POETRY AS NATIONAL ART: CAROL ANN DUFFY'S POLITICAL POETRY AS THE POET LAUREATE*

ULUSAL BİR SANAT OLARAK ŞİİR: CAROL ANN DUFFY'NİN SARAY ŞAİRLİĞİ DÖNEMİNDEKİ POLİTİK ŞİİRİ

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Abstract

When Carol Ann Duffy became Britain's first female poet laureate in 2009, it was a surprise as Duffy had always been a political poet with very harsh criticism of government policies in her works. However, she made it clear that she would not be writing poems for the monarchy and royal occasions unless she felt to do so. In an interview with Andrew McAllister in 1988, Carol Ann Duffy stated that poets don't have answers; they just record the human experience. Therefore, her intention as a poet is to set forth this notion by presenting life as exactly as it is (72). This manifesto represents her work as her political poems illustrate life in the multicultural Britain of the 1980s and 1990s with a close observation of the underprivileged and deprived as seen in Standing Female Nude (1985), Selling Manhattan (1987) and The Other Country (1990). Duffy's laureate poems also reflect her concern about speaking for the unvoiced. For Duffy, poetry offers a valuable alternative voice to journalists, commentators, and academics when it comes to discussing issues that concern us all. (Wroe, 2014, para 1). Accordingly, she speaks for the public to present the social and emotional experience of living in contemporary Britain by way of highlighting public concerns of the British people by targeting her criticism at the politicians. Thus, this paper examines the political aspect of Duffy's laureate poems written during her poet laureateship between the years 2009-2019. It focuses on her political poetry which mostly target at politicians and highlight public concerns

Öz

Carol Ann Duffy'nin 2009 yılında İngiltere'nin ilk kadın kraliyet şairi olması, Duffy'nin her zaman eserlerinde hükümet politikalarını çok sert bir şekilde eleştiren politik bir şair olması nedeniyle büyük bir sürpriz olmuştur. Ancak, Duffy kendisi istemediği sürece monarşi ve kraliyet ile ilgili olaylar için şiir yazmayacağını açıkça belirtmiştir. Andrew McAllister ile 1988'de yaptığı bir röportajda Carol Ann Duffy, şairlerin çözüm önermediğini; onların sadece insanın hayat deneyimini kaydettiğini belirtir ve bir şair olarak niyetinin yaşananları olduğu gibi sunmak olduğunu ekler (72). Bu manifesto, Duffy'nin 1980'lerin ve 1990'ların çok kültürlü Britanya'sında yaşama deneyimini, imtiyazsızların ve yoksunların durumunu betimleyen Standing Female Nude (1985), Selling Manhattan (1987) ve The Other Country (1990) adlı şiir kitaplarındaki politik tavrını ve şiirlerini de tanımlamaktadır. Röportajlarında da belirttiği gibi Duffy'ye göre "şiir, hepimiz için önemli olan şeylerle başa çıkmanın bir yolu olarak gazetecilere, uzmanlara veya akademisyenlere önemli bir alternatif ses sağlar" (Wroe, 2014, para 1). Bu makale Duffy'nin kraliyet şairi olarak yazdığı şiirlerinin politik yönü ile ilgilidir.Dolayısıyla, Duffy'nin 2009-2019 yılları arasında kraliyet şairliği sırasında yazdığı siyasi şiirlere odaklanmakta ve çoğunlukla Duffy'nin siyasi şiirlerinde politikacıları hedef alarak kamuoyunun kaygılarını seslendirip vurguladığını belirtmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Carol Ann Duffy eleştirilerini politikacılara yönelterek İngiliz halkının kamusal kaygılarını öne çıkarmakta ve çağdaş Britanya'da yaşamanın sosyal ve duygusal deneyimini sunmak amacıyla kamuoyu adına konuşmaktadır.

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Introduction

When her opinion was asked by Katherine Viner about why she was disregarded for the laureateship in favour of Andrew Motion to become the next laureate after Ted Hughes in 1999, Carol Ann Duffy told that she was not enthusiastic to get the post. She stated that she was never sure about accepting that post and never declared anywhere whether she wanted the post or not. In Viner's interview, Duffy was cited commenting that the role of the poet laureate "needed to be much more democratic", a poet laureate should be "more people's poet than monarch's band" and that she would not "write poem for Edward or Sophie – no self-respecting poet should have to" (1999, para. 17). A decade later in 2009, considering her harshly critical political poems in her previous collections, it came as a surprise that Duffy became the first female poet laureate in the history of Britain and the first poet laureate of the 21st century. Duffy stated that she accepted the role after "a long and hard" thought with the motivation of being the first woman poet laureate: *"The decision was purely because they hadn't had a woman... I look on it as a recognition of the great women poets we now have writing"* (Flood, 2009, para. 3).

