a jealous God, $-stammering,” and the one commandment of Christ exemplified by his life, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (*The Holy Bible*, John. 13.34) is replaced by “one commandment on the calculator. *Love me*.” Money brings the hammer down on the impossible things that only god can do, and proclaims it can “pass through the eye of a needle” going against the tenet “I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the

eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (*The Holy Bible*, Matthew. 19.24).Yet money doesn't talk about life in terms of dignity, integrity and honour, it only talks about the pleasures of life such as cutting "Time dead" by a "sleek facelift," the intervention of medical science which can be done only with the help of money, even if it means going under the knife. Duffy, by using references from the Bible, suggests that love of money has replaced the love of God as the new religion of the people, and further suggests that the craze for money is nothing new, it has only become more intensive. If the church teaches one to love and help strangers, money also makes connections across strangers, differently though as stated by Yuval Noah Harari in his book *Money*,

> Money has an even darker side. For although money builds universal trust between strangers, this trust is invested not in humans, communities or sacred values, but in money itself and in the impersonal systems that back it. We do not trust the stranger, or the next-door neighbour – we trust the coin they hold. If they run out of coins, we run out of trust. As money brings down the dams of community, religion and state, the world is in danger of becoming one big and rather heartless marketplace. (Harari, 22)

Money can take one in a limousine to places "where it's raining dollars," "women and gigolos, metal tuxedos" (33) all of which goes to prove the commoditization of humans, and "metal tuxedos" sound bulletproof, but once the love of money takes root in a person there is no end to bullets, they get through everything so easily, as is confirmed by the last sentence of the poem "I am / the big bombs, sighing in their thick lead sheaths OK" (33). It also suggests the lengths to which humans go for fiscal gains, killing each other and waging war. History has it that big money has been behind wars like the Opium War (1840-42), fought between Britain and China

in the name of free trade, the involvement of Britain in the Greek War of Independence (1821-30), that even though Greece was freed from the Ottoman empire, its economy was mortgaged to Britain. Money played a dominant role in the process of colonization, dehumanization, exploitation, and manipulation of humans and nature alike. In today's world it continues to be so. In "The Ex-Ministers" from her latest volume *Sincerity*, Duffy seems to suggest that some of the aye-sayers to money are the ex-ministers who "rise above us … in private jets" and when overseas "they float on superyachts … guests of the mortal gods" (Duffy, *Sincerity* 20), which goes to prove that the politicians care a dime about the people for "We are nothing to them now" (Duffy, *Sincerity* 20), and all they cared for was money all along. Duffy, without negating the fact that everybody needs money to survive, educates us about the toxic side to money that can bring about disasters in the everyday world.

"I have heard this ever since I can remember, and ever since I have taught: the teacher must teach the pupil to think" (81), says Robert Frost in his talk "Education by Poetry" and Duffy is the perfect teacher, her readers the pupils who are taught to think by her poetry. Duffy speaks for an education that connects with life and not one that selectively teaches only that which is politically expedient. As Duffy re-makes community ties, she reminds her readers that while communities might be local, there is also the community of the human; it is racially and ethnically diverse, geographically widespread, and these community ties need to be fostered and strengthened.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

In this dissertation I demonstrated that reading Duffy's poetry through the prism of education leads us to a better understanding of her work and the world that she delineates in her poetry. My study focuses on select poems from Duffy's ten volumes of poetry published between 1985 to 2018: *Standing Female Nude*, *Selling Manhattan*, *The Other Country*, *Mean Time*, *The World's Wife*, *Feminine Gospels*, *Rapture*, *The Bees*, *Ritual Lighting*, *Sincerity,* and from *New Selected Poems* which include a few poems published for the first time. Duffy's poems whether dealing with the individual, family or community, are studied through Bantock's understanding that educationists should look to literature in order to widen and deepen their understanding of human behavior, as literature helps individuals to see and understand other people, their behaviour and motivations in a more imaginative and hence, insightful way (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 4).

