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Classics Revisited:

Duffy's *The World's Wife* and Plato's Theory of

Forms

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Abstract

Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* has been thoroughly explored from myriad feminist perspectives. After all, her feminist revisionist poems defy phallogocentrism and the ubiquity of male discourse by endowing fictional female characters with speech and agency. However, this poetic collection has never been explored in relation to Plato's theory of Forms. This study brings the mythological poems of *The World's Wife* into sharp focus to evidence that Duffy provides a feminist portrayal of what Plato deemed as "immanent universals." This Master's dissertation seeks to analyse four mythological poems from this poetic corpus through the lens of Plato's theory of Forms in order to prove that the author not only subverts the myth –which was supposed to be a solid and fixed discourse– but also illustrates the Forms of Disappointment, Beauty, Power and Love from a feminist perspective, thus overthrowing deeply ingrained beliefs about the way we conceive these ideas and emotions.

In order to prove how the author illustrates Plato's immanent universals differently, I have examined in each poem its poetic language coupled with the relationship between a particular Form and its manifestation into the material world. To begin with, gold will be explored in "Mrs. Midas" to portray a feminine perspective on the Form of Disappointment. Secondly, the Platonic Form of Beauty in "Medusa" and its representation into the sensible particulars of snakes is explored to convey a different perspective of Beauty. Thirdly, the statue as a material representation is studied in "Pygmalion's Bride" to portray how Duffy subverts the hegemonic male view of the Form of Power. Finally, Love is the last Platonic Form to be analysed in "Demeter," which is depicted by natural elements to introduce maternal love as the purest Love of all.

By and large, these four polyphonic poems counterattack the father-controlled language discourse by offering an alternative vision of these universal concepts. These paradigms have been traditionally defined according to the hegemonic male gaze and Duffy evidences that these idiosyncratic cornerstones are questioned when analysed from a feminist perspective. Since the dawn of feminism our interpretation of the world has inevitably undergone a metamorphosis and Duffy is an outstanding proof of how our contemporary world questions some 'universal truths.'

Keywords: Duffy, Plato, Poetry, Feminism, Myth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES

This Master's dissertation seeks to explore four poems in Carol Ann Duffy's (1955-) collection *The World's Wife* (1999) through the lens of Plato's theory of Forms in order to prove how the author questions the vision of what Plato deemed as "immanent universals"—such as Disappointment, Beauty, Power or Love—by analysing them from a feminist perspective. In doing so, I will examine the relationship between Plato's transcendental sphere (immanent universals that transcend time and space) and material sphere (the world we perceive through our senses) in a selection of Duffy's mythological poems from *The World's Wife*: "Mrs. Midas," "Medusa," "Pygmalion's Bride" and "Demeter." Hence, this study aims to evidence that neither the myth nor these transcendental Forms are stable since all of them have been created and disseminated by a male perspective.

In order to prove the mutability of the apparently immutable, the goal of this Master's dissertation is twofold: firstly, it pursues to explore four feminine mythological characters so as to portray how Duffy re-creates a new personality for them: they are strong, brave, confident and above all, independent. In this context, this analysis shall also delve into quintessential feminist concepts and practices such as the importance of voice and point of view, the description of the abject, writing as re-vision or *écriture féminine*. Postmodernist landmarks to which Duffy resorts to will be also taken into account (chiefly dramatic monologue, satire and irony) not only to frame and contextualise her rewritings, but also to analyse the effects they trigger on the audience. Secondly, this dissertation seeks to examine the connection between the material and transcendental sphere in each poem to show how the author provides an unorthodox and ex-centric perspective of the Platonic Forms of Disappointment, Beauty, Power and Love.

All in all, these poems counterattack the father-controlled language discourse by offering an alternative portrayal of these universal concepts. Poetic language and literary techniques and devices (e.g. the use of foreshadowing or pathetic fallacy) will be uppermost to elucidate how these human qualities and emotions are depicted in a new light. After exploring alternative conceptions of these Forms in Duffy's mythological poems, I also aim to promote the use of this philosophical approach when it comes to studying different cultural artifacts. After all, the Forms are universal ideas,

something that is a key ingredient in any artistic work. After applying this theory, we realise that the depiction of human aspects and feelings have been portrayed according to the hegemonic male gaze throughout centuries, and it has thus, biased and polluted the way we see and experience the world.

1.2. METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

This dissertation combines an extensive literary criticism of Duffy's poems with philosophical reviews of Plato's theory of Forms. In view of this, this study embraces a holistic and interdisciplinary approach that merges two fundamental disciplines in the field of Humanities: literature and philosophy. By carrying out a combined analysis of philosophical and literary aspects, I aim to prove how many different truths can be unveiled when examined from different perspectives. Besides, being poetry the focus of this study, literary language and rhetorical devices will be thoroughly explored. The poems are analysed individually in the order in which they appear in *The World's Wife*. Since mythology and feminism lie at the core of this dissertation, I have selected the poems from this collection that deal with female mythological figures so as to explore the portrayal of different universal Forms. Each poem analysis includes an explanation about the original source of each myth in order to provide the necessary background for further study. Being aware of the events and characters that appeared in the mother source becomes pivotal when exploring feminist rewritings since deviations often entail ideological implications. By engaging in a comparative analysis I seek to highlight the feminist perspective that the author portrays regarding the immanent Forms of Disappointment, Beauty, Power and Love.

As to the structure of this TFM, the theoretical framework introduces the main literary, mythological, feminist and philosophical tenets that are of paramount importance for the development of this dissertation. As each poem is examined independently, the main section of this dissertation is divided into four clear-cut sections. Firstly, I study the symbolic reference to gold in "Mrs. Midas" to show the Form of Disappointment from the point of view of Midas' long-suffering wife, victim of her husband's foolish ambition. In doing so, I will explore how different references to gold, foreshadowing, rhetorical figures and humor seep into this feminized dramatic monologue. Secondly, the Platonic Form of Beauty in "Medusa" coupled with its representation into the sensible particulars of snakes is examined in order to illustrate a different perspective of Beauty; one told from this grotesque Gorgon. This poem delves into the postmodern portrayal of Medusa and the relationship between the material –

snakes– and transcendental sphere –Beauty–. By the same token, the symbol of the statue as a material representation is analysed in “Pygmalion’s Bride” to portray how Duffy subverts the traditional view on the Form of Power. This section explores the statue’s resilience and the sculpture’s ultimate metamorphosis to point to the author’s subversion of the articulation of power in the relationship between Pygmalion and Galatea. Finally, Love is the last Platonic Form to be considered in “Demeter,” which is illustrated through different natural elements. This part of the dissertation is further divided according to how different natural entities project Love: as a destructive and reconstructing force. After studying these poems through Plato’s theory of Forms, I will conclude by summarising the main findings and pointing out how this study could be useful for the interpretation of forward projection analyses.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. FEMINISM

Bearing in mind the aforementioned objectives, the theoretical backbone of this thesis will be grounded on feminism, myth and Plato’s Theory of Forms. To begin with feminism, it must be stated that when writing and literature appeared (around 3100BC), women already inhabited a man’s world. From then onwards, everything that was said, written and generationally transmitted was permeated by a male vision of the world, and it was presented as an objective unquestionable reality. In the words of Singh, “history is steeped in the greatness of men; the Western literary canon proclaims its male authors’ work as timeless” (2). Likewise, in terms of poetry, there was a long-standing assumption that this artistic form was an issue of male expertise. Poetry was a hallowed ground that could only be inhabited by men. When women encapsulated their flow of thoughts, ideas and emotions on a piece of paper, their works were often belittled or deemed as unworthy of reading in comparison with men’s superior excellence.

As Peukert states, the recording of historical and artistic material concerning women was practically nonexistent in Western patriarchal societies. However, with the passing of time, women rightfully started to ask where their part in history was and why they had been written out of it. Therefore, a necessity arose to deconstruct certain historical ‘truths’ and to make women visible in order to question the present and the past systems (1). In 1848, at the Seneca Falls Convention (New York), Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration, a manifesto that put forward several

resolutions on women's social and civil rights. Stanton's declaration was a quantum leap in feminism that ensured the protraction of women's participation in the public sphere since it eventually brought about legal reforms that enabled women to enjoy the same rights as men at the polling booth.¹ In view of this, by the end of the nineteenth century, women's opinions, viewpoints, testimonies and experiences started to matter more than ever to the public eye. The advent of feminism also seeped into the literary realm, where women started to gain awareness of the need to write and encourage women to start writing. For instance, Virginia Woolf fervently advocated in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) the right for women to have the suitable space and financial means to capture their own experiences on paper.

I would ask you to write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast. By hook or crook, I hope that you will possess yourselves of money enough [...] to dream over books and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream. (67)

Likewise, feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar brought to the surface the fact that the pen is tantamount to a phallic symbol, considering that only men can write. However, using this very analogy, Duffy picked up the pen to use it as an instrument of generative power in the poetic realm, thus evidencing that women can be also (pro) creators.

As a matter of fact, most of Duffy's work can be framed in what Elaine Showalter coined as 'gynocriticism,' that is, the focus on women's writing coupled with new frameworks for the analysis of women's literary works, instead of applying male theories. She writes during the First Wave of feminism and she openly displays her feminist agenda in her works. Her poems, always accessible and witty, serious and hilarious soon spread her feminist messages like wildfire. She has been the recipient of endless awards yet perhaps, the most important one, from a socio-political perspective, is her crowning as Poet Laureate in 2009. It is noteworthy that Duffy is the first woman, not born in England and the first non-heterosexual to hold this royal post, "joining after 341 years of male domination the likes of Dryden, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Ted Hughes or Andrew Motion (Lanone 2). The laureateship coupled with all Duffy's public

¹ Women's right to vote has been achieved in different places at different times. New Zealand was the first country to allow women to vote in 1893, but we have to wait until the twentieth century to see the spread of women's suffrage (US: 1920, UK: 1928).

appearances (radio, TV, universities, poetry competitions...) elevated her poetry and her message to a national level.

As a Poet Laureate, she has been in the public eye for many years and her poetic works have been explored from manifold perspectives. Above all, she is considered a realist poet who continues the “British tradition of social realism” (Schoonwater 3). Her realist poems are usually focused on minorities, oppressed groups and social outcasts due to their gender, race or sexual preference. For instance, *Standing Female Nude* (1985) “exposes how prejudices of race and class influence women’s life and future perspectives” (Schoonwater 5). Along with this poetic collection, Duffy’s subsequent poetic works, *Selling Manhattan* (1987), *The World’s Wife* (1999) and *Feminine Gospels* (2002), have garnered much critical attention, especially from the field of Feminist Criticism. After all, her main literary topics deal with female experiences or emotions including motherhood, love, female identity, sexual desire or gender constructions. In view of this, many of her poems have been thoroughly analysed in the light of the feminist theories of Hélène Cixous and Simone De Beauvoir, which validates the ensuing radical developments in the course of her writing (Kaur et al. 182). Cixous, championed the idea of the *écriture féminine*, in which women need to write poetry as a way of gaining strength through the subconscious, the place where the repressed survives (350). As she put it,

For phallogocentric sublimation is with us, anchored in the dogma of castration [...] women must write for other women and for themselves: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies for the reason, by the same law, with same fatal goal. (347)

Duffy embraces the aim put forward by this feminist critic since she creates “a new female discourse system that is distinct and powerful enough to shake the foundation of the one ingrained male-focused poetic imagination” (Zhou 133). The author’s mode of writing can be deemed as *écriture féminine* considering that her poetic discourse is characterised by puns, metaphors and new images. Her poems are fresh and markedly different from the father-controlled logical language in both form and subject matter.

Another eminent scholar whose contribution will help me to delve into Duffy’s feminist messages is De Beauvoir, who brought much revolution to the realm of

feminist writing. She explained the painful experience of gaining consciousness about what is to be the second sex. In Beauvoir's words, it is perfectly natural for the future woman to feel indignant at the limitations posed upon her by her sex (359). In all the poems included in this dissertation, women are presented as victims under the yoke of their (imposed) husbands, lovers or sons-in law. Definitely, Duffy embraced Beauvoir's revolutionary spirit and also encouraged women to bring about several political and social changes through self-discovery and introspection. After all, her poems shed light on women's consciousness and raise awareness about the restricting world in which women have been caged for years.

In *The World's Wife*, Duffy revises archetypal scenarios and female characters so as to introduce an alternative portrayal of them. The author presents us with thirty dramatic monologues about different wives married or related to a masculine hall of fame who denounce how they fall victims not only to their famous husbands, but also to the man's world. It embraces a broad spectrum of personas, ranging from biblical characters (Pilate's wife), historical (Joan Pope), mythological (Mrs. Midas), scientific (Mrs. Darwin) or even pop culture (Elvis' Twin Sister). Throughout this collection, the author "adopts a post-modern feminist stance with a vengeance" (Lanone 2), considering that these real, fictional and mythological female characters reclaim speech, and power (sexual many times)² in a more contemporary setting. "Duffy's mastery of personae allows for seamless movement through the centuries; in this complementary chorus, there's voice and vision for the coming ones" (Tadonio et al. 12). In her re-examination of feminine principles in folkloric thought, this work "sparkles with wit, intelligence and an impressive lightness of touch, while drawing on some weighty emotional experiences: loneliness, jealousy, self-loathing, desire or the fierceness of a mother's love" (Patterson 3). Duffy reverses gender roles, subverts traditionally held assumptions about women and includes a broad range of sexualities by giving voice to "wise-cracking women, sometimes cynical, scornful, or raging at the folly of their men, at other times blunt and bawdy" (Zhou 135).

Bearing in mind that the author "subverts whatever she considers to be part of the canon shaped by the male gaze" (Lanone 2), there are myriad of feminist perspectives from which this poetic corpus has been examined. As an outstanding example, Kaur et al. explored how this collection "emancipates female characters from

² See in "Pygmalion's Bride."

all kinds of sexual discrimination and marginalization found in the old myths and fairy tales” (182). Beyond question, these poems reject heteronormativity by pointing to the construction and deconstruction of gender stereotypes. Moggridge analysed *The World's Wife* coupled with Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* so as to evidence that “manipulating gender characterisation is effective in liberating one from the constraining standards of femininity and masculinity, thus encouraging the audience to re-evaluate their beliefs” (8). Likewise, Lanone offers a panoramic view of the different issues tackled by Duffy in her intertexts (such as love, pleasure or romantic clichés) by focusing on the poet's “intense awareness of gendered cultural constructs, and her attempt to appropriate the great tradition which she subverts, mostly by revisiting the dramatic monologue” (2). In addition, the articulation of power structures among *The World's Wife* characters has been brought to the limelight in several studies. As a representative example, Michelis and Rowland claim that “Duffy suggests that the relationship between the genders and the sexes is not defined by a hierarchical structure of power, resulting in the impression that men are always oppressors with women as their helpless victims” (25). These scholars exemplify this phenomenon in “Little-Red Cap,” where the heroine is presented as a strong young woman who does not feel threatened by the beast, and is able to help herself without the assistance of the hunter in its fictional source (25-26). Therefore, Duffy offers a refreshingly different approach from the way power dynamics have been traditionally studied in other feminist works that emphasise the outright confrontation between men and women. In a social context where male authority and control were major targets of the Third Feminist Wave, Duffy manages to create flat hierarchies and to empower her female characters without resorting to the binary opposition between male oppressor and female prey. Other researches took more unorthodox feminist approaches when delving into this feminist poetic collection, such as Ioannou, who carries out a feminist theological reading of “Pilate's Wife,” “Salome” and “Pope Joan” by exploring its religious and liturgical elements.