While accepting the offer, Duffy was very clear in her decision and stance as she stated herself ready to carry out the responsibility the post requires, but she would write official poems only if she was excited or influenced by the occasion: "If not, then I'd ignore it" she declared (Flood, 2009, para.5). In that sense, rather than a post to write poems for the monarchy and the royal occasions, Duffy regards laureateship as a sign of Britain's appreciation of poetry and not an individual honour as a poet: "Poet laureate simply means to me that a country values its poets and that one poet is the representative for all the others. So it's sort of saying I'm a poet and I'm proud to take this role, because my country cares about poetry" (Burgin, 2010, para. 14). Certainly Duffy took the role as a privilege to represent poets of Britain.

Indeed, during her 10 years' time as the poet laureate, Duffy has proved that she regards herself as the representative poet of the nation not only by writing poems on public occasions but also promoting poetry and poets. For instance, Professor John Brooks, vice chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University where Duffy teaches praised how she carried out the role:

> It is a great way to reward and celebrate the generosity with which she has infused the role. She has opened up opportunities for other poets – involving established writers in large-scale projects and

> commissions, encouraging and nurturing new voices … and through the many prizes and competitions she has started and supported, and future poets through her national laureate education projects in schools up and down the country ("Poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy", 2015, para.2).

Alan Brownjohn in his review of Duffy's first laureate collection *The Bees*, emphasized that Duffy purely served poetry in her role as the poet of the nation and saw her *"task as entailing a responsibility to poetry more than a duty to the Establishment"* (2012, para.6). Rather than adopting a relaxed attitude and writing popular poetry, or writing *"poems about respectable good causes, … She has chosen instead to go her own way, which involves affirming and extending her contact with a wide range of English poetry"* (Brownjohn, 2012, para.6). Considering her stance and earlier collections such as *Standing Female Nude* (1985), *Selling Manhattan* (1987) and *The Other Country* (1990) it can be argued that by illustrating the experience of living in the multicultural Britain of the 1980s and 1990s with an eye on the condition of the disadvantaged and deprived, Duffy has always been a political poet without any concern for the Establishment. Thus, this paper focuses on the political aspect of Duffy's laureate poems and her political poetry written during her poet laureateship between the years 2009-2019, which mostly target at politicians and highlight public concerns.

Politics in Carol Ann Duffy's Earlier Work

As stated above, Duffy's early poetry collections record the events and concerns in Britain in the 1980s, a decade marked with Margaret Thatcher's premiership who was elected in 1979, 1983 and 1987. Thatcher's privatisation policy and free market economy dominated the era as a result of which sharp divisions occurred in the society creating "two nations", namely the rich and the poor, a society of haves and have nots. In her collections *Standing Female Nude* (1985) and *Selling Manhattan* (1987), Carol Ann Duffy reflected her concerns about the effects of capitalism on culture and the collapse of the Welfare state, which have overall transformed the society into consumerism one through *laissez faire* (free market) economy. Especially, in *The Other Country* (1990), she harshly criticised Thatcherite policies by representing British people who experienced alienation and social otherness in their own country due to the breakdown of the consensus embodied in the Welfare State. Therefore, Duffy's political poetry held a mirror to the British society of the time by voicing shared public concerns through dramatic monologues viewed from various perspectives such as "the urban disaffected,

people on the margins of society who harbour resentments and grudges against the world" ("Whose voice is it?", 2000, p. 14). As Dawson underlines, Duffy's poems

> reflect how unemployment rose to three million in 1983, with more job losses in Britain's industrial north. Some speak out of, or to, a multicultural Britain during a time when the immigration flow was stemmed but race riots broke out, significantly in Brixton Manchester and the Midlands. Others blur the line between a sane, mad, or criminal mind… other poems register a dissatisfaction over the Falklands conflict as well as campaigns for nuclear disarmament (CND) (2016, p. 89).

The poet Lavinia Greenlaw also emphasized Duffy's portrayal of the era by saying *"I remember the impact of her work in the late 80s and early 90s… She was the first poet to push language and form, their limits and tensions, to articulate that bankrupt and dislocated era"*. On her reflection of the political climate of the 1980s and choosing outsiders as characters in her poems, Duffy discloses McAllister that,

> I think if you write a poem honestly you have got to do it as you are moved to do. What I am doing is living in the twentieth century in Britain and listening to the news every day and going out every day and reading the newspapers every day and meeting people who've had wonderful or horrifying experiences… I am not seeking bizarre subjects.
>
> I don't want to write the kind of poetry that tells the reader how I feel when I see a rainbow. I don't want to write the kind of poetry that tells the reader that I as a feminist think that this guy should have his prick cut off because he was the Yorkshire Ripper. What I want to do is present it, as it is. Poets don't have solutions, poets are recording the human experience (1988, pp. 70, 72).