The first chapter "Going to School: Formal Education", studied Duffy's take on the freedom and authority that heads of school and teachers, have in schools; critiquing the regimented, straitjacketed, one-way communication form of education and offering suggestions towards celebrative learning, and also presenting innovative ways of looking at subject lessons while giving life-lessons. Divided into two sections, the first section talks about corporal punishment as a casual cruelty inflicted – with no restrictions – on children in schools, and Duffy suggests sparing the rod to save the child. Duffy shows the readers how the pronouncements that teachers pass on the intellectual merit of students, without an understanding of their personality, can cause a lifetime of damage to those students. Speaking out against the faulty educational

system in England, Duffy suggests laughter, a spontaneous and unforced expression as a means to talk back, rebel, and set right the wrong in a natural and harmless manner, resulting in the possibility of the school being nursed back to healthy learning and a better teacher-student relationship.

This chapter also examines Duffy's views on the education department's power to decide the school syllabi, and questions the credibility of their decision to ban a poem that exposed the lack present in the prevalent education system. Even as Duffy stresses the need for teachers to be frank and open when asked questions about sex, she also stresses the importance for the education of emotions, and lists examples of model teachers, who made learning enjoyable, while giving lessons for life.

The second chapter "All in the Family: Education within the home" explores the specific role that family plays in the formation of a person, for, "A teacher is not simply a substitute mum or dad." (Bantock, *The Parochialism of the Present* 61). Divided into two sections, the first section studies the parent-child relationship that begins with birth of the child, where, even as the child learns the ways of the world from the mother, the mother also learns and grows with the child, emotionally and mentally; simultaneously, we the readers witness the growth of the child and in that witnessing, we learn as well. The tender care with which a mother tends to the child, is returned in reverse parenting when the daughter takes the role of a nurse/mother, catering to her needs on her deathbed, and by extension Duffy shows a different model from that prevalent in the contemporary world where children often do not care for their aged parents, but conveniently leave them in old-age homes. The absence of the father figure in some of the poems goes to prove that single mothers can do equally well in bringing up their children with no lack whatsoever, and in the absence of the mother, the grandmother plays the encompassing role of

both the mother and grandmother in the education of her grandchildren. On the other hand, we also learn about a dishonest kind of parenting, where, irrespective of who is right or wrong, an attempt is made to coerce a child into believing an adult's truth just because they are bigger and older; especially regarding issues like child sexual abuse, sometimes committed with the parents' complicity. Sibling relationships also change as they grow older, and grow out of love and affection, sometimes resulting in one being happy and contented with life, whereas another becomes distraught and self-destructive.

The second section deals with the husband-wife relationship where Duffy presents the nuances of love found and love lost; caught in abusive and repressive marriages and the price one pays for making children a priority; at the same time, there are those who enjoy content, fulfilling relationships. This section also looks at the retellings of myth, at how Duffy gives the women characters a story/voice of their own, which are otherwise muffled by the tales of their husbands, and frees them from the traditional and customary chauvinistic presentations. Jo Gill states that Duffy's poems which retell myth, fairytale, and history "ask the reader to pause for a moment, to rethink their lazy assumptions, to look again at what they think they know" (Gill, 189) and thus, thinking and listening to the other side of the story, Duffy liberates both men and women.

The third chapter "Living in a Community: Social Education" spotlights the difference between actual and virtual society: the tourism catalogues contrast starkly with an immigrant's travels –the rich are always welcome and the needy immigrant is unwelcome. Duffy shows us that the world is not as innocent as we might think it to be, but is divided on the grounds of religion, race, culture, language, politics and much more, and therefore, it would be naïve to believe every place to be welcoming. That this sense of displacement and alienation is felt not

just by the immigrant, but also by those who can be/are ostracized due to social, religious, racial, linguistic, environmental and financial disparity is also made clear by Duffy in her work.

This chapter also looks at the social ills and disgrace, brought about by certain social errors or the unwise management of the social, physical, and mental aspects of life. It posits that the pursuit of physical beauty or acceptance in society is largely meaningless, and could quite quickly turn tragic. Duffy also stresses the need to look into the root causes of social ills, such as the disregard for the labour performed by women and the generosity of nature, which goes unnoticed and unappreciated, and substance abuse which often leads to social disgrace. Without negating the need for the financial security necessary for survival, Duffy educates the readers about the evils wrought by greed which can lead to disaster, or even a war, fought by the provision of money, for the acquisition of the same.