Since the dawn of the first feminist wave, revisionist literature aims to counterattack phallogocentrism by ‘rescuing’ female characters from the history of literature and endowing them with speech, authority and power. Duffy is an outstanding example of the deconstruction of the patriarchal cultural mores that have been deeply rooted in our Western society. She discovers uncharted territories for women and revises history to portray how the ubiquity of male discourse has influenced the way we

conceive the world. In her well-known article, “When we Dead Awoken: Writing as Revision,” Adrienne Rich envisions rewriting as a necessary tool to break up with the past. According to Rich, “re-vision –the act of looking back and entering an old text from a new critical direction– is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (18). In short, women cannot craft a new tradition until they fully understand all the stories that have been forged before and upon them. Duffy re-reads and re-writes popular, folkloric and mythological texts in order to rediscover, reassess and make available to a broad audience the plethora of hardships women had to endure.

Revisionist literature is one of the landmarks of postmodernism, and Duffy makes extensive use of postmodernist traits in *The World's Wife* to lead readers to question the veracity and authority that have been resting on these sacred and canonical texts. Just like the French post-structuralist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, Duffy despises the master narratives that have been controlling and shaping Western society and offers *petit recits* instead, i.e. mini-narratives that have also much to say about the degree of reality that lies behind the main story. She follows the postmodernist drive to absorb and transcend prior concepts and she does not hesitate to subvert everything she considers part of the male canon. Her revisionist poems illustrate several benchmarks of postmodernism, such as the use of dramatic monologue, a hybrid genre that merges lyric and dramatic elements by directly addressing an unseen listener. It is worth pointing out that the form of this poetic collection has also been carefully examined by Abad, who zooms in on the satiric and dramatic components in this revision of folkloric thought. By the same token, Holownia brings the use of dramatic monologue into sharp focus in order to point how this lyric form “allows for an effective channelling of the poet’s views in a masked way” (65). It goes without saying that Duffy’s choice of this poetic mould has a direct impact on the audience when listening to the Other side of the story. According to Peukert, Duffy’s collection “is clearly directed towards a female audience; she creates a web that connects the poems with each other and that also reaches out to the female reader to share the experiences, to maybe identify with them and learn a different part of history” (1).

Aside from dramatic monologue, perhaps the most obvious trait of these postmodern artifacts is intertextuality. This term was coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s and it was defined as a literary device that points to the interconnection among different works of literature. Jorge Luis Borges wittily referred to this intertextual

phenomenon when he mentioned that when we are reading his poetry, we are just hearing the voices of all the dead poets that had influenced him. The literary technique of intertextuality plays a core role in feminist revisionist literature as it modernises gender by offering new interpretations and representations of women that were seen as monolithic. According to Lanone, Duffy, “instead of merely challenging the tradition of male poetry chooses to quietly appropriate it, using intertextuality as a playful but powerful weapon (11). Duffy resorts to intertextual figures such as parody (subversive mode of imitation). The way and path the author takes in her aim towards subversion has also been contested by other scholars like Zhou, who proves that what Duffy stirs and subverts is a settled male-centered poetic imagination, but she does not carry out her plan in a subversive way (133). According to him, the author does not seek to wage a war between husbands and wives, or between males and females. Instead of subverting the man’s kingdom and myth, Duffy extends the space within it (Zhou 136).

By and large, *The World’s Wife* “engages with the central tenets of Western philosophy and culture, wittingly exposing their subversive nature and the often ‘ludicrous views’ in which they result” (Horner 152). Duffy frequently intertwines parody with satire when deploying humour to bring societal flaws and moral wrongs to the fore. According to Abad, the two major tenets of the satiric universe are the exposure of folly and the punishment of vice and transgression (10). The poet definitely manages to combine both principles when deleting the male’s perspective and granting voice to those silenced or forgotten female figures. According to Bloom, the satirist is, above all, an indignant voice, an idealist, firmly convinced of the possibility of human moral and social regeneration. The satirist displays general empathy with the world and despite everything, with its inhabitants (25-26). *The Times* also commented upon her harsh criticism, “Duffy takes a cheeky, subversive, no-nonsense swipe with a dish-clout at the famous men of history and myth. They don’t have a chance in hell of dodging her quick-witted wallop as she relays their stories from their spouse’s points of view” (Zhou 133).

At this point, it may be stated that the poet rescues these women literarily and metaphorically in *The World’s Wife* yet, despite their potent feminist message, she is far from being a radical in her poems as she indulges in humour, flippant wit and irony to convey her message in a mildly sarcastic way. Moreover, her choice of language reveals that, besides shouting out loud the plethora of ordeals women have to go through, she also aims to amuse her audience. Thanks to her grace at making the audience laugh and

meditate at the same time, we sympathise more with the female victim as we become more involved in the poems. In the words of Patterson, Duffy “wanted to use history, myth, popular culture and elements from cinema and literature but also to anchor it in a deeply personal soil and make an entertainment” (3).

2.2. MYTH

Unlike her literary forefathers such as Philipp Larkin or T. S. Eliot, who favored logic and cool reasoning, Duffy resorts to mythical and allusive mode of writing to illustrate the ills and flaws of contemporary world from a feminist point of view. “Myths are an important part of the literary canon, and this literary status has often been denied to female writers” (Schoonwater 7). Therefore, as Vujin states, it was only a matter of time before women started questioning their position in the mythological realm (45). In order to narrow the object of my study, this dissertation aims to focus on the specific area of research of mythological intertextuality. In this context, it is uppermost to underline the author’s choice of the myth, a fixed and solid genre. The myth forms part of the canon, which has traditionally operated to enforce racist, patriarchal and imperialist notions of whose art matters. “By deconstructing mythology, women poets reconstruct poetic expression and cultural landscape” (Vujin 54). Feminist revisionist mythology attacks the very foundation of this canon and, in doing so, asserts the validity of women’s authorship. Therefore, it is a practice targeted at reforming the Western literary canon, intent on viewing the construction of culture as an inherently politicized act (Taylor 5). We may say that the author enters into the canon and as a sort of inside job, she deconstructs it from within.

In Duffy’s work, “the feminized dramatic monologue subverts His/story into Herstory, addressing archetypal tales and Greek mythology as cultural constructs” (Lanone 4). These polyphonic poems give voice to the long-ignored female voices in mythology through a transposition of myths to modern times, thus engaging Ancient and classical world with contemporary society. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* describes *The World’s Wife* poems as “witty and lively; they emerge from the strong late twentieth-century reawakening of interest in classical myth, in part a response to Ted Hughes’ much praised *Tales from Ovid*” (Brown 448). This Renaissance-like revival of mythical subjects is used by Duffy to draw attention to how the myth has been yet another medium and means to ensure women’s subordination. After all, patriarchal system has been using the myth for “social, exegetic, validatory,

discursive, exemplary, referential, and (increasingly) overtly political purposes” (Boyle 355).

Bearing in mind the dominant role that mythology plays in our Western culture, Doherty explores the different nexus of symbols, roles and norms in Roman and Greek myths that structure contemporary gender relationships. Interestingly for this dissertation, she underscores that since the dawn of women’s movements for social and political rights, most recent appropriations of myths underscore gender differences (12). Definitely, in *The World’s Wife* we can find ample evidence of this phenomenon since Duffy’s presentation of Greek Gods and Goddesses often sheds light on gender asymmetry. Michelis and Rowland explored how the author re-views from a feminine, and often feminist, perspective the myth in its social and literary sense. In their article, they illustrate the hierarchical relationships between male and female mythological characters: men are wronged by treacherous women and femininity is accepted only if it is lived according to patriarchal law (26). Likewise, Tadonio et al. also focused on some of Duffy’s mythological poems to justify how the author redefines the myth through intertextuality in order to prove that “female figures were given new possibilities of representation” (12).

All in all, Duffy gives voice to invisible mythological female figures and transposes myths to modern times. Sometimes she focuses on already existing characters like Medusa or Demeter; others she even invents them such as Galatea or Mrs. Midas, whose names are never mentioned in the original source. The mythical approach provides a sense of universality to the critical message of the poems that might not have been present without it; vice versa, realism anchors the fantastical stories to the real world, which allows Duffy to engage with society more easily (Schoonwater 22). The portrayal of mythological characters mirrors the patriarchal society to which folklore belonged, maintaining gender relationships already embedded in the cultures that created them. In ancient Greece, women were portrayed as the vehicles for men’s downfall due to their deceitful and manipulative nature. Roles had been assigned and were crystal-clear: men were in charge and women were subordinated to their male counterparts (Meehan 2). Pessimistic and worrisome as this statement may sound, Duffy’s heroines are strikingly different from the original mythical ones and they always provide a solution or morale that is useful for the female community.

2.3. PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS

As noted, *The World's Wife*, labelled “a feminist manifesto” (Ioannou 2), has been extensively analysed from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. In the same manner, its mythological poems have been vastly explored by Feminist Revisionist Mythology. Several of the aforementioned contributions to the feminist realm will be the starting point of my analysis. Nevertheless, as this dissertation argues, Duffy's poetic collection can be also examined from a philosophical perspective. By exploring her mythological poems through Plato's theory of Forms, I seek to unveil fundamental truths that have remained unnoticed in her verses so far. In fact I have found no evidence whatsoever of any other literary text analysed from this philosophical angle. In view of this, Plato's theory of Forms will be the central axis of this TFM as it will evidence how Duffy subverts the traditional notions of the Forms of Disappointment, Beauty, Love or Power.

Before Plato's theory, the Eleatics³ argued for monism, i.e. the view that reality is one. Nevertheless, Plato put forward in his theory that there are many realities, thus advocating for pluralism. In fact, his theory of Forms reached such solid public agreement that became an alternative to Eleatic monism, (Cohen 2) entailing a significant breakthrough in the way the world was experienced and understood. The Athenian philosopher claimed that Forms and particulars exist in two different spheres, being the former the superior realm. In this hypothesis, every object we experience through our senses belongs to the realm of particular things. We do not ever sense anything abstract, but always an individual thing. On the other hand, the Forms are independent and separate realities that are rendered into sundry particulars, which can take on multiple appearances (Plato 476a 4-8). To understand this concept better, Lacewing provided an illustrating example. We can see a beautiful thing (e.g. the particular of a flawless rose) but we can never see Beauty (the Form). Beauty is a property that more than one thing can have; thus Plato claims that it is universal considering that Forms exist independently of particular things (1). After all, a beautiful rose can be burnt to ashes and then stops being beautiful. Nevertheless, that would not destroy Beauty itself. Forms are immune to destruction and change because they exist regardless of temporal or spatial axis and, therefore, exist in their own right. In contrast

³ Philosophic pre-Socratic school led by Parmenides around the fifth century BC. Cherubin has analysed the Eleatics views on “the nature of human understanding and the meaning of ontology” (3).

to Forms, particulars are “complex, changeable and imperfect” (Lacewing 2). In view of this, Forms are an ontologically superior version of a quality which should be referred as the intelligible, while the particular should be considered as the visible (Clegg 35). Hence, they are apprehended “not by the eyes but by the mind” (Perl 342). In Plato’s words, “ideas and Forms are conceived, but never seen” (507c2). In *The Republic*, the philosopher underlined the importance of differentiating between mere opinions about the Forms and true knowledge about these paradigms.

- And what shall we do if an individual gets angry because we tell him that he is giving his opinion instead of truly understanding a specific Form? Do we have a way to exhort and convince him that he is not right?
- It is a must to do so, indeed. (476a 3-5)

In this context, it is worth pointing out that the ‘neutral’ vision that we have about these Forms has been created and spread from a male perspective. After all, when Western philosophy appeared (6th century in Greece), women still inhabited a man’s world. By analysing these immanent and transcendent ideas together with their physical mutable particulars, this TFM aims to prove that Duffy offers another version not only of the myth, but also of the perception of these paradigms from a feminine and feminist perspective. In view of this, this analysis will merge literary and philosophical theories in order to prove how Duffy deconstructs two main mainstays –literature and philosophy– of the patriarchal world. Both, the myth and the conception of Plato’s Forms were supposed to be part of a fixed reality; however, these universal and idiosyncratic cornerstones are questioned when analysed from a feminist perspective. Duffy proposes not only an alternative version of the myth, but also of the way we conceive human qualities and emotions of Disappointment, Beauty, Power or Love in the poems of “Mrs. Midas,” “Medusa,” “Pygmalion’s Bride” and “Demeter” respectively. I must underscore that this study does not aspire to analyse the deconstruction of these Forms themselves; mostly, because it is utterly impossible. In contrast to the perishable sensible entities, Forms are eternal and unchanging and that is why Plato considered them ontologically superior. After all, the ideas of Disappointment, Beauty, Power or Love will always exist regardless of their representation into particulars. This Master dissertation does not pursue to dismantle the notions of Disappointment, Beauty, Power or Love but the concept we have of them and

the fact that they have been disseminated by the hegemonic male perspective and are, consequently, a glaring example of the patriarchal voice that has impregnated most literary works.

3. DUFFY, *THE WORLD'S WIFE* AND PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS

3.1. "MRS. MIDAS"

Having established the theoretical framework of this dissertation, an individual analysis of the selected poems will be carried out. To begin with, the first female mythological character we come across in *The World's Wife* is Mrs. Midas (see Annex 1). In the original source, Ovid describes in his *Metamorphoses* how Midas, king of Phrygia, is granted the wish to turn everything he touches into gold. Nevertheless, Midas soon realises about the detrimental effects of this golden touch. He cannot quench his thirst or hunger because food and drinks are also transformed into gold so he finally asks Dionysius to take the spell back. In her appropriation to the myth, Duffy does not only give voice but also visibility to Mrs. Midas as she is not even referred to or mentioned in Ovid's text. In her dramatic monologue, Duffy presents in eleven sextets Midas' wife reaction to her husband's unconscious wish.

3.1.1. THE FORM OF DISAPPOINTMENT

The analysis of this poem seeks to evidence how the author offers a different version of the myth as well as the Form of Disappointment by offering a feminist point of view. To begin with, this poem presents a different woman that does not comply with male behavioral expectations. In myths, as in any folkloric account, ideal women have been portrayed throughout centuries in the Western canon as passive, obedient and respectful towards their husbands. Their degree of adherence to these social requirements would indicate their husbands' level of disappointment or contentedness with their wives. Overall, "males had major opportunities to establish their ideology through narrating fairy tales and myths, which lay great emphasis on the same target" (Kaur et al. 181). For those women in the history of literature who woke up from lethargic passivity to take action, their consequences inevitably ensured mayhem for the male characters. The *femme fatale* has been a leitmotif in literary works to present women as the main cause of the heroes' downfall. According to Mario Praz, "there have always existed Fatal Women in both mythology and literature, since both are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of life, and the real life has always

provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters” (161).