Thus, Duffy takes the role of a witness, recorder and commentator as a poet, which is still valid for her perception of poetry as she states that "it's the poet's obligation- wrote Plato- to bear witness" (2009, para.1). Similarly, Duffy witnessed and recorded shared public concerns of Thatcherite Britain through her poems such as "Translating the English, 1989," "Money Talks," "Job Creation," "Stealing" and "Making Money," which are remarkable in reflecting Duffy's critique of capitalism and the Conservative government that was in power in the 1980s. Duffy maintained her perception of the poet as a witness, observer and a reporter in her

official post as the poet laureate. While speaking of her poetry as the poet laureate, Duffy stated that:

> I wanted to continue to write as I always had, and I have tried very hard not to write a poem I previously wouldn't have written. There always had been a public element to my work, particularly during the Thatcher years, and I think all poets, to a greater or lesser degree, need to have a finger on the national pulse. Poetry provides an important alternative voice to journalists or pundits or academics as a way of dealing with things that matter to us all (Wroe, 2014, para.1).

In that respect, Duffy believes poets should be concerned with the contemporary public matters, voice the concerns of the people and reflect on the contemporary living. Indeed, Duffy consciously maintained her concern for the public element in her poetry as the poet laureate and continued to record the experience of living in British society in the 2010s.

Politics in Duffy's Laureate Poems

Duffy's first official poem as the laureate is named "Politics", first published in 13 June 2009 in the *Guardian*, a month after she took the role. As Mark Brown stated, *"she could have chosen to write on Prince Philip's 88th birthday or the sombre commemorations for the D-Day landings in Normandy. Instead, Carol Ann Duffy has chosen a far more meaty subject for her first poem as poet laureate: politics. And she's angry"* (2009, para.1). In "Politics*"*, Duffy remarks that

> How it makes of your face a stone
> that aches to weep, of your heart a fist,
> clenched or thumping, sweating blood, of your tongue
> an iron latch with no door. How it makes of your right hand
> a gauntlet, a glove-puppet of the left, of your laugh
> a dry leaf blowing in the wind, of your desert island discs
> hiss hiss hiss, makes of the words on your lips dice
> that can throw no six (Duffy, 2011, p. 12).

"Politics", included in *The Bees,* her first collection as the poet laureate, reflects Duffy's anger at and reaction to MP expenses scandal of 2009 which revealed that many MPs exploited their right to claim expenses for their second houses. For Brown (2009), Duffy's poem "Politics" is "a powerful, passionate commentary on the corrosiveness of politics on politicians and the ruinous effect on idealism". Dawson similarly indicates that Duffy's *"characteristic sympathy for men*

and women who find themselves embroidered in corrupt systems" (2016, p. 156) is reflected in the first four lines of the poem. The lines suggest a catatonic mood in which the person cannot move, act or react to a situation. The lines suggest numbness, inability to act or speak as if in a state of shock or rage. The speaker indicates no difference between two hands as one of them should dominate the other in use. This reference to right and left hands may also hint that there is no difference of political ethics between both wings when it comes to rules of politics. The laugh is likened to a dry leaf being blown by the wind, carried away or moved by another agency underlining lack of control. It suggests the lifeless, joyless, disappointed people with laugh as a dry leaf, as well. The line "makes of the words on your lips dice / that can throw no six" implies both lack of hope and inability to determine the next move. It is known that rolling the dice determines the next move in a game: dices determine who will make the next move and what happens next. Moreover, throwing six in dice represents luck and superiority in taking the next move in a game. In that respect, Duffy points out that through their inability to react and articulate, people are risking their own hope and luck. Politics is revealed towards the end of the poem as the reason for this unresponsiveness.

> How it takes the breath
> away, the piss, makes of your kiss a dropped pound coin,
> makes of your promises latin, gibberish, feedback, static,
> of your hair a wig, of your gait a plankwalk. How it says this –
> politics – to your education education education; shouts this –
> Politics! – to your health and wealth; how it roars, to your
> conscience moral compass truth, POLITICS POLITICS POLITICS
> (Duffy, 2011, p. 12).

False promises of the politicians are further explored in the line "education, education, education". It echoes Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's famous speech given at University of Southampton in 2001, promising to enhance education at all levels in the country. In this last stanza, Duffy says that politics is all about empty promises, *"gibberish, nonsensical language and hypocrisy. Dawson argues that "the capitalization and repetition of 'POLITICS' in the final line represent the raised voices, bullying tone and hallow rhetoric of political speech"* (2016, p. 157). Judith Palmer, Director of the Poetry Society, too, defined "Politics" as a courageous poem voicing the reactions of the British public to the scandal:

> I think that what she has managed to do is capture in poetry the sense of disbelief, the strangled despair, which leaves most of us just

> shaking our heads, open-mouthed and inarticulate… bloody hell feeling most people felt every time they listened to the latest detail of the expenses scandal (qtd in Brown, 2009, para.9).