In the analysis of the chapters I have done a close reading of Duffy's poetry in the light of Bantock's guide to theorising education, at the same time I have also deployed insights gained from theorists such as Adrienne Rich, Elaine Scarry, Helen Cixous, Gloria Steinem, Maud Bodkin, Ruth Padel, Stan Smith, Susan Sontag, Amy Tan, Robert Frost and Antonio Gramsci for the consolidation of my arguments. The poetry of Duffy is almost prayer like in intensity, as, through a person's life experiences, they speak truths about universal suffering and joy, offering the readers an education on the abundance of secular comfort. Duffy was the Poet Laureate not only for the poetry reading elite, but also for children in schools, for families and for communities at large. She is so loved that she confesses, "The best thing I ever had was someone had one of my poems tattooed on them … I was really moved by that. I don't think I will ever top that" ("The Music of Being Human", unpaginated).

On the Future

In an interview with Joanna Moorhead, Duffy opens up about her vision for introducing innovative learning in schools:

> "What I'd like to do is create anthologies for other school subjects—for history, for geography, for maths … I think poetry can help children deal with the other subjects on the curriculum by enabling them to see a subject in a new way. So you'd have a maths lesson, and the teacher would hand out a poem about mathematics. Poetry is a different way of seeing something and seeing a subject in a different way is often a very good tool to better learning." (Moorhead, unpaginated)

There are already numerous anthologies edited by Duffy on themes such as love, the moon, war, attire, a conversation with the poets of the past, and on the golden jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. And while Duffy has written poems on school subjects like poetry, history, geography, and the social sciences, the readers have much to look forward to on other subjects such as mathematics, the pure sciences, and so on.

Much remains to be done as I have done only a select reading of Duffy's poetry, on themes pertinent to school, family and community education. There is a wide range of projects which can be taken up in the future on other themes such as work places, travels, religion, politics, language, nationhood, environment, climate change etc., and Duffy's range of style and prosody. Duffy's poetry is contemporary, and she being in her poetic prime, she may yet offer new themes and forms in the world of poetry. Duffy's contribution to poetry is so layered and

varied, that in Manchester Metropolitan University where she is the director of creative writing, she has plans to deliver a new home for poetry itself. Duffy explained:

> A great future project coming as soon as 2020 is the Poetry Library that we are building. This will be a testament in stone to what The Writing School at Manchester Met has been about for the last 20 years. It will be a brand new building and will offer poetry to members of the public, people who want to write, to students and it has been envisioned by all my colleagues here, all the poets here, blessed by the Vice-Chancellor, and I think that is going to be a fantastic legacy for the city. ("The Music of Being Human", unpaginated)

Duffy has spearheaded the popularisation of poetry, performing poetry gigs across the United Kingdom with fellow poets, Gillian Clarke, Simon Armitage, Grace Nichols and John Agard, going to poetry readings at schools, and even donating her annual Poet Laureateship prize money to Poetry Society, for a new poetry prize. Duffy opines, "I don't think poetry is ever going to be as popular as football or the movies, but I do think there is a place for it in our civil life" and that "there are times in your life when you do come to poetry" ("The Music of Being Human", unpaginated), and as far as contemporary issues and debates are concerned, Duffy in her interview with Lorna Bradbury reminds us that "Climate change is what everyone needs to be focusing on" (Bradbury, unpaginated). Duffy states, "I like to think that I'm a sort of the poet / for our times" and that "You do not have to be an educator" (Duffy, *The Other Country* 10). Without exception, Duffy truly is the poet and voice of our times, and she seems to be implying that one need not necessarily be an educator to be able to distinguish right from wrong, to learn, to think, to listen, to sympathise and empathise with fellow human beings and nature; she sounds a clarion call for everyone to be a part of the battle, for the change that we want to see.

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