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### **Curse Upon Beauty: Analysis of Carol Ann Duffy’s “Beautiful”**

**Güzelliğin Laneti; Carol Ann Duffy’nin “Beautiful” Adlı Şiirinin Analizi**

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**Öz** Carol Ann Duffy'nin "Beautiful" şiiri, güzelliğin alışılmadık yönlerinin incelemesini sunar. Şiir, canlı imgeler, imalar, mecaz ve çağrışımçı bir dil kullanarak güzelliğin karmaşıklığını ve kadının sosyal yaşamda yıkımına neden olma potansiyelini analiz eder. Şiir, dört farklı kadının -Truvalı Helen, Kleopatra, Marilyn Monroe ve Prenses Diana- dört farklı zamanda incelenmesiyle, kadınların hayatlarına getirdiği hem fiziksel hem de zihinsel yıkımı göstererek geleneksel güzellik kavramına meydan okur. Böylelikle, Duffy'nin şiiri, çağlarında güzelliğin hem sembolü hem de kurbanı haline gelen, açıkça ismi verilmeyen ancak ima edilen kahramanların trajedileri etrafında döner. Duffy, ataerkil düzen tarafından inşa edilen geleneklere, düzene ve ataerkil bakışa maruz kalan kadınların mevcut sosyal yapı içerisinde nasıl kapana kısıldığını ve güzellikleri nedeniyle insanlık dışı muameleyle insani statülerinin onlardan nasıl gasp edildiğini gösterir. Duffy güzelliğin karanlık tarafını sunarak, şiirde ataerkil düzende kadının değerinin nasıl metaya indirildiğini resmeder. Güzelliğin bu metalaştırılması, her yaşta kadının nesneleştirilmesine ve sömürülmesine yol açar. Duffy, şiirde farklı çağlarda farklı isimlerin kullanılmasıyla çağlar değişse de sorunun aynı kaldığını kanıtlar. Duffy'nin şiirinde güzellik ve güzel olanın takdir edilmesi değerini korumaz aksine kadının hayatını zehirleyen bir lanet haline gelir. Bu nedenle, bu makalenin amacı, Duffy'nin "Beautiful" şiirinde kadın olmanın ve güzel olarak etiketlenmenin karmaşıklığının nasıl irdelediğini analiz etmektir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Carol Ann Duffy, Beautiful, Truvalı Helen, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, Prenses Diana

**Abstract** Carol Ann Duffy's poem "Beautiful" presents an exploration of unusual aspects of beauty. With the use of vivid imagery, allusions, metaphor, and evocative language, the poem analyses the complexities of beauty and its latent potential to cause the destruction of women in social life. Through the exploration of four different women — Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Princess Diana— of four different times, the poem challenges the conventional notions of beauty by showing both the physical and mental devastation it brings to women's lives. Thus, Duffy's poem revolves around the tragedies of the clearly unidentified but hinted protagonists that become both the symbols and victims of beauty. By being exposed to the patriarchal conventions, male order, and the gazing eye, how women are entrapped in the social order, and how their human status is usurped from them in their inhuman treatment based on their beauty is what Duffy presents in the poem. Duffy presents the dark side of beauty and how women's value is reduced to a simple commodity that can be bought and sold in the patriarchal order. This commodification of beauty results in the objectification and exploitation of women in every age. Through the use of different names different ages, Duffy proves that even though the ages change, the problem remains the same. As a consequence, the appreciation of beauty and what is beautiful no longer preserves its positive value but becomes a curse that poisons women's lives. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyse how Duffy delves into the complexities of being a woman and being labelled as beautiful in her poem "Beautiful".

**Keywords:** Carol Ann Duffy, Beautiful, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, Princess Diana

## Introduction

"Beautiful" is a poem written by Carol Ann Duffy which is published in her poetry collection entitled *Feminine Gospels* in 2002. By alluding to four women of different times and places, namely —Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Princess Diana— Duffy connects the past with the present in "Beautiful". What brings these women together in the same poem, as the title suggests, is their admitted beauty. However, Duffy does not present the concept of beauty as something to be praised. She rather presents it as the reason for their entrapment in society. She asserts that the female body is sexualized by society for its own benefit. Reflecting the unusual side of beauty, Duffy subverts the conventions and reflects how all these influential women experienced the horrors of society and pushed their tragic

ends. In the poem, seductive female beauty is often accompanied by destructive male strength, male order, and the idea of control. In this perspective, the poem conveys the message that beauty brings anguish to women's existence, threatens their mental health, and eventually, destroys them. Accordingly, Carol Ann Duffy's "Beautiful" is suitable for delving into the complexities of beauty and how it contributes to women's objectification and controls them in the patriarchal order by being exposed to the controlling gazing eye related to these four women; Helen, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Princess Diana.