A month after having been appointed as the poet laureate in 2009, Duffy, while visiting a school in Manchester, told the students that "she had already started work on a poem about recent national events", reading a couplet *"What did we do with the trust of your vote? Hired a flunky to flush out the moat"* (Naughton, 2009, para.3). Duffy uses the same image of the moat in her poem "Democracy" which reflects the electoral crisis of 2010 when hundreds of people could not vote due to closure of polling stations at 10 pm despite queuing outside for hours. According to the *Guardian* on 7 May 2010, *"The polling stations affected many parts of the London including boroughs of Hackney, Peckham, Lewisham, as well as Milton Keynes, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle"* (Adetunji and Tran, 2010, para. 3). Some voters reported that they could not vote after waiting for an hour and a half in the long queues and the complaints included lack of extra staff in the crowded polling stations and slow working polling staff. Within twenty-four hours, Duffy responded to the situation by writing "Democracy" which she published on the *Guardian* and read on BBC's Today programme:

> Here's a boat that cannot float.
> Here's a queue that cannot vote.
> Here's a line you cannot quote.
> Here's a deal you cannot note …
> And here's a sacrificial goat,
> here's a cut, here's throat,
> here's a drawbridge, here's a moat …
> What's your hurry? Here's your coat (Duffy, 2010).

The title of the poem is very ironic, capturing the mood of would-be voters. The poem also makes a public criticism with leaving the statement "Here's a democracy you cannot vote". Moreover, images of the drawbridge and the moat similarly act as a metaphor for the strict bureaucratic rules. In medieval times, people could not enter the castles once the drawbridge was lifted. Likewise, in contemporary times, it is clearly the bureaucracy that acts as a drawbridge to keep people out.

Another poem Duffy voices her public concern is "22 Reasons for the Bedroom Tax" which was emailed by the poet to be published by *The Guardian* in an article by Maeve Kennedy on October 11, 2013. The poem satirizes the meaningless, even ridiculous justifications for introducing a cut in housing subsidy for working-age

people who live in social housing. The government proposed to remove spare room support with a legislation on 1 April 2013 under the Welfare Reform Act 2012. According to this new regulation, "tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need may lose part of their Housing Benefit" and accordingly "tenants in social housing will have their benefit reduced by 14% if they have a spare bedroom or 25% if they have two or more spare bedrooms" ("Welfare Reform Act 2012").

According to the *BBC*, under this new legislation, Conservative ministers expect that, "the policy would encourage people to move to smaller properties and potentially save about £480m a year from the housing benefit bill" ("'Bedroom tax' appeal", 2016, para.6). However, the bedroom tax was unpopular with the public on grounds that it discriminated people who would not be able to move to a smaller property, such as the disabled.

The motive behind Carol Ann Duffy's response was the Secretary of environment Owen Paterson, who then justified the badger cull extension by arguing that "despite the government slashing by two-thirds in 12 months its estimate of the number of badgers in the Somerset cull zone, marksmen still failed to reach their target" (Carrington, 2013, para.2). When call for an extension was criticized by Gavin Grant, the then RSPCA (the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) chief executive announced that *"they keep moving the goalposts on how many badgers exist and how many need to be killed but, whatever the figures, it is clear the system has failed"*. The minister responded, *"I am not moving anything – the badgers are moving the goalposts. You are dealing with a wild animal, subject to the vagaries of weather, disease and breeding patterns"* (Carrington, 2013, para.4). The absurd explanation of the minister putting the blame on the badgers is mocked in Duffy's poem showing all animal world in upheaval and responsible for bending the rules, changing the game, playing the blame-game and twisting the facts on behalf of the politicians:

> Because the Badgers are moving the goalposts.
> The Ferrets are bending the rules.
> The Weasels are taking the hindmost.
> The Otters are downing tools.
>
> The Hedgehogs are changing the game-plan
> The Grass-snakes are spitting tacks.
>
> The Squirrels are playing the blame-game.
> The Skunks are twisting the facts (2013).

Starting with badgers shifting the goalposts, Duffy claims *"it all adds up, – an explanation which makes as much sense as anything else in recent politics – to 22 Reasons for the Bedroom Tax"* (Kennedy 2013, para.1). Through the poem, Duffy features the culture of blame, underlining the fact that the politicians never accept responsibility and accountability for their policies or decisions but rather put the blame on others.

"Ex-Ministers" in *Sincerity* (2018) is also critical of politicians and introduces how they claim superiority above the common people and continue to benefit from contracts or deals all around the world even after their official post. Similar to her idea in "Politics" which is a reaction to MPs expenses scandal, Duffy shows that there is no difference between the left or right wing politicians when it comes to the matters of financial benefit.

> They rise above us, the ex-ministers,
> in private jets, left wing, right wing, drop low
> to Beijing, Kuwait, the Congo, Kazakhstan;
> their deals and contracts in the old red boxes, for sentimental
> reasons.
>
> Beyond our shores, they float on superyachts, *Nostrovia!*,
> guests of the mortal gods; the vague moon a Bitcoin.
> We are nothing to them now; lemmings
> going over the white cliffs of Dover (Duffy, 2018, p. 20).

The sentimental reasons of travelling to Beijing, Kuwait, the Congo and Kazakhstan surely point the material aspect of these deals and contracts and suggest that these ex-politicians show interest only in people or places that are beneficial to them. Referring to the common people as "lemmings going over the white cliffs of Dover", she indicates that these politicians have no concern for the British people. Why Duffy chooses the animal lemming for her metaphor may be related to the word lemming for *"someone who blindly follows a crowd -maybe even towards catastrophe"* (Britannica, para.2). There is also a legendary claim about the lemmings that they commit group suicide by jumping off the cliffs which can be traced back to a Disney documentary "White Wilderness" shot in the 1950s. In that respect, British people are resembled to a group of lemmings who are collectively marching towards their own destruction by blindly following these politicians. This may allude to Brexit rather than the politicians as common people will be affected the most with such a disputed decision.