Following the Christian culture we might find this recurrent negative female portrayal as early as Genesis. Eve tempted Adam and as a result, both were expelled from Paradise and condemned to misery and wretchedness. The Old Testament Eve is closely related to the myth of Pandora, a woman whose inability to refrain from curiosity, unleashes all kinds of miseries. In this case, the trickster god Hermes is the equivalent of the serpent, the eating of the fruit parallels the opening of the jar; and the outcome of each is the same, with the earth turned from a paradise into a problematic place where labor, birth and death are facts of life (Hassan 87). In Romantic poetry we can also witness this unfavourable depiction of woman in Keats’s *La Belle Dame*. She is a supernatural being who puts a spell on a knight to make him fall in love with her. She tempts the cavalier with her beauty and then destroys him by draining his strength and leaving him in the barrenness cold of winter (Hassan 88). In addition, Victorian novels also forged a very specific vision of women at that time. The ideal Victorian woman is beautiful, plays majestically the piano and must be in the hunt of a wealthy husband. Or in Jane Austen’s words: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (1). All things considered, some of the most famous female characters in literature were seen to be bound to disappoint men, either by eating a fruit, opening a box, or by being treacherous wives only interested in material gain.

Needless to say, money has been an overriding force in the world since its emergence as a means to trade good and services.⁴ From then on, men and money have been forging their relationship for centuries in Western patriarchal societies. On the other hand, “it is well known that a woman’s role politically, economically, and even conventionally, has always been under-estimated as coming second” (Kaur et. al. 180). Bearing in mind that men had been ruling the public sphere their whole lives, for them working and making money was uppermost. They were supposed to cover their wives’ basic expenses (at least food and shelter); and their honor depended on the fulfilment of this social requirement. Meanwhile, women were supposed to respect and enjoy the goods offered by their dutiful husbands. Katherine’s final speech in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* perfectly encapsulates this deeply rooted belief: “thy husband is

⁴ Gold coins were minted in Europe around the thirteenth century.

thy lord, life, keeper, sovereign; one that cares for thee and commits his body to painful labour whilst through liest warm at home, secure and safe” (128). As a result of this imposed social practice, many Western cultural artifacts often portray female characters as cold and aloof beings, only interested in money and in choosing a suitable affluent husband. Take as illustrating examples the romantic comedy *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) or the film noir *Blonde Ice* (1948), which show the stereotype of the self-absorbed fortune hunter that is introduced to ensure men's doom. However, as Jeannette Winterson stated in *The Guardian*, “Mrs. Midas,” “questions the masculine obsession with money-far from the stereotype of women as a gold digger.” Mrs. Midas longs for the only thing she cannot have: “his touch” (1.5.) It is precisely Midas the one that gets blinded by money whereas his downcast wife is an emotional being who falls victim to her husband's burning ambition.

Since the first line of the poem we realise that Duffy transposes the myth to a contemporary setting. The very first stanza introduces an ordinary housewife pouring some wine in order to unwind from the drudgery of everyday life. She is cooking dinner and standing in the kitchen while she sees her husband outdoors. The introduction of her husband in the last line of the first stanza makes crystal-clear that the focus is Mrs. Midas; the eyes and voice of this poem belong to her. In the following stanzas, Mrs. Midas still remains unaware of the gift her husband has been granted. When some supernatural events start falling into place as Midas touches objects, and she naturally asks her husband what is going on, he bursts out laughing, thus showing a total disregard for her feelings. After all, he prefers keeping the secret that is going to turn her life upside down and the suspense for a little longer. Despite his disrespectful attitude and all the odd things going around her she continued serving up the meal. Her “shaking hand” (1.22) while pouring the wine reflects the distress of this character and gives us a glimpse of the typical American sweetheart of the 1950s, who pretends that everything is fine in her blissful domestic sphere.

However, on learning about the tragic news, she panics and sends her husband to another room in order to avoid the lethal effects of his touch. In the sixth stanza, Mrs. Midas rises while Midas “sank to his knees” (1.23). This evidences that far from being a passive wife who sinks in her own sorrows, she takes action swiftly. She is not a submissive wife anymore but an enraging woman whose life has changed due to her husband's unwise decision. His actions have taken a toll on her mental state as she is “near petrified” (1.38), and in constant fear of being turned to stone if her husband

touches her. Nonetheless, the ninth stanza shows that far from being as futile as a stone, she finds a solution to her problem: “so he had to move out” (l.49). She makes him get into a caravan and drives him up to the woods and then abandons him. This evidences that Mrs. Midas is an active agent that proves not to be the ornamental object that society expected her to be. Her husband’s gift has become a burden for her and she is angry and disappointed enough to not to take him back. From time to time she visited her husband by following the golden footprints he leaves on his way. In the end, Mrs. Midas explains that what disappointed her most was not his greed or idiocy but his lack of thought for her. She sees herself as “the woman who married the fool/who wished for gold” (l.52-53). At this point, we see that Duffy does not hesitate to create a bold woman who dares to shout out loud and ridicule the idiotic mistakes of her husband. In this way, Duffy presents an empowered wife, who places her own needs and feelings over her husband’s and who is strong enough not to let her nostalgia regret from her decision. After reading the poem we realise that Mrs. Midas is not a flat character since her personality has been shaped and developed as a response to different external events and stimuli. At the beginning she seemed an ordinary vulnerable housewife, preparing dinner waiting for her husband to come back, yet as soon as she hears Midas’ new God-given gift she proves to be a strong, assertive and resourceful woman who blatantly displays her disappointment regarding her husband’s foolish actions. On the whole, this revisionist poem becomes a place where one can re-invent oneself and where new versions of identity can exist and thrive (Tadonio et al. 5).

This analysis seeks to illustrate how Duffy not only pulls down the cliché of the materialistic woman but also subverts the traditional Form of Disappointment in marriage. By and large, “Mrs. Midas” debunks the male crafted cliché in which women are bound to disappoint their lovers because they were considered to be the source of all evils. In “Mrs. Icarus,” a five-lined dramatic monologue also found in *The World’s Wife*, Duffy also endows Icarus’ wife with voice so she can complain about her high-flying husband.⁵ Icarus, just like Midas, is a Faustian character, an overreacher, whose ambition and sheer greed makes him liable for his wife’s suffering. In the same manner, “Mrs. Midas” is not about a man’s infatuation with a *succuba* but about a disappointed woman bewailing about her husband’s foolish actions that will eventually lead to their separation. Therefore, in this poem Duffy is not only giving voice and

⁵ “Watching the man she married//prove to the world// he’s a total, utter, absolute, Grade A Pillock” (l.3-5)

visibility to a forgotten mythological character but also offering a female perspective about Disappointment in marriage, a subject matter that remained in the shadow from women's standpoint in literary works.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Disappointment as: "the feeling of being sad because something has not happened or been as good, successful, etc. as you expected or hoped." Disappointment was an emotion vastly explored by male authors; thus, women were often the cause of men's disillusion and discontent as the aforementioned examples have evidenced (Eve, Pandora...). Dawson delves into the depictions of lovesickness, how gender roles are encoded and contested in courtships and the psychic pains of frustrated love in early modern literature (2). According to him,

Male lovesickness becomes associated with creativity, interiority, and intellect, attributes that allow men's disappointments in love to be placed within a wider cultural context of courtly romance, Neoplatonic philosophy, and Petrarchan poetry. Whereas the masculine intellect is capable of converting sickness and sorrow into an elevating understanding of life, women, it is said, are barred from such privileged forms of expressions because they lack the faculty of reason. (5)

Being women envisioned as witless and feeble-minded beings, the patriarchal system prevented them from conveying the deceptions and disillusion they have to live through in their romantic relationships. Duffy bestows voice upon Mrs. Midas to encapsulate the sorrows and lovesickness that this wife had to endure due to her self-regarding husband.

In view of this, the author portrays the Form of Disappointment from a feminist angle. Keeping in mind Plato's theory of the connection between the transcendental and material sphere, this Form is represented in "Mrs. Midas" through the material element of gold. This may struck as surprising considering that gold does not normally have negative connotations attached. Nonetheless, in his metaphysics, Plato dictated that one of the properties of the Forms is their independence from particulars. Because each Form is in its own essence, it is what it is, regardless of whether particulars participate in it. Therefore, the Forms can take a wide array of manifestations into sensible objects or can even take none at all (Lacewing 1). Hence, Disappointment will always be Disappointment, no matter what form it takes in a broad spectrum of sensible objects. The particular is changeable, bound to morph and definitely, not fixed. This instability

makes room for a variety of representations, being gold the chosen particular entity in this case. The positive connotations we traditionally ascribe to gold highlight the authorial intention to subvert deep-seated beliefs. She does not only blow up the stereotype of women as gold-diggers but also offers a female perspective on how women can be disappointed in marriage. Mrs. Midas underscores her disappointment with her husband by means of portraying gold in a negative light. In doing so, Duffy resorts to different techniques, including: references to gold, foreshadowing, rhetorical figures and humor. By analysing these techniques I am going to portray how Duffy creates a different version not only of this mythological figure but also of the traditional portrayal of the Form of Disappointment in literature.

3.1.2 REFERENCES TO GOLD

Taking into account that gold partakes in the characterization of Disappointment, the poem is brimming with references to this sensible object. Along with explicit references to gold, Duffy also uses literary language to render a portrait of different elements that contain this bright yellow colour. The “light bulb” (l.11), “fairy lights” (l.12), or “corn on the cob” (l.19) are illustrating examples of this phenomenon, and they are used to reinforce the ubiquity of gold (of Mrs. Midas’ disappointment). Furthermore, gold also appears in disguise in several words related to the lexical field of royalty, a supreme symbol of wealth. After all, Midas seems to have all the ingredients to be a king; he has a “burnished throne” (l.16), “the teeth of the rich” (l.20) and a “golden chalice” (l.24). Nevertheless, all these means are worthless to the king as he cannot drink from a golden goblet nor use his golden teeth to eat. Yet the poem does not only use gold to reflect its detrimental effects on Midas. His golden touch condemns him to be apart from his wife, who now fears his “honeyed embrace” (l.41). By referring to the word honey, a yellow sweet and sticky food, yet also an affectionate way of addressing your lover, Mrs. Midas openly expresses her disappointment over her thwarted marriage, as she cannot even enfold him in her arms. Perhaps the most powerful portrayal of gold is the destruction of the positive connotations of the phrase “to have a heart of gold.” Mrs. Midas wonders: “And who when it comes to the crunch, can live, // with a heart of gold?” (l.43-44) Her life has changed overnight, and she suddenly finds herself having to live with someone with a heartless heart. This example perfectly encapsulates the negative connotations that gold carries, as it has the power to corrupt and de-humanise Midas. Moreover, golden worthless objects in her random visits to her husband after being exiled including the “golden trout on the grass” (l.55)

or “a beautiful lemon mistake” (l.57) also underline Mrs. Midas’ disappointment, as these are evidences that lead and point to her blamable husband.

Nevertheless, being Disappointment an overriding emotion in this poem, love is also closely associated with this feeling. After all, if we are disappointed with someone is because at some point we cared for him/her. Hence, it is no surprise to find some scattered references throughout the poem to the love she had for her husband and the painful experience of losing the man who she once loved dearly. In view of this, other references to gold are also portrayed in a more positive light. Take as an outstanding example the reference to “amber” (l.46) to describe the eyes of the child she would never bear. Similar nuances of nostalgia might be found in the different parts of the day she remembers him, precisely: “in certain lights, dawn, late afternoon” (l.64), i.e. daytimes when the golden colour is present. This final line can be easily understood by anyone who has lost their partner as it illustrates Mrs. Midas’ yearning for Midas’ touch; missing paradoxically, their golden memories and moments together. By and large, Duffy includes a broad spectrum of references to gold, most of them negative as they shed light on the unfavourable side of Disappointment. However, at the same time she also conveys a more positive image of gold as disillusion and frustration are intrinsically linked to love.

3.1.3 FORESHADOWING

Foreshadowing is a technique ceaselessly used in the first stanzas in order to reinforce the inescapable fate that awaits the couple. According to Morson, “when a literary work uses foreshadowing, the character may experience time as anisotropic and asymmetrical with respect to knowledge, just as we do in life, but foreshadowing gives the reader a sign indicating what will happen” (47). Thus, with the impressive certainty of the Sphinx’s prophecy, Duffy foreshadows the imminent tragic fate that lies ahead the couple. For instance, the very first line sets the story in “late September,” this reference to the golden season not only aims to provide information about the seasonal time in which events take place but also to establish a specific mood; summer has gone by and gray weather is about to be the norm. In this case, the use of ominous imagery is justified as it highlights the negative consequences of gold. Besides “the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky” (l.8), thus foreshadowing the advent of cold days, especially considering that Mrs. Midas will not sleep in the company of her husband anymore. Despite all the brightness, shining and gleaming his husband is about to bring into the house, their days are bound to be dark and sullen. Furthermore,

spellings in some words such as the multiple use of /l/ in “filled smell” (1.3) or the use of long sentences not only contribute to create a tense atmosphere but also a sense of abundance. Midas’ wish for wealth and abundance leads him to turn everything he touched into gold, thus sealing the couple’s doom. Therefore, bad omens are used to keep us aware of how disappointment is on the verge to destroy and set apart lovers by means of foreshadowing its destructive results.

3.1.4 RHETORICAL FIGURES

Beyond a doubt, poetic language plays a starring role in poetry since it has the power of conveying powerful meanings in a few words. The compressed language of poetry demands the reader to ‘squeeze’ every word so as to grasp the meaning that lies at the core of the poem. In “Mrs. Midas” we can find several rhetorical figures that contribute to enrich and expand the message of the poem. For instance, Duffy makes extensive use of alliteration in order to provide a psychological portrait of the main characters that are involved in this dramatic monologue. To cite an instance, the repetition of the sound /p/ in “he plucked a pear” (1.9-10) enhances Midas’ power. Likewise, the recurrence of the sound /w/ in “where was the wine” (1.22), when Midas waits to be served dinner, reinforces the demanding and irritating nature of this character. Alliteration helps once more to characterise Midas as an overreacher; yet a foolish one, as the repetition of the sound /g/ makes the scene in which he “picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice” (1.29) more humorous. Despite realizing about the dire consequences of his touch, his ambition leads him to keep on touching several things. The use of asyndeton in this very sentence makes Midas’ eager desire endless and uncontrollable, thus pointing out that this character is prone to stumble over the same stone time and again.

On the other hand, Duffy also resorts to alliteration to construct the identity of the female character of Mrs. Midas. Take for instance the initial repetition of the sound /b/ (“burned in my breasts,” 1.48) and /s/ (“streaming sun,” 1.48) when she is yearning for her unborn child. This endows this wife with sensibility, someone who wishes to look after others, unlike her husband, a narcissistic and egotistic being who cannot see beyond his own greed. It is noticeable that all these references have the colour of gold inscribed upon them (“burned,” “sun”) and they act as the scars that Mrs. Midas will have to carry for the rest of her life. This golden touch contributes to heighten the sympathy we feel for this mythological character, whose dreams of having a family have been shattered by her rapacious husband.

Just as there is a psychological portrayal of characters through poetic language, pathetic fallacy –literary device used to attribute human emotions to inanimate entities– is also used in order to convey emotions through the weather or a setting. By setting the events in “late September” (l.1) in a garden in which they grew “*Fondant d’Automne*” (melting autumn) (l.10), it presents how the golden touch will have much to do with the leaving times. The autumn season reflects how the brightly coloured foliage has completed a cycle, and dismal weather is on the brink of being settled. This seasonal time alludes to the couple’s story considering that Midas’ gold will bring an end to their life together and will be the beginning of much gloominess in Mrs. Midas’ life. Duffy’s allusive mode of writing is extremely felt in this poem. For instance, in the tenth stanza, Midas asserts that he has listened to the music of Pan, a Greek God associated to music, woods and shepherds. This reference does not only show how well documented Duffy was about mythology but it also works to reinforce the reality of the fantastic world Duffy has crafted. However, the author does not hesitate to subvert some of these classical allusions to convey a feminist message. For instance, the last line in the seventh stanza reverses the traditional hallmark in fairy tales in which the prince kisses the princess to bring her back to life. “The kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art” (l.42) symbolises the lethal power of Midas’ lips. His kiss would seal her death by turning her into a golden statue. Hence, “work of art” is used here ironically because any artwork, just like gold, would be appreciated by any external observer; however, in this case, it will be her perdition. Midas’ sheer greed and avidity lead him to forget about the fact that he would never be able to live happily ever after with his wife.