When these ex-ministers are in Britain, they are not reachable by people as they live in private mansions, "chauffeured in blacked-out cars to the bars / in the heavens – far, glittering shards – / to look down / on our lucrative democracy". They are not in touch with the people who voted for them and they shine as if broken pieces of glass within the society and they literally rise above the society by their relations and interests in trade centres of the world. They also metaphorically see themselves above the nation but still criticize the British democratic system to which they owe their place. In the last two lines, "Though they have bought the same face, / so they will know each other", Duffy underlines that the ex-ministers all have the same qualities, so they can recognize each other immediately.

Lawson indicates that what is central to Duffy's work is that she observes public matters through a private lens of someone partaking, or someone affected, or through her own (2011). For instance, in "Britannia" from *Sincerity* (2018, p. 21), Duffy links two disasters Britain witnessed: Aberfan disaster in 1966 and the fire in the Grenfell Tower in 2017. The Aberfan disaster took place in 1966 in a mining village in South Wales due to a destructive breakdown of mine spoil tip which claimed lives of 116 children and 28 adults. In "Britannia", Duffy stresses "how the political moves out of the personal" reporting *"I remember my father talking about the negligence of the coal board allowing that slide. Fifty years later we are all traumatised by Grenfell … these national disasters that have a principle or cause about them"* (Allerdice, 2018, para.7).

A day fifty years ago surfaces
as I watch the rolling news
in the days after Grenfell
and somebody screams *Bastards!* Off-camera.

…

My father shouted
The Coal Board were *criminals, murderers*;
raged again when they looted the Fund.
I should not connect the two, but I do:
the school drowned in slurry
on the small black-and-white screen;
the tower in flames on full-colour plasma.
The constant, dutiful Queen (Duffy, 2018, p. 21).

What links these two disasters emphasized by Duffy is the negligence of the authorities in taking necessary precautions to prevent the upcoming disasters and their reluctance to take responsibility afterwards. BBC introduces Aberfan as "the mistake that cost a village its children". Although various complaints along with a petition from Pantglass School were made in 1963 to the National Coal Board about the potentially deadly dangers of the highly fluid, huge slurry in the village, they were not taken into consideration. Finally, when the slurry slid onto the village, "*the glistening black avalanche consumed rocks, trees, farm cottages then ruptured the Brecon Beacons to Cardiff water main, engorging it further and increasing the velocity of its murderous descent towards Pantglass, killing 116 children and 28 adults"* (Jackson, 2016, p. 1). A similar negligence is observed in the Grenfell Tower fire. For, it was revealed that the material used in the cladding of the tower as a part of its refurbishment in 2017 was *"the cheaper, more flammable version of the available options"* (Davies, 2017, para.1). Fireproof cladding in the original refurbishment plan was removed for the sake of saving money by the Council and the more flammable version chosen is believed to have spread fire very quickly costing many lives. The key point emphasized by the lawyer of the residents in this inquiry claims that the related tenant management organization's failure to supply Grenfell residents with a regulation compliant safe housing "exemplifies this erosion of the state's obligation to the residents" (Paterson, 2018). In that sense, both Aberfan and Grenfell appear to be preventable disasters which took the lives of many.

In this context, the last line of the poem notes that what remains unchanged in these two disasters witnessed by the nation is "the constant, dutiful Queen visiting" paying her respects to the families. In this final line, the indifference of politicians to the families of the victims and the survivors is juxtaposed with the Queen as the loyal and devoted figure to British people. Theresa May, the prime minister of the time was harshly criticized for being indifferent to the families affected. A year later, she expressed her regret at not meeting the concerned families during the time of the disaster although she visited the scene. Mentioned as "dead to emotion" and displaying "lack of empathy for the bereaved and the newly homeless", May, as the representative of the state, was condemned by the citizens (Toynbee, 2017). In contrast to the insincerity of the politicians and their lack of empathy, The Queen stands as the solid representative of the State. Duffy acknowledges this positive image of the Queen by observating that "whether or not you are a monarchist or a republican, people respect and admire the Queen very

much. (Allerdice, 2018, para.14). This is also the reason why she writes her poem "The Crown", marking the diamond jubilee of the Queen's coronation.

Similarly, Duffy's poem "Big Ask", published in her collection *The Bees* (2011), is concerned with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It highlights the principles of politics and how politicians avoid answering questions or accounting for their decisions and actions. The poem is dedicated to the poet Adrian Mitchell whose "To Whom It May Concern (Tell Me Lies About Vietnam)" became an anthem for anti-war protests after being read at the protests against the Vietnam war in Trafalgar Square in London in 1964 (Mitchell, 2008, para.1). Dawson argues that Duffy's poem "Democracy" *"marks the magnitude of the principles at stake and ironically confronts the Labour Party's reluctance to progress the Iraq inquiry, announced in July 2009"* (2016, p. 161). When finally published in May 2018, the reports of the parliamentary intelligence and security committee (ISC) exposed that *"British intelligence officers were present at, or knew about, hundreds of incidents, working alongside the CIA and other American partners in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo"* ("The Observer view", 2018, para.1).

Asked in a challenging tone, Duffy's poem involves questions about Guantanamo Bay, the suspected weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein, and the role of the US presidents Barrack Obama and George Bush which sound like an interrogation at a court of war crimes or a special committee established to inquire about the war and the operations in Iraq:

> What was it Sisyphus pushed up the hill?
> I wouldn't call it a rock.
> Will you solemnly swear on the Bible?
> I couldn't swear on a book.
> With which piece did you capture the castle?
> I shouldn't hazard a rook. (Duffy, 2011, p. 9).

The poem introduces themes of denial, deception and lack of responsibility right in the first stanza. The person interrogated shows that s/he will not be truthful as s/he gives subversive answers to questions requiring very obvious answers such as Sisyphus' rock, rule for capturing the castle in chess and refuses to swear on the Bible.

> When did the President give you the date?
> Nothing to do with Barack!
> Were 1200 targets marked on a chart?

Nothing was circled in black.
On what was the prisoner stripped and stretched?
Nothing resembling a rack (Duffy, 2011, p. 9).

The same attitude of the person continues in the second stanza when s/he is asked about the details of a military attack in Iraq. Whether the targets were decided and marked, whether the president gave the order and whether the prisoner was tortured or not are among the questions the interrogator continues to ask:

Guantanamo Bay - how many detained?
How many grains in a sack?
Extraordinary Rendition - give me some names.
How many cards in a pack?
Sexing the Dossier - name of the game?
Poker. Gin Rummy. Blackjack (Duffy, 2011, p. 9).

The Extraordinary Rendition mentioned in the poem is a program developed by the US Intelligence Agency (CIA) that regularly kidnaps people from places around the world, transfers them to different counties, and interrogates them in extreme methods that are not permitted under US jurisdiction. (Bellaby, 2018, p. 574). The programme is legally banned as it clearly involves *"the capture, transportation or detainment of an individual with the intent to inflict extreme levels of physical, psychological and emotional pain to gain intelligence"* (Bellaby 2018, p. 575). Before the programme had been developed and used by the CIA, the USA was already positioned as the major force responsible for these acts of torture. However, there are claims addressed to other European countries that are involved in these rendition programmes by providing aid and assistance. Accordingly, The Rendition Project, a research project which had "systematically worked through testimony from detainees, Red Cross reports, courtroom evidence, flight records and invoices" exposed that the support of UK for the rendition programme has been very significant than has been previously recognised" as the project highlighted *"1,622 flights in and out of the UK by aircraft now known to have been involved in the agency's secret kidnap and detention programme"* (Cobain and Ball, 2013, para.2). According to the *Guardian*, *"the CIA's use of UK airports was first reported by the Guardian in September 2005. Jack Straw, the then foreign secretary, dismissed the evidence, telling the MPs in December that 'there simply is no truth in the claims that the United Kingdom has been involved in rendition'"* (Cobain and Ball, 2013, para.6). However, the parliamentary intelligence and security committee found that

> UK intelligence agencies to be complicit in hundreds of incidents of torture and rendition, mainly in partnership with the US in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. Britain planned, agreed or financed 31 operations. British intelligence officers consented to or witnessed the use of torture on 15 occasions. On 232 occasions, the intelligence agencies supply questions to be put to detainees whom they knew or suspected were being mistreated ("The Guardian view", 2019, para.4).

The interrogator in Duffy's poem asks how many people are arrested and sent to Guantanamo Bay, a US detention centre established in 2002 and used for the detention of *"Muslim militants and suspected terrorists captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere"* (Nolen, 2020, para.1). Since a vast number of prisoners from various countries are captivated at Guantanamo without "charge and without the legal means to challenge their detentions", the place *"became the focus of worldwide controversy over alleged violations of the legal rights of detainees under the Geneva Conventions and accusations of torture or abusive treatment of detainees by U.S. authorities*" (Nolen, 2020, para.1). In the poem, the interrogator accordingly asks for some names related to the rendition programme but gets the answer "How many cards in a pack" without any clear and truthful answer, echoing deceptive, vague answers of politicians when asked about important political matters.

The next line in this stanza referring to "sexing the dossier" corresponds to the dossier released by Tony Blair's government relating to Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction which was used as justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (McSmith, 2016). So, the phrase indicates "sexing up" intelligence, meaning that it invents intelligence through lies and deceit to persuade a parliament and country to go to the war. Alasdair Campbell, Blair's director of communications before and during the war, has denied the accusations (McSmith, 2016). When the interrogator mentions this particular file and asks "the name of the game", the interrogated answers "Poker. Gin Rummy. Blackjack.". There are the names of gambling card games, which maybe suggesting that politicians gamble on fates and future of people and countries.