It is worth stressing that dramatic monologues are tools that try to play on the reader’s sympathy. In the words of Alan Sinfield, “many dramatic monologues swing decisively to the pole of sympathy and aim primarily to involve the reader in the sufferings of another” (35). In addition, there are plenty of run-on lines and enjambments, thus forcing the reader to keep on reading to the next line. By making her testimony restless for the audience and by portraying Mrs. Midas as a non-materialistic and sensitive woman, she makes us sympathise and share her disappointment about her materialistic and inconsiderate husband. In addition, the rhetorical question: “who can live with a heart of gold?” (l.44) also contributes to Mrs. Midas sympathetic portrayal, as she encourages the audience to reflect on how their lives would be with someone like Midas. Perhaps the point in which we commiserate most with this female character is in the last line: as the asyndeton in which she enumerates all the things she misses from

her husband “his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch” (l.66) makes her nostalgic and suffering for her husband’s foolish deeds endless.

It is worth emphasizing that while portraying Disappointment, Duffy wittily intertwines comedy and horror. Considering that she chooses the path of irony and humour, this poem is less gruesome than others in that sense. It makes us feel sorry for Midas’ long-suffering wife but laugh at the same time. This neo-Ovidian writing leaves unforgettable moments such as Mrs. Midas rejoicing in her husband’s final ability to give up smoking for good, or when she rushes to save the cat and the phone from her husband’s lethal touch as a first response to this grim news (l.24). Sometimes she takes this comic tone further and even embraces a dark and comic perspective. For instance, by comparing her husband’s bed to “the tomb of Tutankhamun” (l.39) she equates the golden treasure to a tomb. In view of this, we may state that the author resorts to humour and flippant wit to convey her message in a mildly sarcastic way.

In short, Duffy seeps Mrs. Midas into the traditional version of the myth not only to empower this female mythological character but also to render Disappointment from a feminist perspective. This poem not only dismantles the stereotype of women as gold-diggers but also portrays an assertive and active woman who, far from sticking to her husband no matter what, does what she considers to be the best for herself. This idea echoes Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* when she stated that

On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in strength, not to escape herself but to find herself, not to abase herself but to assert herself— on that day love will become for her, as for man, a source of life and not of mortal danger. (124)

This bold woman is not scared to show her disappointment as she envisions her marriage as an ignominious failure which ends up by a foolish action of her husband. In this way, Duffy contributes to offer an alternative and feminist perspective to the way Disappointment has been illustrated in literary works. As it is evident from Plato’s theory, it becomes clear that claims made about the physical or visible world are mere opinion, some founded while others are not (Allebban 30). In the same manner, in patriarchal societies, Disappointment had often been depicted from a subjective male’s standpoint and few literary works dealt with women’s experiences regarding their disillusion in marriage. All things considered, “patriarchy dominated Western culture

for more than two thousand years and supplied the framework for what is to be known and how, i.e. in which contexts, it is to be known” (Peukert 2). Duffy, as a postmodernist writer does not hesitate to imitate this very Form of Disappointment including substantial changes such as voice or personality so as to create a new mythical portrayal of Mrs. Midas. As I hope to have proven, the Form of Disappointment is always cognitively present in the particular of gold and Duffy includes a wide array of techniques to do so, such as: references and allusions to gold, foreshadowing or rhetorical devices. Duffy’s amusing and engrossing lines coupled with the engaging nature of the dramatic monologue makes us sympathise with Mrs. Midas; the woman whose husband allowed his fervent materialism to cloud his senses and that led to the erosion of what gold actually was: their golden times together.

3.2. “MEDUSA”

Unlike Midas, who voluntarily demanded a specific gift, the next mythological character to be analysed did not succumb to the same fate. In fact, far from being granted a wish, what she received was a curse. The Gorgon Medusa is perhaps the most famous mythological character in this collection and her figure has been ceaselessly used in different mediums of adaptation such as films, comics, music or videogames. As an outstanding example, the band UB40 composed the song *Madame Medusa*, in which the former PM Margaret Thatcher is compared to this Gorgon. Likewise, Medusa has been a popular character in videogames (e.g. *God of War*, *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey*, *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Final Fantasy*), *DC Comics*, and films such as *Clash of Titans* (1981) or *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010).

Medusa took its first appearance in the fourth book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. She was one of the three sisters born to Phorcys and Ceto known as the Gorgons. Unlike her other sisters, Eurala and Stheno, she was the only mortal one. Medusa was considered the most beautiful woman in Ancient Greece yet as she was a priestess in Minerva’s temple, she was not allowed to cede to passions nor get married. Her beauty was universally acknowledged until one day, while she was worshipping in the temple of Minerva, the god Neptune raped her. Medusa was blamed for this transgression and the Gods punished her by turning her beautiful hair into filthy venomous snakes and by giving her the power to petrify her onlookers. She was further cursed with isolation on a remote island. Hence, she moved from being the object of desire to the object of anger.

From then on, men no longer pursued her beauty but her death. Perseus was one of those men willing to kill the mortal Gorgon and he finally chopped her head off to use it later as a weapon to overcome his enemies. It is curious how people avoid the part of the rape by Neptune and only remember that Medusa was a beautiful woman and that she was cursed and punished because of it (Tadonio et. al. 30-31). In view of this, Medusa's story could be easily extrapolated to our current society, where female victims of rape are doubly victimized since they are often blamed for the abuse.

3.2.1. MEDUSA'S PORTRAYAL

With this in mind, Medusa has become an enduring symbol of feminist struggle. Cixous already re-presented this Gorgon in a different light in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa*, a re-vision of Freud's interpretation of snakes as phallic symbols. She erases all the pejorative connotations attached to this Ancient Gorgon and introduces a different portrayal of her. She is neither the emasculating woman with castrated penises on her hair that Freud envisioned nor a *vagina dentata* that inexorably leads to the hero's downfall. Cixous relates Medusa's myth to male-centric thinking and alludes to the killing of Medusa by beheading as a way of stripping a woman of her ability of expression and confining her with the illusion of being weak and subordinate. In her essay, Cixous frees Medusa from her archetypical image and presents her as a beautiful New Woman whose future is no longer determined by the past (Kaur et al.182). By the same token, Duffy offers a contemporary representation of Medusa (see Annex 2), a portrayal that also significantly differs from the original source. In this feminized dramatic monologue made up of eight stanzas, the modern Medusa is presented as a long-suffering woman who is downright scared of her Greek God's (presumably Perseus) treason and infidelity. Jealousy makes Medusa's mental state degenerate to the point that she becomes a monster. In the very first line, the use of tricolon and asyndeton act as a sign of the endless mental burden Medusa has to carry: "a suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy" due to her partner's infidelity. When jealousy strikes, it has dire physical and psychological consequences on this Gorgon. "The love which once beautiful and passionate is corroded by distrust and cruelty coming from the beloved's betrayal. This causes an adverse change mentally and physically to the woman in the poem" (Tulus 12).

Jealousy is one of the most common human emotions and it carries pejorative connotations as it is associated to fear, insecurity or anxiety. All these ingredients permeate Duffy's poem. "The poet tries to show us about a feeling of rage which is

literally animated upon the speaker's scalp" (Tulus 5). However, just like Mrs. Midas, despite her disappointment we can also find traces of love within her contempt. All things considered, Medusa's feelings of jealousy are grounded on her deep love. Love triggers jealousy as she envisions a third party as a threat to her relationship. Nonetheless, she is fairly confident and seems to be right about Perseus' unfaithfulness (I know you'll go, betray me, stray // from home, l.15-16). Moreover, the repetition in "your girls, your girls" (l.39), coupled with the use of plural in "girls," manage to make Perseus more blamable, as if disloyalty and treachery were already inscribed on his nature. At this point, we cannot help but sympathise with this vulnerable character whose psychological condition still echoes women's contemporary anxieties of not being beautiful, fragrant and young enough for their husbands.

By the end of the poem we realise that Medusa is not an obnoxious being but a victim of her lover's disloyalty. Therefore, this modern Medusa, just like Cixous', proves not to be the castrating woman Freud had made of her. Instead, she is portrayed as an emotional and tormented being and not as a ruthless creature that deserves to be killed due to her threatening physical aspect. In order to depict this character in a more sympathetic light, the rhetorical questions and repetition of the past tense in "Wasn't I beautiful/ Wasn't I fragrant and young?" (l.40-41) work to heighten our sense of compassion for the loss of her past alluring attributes. Nonetheless, she is not a vulnerable and feeble being who whines about her current aspect. The oxymoron in the second stanza perfectly encapsulates that she is also a mighty being as her eyes contain "bullet tears" (l.10). Moreover, the empowerment of this Gorgon is perhaps best illustrated in the several repetitions to the personal pronoun "I" coupled with the possessive adjective "my" ("my mind" (l.2), "my head" (l.3), "my own" (l.14)). This evidences that she is not a possession as Neptune made of her in Ovid's text, but a possessor. Her strength is further reinforced at the end of the poem, as it shows a woman who is not going back to her ex-lover's arms. Just like Mrs. Midas, she has accepted her fate with dignity: Midas and Perseus cannot think beyond themselves and these women, after being victims of their husbands' respective flaws, will not go back to the man that made them suffer. Medusa is independent, strong-willed, and above all, unforgettable. This contemporary mythological figure retaliates from her former portrayal in the original text as her will is "to possess a man the way men traditionally possessed women: by treating them as objects" (Tadonio et al. 37). She is not a

beautiful ornament to be gazed upon; instead, she is the one who looks (the focaliser) throughout the whole poem.

3.2.2. THE FORM OF BEAUTY

After analysing how Duffy provides a modernised version of the myth by endowing Medusa with power, voice and independence, the next section aims to explore how the author goes further in the subversion of the male canon by offering a different version of the Platonic Form of Beauty. As women are considered objects to be looked at in patriarchal societies, the quality of Beauty gains importance in this context. Beauty has been incessantly included in artistic works and women have always been expected to conform to different beauty canons and parameters throughout history. In ancient Greece, curves, small breasts and an elongated figure were desirable physical traits for a woman. This is perhaps best illustrated in the curvy representations of the Venus de Milo or Aphrodite, the goddess of sex and beauty. However, with the passing of time the canon changed and beautiful women were (and still are) supposed to have a more athletic and slender body shape. All in all, the form of Beauty has been represented through specific canons in order to please the male eye. Women were –and still are– expected to come up with societal expectations when it comes to beauty touchstones and Medusa is an outstanding example of women’s fear in contemporary society of “being insufficient in a society that pays attention to beauty and behavior standards” (Tadonio et al. 37).

In his metaphysics, Plato stated that Beauty bears some close relationship with ‘the good’ –even though Socrates argued that the two were distinct– and he claimed that we can call beautiful the object of yearning (Pappas 4). More modern definitions of this Form, also follow the same line when defining Beauty, such as the Cambridge Dictionary, which defines it as “the quality of being pleasing, especially to look at, or someone or something that gives great pleasure, especially when you look at it.” Considering the utmost importance of the eyes when it comes to defining Beauty, this poem is laden with visual imagery to underline the importance of these organs. The author includes specific words that involve the gaze: “mirror” (l.30), plenty of adjectives that create powerful images such as: “foulmouthed” (l.8) or verbs that refer to the act of looking: “glanced” (l.18), “stared” (l.30), “showed” (l.32), or “look” (l.42). Bearing the aforementioned definitions of Beauty in mind, Duffy’s Medusa is far from being a pleasant object to the eye. Unlike the rest of mythological female characters analysed in this study, Medusa is a monster with poisonous snaky hair and whose

beauty, or better said, lack of beauty, emphatically displeases. In this context, Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection is of paramount importance. According to this leading scholar, "the abject refers to the human reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other" (12). Barbara Creed adapts Kristeva's term abjection to introduce the concept of the 'monstrous feminine,' by claiming that "the abject threatens life; it must be radically excluded from the place of the living subject [...] and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self" (9). Witches and female monsters have been recurrent leitmotifs in literature, especially in the genre of horror. Their presence disturbs identity, system and order since their physical features step outside the logical boundaries that society has carved out for them. They stand against the traditional Form of Beauty, just like Medusa, and the male gaze presented the lack of beauty of these female characters as an objective and undeniable reality.

In this poem, "Medusa is the personification of the wicked and corrupted woman, who dares to defy the established order of powers and therefore deserves to be punished" (Tadonio et al. 13). This mythological character is the embodiment of the monstrous feminine, which is further reinforced in the poem by several allusions to her body parts as well as to bodily fluids: "spat" (1.5), "spew" (1.34). Far from being beautiful, Medusa is a grotesque figure that does not respect boundaries and therefore, she is regarded as a threat to the symbolic order. It is worth pointing out that there is a stark contrast between the beautiful and the grotesque in the fourth stanza when she turns bees into "dull grey pebble" (1.19) and a singing bird into "a handful of dusty gravel" (1.22). Bees and birds, which epitomise beauty and freedom, are turned into grotesque entities. This might strike as familiar because this is precisely the story of Medusa herself. She was once radiant and beautiful and her praised physical traits were gone overnight. At this point we cannot help but sympathise once more with the poetic speaker, as we realise that no matter where she looks, she is condemned to carry her torturous vision of herself with her, unable to see anything beautiful ever again. However, this poem shows that a modern woman no longer needs to have pleasant aesthetic qualities to the male eye. Duffy provides a different perception of the notion of Beauty in order to prove that women who do not fit into the male system of order and logic should not be envisioned as polluted subjects. Medusa does not threaten social

order because Duffy has created a new order, independent from the male one, which forces us to reinterpret traditional notions such as the Platonic Form of Beauty.

3.2.3. BEAUTY AND SNAKES

In order to shed light on this feminine perspective on this Form, the relationship between the paradigm of Beauty and its rendition into snakes will be explored. Plato resorts to the metaphor of participation to explain the relationship between the sensible world and the transcendental world. Therefore, participation explains predication considering that a thing's being beautiful consists in, and is explained by, its participating in Beauty. In Plato's formula, x's being F is explained by x's participating in F-ness (Cohen 1). Applying this idea into this poem, we may state that snakes 'participate' in the creation of meaning of the Form of Beauty. Bearing in mind that this animal is one of the most loathed ones from the animal realm, the authorial choice to represent Beauty might struck us as surprising. However, just like gold was used to render Disappointment because the Forms can take any representation, snakes are used to portray Beauty. We may state that the snake is a double-edged sword since at first it is tantamount to lack of Beauty but at the end of the poem it becomes the best symbol of Beauty itself. At the beginning of the poem, Medusa's hideous appearance is emphasized and her powers make her look terrifying. Nonetheless, as we keep on reading, we realise that she is not a hideous character anymore. After wading through her thoughts we sympathise with her to an extent that our traditional notion of aestheticism seems to fade out. This section will explore the sensible particulars of snakes to illustrate a feminine standpoint on the Form of Beauty. In doing so, it will take into account the use of poetic language, imagery and symbolism throughout the whole poem.