Duffy's extreme anger at politicians also bursts out in poems "Swearing In," "Gorilla" and "A Formal Complaint" in *Sincerity*. For instance, in the poem "Gorilla" she tells about coming across with a gorilla at Berlin zoo which she thinks *"With a day's more evolution, it could even be President"* (Duffy, 2018, p. 22) alluding to

Donald Trump, the president of the United States. In the poem "Swearing In", she cannot help swearing at Donald Trump through very original insults like ""twitter-rat," "tan-faker," "lie-monger," "tongue-trickster," "golf-plonker", and "bigot-merchant", formulated in kennings with a concluding line *"Welcome to the White House"* (Duffy, 2018, p. 23). For Duffy, these insulting poems reflect her own frustration which finally made her cry out:

> I think the past couple of years, with the evil twins of Trump and Brexit … I don't remember ever having felt such a kind of lowering abstract stress coming from the political aura. It's just so demoralising. You feel powerless… There was no way of not writing about that, because it is just in the air (Allardice, 2018, para.4).

In the same manner, "A Formal Complaint", a sestina written as a political protest for false patriots, who are identified as gatekeepers that cannot "mean" the nation well also reflects Duffy's frustration with the current British political situation. Duffy remarks that the poem is inspired by politicians like Michael Gove and Boris Johnson:

> I kept thinking about how these politicians, like Michael Gove and Boris Johnson, must have been children once. How do they suddenly appear fully formed as the same old bullshitters in suits we remember from Thatcher's era? I found the litany of abuse I was using fell into a sestina, which is why I called it 'A Formal Complaint' (Major, 2018, para.11).

In "A Formal Complaint", Duffy protests these politicians because she regards them as fake patriots who somehow emerged as political leaders and for her, their policies and actions contaminate the world. Thus, she scornfully displays her disrespect towards them.

Conclusion

Carol Ann Duffy intentionally named her latest collection *Sincerity*, a word which denotes being truthful and honest without any pretence. This means talking and acting truthfully in line with one's beliefs, thoughts and feelings, without faking anyone. Duffy reveals that she likes the word sincerity as its Latin etymology goes back to the technique dishonest sculptors would use to conceal the flaws in their work by putting wax on them. Accordingly, the word comes from Latin *sine cera* which means without wax, thereby indicating honesty (Major, 2018, para.9). In that sense, this word, sincerity, reflects how genuinely Duffy projects her emotions and

thoughts into the poems. When asked about her harsh political poems in her latest collection *Sincerity* in an interview with Nick Major (2018), Duffy responds that, as the title of the collection indicates, she wants to reflect herself honestly, without any ploy: *"I wanted to speak as myself both personally and as a citizen. I think the past two years with the twin evils of Brexit and Trump have been very stressful. Politics presses in on the personal, even if you're not writing political poems"* (2018, para.9). With respect to the role she undertook as the poet laureate, Duffy emphasizes that it is inevitable to avoid the political agenda as its effects are felt by everyone in the British society. Thus, she speaks for the public to present the social and emotional experience of living in contemporary Britain by way of highlighting public concerns of the British people and targeting her criticism at the politicians.

Sincerity, being truthful and meaning what you say has been a key element in Duffy's poetry throughout her career. When Carol Ann Duffy became the first female poet laureate of Britain in 2009, she stated that she accepted the role with the motivation of being the first woman poet laureate. She also emphasized that she regarded laureateship as a sign of Britain's appreciation of poetry rather than an individual honour as a poet. She also made it clear that she would not be writing poems for the monarchy and the royal occasions unless she felt to. Considering Duffy's earlier political poetry illustrating the experience of living in the multicultural Britain of the 1980s and 1990s and closely observing the underprivileged and deprived in her collections, whether her laureate poetry would avoid harsh political comments and involvement with politics was mostly discussed by critics. Duffy maintained her perception of the poet as a witness, observer and a reporter in her official post as the poet laureate. Duffy believes that poets should be concerned with the contemporary public matters, voice the concerns of the people, and reflect on the contemporary living. Indeed, Duffy consciously maintained her concern for the public element in her poetry even as the poet laureate and continued to record experience of living in British society of the 2010s. Accordingly in her laureate poetry, Duffy voiced the public anger at MPs scandal in 2009 and touched upon the hypocrisy of the politicians in "Politics". She also reflected the public reaction to the electoral crisis of 2010 in "Democracy", satirised the Welfare Reform Act 2012 in "22 Reasons for the Bedroom Tax", revealed the true face of the politicians who were not concerned with the country or people but with their own financial gains in "Ex-Ministers". Duffy not only voiced the public concerns of the British people in matters of political decisions and scandals, but she also criticised the attitudes of the politicians in the national disasters. For instance, in "Britannia"

in *Sincerity*, Duffy links two disasters Britain witnessed: Aberfan disaster in 1966 and the fire in the Grenfell Tower in 2017. What links these two disasters is the negligence of the authorities in taking necessary precautions to prevent the upcoming disasters and their reluctance to take responsibility afterwards. Similarly, Duffy's another poem "Big Ask", concerned with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, highlights the principles of politics and how politicians avoid answering questions or giving account for their decisions and actions. In some poems like "Swearing in," "Gorilla" and "A Formal Complaint" in *Sincerity*, Duffy's extreme anger at politicians bursts out and she even cannot help swearing at fake patriots who somehow emerge as political leaders but pollute the world with their policies and actions.

In the same manner, as in her political poems of the 1980s and 1990s, Duffy continues to "present it, as it is" by underlining the role of the poet in contemporary society as a commentator who "should have a finger on the national pulse" (Wroe, 2014, para.1). Duffy's manifesto and perception of the poet as a person who should have a concern for the public matters reminds one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, another female poet who declared in her nineteenth century verse-novel *Aurora Leigh* that poets should reflect the age they live in. Barrett Browning also argues that the age they live in breastfeeds the poets as a mother. Similarly, Carol Ann Duffy captures the contemporary reality and concerns of the British society and voices them boldly in her laureateship poetry.

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Summary

When Carol Ann Duffy became the first female poet laureate of Britain in 2009, it was a surprise as Duffy had always been a political poet with a very harsh criticism of the government policies in her works. Ten years earlier, when she lost the position to Andrew Motion in 1999 to become the next laureate after Ted Hughes, Carol Ann Duffy told that she was not willing to become a poet laureate as, for her, a poet with a self-respect would not write poems for the monarchy and official occasions. Obviously, it was not expected from her to accept the position. However, when Duffy became the first female poet laureate in the history of Britain and the first poet laureate of the 21st century in 2009, she stated that she accepted the role with the motivation of being the first woman poet laureate, also emphasizing that she regards laureateship as a sign of Britain's appreciation of poetry rather than an individual honour as a poet. She also made it clear that she would not be writing poems for the monarchy and the royal occasions unless she feels to. Considering Duffy's earlier political poetry illustrating the experience of living in the multicultural Britain of the 1980s and 1990s with a close observation of the underprivileged and deprived in her collections written in keeping with her manifesto "to present it, as it is", it was a question whether her laureate poetry would avoid harsh political comments and involvement with politics. However, her poems reflected that "presenting it as it is" manifesto still informs her work as Duffy's laureate poems similarly reflect her concern to speak for the unvoiced. Because Duffy also thinks that it is one of the duties of the poet to witness and to record, she witnessed and recorded in her poetry the shared public concerns of Thatcherite Britain government in close relation to the British political climate of the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, Duffy maintained her perception of the poet as a witness, observer and a reporter in her official post as the poet laureate. Duffy believes that poets should be concerned with the contemporary public matters, should voice the concerns of the people and reflect on the contemporary living. Indeed, Duffy consciously maintained her concern for the public element in her poetry even as the poet laureate and continued to record experience of living in British society of the 2010s. Accordingly in her laureate poetry, Duffy voiced the public anger at MPs scandal in 2009 and touched upon the hypocrisy of the politicians in "Politics", she reflected the public reaction the electoral crisis of 2010 in "Democracy", satirised the Welfare Reform Act 2012 in "22 Reasons for the Bedroom Tax", revealed the true face of the politicians who are not concerned with the country or people but with their own financial gains in "Ex-Ministers". Duffy not only voiced the public concerns of the British people in matters of political decisions and scandals, but also criticised the attitudes of the politicians in the national disasters. For instance, in "Britannia" in *Sincerity*, Duffy links two disasters Britain witnessed: Aberfan disaster in 1966 and the fire in the Grenfell Tower in 2017. What links these two disasters is the negligence of the authorities in taking necessary precautions to prevent the upcoming disasters and their reluctance to take responsibility afterwards. The prime minister of the time Theresa May is criticised for her lack of emotion towards the survivors and in contrast to the insincerity of the politicians and their lack of empathy, the Queen stands as the solid representative of the State. Similarly, Duffy's another poem "Big Ask", concerned with the war in Iraq and Afghanistan

highlights the principles of politics, and how politicians avoid answering questions or giving account for their decisions and actions. In some poems like “Swearing in,” “Gorilla” and “A Formal Complaint” in *Sincerity*, Duffy’s extreme anger at politicians bursts out and she even cannot help swearing at fake patriots who somehow emerge as political leaders but pollute the world with their policies and actions. In that respect, as in her political poems of the 1980s and 1990s, Duffy continues to “present it, as it is” by underlining the role of the poet in contemporary society as a commentator who “should have a finger on the national pulse” (Wroe, 2014). Duffy’s “presenting it, as it is” motto and perception of the poet as a person who should have a concern for the public matters reminds one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, another female poet who declared in her Nineteenth century verse-novel *Aurora Leigh*, in “Book Five: Poets and the Present Age” that poets should reflect the age they live in. Like Barrett Browning’s metaphor of the age as a mother breastfeeding the poets like a mother feeding her children, Carol Ann Duffy captures the contemporary reality and concerns of the British society and voices them boldly also in her laureate poetry.