To begin with, snakes have traditionally carried negative connotations as they are envisioned as treacherous, evil and averse beings. In Duffys' poem, Medusa's hair turned to "filthy snakes" (l.3), thus being a metaphor of her destructive thoughts. The use of the extreme adjective "filthy" in the very first stanza, presents these animals in a deprecatory way. Significantly enough, Duffy makes extensive use of imagery to picture snakes as a representation of herself so as to show how she is drowning in self-loathing and anxiety. "Imagery is a vivid descriptive language that uses one or more of the human senses" (Tulus 2). "Medusa" includes visual, olfactory and kinesthetic imagery, thus resulting in a highly sensorial and intense poem. To begin with, visual imagery permeates throughout the whole poem to represent the snakes. As an

outstanding example, there are plenty of references to colours that typically belong to a snake: “grey” (l.7), “yellow” (l.9), “ginger” (l.24), which are used to describe Medusa and her surroundings. It is also noteworthy that snakes possess all the parts of the body that are mentioned in this poem: “head” (l.3), “lungs” (l.7), “tongue” (l.8), “eyes” (l.10), “mouth” (l.35) and “heart” (l.37), thus stressing once more her reptilian features. Moreover, kinesthetic imagery is also used to present the hideous snake as an organic entity that “grew” (l.2) and “spat” (l.5).

Imagery also contributes to raise certain feelings on the audience by describing her hideous transformation. For instance, olfactory imagery in “breath stank” (l.6) serves to create the image of the fetid breath of the snake, an animal that is well known for eating corpses in decay, which creates a striking and disturbing image of this female character. Furthermore, gustatory imagery is also present when defining her own breath as “sour” (l.6), this makes us experience an acidic taste, thus underscoring the idea that nothing coming from this animal is pleasant to the senses. We feel helpless in the face of Medusa’s appearance, as she is a victim of love whose transformation has brought about the loss of her former beauty. It is noteworthy that at the beginning, the poem is brimming with alliterations that are related to the snake. As an illustrating example, the onomatopoeia “hissed” (l.5) and the alliteration of the sound /s/ in “spat on my scalp” (l.5) work not only to reinforce the presence of the snake in the very same line but also to mesmerize her audience, thus inevitably luring us to side with her. Likewise, the compressed spelling used in: “though my thoughts” (l.4) represents her entangled thoughts and emulates the movement of the snakes. Duffy plays once more on the reader’s sympathy by presenting a tormented woman like many others, whose suffering stems from her lover’s treachery.

As we keep on reading, the image of the grotesque snakes starts to evolve, and soon becomes a symbol of power. The dreadful portrait of the snakes starts to blur in the climactic moment when she looks at the mirror and sees a dragon spewing fire from the mouth of a mountain (l.35). This is a powerful image that highlights the strength and imposing authority that lie behind the dragon. Dragons are animals that take a serpentine-like form. In fact, the word dragon comes from ancient Greece and means “serpent giant seafish or snake.” This reptilian transformation reveals not only that Beauty is to be found in powerful women but also that we were (mis)judging this Form. After all, Ovid’s Medusa has been presented as an enduring symbol of ugliness because she did not conform to the canons written by the patriarchal society. Yet taking into

account that Duffy provides an alternative portrayal of Beauty, we must also change the parameters from which we assess whether particulars are beautiful or not. In this way, the image of the snake does not carry negative connotations anymore because we no longer assess Beauty through the hegemonic male gaze that chiefly focuses on physical appearance. After dismantling our traditional conception of aestheticism and learning about the Gorgon's story, we finally get a sense of victory for this angst-ridden woman, who, despite the endless ordeals she has to bear, manages to become the most powerful version of herself: a dragon. Besides, following the extended metaphor of this female dragon, Medusa makes crystal-clear how her male opponent looks like. He wears "a shield for a heart" and "a sword for a tongue" (l.37-38). Therefore, Perseus is depicted as the traditional fearless and ruthless warrior who is about to kill the monster she has become in order to restore social order in the community. In view of this, we feel helpless in the face of Perseus' cruelty as he is threatening and admonishing a woman who loves him dearly.

Perhaps we may find the best allusion to Medusa's powerful nature in the very last line, when she uses imperative tense –significantly enough, for the first time in the whole poem—to address her Greek God. This last line also works to reinforce the change of ideals regarding Beauty: "Look at me now" (l.42). This time, onlookers are not terrified nor turned to stone; we now see a different perspective of Beauty this time we look at her. Furthermore, the bold and defiant tone of the poem mirrors the snakes' traditional insubordinate nature. Definitely Perseus should "be terrified" (l.12) considering that this woman seems to make no attempt in giving up herself to please either the male eye or the patriarchal system of order and logic. Duffy is therefore offering a different perspective, a feminist one, on the paradigm of Beauty.

The poet has managed to offer a different portrayal of Medusa's magnificence and radiance by means of empowering her and making us sympathise with her. Throughout centuries, this Gorgon has been depicted as a universal symbol of ugliness and death. She was considered a cold blood being whose unsightliness disturbed the traditional patriarchal system. Nevertheless, in the end, we realise that she is just a vulnerable woman suffering for her beloved's betrayal. Medusa is tortured by her inability to come up with her partner's expectations in a romantic relationship, just like many other women in the world. Yet far from sinking into her own torment, she displays a blatant and bold personality which finally enables us to see Medusa's Beauty clearly. Her Beauty lies precisely on being a strong and powerful woman. This

dismantles the long-held belief that women who have been given the gift of Beauty must preserve it, as it was considered the best trait a woman can have. Women no longer need to fit the traditional canon of Beauty anymore and Duffy proves it the best way: by turning the most grotesque female character in mythology into a beautiful strong woman. Beyond a doubt, Duffy's Medusa is very much alike Cixous'. After all, "You only have to look at Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 27).

All in all, snakes are used at first to reinforce her negative physical traits but in the end they become the best embodiment of Beauty itself. The first part of the poem shows that our conception of the Form of Beauty was polluted by male gaze, as we were just focusing on her physical traits. Likewise, the presence of the snakes was equally conceived as repulsive. Nevertheless, Plato argues that in order to fully understand the paradigms of Forms, we should free our mind regarding the world of senses. "The mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change –the sensible world– until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, the brightest reality" (Lacewing 4). In other words, only by studying these Forms in detail can we acquire knowledge about how they have been portrayed throughout centuries, "so understanding Beauty entails going beyond the study of beautiful objects to the study of Beauty itself, which is the common element that is found in all these different objects that partake in Beauty" (Allebban 30). At the end of the poem, she is still a monster with snaky filthy hair but we no longer envision her as such. Our perception of Beauty has paralleled the undulatory (wave-like) movement of the snakes and it has swerved off from our traditional perception of what actually makes a woman beautiful: her power. We become so mesmerized and lured by the presence of the snake that we end up thinking: to whom should we not look into the eyes, Medusa or Perseus? All things considered, Duffy has reminded us that Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

3.3. "PYGMALION'S BRIDE"

The next poem to be analysed also echoes the idea of the importance of beauty canons and the objectifying male gaze upon women. "Pygmalion's Bride" (see Annex 3) is a glaring example of the chauvinistic idea that women are designed to be perfect because they are just an object to possess. In the original myth, Ovid describes how Pygmalion, a sculptor and king of Cyprus, builds a woman-like statue. Pygmalion was disgusted by women so he decides to create an ideal woman for himself. In doing so, he

starts to sculpt a woman out of a block of ivory. He immediately falls in love with her and he starts kissing, lavishing and talking to her. Venus feels pity for him and she decides to turn the statue into flesh and bones. Finally, they get married and have a daughter together, Paphos (Tadonio et al. 23). This myth gives us a glimpse of how the Greeks envisioned the perfect woman: beautiful, silent, chaste and fertile; a stereotype that will reverberate in subsequent Western literary artifacts (to cite some of the most popular female characters: Shakespeare's Juliet, Fernando de Rojas' Melibea or Cervantes' Dulcinea del Toboso).

Yet, perhaps, this myth best illustrates how Power operates in the relationship between men and women. In the Ovidian text, Pygmalion is the axis of the story, the focaliser through whom we see the world so we can never access to the statue's thoughts –let alone her feelings–. Definitely, the statue occupied a peripheral space in this myth as she is speechless and nameless. However, with the passing of time this myth will come into criticism for its inability to depict a real woman, thus widening the interest in the figure of the statue. For instance, Rousseau's melodramatic version of Ovid's myth grants the statue the name of Galatea, which she has usually kept ever since –and will be referred as such in this analysis.– Now at least, the animated statue was identified by a name, which might be read as her first step towards individuality. Consequently, in the course of time, Galatea begins to emancipate herself from her voiceless status as an artwork without character towards a more individual, conscious self (Eck 5-6). Duffy, as a fervent advocate of gender equality, does not hesitate to re-create and re-construct this myth by endowing Galatea with power, speech and authority. In the words of Woodard, “the monologue spoken by Pygmalion's statue implies irritation with the original story's creation of a pliable fantasy wife” (448). In seven stanzas of unequal length, this feminist revisionist poem deconstructs the traditional image of men holding a powerful position in a relationship.

3.3.1. THE FORM OF POWER AND THE STATUE

The notions of Power, leader and man have gone hand in hand for centuries and, consequently, it is no surprise that Power has been in the limelight of feminist concerns for years. Men have controlled every avenue of power whereas women were supposed to embrace a secondary and powerless position. Samman and Santos define empowerment as “the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes” (3). Bearing this definition in mind, men's empowerment

is a social construction to oppress women based on the long-standing belief that Power is an intrinsic and natural trait of the male gender. After all, “history has always been a space of male deeds, male achievements, male gain or loss. Or so is one to believe in retrospection” (Peukert 1). The idea of almighty men has always been projected from a male perspective, thus strengthening the belief that men must always be in control. Therefore, phallogocentrism seeped into the discourse to normalise the privilege of the masculine in the construction of meaning of the Form of Power. This idea is accentuated in the mythological realm, where the most powerful characters are male. We have been made to believe that only Hercules, Prometheus, Ulysses or Zeus would be capable of such heroic deeds; unlike women, who were –using Beauvoir’s metaphor– the second sex. Women in Greek mythology illustrate how crippled women’s rights were and how their role was seen as insignificant when compared to the self-sufficient Greek man.

Nevertheless, Duffy, as a postmodernist writer, is fully aware that everything that has been socially constructed can be also deconstructed, which is her best signature in her writings. It is crystal-clear that in Ovid’s text, Pygmalion embodies the chauvinistic belief that men must be in power and in control in a relationship. In this sense, the statue represented a ‘tabula rasa’ that could be filled with man’s wishes and fantasies (Eck 6): Galatea is literally man-made, utterly designed to satisfy the fantasies and wishes of her creator. Duffy’s poem also embraces this central idea as a starting point in her poem. Duffy’s statue does not have a say in their relationship, she is constantly forced and she finds herself in an oppressing and suffocating reality. Likewise, Pygmalion’s treatment towards her is firmly grounded on the deeply ingrained belief that women were inherently inferior to men, and consequently, less powerful. Nevertheless, Duffy subverts this traditional portrayal of the Form of Power by presenting the statue as a resourceful, independent woman who will use her sexuality as a means of generative power. As Cixous pointed out,

Men still have everything to say about their sexuality, and everything to write. For what they have said so far, for the most part, stems from the opposition activity/ passivity, from the power relation between a fantasized obligatory virility meant to invade, to colonize, and the consequential phantasm of woman as a dark continent to penetrate and to pacify. (157)

In Duffy's postmodern version of this myth, it is not Pygmalion's voice the one we hear when describing the sexual act. It is precisely Galatea who renders an account of her (feigned) pleasure, being this reason enough for Pygmalion to be scared of her. In this way, the author also subverts the archetype of the chaste woman, the Pamela-like who faints at any sexual advance. Sex remained buried as a taboo for women throughout centuries and hearing a woman talking about sex was considered something obnoxious and disgraceful. Take as an illustrating example when Catherine Deneuve appeared onscreen as the curious sexual day-laborer in the representation *Belle Du Jour* in 1969. Her representation of sex was considered so scandalous that Britain started to operate under full theatre censorship (Badham). Feminists are still wrestling for sexual freedom and in this poem the author presents a new portrayal of the statue as an empowered woman who does not only blatantly display her sexual pleasure but also who uses sex as a means to get rid of her oppressor.

Considering that the paradigm of Power has been traditionally portrayed from a male standpoint, this section aims to explore how Duffy offers a feminist perspective on this Platonic Form by deconstructing the power relations between Galatea and Pygmalion. We shall bear in mind that the Forms are in the world we experience with our sense, but they are not parts or members of it (Perl 343). Instead, we see their reflection. Yet in the realm of literature, these shadows have been orchestrated by the male discourse by placing Power in men as an ultimate truth. At the end of "Pygmalion's Bride," Galatea, the statue, becomes the best representation of this new feminist perspective of Power. She evidences that men are no longer in control but shrewd and sharp women like Mrs. Midas, who make use of her cunning to free themselves from their powerful partner. Just like gold was used to portray Disappointment in "Mrs. Midas," and snakes to yield a representation of Beauty in "Medusa;" in this poem the statue becomes the best symbol of Power itself. Therefore, this analysis intends to analyse the statue as the sensible object that partakes in the representation of an alternative vision of Power; one in which it is wielded by the woman.

3.3.2. THE STATUE'S RESILIENCE

In order to prove that the sculpture is the embodiment of the Form of Power, this section will explore Duffy's use of the extended metaphor of the statue throughout this poem. To begin with, as in the poems analysed so far, the lyrical subject is a woman who shouts out loud all the tribulations she has to endure due to her inconsiderate

partner. The use of first person narrator empowers this female, who is no longer the voiceless plain statue that Ovid made of her. She has independent ideas different from Pygmalion's, unlike in the original source, where she relies on him to learn the language, thus biasing her thoughts and polluting her vision of the world. Being the statue the narrator as well as the focaliser of the poem, she is the one that introduces the characters to the audience. Thanks to her mode of thought, we start to envision Pygmalion as a clear antagonist who uses and abuses the lyrical subject. In this poem, "Pygmalion is not the persevering Ovidian lover anymore, but almost resembles an obsessed stalker" (Eck 12). He displays a pathological obsession that threatens her and, therefore, the male becomes a looming presence who tries to position himself as the superior member in the relationship. On the other hand, the statue at first might symbolise most obviously the metaphorical and literal objectification of women. As the very title points out, the statue is Pygmalion's bride, a possession whose identity is defined in terms of her husband. In addition, the very first stanza introduces the statue as a defenseless being in the hands of her oppressor who acts as he pleases with her body. Moreover, the first five stanzas are brimming with references to the personal pronoun "he" in an attempt to suppress her speech. The suffocating male voice works to underscore the predatory nature of this man, who tries to exert his power time and again over the statue.

Nevertheless, the statue is far from being silent, submissive and non-complaining –all the traits that the misogynistic Pygmalion looks for in his creation–. He attempts to exert his power in the relationship by means of domestic violence and abuse, something that men have been resorting to as a way to make clear who takes the reins in a relationship. Galatea's discomfort becomes palpable in the very first stanza where she desperately hoped that he did not touch her. "But he did" (l.3). The use of the conjunction "but" creates an abrupt sense of violation and it carries strong connotations of sexual abuse. She is not interested in Pygmalion and we will soon learn that every time he lays his hand on her it hurts her. He is described as an animal with "claws" (l.32) unable to control his primitive instincts, ceaselessly trying to implement his power over the woman. As a matter of fact, the statue epitomises the violence on the female body, which has been incessantly mistreated by men throughout centuries as a way to seize power.

However, as mentioned above, the statue is the best embodiment of Power itself and this can be reflected in Galatea's attitude towards her husband's manifestation of

power. For instance, she uses materials that are traditionally part of statues as the vehicles of the metaphor to describe her body: “my stone-cool lips” (l. 4), “my marbled eyed” (l.8), “my ears were sculpture” (l.12), “my heart was ice, was glass” (l.36). Therefore, by defining her body in terms of tough materials (stone, marble, sculpture, glass) she is pointing out her strong nature. In addition, the use of the first person possessor coupled with these hard materials indicates that she is the one that rules over her body. In view of this, Pygmalion has failed in her attempt to exercise his power over the female body by conquering it. In this context, it is of utmost importance Duffy’s choice to use the statue’s body parts to stress her power. As Cixous stated: “censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard” (267). Galatea embraces this idea and she provides an account of her statue-like body and the violence that is inflicted upon it from a feminine standpoint.

By and large, the statue is far from sinking into submissiveness and subjugation as the male character would wish or expect. Men have been abusing women to reinforce their position of power as well as to boost their self-esteem. Nevertheless, Duffy’s statue is a symbol of resilience who withholds with stoicism all the hardships she has to face in the hands of her abuser. Her strong attitude might be best encapsulated in the metaphor of her ears being “sculpture, stone-deaf shells” (l.12) while he is raping her. This is a powerful image that she uses to evade herself from that painful reality and to imagine herself in the sea⁶ drowning him out while he cries out for help. Therefore, even during this painful moment of the rape, her sculpture-like form acts as a shield to which she runs for shelter in order to avoid falling into subjugation. Furthermore, she refuses to show any outwards signs of her oppression. Despite all the violence Pygmalion attempts to inflict upon her body, she resists, something that bewilders him. He is further perplexed when he looks for marks and bruises over her body, but he cannot find any trace of them. “He squeezed, he pressed” (l.27) yet he could not find any explicit symbol of his Power inscribed on her body. The asyndeton and syntactic parallelism in: “he looked for marks/ for purple hearts/ for inky starts, for smudgy clue” (l.29-31) contributes to make the statue’s power endless. He is staggered by the fact that this woman shows no evidence of the power he has been exerting over her nor mentally or physically. The statue is, thus, an alternative representation of the Form of Power, this time told from a female voice. She “didn’t shrink” (l.24) or “would not bruise”

⁶ According to popular belief, if we approach a seashell to our ears, we can hear the sea sound.

(l.28) in order to evidence her strength and determination. She is not willing to prove to be the inferior sex by giving up to her abuser's wishes. The statue is not a 'tabula rasa' anymore but an independent, confident, assertive and powerful individual who will eventually defeat Pygmalion. The strong statue "showed no scratch, no scrape, no scar" (l.33). The alliteration of the sound /s/ makes the audience feel somehow at ease, even after witnessing the plethora of afflictions she is forced to go through. Despite all the physical mistreatments she had to endure, the statue is strong like a rock. At this point we might realise that the simile in the very first line "like ivory" not only points to her feelings of aloofness towards her husband but also to underscore her sharp and tough personality. In short, "while Ovid's statue seems not to move because of modesty, Duffy's Galatea does not move because of her reluctance" (Eck 12). Only by having access to her train of thoughts can we understand the real personality of this character. She "played the statue" (l.25) in order to make Pygmalion fail at this attempt of exerting power.

Besides, his treatment of the statue as the inferior sex is also reflected in the way he deals with her, by giving her many presents that are stereotypically liked by women or treating her like a child. He brought her "presents, polished, pebbles" (l.17), the alliteration of the sound /p/ works to enhance his economic power as he tries to buy her happiness through materialistic things. This act points to yet another way men have been exerting power in a relationship over women; precisely by buying them gifts so as to evidence their superior financial power. Virginia Woolf also pointed out in *A Room of One's Own* how women's deprivation of economic means was also a mode of oppression. In Woolf's words, "intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time" (37). Pygmalion firmly believes in the stereotype of the materialistic woman who enjoys her man's gift-giving skills as he calls all these presents: "girly things" (l.22), thus assuming that all women want the same. In addition, the repetition of the words "and" in everything he bought her –"pearls and necklaces and rings" (l.21)– contributes to reinforce the fixed idea that women's happiness can be reached just by offering them these accessories. In the words of Beauvoir, to be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to prim and dress herself but also to repress her spontaneity. Any self-assertion will take away her femininity and seductiveness (127). He treats her like a little girl, gives her toys, as if she was an inferior being in constant need of

protection and supervision. Nevertheless, the statue is far from complying with this societal practice and she sees him as “dumb” (l. 20) for believing so. Therefore, contrary to heteronormativity, she shows reluctance towards these gifts and presents him as a fool to the audience, thus making him fail once more in his attempt to wield power. So far, we realise that he had been unsuccessful on all the occasions he tried to implement his power. Despite his domestic abuse or his stereotyping of women as mere objects whose feelings deserve no consideration, in the end the sculpture is the one that exercises the real power. It may be true that in the first five stanzas Galatea does not explicitly take any outward action that reveals her power but the use of her voice, coupled with all the references to the strength and power that this statue holds, work to dismantle the archetype that men are the ones in control in a relationship. No matter how hard Pygmalion tries to mould her body and mind, the powerful statue makes all these attempts futile and even ridicule.

3.3.3. THE STATUE’S ULTIMATE METAMORPHOSIS

The statue gains power progressively as the narrative unfolds, especially in the last two stanzas. Just like Mrs. Midas reaches the conclusion that “he had to move” (l.49) to alleviate her mental distress caused by her husband; Galatea, after realizing that playing the statue is no longer efficient to do away with her tyrannical ruler, she announces: “so I changed tack” (l.39). She decides to have sex with him and blatantly display her pleasure. Keeping in mind that this behavior was traditionally attributed to the masculine role, Pygmalion, “an early worshipper in the long tradition of poetic and artistic idealisation of the feminine” (Wainwright 51) cannot cope with her sexual roughness so he flees in terror once he witnesses the statue’s transformation. Hence, this makes us realise how “manly power and the desire for control is melting down because of a simple turn in her tact” (Zhou 134). Her revolutionary sexual act is significant in this feminist poem, considering that “sexual freedom has become another realm of women’s experience for patriarchy to conquer” (Badham). In this context, it is worth considering the story of the Propoetides, also included in Ovid’s text. This chapter anticipates the myth of Pygmalion to justify why he became a misogynist. The Propoetides were female inhabitants of Cypris who did not worship Venus and, as a result, the goddess turned them into the first prostitutes. Due to their shameful business, they finally lost their humanity and were turned into stone. Ovid justifies Pygmalion’s decision to ensconce himself in bachelorhood by the negative example of the Propoetides as he was horrified by their countless vices (Eck 1). In view of this, Duffy

wittily uses the very source of Pygmalion's hate towards women as a way to free this female mythological character. Her strategy to liberate herself from that situation is precisely to give him what he wants; not passively, because that would mean to surrender to him. She knows she must act in a way that will make Pygmalion disgusted by her. Given the circumstances, she decides to show pleasure during sexual intercourse, while in reality she is making up a farce as she is performing a passion she does not feel (Tadonio et al. 27). Her striking manifestation of pleasure is too much to process for Pygmalion, who feels the urge to leave her, thus granting Galatea her treasured freedom unwillingly.

Metamorphosis is a leitmotif that takes place in several mythological stories, yet in this poem the metamorphosis of the statue is not grounded on a transformation from lifelessness to life as in Ovid's text, but from a passive agent to an active one. In addition, Duffy illustrates the transformation of the statue in both form and content. To begin with the form, we realise that the sculpture's metamorphosis can be proved in the poem's layout. Unlike the previous stanzas, the last two are much shorter, which contributes to add up tension. Likewise, these final lines are written in a more informal tone. This "colloquial and casual tone, though far away from aggressive and radical, successfully creates an ironic tone toward male voice" (Zhou 134). Moreover, the sixth stanza includes several half rhymes and internal rhymes such as "So I changed tack/ grew warm, like candle wax" (l. 39-40). In this sense, rhythm mirrors the progression of sex intercourse and it explodes into an orgasm. All this evidences that she is in control now, she is the active agent that carries out the action, thus dismantling the deeply rooted belief that "men pursue, women are pursued. Men act, women are acted upon" (Taylor 15).

In terms of content, we become aware of the fact that the portrayal of the statue has been empowered. As an outstanding example, the statue is defined differently by using the simile "warm, like candle wax" (l.40). Therefore, she is not cold "like snow" (l.1) anymore, but a warm being who daringly displays sexual pleasure. She "got hot, got wild" (l.44) during the sexual intercourse, thus unleashing her animal and primitive instincts and only worrying about her own pleasure. Her blatant sexual activity is too much for Pygmalion to cope with, and his reaction of fleeing might be read as male fear of female sexuality. As Cixous pointed out: "we've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with stupid sexual modesty" (287). The statue makes use of the stereotypical chaste woman to use it in her favor considering

that she subverts the traditional idea of male power over the female body. Women's sexual freedom is a threat to patriarchy and once men are not in control anymore the most obvious reaction –as to any external threat– is fear. After all, Galatea, just like Medusa, becomes an abject that threatens the patriarchal system of order and logic and, therefore, her aberrant presence strikes terror into her husband. As a matter of fact, the statue's emancipation from Pygmalion might be translated as her liberation from male sexual domination.

The statue is the predominant voice during the sexual act, the one that “began to moan” (l.43) and manifested her overt sexual behavior when narrating her actions through a vivid kinesthetic imagery: “arched, coiled, writhed” (l.45). However, in the very last line of this stanza, she announces that her pleasure and orgasm was “all an act” (l.49). This reinforces the power that lies on the statue as she is an intelligent and resourceful woman who strikes back her oppressor by virtue of her cunning. Galatea is intelligent enough to outwit her master and by blurring the traditional power relations she evicts Pygmalion from her bodily territory. In the end, she proves that she is not a child that deserves to be treated as such but an empowered woman who ousts her husband from his position of power. This idea also reverberates in another poem from *The World's Wife*, “Little Red Riding Hood,” where male peril rises an inspiring driving force that transforms the little red cap from a vulnerable into a mature, self-conscious and daring woman (Zhou 134). In this postmodern version of the traditional folktale Little Red Riding Hood, the little girl is not a vulnerable woman who needs to be rescued by a male woodcutter but instead picks up an axe and violently kills the wolf “as he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat” (l.31). In the same manner, Galatea stops being a naïve girl and turns into a bold and self-conscious woman driven by her survival instinct who tries to vanquish the male predator. Hence, in this postmodern appropriation of Ovid's myth, the happy ending is applied this time to the female character who hasn't “seen him since. // Simple as that” (l.50-51). It is noteworthy the lack of punctuation in the very last line, thus making her power seamless. After witnessing all the hardships this woman had to endure, we finally get a sense of victory in the light of her sabotage on the traditional Form of Power.

Duffy's bride is a strong, determined and formidable character who battles against the restrictions set upon the female agency such as domestic violence, sexual abuse or women's stereotyping as feeble and passive beings. Women were not supposed to hold any sort of power –let alone sexual one–, yet the statue proves not to be an

object brought to life just to keep on being treated as an object to the male gaze. Instead, she proves to be a free-willed individual whose strength not only prevents Pygmalion from imposing his power but also crowns herself as the powerful partner in her relationship. In short, the notions of agency and power have garnered scrupulous attention in literary works from a feminist perspective. The Form of Power was supposed to rest on the male partner in a relationship, yet Duffy deconstructs this androcentric perspective by presenting the female statue as the best embodiment of Power.

3.4. “*DEMETER*”

The next poem to be analysed (see annex 4) does not revolve around the traditional male-female relationship but around two female mythological characters: Demeter, the Greek Goddess of harvest, and her daughter Persephone, the Goddess of spring. According to the original Greek myth, Persephone was gathering flowers in a meadow with her young friends when the earth opened up and Hades emerged on his horse-drawn chariot to carry her off into the Underground. Demeter, who was distraught when her beloved daughter was abducted, embarked herself on a relentless quest on her behalf. She demanded Zeus, her brother, and the one who had orchestrated Persephone’s marriage to Hades, to bring her back. Otherwise, she will not let fruit or vegetables grow on earth. As a human genocide was not clearly in the God’s interest, Zeus sent Hermes to the depths of the earth to bring Persephone back. However, as she is leaving the Underworld, Hades prevailed on her to eat the seed of a pomegranate which condemns the world to change forever. She will be forced to spend half of her time in the mortal world with her mother and half of her time in Hades’ world, thus bringing seasonal change with her (Mackie).

In this poem, Duffy seems to make amends with classic mythology for the first time in the whole collection since this time she neither alters the original version nor provides an alternative one. The author delves into the character of Demeter to expand her renowned strong feelings of attachment towards her daughter. In this postmodern adaptation, the female mythological character is still used to represent the purest Love of all; the one that a mother feels for a daughter. Duffy’s Demeter is the focaliser who describes the reencounter with Persephone and the one who illustrates that motherly love is an overriding force that surpasses everything. This poem poetizes the Greek Goddess’ “historical evolution from an enraged and revengeful yet generous goddess to

a wise mortal woman who has renounced her dangerous powers for Persephone's sake" (Bijelic 12). She has been stripped of her supernatural powers in order to encapsulate mundane consciousness. This time, the mythological female character has been granted a voice not to talk about disappointment, treachery or power, but about the genuine love between two women.

3.4.1. THE FORM OF LOVE

Being Demeter's Love the fulcrum of this poem, this section aims to explore the Platonic Form of Love and its representation into natural particulars in order to prove how Duffy illustrates this Form from a feminine and feminist perspective. To begin with, the paradigm of Love is perhaps the most recurrent and universal topic in literature and definitely, a major source of inspiration for bards. Love is what drives people to sacrifice themselves for others but also a deadly force that degenerates into lunacy or violence. In any event, the common denominator of the different manifestations of Love is that it has been traditionally been projected from a male perspective. Likewise, in poetry Love has been traditionally rendered as the romantic relationship between men and women. Males often communicate in their discourse their infatuation with a female, who becomes the recipient of the man's romantic love. Take as prime examples the treasured love poems written by leading poetic voices such as Shakespeare, Percy Shelley, Robert Burns or Neruda. Not only Love between men and women has been incessantly explored in literary works but also among men themselves. In this context, the notion of homoeroticism shall be introduced as it indicates the tendency of having feelings for a person of the same sex. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is a glaring illustration of this phenomenon since the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is framed upon romantic friendship and homoeroticism. In this context, it is worth considering Plato's definition of Love. For Plato, the best kind of friendship (*philia*) is that which lovers can have for each other. It is a *philia* that is born out of love (*erôs*), and in turn feeds back into *erôs* to strengthen and to develop it. More specifically, Plato's theory of Love is fleshed out in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. Like many Greeks of his era and social position, Plato is keenly interested in the same-sex desire that can exist between an older and a younger man (Burton). This loving practice grounded on the preference of sameness over difference has been traditionally embraced by men, who resort to homosociality to maintain their social status quo. In the words of Hammaren and Johansson.,

This common and somewhat overexploited use of the concept referring to how men, through their relations to other men, uphold patriarchy tends to simplify and reduce homosociality to an almost descriptive term that is used to show how men bond, build closed teams, and defend their privileges and positions. (1)

In view of this, in patriarchal societies, male bonding makes room for the imposition of masculine norms, desires and wishes. On the other hand, women were denied the entry to this sacred realm, thus making them believe that this type of love was unattainable for them, as if only men were capable of reaching such a level of bonding and mutual understanding.

On the whole, the sharing feature among different texts about the Form of Love is that men are always participants in this emotion, either in its projection or reception. No matter whether he is the lover or the object of desire, the male figure has been omnipresent. Due to the ubiquity of male discourse, the relationship and bonding between females remained fairly unexplored in the literary field. Nonetheless, Duffy subverts “traditional literary dynamics by prioritizing women’s relationships with other women over their relationships with men” (Taylor 29). Specifically, the relationship between mother and daughter in fairy tales or myths has been traditionally portrayed in a negative light. According to Warner, in the original spread of folklore there is an emotional truth to mothers’ jealousy of their daughters (125). Besides, the “good” mother is usually dead or absent, thus leaving the innocent offspring into the hands of a woman who is trying to play the role of a mother. This evil figure bears repulsive traits such as vanity, narcissism or burning ambition like the step-mothers of Cinderella or Snow White. Their presence threatens the patriarchal order –just like Medusa’s appearance or Galatea’s sexual power– and, thus, they have to die or be severely punished so as to purify society. These wicked mothers display the tendency to mistreat and take advantage of their naïve daughters and do not hesitate to act as being aloof, distant and uncaring towards them. Duffy gets rid of this stereotype of the evil female parent and presents an adoring mother willing to sacrifice herself on behalf of her daughter. *Demeter* epitomises real Love, as it sheds light on the fact that the purest Love of all is not to be found between two lovers or intimate male friends but between a mother and a daughter. In addition, there are no traces of male presence in this poem, mainly because no other kind of love could rival a mother’s unconditional and dearest affection for her daughter. In view of this, “Demeter” clearly challenges the traditional

vision of the Form of Love by focusing on the projection of the innermost feelings of a devoted and loving mother.

3.4.2. LOVE AND NATURAL ELEMENTS

Following Plato's theory in which the Forms take on specific material representations in the sensible world, this section aims to analyse how the Form of Love is portrayed by means of different natural elements. Contrary to the previous poems, where I explored each Form coupled with one particular rendering, in "Demeter" multiple sensible entities will be examined to delve into the paradigm of Love. As Cohen puts forward, "we are in the habit of posting a single Form for each plurality of things to which we give the same name" (6). Consequently, Love, as any Form, can take on a broad spectrum of entities in its representation, being weather conditions, lakes, air, flowers or the moon in this poem.

It is not by mere chance that the role of ensuring harvest and agriculture has been assigned to a female agency. Demeter embodies the entrenched belief that upholds that women are traditionally regarded as closer to nature whereas men are closer to culture (Roach 50). After all, nature is a quintessential feminine concept, also referred as 'Mother Nature' or 'Mother Earth.' Demeter, who is life-giving and life-sustaining, has been a symbol thoroughly explored in ecofeminism. For instance, in the book: *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Demeter is mentioned as an outstanding example of how women blur the boundaries between the human world and the vegetable and animal realm. When this happens, hybrid forms like the Goddess of harvest appear to merge with natural entities (Donovan 182). One of the fundamental points of ecofeminism is that: "the way we think about and treat the environment is related to the way we think about and treat woman" (Roach 47). Nevertheless, this viewpoint that parallels women to nature has also been criticised by feminists. After all, the mother in patriarchal culture is the one who makes disappear our waste products, satisfies our needs endlessly and without any cost, loves us and will take care of us no matter what. Nature is perceived as female, a virgin resource to be exploited, an asset to be owned, harnessed and mined (Roach 47-48). However, for the purpose of this dissertation I will just embrace the idea that Nature –Demeter– is metaphorically equated with the figure of the loving mother and for this reason, this poem remains a glaring example of *écriture féminine* that offers a fresh and new perspective on Love. The following section seeks to explore the exponential Love of this mother by analysing

the function that different natural entities fulfil in defining the mother's relationship with her daughter.

Being Love the Form that is manifested in different natural elements, Duffy makes extensive use of natural imagery throughout the whole poem. In fact, the poem's structure can also be framed according to seasonal change (the transition from winter to spring), which mirrors Demeter's inner state of mind and feelings towards the arrival of her daughter. In the two first stanzas gloomy, cold and unstable weather conditions are used to portray the mother's feelings regarding the loss of her daughter. However, in the third stanza Persephone arrives, heightening her mother's low-spirits and bringing a sense of rebirth and renewal to the wasteland her mother had been inhabiting. In order to prove how Duffy uses the natural world as a vehicle of Love, the poetic form, use of pathetic fallacy, imagery and rhetorical devices will be taken into consideration.

To begin with the poetic form, "Demeter" is written as a fragmented sonnet: it has 14 lines, a rhyming couplet and it conforms to its traditional narrative scheme: introduction, central conflict and resolution of the problem. The choice of the sonnet is worth considering since this poetic form is broadly believed to be the best container of the language of love. In view of this, Duffy seeps into the traditional canon once more to subvert it from within and uses it as a means to convey her feminine and feminist perspective. Instead of using this poetic mould to deal with the fortunes and misfortunes of a traditional man-woman relationship, she uses it to contemplate a mother's genuine love for her daughter. Moreover, its fragmentary outline mirrors Demeter's inability to cope with the physical separation from her daughter and the final rhyming couplet symbolises the harmonious union between mother and child. This phenomenon evidences once more Duffy's ability to merge form and content and present it as a unity.

3.4.3. LOVE AS A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE

As mentioned before, this poem is clearly divided into two parts that show the two different emotional states of mind that Demeter goes through in relation to her daughter. Love is presented as an overriding force that gives the mother a reason to live yet, at the same time, her fervent attachment and devotion is also the very source of her distress and uneasiness. Bearing in mind that Demeter's mood mirrors weather conditions, Duffy makes considerable use of pathetic fallacy throughout the sonnet in order to make the different facets of Love visible. The two first stanzas underline Love's destructive effects by using inclement weather conditions and a gloomy and bleak imagery. Demeter is alone, sinking into her misery and dismay, suffering the loss

of her daughter. Her despair is reflected in the rough atmospheric conditions she has to endure. The low-spirited poetic speaker announces in the very first line that she has “lived in winter and hard earth.” Following the mythological tradition, the arrival of winter is tantamount to Persephone’s absence from the earth. Without her daughter, her existence on the ground was “hard” and unbearable. Therefore, Demeter’s Love is introduced in natural terms by using references to “earth” and seasonal time. The next lines give us a glance at Demeter sitting in her “cold stone room” (l.2), wrestling with her thoughts and trying to cope with the coldness of that tough winter. This image perfectly captures the feelings of solitude and suffering of this mother, who inhabits a jail-like place since she lost her daughter to Hades. In fact, the “cold stone room” may also point to Persephone’s stay in the Underworld, who is also a prisoner in a lugubrious and sorrowful place. In the words of Mackie, “Persephone’s transition from the feminized world of a flowery meadow to the unrelenting male world of Hades is fundamental.” As mentioned above, this poem is free from explicit references to men, and it namely pivots on two female agencies. Nonetheless, it cannot be forgotten that Hades is the one to blame for Demeter’s loss and her feelings may be well understood by any mother whose daughter is taken away before her very eyes. Her burning desire to protect her innocent child from the evil world could not prevent Persephone’s forced entry into Hades’ *inferno*.

The inhospitable world this mother has been condemned to wander about without her daughter is reinforced in the second stanza by resorting to other elements related to the natural world such as rocks, minerals or landforms (e.g. lake). To begin with, the allusions to pebbles and materials such as: “stone” (l.2), “granite” (l.3) or “flint” (l.3), point to the harsh conditions she has to face. It is worth stressing the thermal properties of these minerals since they are known for conducting away our fingers’ warmth, thus reinforcing the frosty atmosphere in which Demeter has to move. Moreover, the use of asyndeton in the enumeration of these rocks contributes to make the ordeals she has to go through everlasting. The use of glacial imagery (“ice,” l.4) also mirrors the mother’s sense of void and despair. Besides, the powerful imagery of her “broken heart” (l.4) falling over the “frozen lake” (l.6) evidences her wounded psyche as she was on the verge to sacrifice herself. Furthermore, the reiterated use of enjambment and incomplete stanzas emulate her emptiness and sense of alienation.

Demeter, who is supposed to be the Goddess of the earth and fertility, is next to a “frozen lake” (l.6). The territory that surrounds her is barren and definitely not the

fertile land that the earth used to be when Persephone was by her side. According to Bijelic, “she seems imprisoned by the forces of nature she is supposed to govern. The change of seasons is out of her control as well as the exact moment of Persephone coming from a far-away land” (12). Her inability to harbor life and preserve fruitfulness introduces a vulnerable woman who, far from acting like one of the twelve Olympian Gods, seems to sink into her sorrows. By and large, these two first stanzas give us a glimpse of how a world without love looks: cold, lifeless, stark and void of meaning. Duffy renders a striking portrayal of the devastating effects of Love by using different natural entities that contribute to capture the hostile and stifling atmosphere in which the devoted mother is found without her daughter.

3.4.4. LOVE AS A RE-CONSTRUCTING FORCE

Nonetheless, Duffy brings an end to Demeter’s suffering visually by using an end-stopped line for the first time at the end of the second stanza. This definite punctuation mark closes the stage in which the mother laments the loss of her offspring. From then on, the subsequent lines encompass the most favorable effects of Love by using a much more gentle imagery and more favorable weather conditions. The third stanza announces that: “She came from a long, long way” (l.7), thus introducing the arrival of Persephone/spring. The repetition of the word “long” evidences how much she has been awaiting her daughter’s presence. She had devotedly longed for her return throughout the tough winter and, finally, Persephone brought with her all the sense of renewal and rebirth that her mother needed. In fact, the repetition of first person possessive adjective when addressing her child as “my daughter, my girl” (l.9), coupled with the excessive use of commas in this stanza work to underscore how badly she needs to keep her daughter close to her. Persephone came to strengthen the fragile mental state of her mother and Love becomes, this time, the very source of Demeter’s blissfulness.

Furthermore, these stanzas are also saturated with pathetic fallacy, as there is an obvious connection between the mother’s feelings and natural conditions. Translating this idea into Plato’s theory, the Form of Love is represented in different natural particulars (fields, flowers, air or moon) to present Demeter’s genuine motherly love. Persephone is walking “across the fields” (l.9), “bringing all the spring flowers” (l.10) thus sharply contrasting with the barren territory we were presented before. Persephone

does not wander the asphodel prairies anymore,⁷ but a rich land brimming with flowers and blossoms. Flowers are a potent symbol of Love and the arrival of the spring, epitomises Demeter's high spirits and joyfulness for having her only child with her. Significantly, Persephone walks "in bare feet" (l.10), not only accentuating her innocence but also her connection to nature, as she renounces to all sort of commodities offered from the material world. Within this settled bright weather, the natural phenomenon of air also contributes to heighten Demeter's feelings for her daughter. "The air softened and warmed as she moved" (l.12), and this presents how Persephone's presence makes Demeter's world change. In fact, in the personification of this inanimate entity, the poetic speaker uses the words "soft" and "warm," providing a sharp contrast with the former "tough" (l.3) and "cold" (l.2) atmosphere of the first two stanzas. In addition, the personification of the sky –"the blue sky smiling" (l.13)– elevates Demeter's happiness to a universal scale, as if all natural elements agreed upon these women's re-encounter. By the same token, the alliteration of the sound /s/ in the two final lines: –"sky smiling" (l.13) and "small shy" (l.14)– makes the audience feel at ease and therefore, encourages us to join in the celebration of their union. Along with the fields, flowers and air, the moon is the final natural symbol that Duffy uses to convey Demeter's love. The "new moon" (l.14) is the last natural symbol resorted to in this poem and it is of utmost importance. The adjective "new" adds up the sense of renewal that this female agent needed. Besides, the moon is a potent symbol of feminineness, as its rhythm parallels women's menstrual cycle. Hence, in this poem, the natural satellite becomes the ultimate symbol of the strong bond that has been forged between both females and therefore, this poetic creation is a conclusive proof of Duffy's attempt to present the Form of Love through feminist and feminine lenses.

In short, Demeter embraces different natural elements to convey her deepest feelings towards her daughter. Being the Form of Love represented into the particulars of a host of natural entities, the author takes advantage of this variety to portray the two different faces of love. During Persephone's absence, she uses unfavorable weather conditions and a dismal imagery to project her feelings of solitude and helplessness. Nevertheless, no sooner had her daughter set a foot on the ground than the atmospheric conditions bettered, thus mirroring the mother's emotions. Miscellaneous natural elements (flowers, air, moon) merge with Demeter's inner state of mind and bring a

⁷ Asphodel flowers were thought to be common in the Ancient Greek Underworld.

sense of renewal and peace to the tormented mother. At this point, it becomes clear that Love is a double-edged sword since, despite being the source of excruciating pain, it is also the reconstructing force that makes life worth living. Or in other words, we all have to go through harsh winters to fully appreciate “a blue sky smiling.”

Despite this fluctuation in the portrayal of Love, if there is something unremitting throughout the whole poem is precisely Demeter’s abiding love. Come rain or shine, she will love and care for her daughter. Everything she has been, seen and experienced is directly linked to Persephone. Hence, we might describe the love of the Greek Goddess of harvest as evergreen. The idea of Love being a timeless entity that does not submit to the ravages of time also reverberates in Duffy’s poem entitled “Hour” where, by stating that “Love’s not time beggar” (l.1), she is pointing to its outright refusal of imploring for more minutes, hours or days because it is inherently independent from it. Demeter’s genuine love for her daughter is eternal, seamless, unique and it proves that no other kind of love can rival a mother’s. Demeter, who has the word mother already embedded in her name,⁸ epitomises motherly Love as the supreme manifestation of affection. As a matter of fact, the portrayal of this Form is notoriously different from its traditional representation, where the purest and most genuine Love was traditionally found between a man and a woman or between two men (homoeroticism). The main focus of “Demeter” is the love between two blood-related female characters and this poem is definitely a powerful closure to the collection that manifests that a mother’s love surmounts everything. Hence, this postmodern poem fits as a perfect ending to *The World’s Wife* because it finally brings truce to the war that the author had waged against men throughout the former poems. Demeter’s sheer Love eclipses all the thwarted relationships that had been told before and succeeds in making the audience savour the typical sweet ending of a fairy tale.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, mythology, just like fairy tales, has been used as a medium to explain our abstruse and complex reality through a fantastic mode of telling. However, as Warner states, “the more one knows fairy tales, the less fantastical they appear; they can be vehicles of the grimmest realism, expressing hope against all the odds with gritted teeth” (31). These accounts cast women in the role of passive, chaste and dependent

⁸ The ancient Greek word for “mother” is meter” (Mackie).

beings, thus sharply contrasting with the courageous, intrepid and enterprising men. Besides, these stories have been transmitted to children for centuries to perpetrate which traits were desirable in both genders. However, modern adaptations begin to recognise a change in societal values, being evolved and morphed to mirror present day values. Heroines possess more freedom to make choices and more changes in their lives as they pursue their highly articulated dreams (Nanda 249). In Cixous' words, "women should break out the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem" (257).

Duffy's *The World's Wife* embraces Cixous' idea since she endows Mrs. Midas, Medusa, Galatea and Demeter with speech, power and agency. Male mythmakers had disseminated their stories and had spoken on their behalf and, as a result, none of these women was devoted assiduous attention. In view of this, these mythological characters do not only fall victims to their husbands, lovers or sons-in-law but also to the father-controlled discourse, which perpetuated the portrayal of women as subordinate, feeble and prudish (Galatea) or as monsters that deserve to be killed (Medusa). Others, like Mrs. Midas, simply fell into oblivion as we find no trace of her existence in the original source. Duffy, a postmodern writer fully aware of how master narratives belittle and relegate ex-centric writings to the background, enters the mythological canon to deconstruct it from within. The author seeps into His-story to explain how Midas' unconscious wish affected his marriage, to portray Medusa's appearance in a different light, to set Galatea free from her oppressor and to delve into the abiding love between a mother and a daughter. Poem after poem, Duffy has eroded the truth that lied at the core of these canonical texts by providing an alternative version of the myth. By and large, she has bred a new generation of women who bring to the fore that "the personal is political" by exposing sexuality, motherhood, frustrated marriages and domestic violence into the public eye. In order to break the silence of these mythological characters, the author resorts to dramatic monologue. By taking on the mask of different fictional personae, the author allows us to delve into the innermost experiences and emotions of different wives, mistresses, lovers or mothers.

Duffy is definitely gifted for ventriloquism and the personal stories of Mrs. Midas, Medusa, Pygmalion's bride and Demeter contribute to resist and subvert master narratives. Duffy is skeptical towards these *grand* stories as they sacrifice verity for the sake of maintaining order and, thus, they are untrustworthy. Hence, these poems show the postmodernist trend to absorb, use and abuse previous concepts so as to transcend

and subvert them to unearth a hidden truth. Overall, the author makes extensive use of postmodernist landmarks such as parody, irony and satire. In her poetic creations, she combines light-hearted tone and dark humour –as in “Mrs. Midas” when she equates her husband’s bed to Tutankhamun’s tomb– with serious and solemn tone –when denouncing sexual abuse in “Pygmalion’s Bride–.” Duffy takes on the path of irony and satire towards gender politics and thus, aside from drenching her poems with incisive comments and flippant wit, she undermines the original version of the myth –as happens in the strikingly different portrayal of the grotesque Gorgon Medusa–. All in all, Duffy’s skillful combination of hybrid postmodern techniques “add inertia to the continuing crosscurrents of linguistically formal and avant-gender practices” (Mhana et al. 105).

Undoubtedly, feminism is at Duffys’ fingertips and her revolutionary revisionist poems garnered much critical attention from different branches of feminism. In fact, as this dissertation has evidenced, *The World’s Wife* incorporates quintessential concepts from the feminist realm such as the abject, the monstrous feminine, the *femme fatale*, *écriture féminine* or ecofeminism. However, this poetic collection had never been explored in relation to Plato’s theory of Forms. As I have proven before, in her postmodernist appropriation of these myths, the author does not only subvert the myth – which was supposed to be a solid and fixed story– but also portrays human qualities and emotions in a new light, thus also overthrowing unwavering beliefs about the way we conceive the Platonic Forms. Thanks to the voice these mythological characters are granted, we are acquainted with female experiences, feelings and thoughts, which had traditionally remained in the shadow for centuries. Disappointment, Beauty, Power and Love had been defined according to the hegemonic male gaze and Duffy makes a different portrayal of these Forms available in her feminist poems. In order to prove how Duffy illustrates Plato’s immanent universals in a different way, I have examined in each poem its poetic language coupled with the relationship between the Form and its manifestation into the material world. By virtue of these new representations, several useful morals for our contemporary society can be extrapolated from each poem.

For instance, Mrs. Midas makes her disappointment and rejection towards her husband visible. This emotion was frequently explored by male authors and, consequently, women were believed to be prone to disappoint men and to be the cause of men’s downfall. The Form of Disappointment is presented through the particular of gold. Duffy resorts to; explicit and implicit references to gold, foreshadowing and a host

of rhetorical devices such as asyndeton, alliterations, rhetorical questions and metaphors that contribute to underline Mrs. Midas source of disappointment. This poem may well have an impact on the millions of Mrs. Midases who fall victim to their partners' foolish mistakes and lack of thought for them and, therefore, are sunk in a mixture of disappointment, love and nostalgia. "Mrs. Midas" encourages women to shout out loud their disappointment and rejection towards their husbands and to be assertive and independent enough to bring an end to their failed marriages and continue with their lives.

Duffy's heroines are far from being silent and they are willing to denounce deeply ingrained beliefs such as societal demands when it comes to women's beauty standards. The attribute of Beauty was considered the best trait a woman could aspire to and this idea had been incessantly encapsulated in different artistic works. Duffy places her postmodern Medusa in a contemporary setting, where women are still expected to conform to the beauty canons and parameters dictated by society. The grotesque appearance of this Gorgon threatens the patriarchal order and emphatically displeases the male eye so Medusa has always been presented as a dreadful and hideous creature that deserves no mercy. Nevertheless, Duffy's "Medusa" illustrates the Form of Beauty in a different light by the rendition of this paradigm into snakes. At the beginning, this animal is presented as unpleasant to the senses by an extensive use of visual, olfactory and gustatory imagery. Throughout the poem, alliterations and onomatopoeias –that emulate the hissing of the snakes– and other literary devices such as rhetorical questions and vivid and graphic descriptions of her body make the audience sympathise and side with Medusa's luring presence. In the end, the snake metamorphoses into a powerful dragon and, at this point, we are able to see Medusa's Beauty clearly: she is a beautiful strong woman trying to come to terms with the betrayal of her treacherous lover. In this poem Duffy blurs our traditional notions of aestheticism and evidences that Medusa's Beauty lies on her power. In fact, this new image of this mythological character still reverberates in our contemporary society, where we can find Medusa's face as a symbol of beauty, fashion and power in the logo of the luxurious brand Versace. In a society that devotes so much attention to beauty standards, Medusa has become an enduring ground-breaking aesthetic model.

Women no longer need to come up with societal expectations regarding traditional beauty canons and men can no longer mould the female body or mind as they please, as "Pygmalion's Bride" evidences. This poem deconstructs the portrayal of the

traditional Form of Power, which was normally attributed to men, especially in marriage. By exploring the connection between the paradigm of Power and the particular of the statue, Duffy subverts the traditional power relationships between Pygmalion and Galatea. This time, the statue is the one that wields power and uses it to cast aside her husband from his superior position. Rhetorical devices helped me to delve into the interrelation between the transcendental and material spheres. For instance, thanks to the metaphors to describe her sculpture-like body and the use of kinesthetic and graphic imagery to recount her sexual encounter, the statue dismantles the long-held belief that men must always be in control. Without the shadow of a doubt, “Pygmalion’s Bride” deserves feminist praise as it provides a feminist perspective of Power while engaging with women’s contemporary hurdles such as women’s objectification, men’s superior financial power, domestic violence or sexual assault. Duffy’s bride urges females who are trapped in toxic relationships to stand up for themselves and to take the reins in their relationships.

In order to leave aside all the disappointment, violence and anguish of the former poems, Duffy casts Demeter in the role of closing *The World’s Wife*. By bringing the relationship between a mother and a daughter into sharp focus, Duffy portrays in a different light the traditional Form of Love, which was chiefly examined by men. Furthermore, maternal love remained rather unexplored in fantasy writings and, when portrayed, mothers were presented as vile and uncaring beings that show no attachment towards their daughters. On the other hand, Duffy’s “Demeter” epitomises motherly love as the purest Form of Love. Moreover, this poem is an outstanding example of what Cixous deemed as *écriture féminine* since it explores the experiences and emotions of two female characters by means of new images, allusions, and potent symbols of feminineness (e.g. the moon) that emphasise a feminine mode of writing that is markedly different from the father-controlled discourse. In addition, it displays the tenet of ecofeminism that supports the idea that women are closer to nature than men. In this case, both, Persephone and Demeter, are directly linked to nature, which makes the representation of Love through miscellaneous natural elements more obvious. Pathetic fallacy is used throughout the poem to represent the paradigm of Love and its rendition into different natural entities. At first, appalling weather and cold and gloomy imagery are portrayed to convey Demeter’s feelings in the absence of her child. Yet Persephone’s return restores her mother’s world and leads the lyrical subject to define her love in terms of a much gentler imagery and more favorable weather conditions.

Definitely, every mother dealing with the loss of a daughter after her marriage may well understand Demeter's feelings of rebirth once she is able to enfold her beloved child again.

In short, Duffy subverts the conception of the transcendental and idiosyncratic Forms of Disappointment, Beauty, Power and Love in order to point out how the former male portrayal of these staunch concepts has polluted our vision of the world. After examining these feminist revisionist poems through the lenses of Plato's theory we realise that neither the myth nor the projection of these universal Forms offer objective realities since everything has been told from a male perspective. Duffy's bold and forthright mythological characters ensure the protraction of women's uprising in the field of Humanities by counterattacking the androcentric cultural milieu in which they were caged. I hope this dissertation sheds light on the importance of analysing how some universal ideas have been portrayed throughout history in different literary works. Besides, the broad scope of applicability of the Theory of Forms could definitely help us to keep on analysing and discovering the world that surrounds us. After all, currently, taking second hand information from politicians, the media, religion, parents, or peers can be related to Plato's reflection of the Forms since this world of particulars (objects, ideas etc.) is nothing but a reflection of the real world –the world of Forms (Allebban 29). All things considered, Duffy teaches us that we should re-consider our reality since all the shadows we saw in the cave had been orchestrated by male discourse.

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ANNEX

1.

Mrs. Midas

1 It was late September. I'd just poured a glass of wine, begun
2 to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen
3 filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath
4 gently blanching the windows. So I opened one,
5 then with my fingers wiped the other's glass like a brow.
6 He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.

7 Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way
8 the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,
9 but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked
10 a pear from a branch. – we grew Fondante d'Automne –
11 and it sat in his palm, like a lightbulb. On.
12 I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree?

13 He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed.
14 He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of
15 the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Miss Macready.
16 He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.
17 The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said,
18 What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.

19 I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob.
20 Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich.
21 He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks.
22 He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand,
23 a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched
24 as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.

25 It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees.
26 After we'd both calmed down, I finished the wine
27 on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit
28 on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself.
29 I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.
30 The toilet I didn't mind. I couldn't believe my ears:

31 how he'd had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted.
32 But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?
33 It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes
34 no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced,
35 as the blue flame played on its luteous stem. At least,
36 I said, you'll be able to give up smoking for good.

37 Separate beds. in fact, I put a chair against my door,
38 near petrified. He was below, turning the spare room
39 into the tomb of Tutankhamun. You see, we were passionate then,
40 in those halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly,
41 like presents, fast food. But now I feared his honeyed embrace,
42 the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.

43 And who, when it comes to the crunch, can live
44 with a heart of gold? That night, I dreamt I bore
45 his child, its perfect ore limbs, its little tongue
46 like a precious latch, its amber eyes
47 holding their pupils like flies. My dream milk
48 burned in my breasts. I woke to the streaming sun.

49 So he had to move out. We'd a caravan
50 in the wilds, in a glade of its own. I drove him up
51 under the cover of dark. He sat in the back.
52 And then I came home, the woman who married the fool
53 who wished for gold. At first, I visited, odd times,
54 parking the car a good way off, then walking.

55 You knew you were getting close. Golden trout
56 on the grass. One day, a hare hung from a larch,
57 a beautiful lemon mistake. And then his footprints,
58 glistening next to the river's path. He was thin,
59 delirious; hearing, he said, the music of Pan
60 from the woods. Listen. That was the last straw.

61 What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed
62 but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness. I sold
63 the contents of the house and came down here.
64 I think of him in certain lights, dawn, late afternoon,
65 and once a bowl of apples stopped me dead. I miss most,
66 even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch.

2.

Medusa

1 A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
2 grew in my mind,
3 which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes
4 as though my thoughts
5 hissed and spat on my scalp.

6 My bride's breath soured, stank
7 in the grey bags of my lungs.
8 I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
9 yellow fanged.
10 There are bullet tears in my eyes.

11 Are you terrified?
12 Be terrified.
13 It's you I love,
14 perfect man, Greek God, my own;
15 but I know you'll go, betray me, stray
16 from home.
17 So better by for me if you were stone.

18 I glanced at a buzzing bee,
19 a dull grey pebbly fell
20 to the ground.
21 I glanced at a singing bird,
22 a handful of dusty gravel
23 spattered down

24 I looked at a ginger cat,
25 a housebrick
26 shattered a bowl of milk.
27 I looked at a snuffling pig,
28 a boulder rolled
29 in a heap of shit.

30 I stared in the mirror.
31 Love gone bad
32 showed me a Gorgon.
33 I stared at a dragon.
34 Fire spewed
35 from the mouth of a mountain.

36 And here you come
37 with a shield for a heart
38 and a sword for a tongue
39 and your girls, your girls.
40 Wasn't I beautiful
41 Wasn't I fragrant and young?

42 Look at me now

3.

Pygmalion's Bride

1 Cold, I was, like snow, like ivory.
2 I thought He will not touch me,
3 But he did
4 He kissed my stone-cool lips.
5 I lay still
6 As though I'd died.

7 He stayed.
8 He thumbed my marble eyes.
9 He spoke –
10 Blunt endearments, what he'd do and how.
11 His words were terrible.
12 My ears were sculpture
13 Stone-deaf, shells.
14 I heard the sea.
15 I drowned him out.
16 I heard him shout.
17 He brought me presents, polished pebbles,
18 little bells.
19 I didn't blink,
20 Was dumb.
21 He brought me pearls and necklaces and rings.
22 He called them girly things.
23 He ran his clammy hands along my limbs.
24 I didn't shrink,
25 Played statue, shtum.
26 He let his fingers sink into my flesh,
27 He squeezed, he pressed.
28 I would not bruise.
29 He looked for marks,
30 For purple hearts,
31 For inky stars, for smudgy clues.
32 His nails were claws.
33 I showed no scratch, no scrape, no scar.
34 He propped me up on pillows,
35 Jawed all night.
36 My heart was ice, was glass.
37 His voice was gravel, hoarse.
38 He talked white black.
39 So I changed tack,
40 Grew warm, like candle wax,
41 Kissed back,
42 Was soft, was pliable,
43 Began to moan,
44 Got hot, got wild,
45 Arched, coiled, writhed,
46 Begged for his child,
47 And at the climax
48 Screamed my head off –
49 All an act

50 And haven't seen him since.

51 Simple as that.

4.

Demeter

1 Where I lived – winter and hard earth.

2 I sat in my cold stone room

3 choosing tough words, granite, flint,

4 to break the ice. My broken heart –

5 I tried that, but it skimmed,

6 flat, over the frozen lake.

7 She came from a long, long way,

8 but I saw her at last, walking,

9 my daughter, my girl, across the fields,

10 in bare feet, bringing all spring's flowers

11 to her mother's house. I swear

12 the air softened and warmed as she moved,

13 the blue sky smiling, none too soon

14 with the small shy mouth of a new moon.