### **Carol Ann Duffy and the Concept of Beauty**

Carol Ann Duffy's poetic vocation is based on the "conflation of the representation of reality and the represented reality as reality itself" (Reis, 2004, p.134). Her selection of the topic and the presentation of it in contemporary life offers a health standpoint since Duffy chooses to mention the latent darkness that involves the duality of reality even in basic definitions like the concept of beauty. Accordingly, Duffy redeems the flamboyant praise of the "what is beautiful" based on goodness, purity, and attraction by displaying the destructive side of beauty since it has the potential to lead destruction of a woman who is being labeled as beautiful. She combines the desirability and purity effect of the beautiful with destruction. By showing the duality of the innocence and brutality that beauty has, Duffy casts doubt with her use of "witty language, metaphors and imagery" (Kut, 2013, p.103). The most common definition of duality in beauty is described by *LDOCE* in two ways, namely, "someone or something that is beautiful is extremely attractive to look at" and secondly: "very good or giving you great pleasure". However, as opposed to the most common aspect of beauty, the attractiveness in females captures the eye of the beholder which is male in the patriarchal context. Even if the concept of beauty seems innocent at first, the "admiration of natural physical beauty becomes objectification" (MacKinnon, 1989, p.198) of females since "sexual objectification, [...] definitive of and synonymous with women's lives as gender female" (MacKinnon, 1989, p.120). In addition to the seemingly innocent side of the concept of beauty, Carol Ann Duffy, by exemplifying the concept of beauty with real people in real life, presents the hidden brutality that beauty contains in her poem, "Beautiful". With the unusual representation of beauty in the poem as something catastrophic, Duffy dismantles the common notions of beauty as a natural and positive concept by showing its destructive power in the use of men by revealing gender dynamics.

### **Curse Upon Beauty: Analysis of Carol Ann Duffy's "Beautiful"**

#### **Reassessment of Helen's Beauty**

"Beautiful" begins directly by addressing a personal pronoun "[s]he" (Duffy, 2002, l. 1). Even though the name is not given overtly, it is evident that the person who is mentioned is Helen of Troy whose mythical beauty resounds among the gods and the mortals. In the poem, Helen is said to be "born from an egg"<sup>1</sup> (l. 1). This statement signifies the birth of a divinity as the only mortal daughter of Zeus (Blondell, 2013, p.29). Her most celebrated beauty is defined by Duffy as "divinely fair, a pearl, drop-dead/gorgeous, beautiful, a peach, / a child of grace, a stunner" (2002, ll. 3-5). While the pearl, which is "credited to the tears of heavenly creatures or the formation of sun-touched dewdrops" (Hallman, 2020, p.4) is used as a symbol of "seduction" signifying deific allure and "purity" (Hallman, 2020, p.4), peach is used as an omen of danger. Broadly, the peach has been taken as a symbol of breasts or more

<sup>1</sup> It was mentioned in *Deipnosophistae* by Athenaeus of Naucratis for the first time. Michael B. Hornum, in his book titled "*Nemesis, the Roman State & the Games*", partly translated *Deipnosophistae*. According to this translation "Zeus, taking the form of a swan, had intercourse with Nemesis, the daughter of Oceanus, having changed her into a goose, as they say foolishly. She bore an egg and left it in the marsh. A herdsman upon finding it took it to Leda. Placing it in a box, she guarded it. At the proper time Helen was born from the egg, whom Leda raised as her own daughter" (1993, p.146).

broadly, the female body as Duffy uses in the poem, to describe Helen's sensuality and the precarious erotic desire she evokes in others. However, Helen's beauty is completed with "the starlike sorrows of immortal eyes" (Duffy, 2002, l. 6) suggesting the curse of beauty which is placed upon her in her heavenly position. Her life is marred by her beauty since she became the object of men's erotic fantasy world.

Helen is the mythical epitome of masculine obsession in both her classical representation and in Duffy's poem which she uses as proof to reflect the uncanny and dark side of the beauty. Her gracious attraction and "perfume of her breath" (Duffy, 2002, l. 16) simply "won the heart / of every man she saw. / They stood in line, sighed, / knelt, beseeched Be Mine" (ll. 8-11). As represented in the poem, Helen has an overwhelming power over men based on her beauty. Thus, men beseeching "be mine" in desperation presented in the poem to Helen is the sign of "belonging and connection [which] often gets bound up with the sense which expresses proprietary control and possession. This proprietary control [...] involves dominating power" (Smith, 1986, p.103). The possessive masculine desire to own Helen as if she is an object, or to be the master of her, turns her beauty into a punishment withholding Helen to make her own decisions even in marriage. In the ancient Greek culture, a woman's duty is to "perpetuate her husband's name and line by bearing him male heirs. [Furthermore, a] girl's acquisition of erotic beauty at adolescence marks her readiness to undertake this role, signaling her desirability as a wife and her potential to bear fine children" (Blondell, 2013, p1), and this understanding entrapped Helen into a marriage with Menelaus. She is regarded as an object whose beauty will glorify her husband's name since, as the poem also underlines, "beauty is fame" (Duffy, 2002, l. 49). Therefore, many men competed. Yet, it is Menelaus who won her with his tremendous presents (Osborne, 2005, p.18) in her classical representation. As Roisman suggests, in Homer's *Iliad*, "women are possessions, to be bartered or fought over, but are not free agents" (2006, p.2). As it can be seen clearly, any woman in the patriarchal order is not far away from being a rightful commodity of men. Yet, Carol Ann Duffy grants Helen agency in her decision to take a lover (Duffy, 2002, l. 18) that Homer denies.

While Helen is "not the taker but the taken" in *The Iliad* (Blondell, 2010, p.3), a stolen object from Menelaus by Paris, Duffy's Helen, the object of manly desire, has her own passions, and she shows the sign of momentary autonomy by choosing to go off with her lover, leaving her wedding ring on the bedside table (2002, ll. 21-22) which symbolizes her indifference to her marriage with Menelaus. Thus, the wedding ring is no longer the symbol of loveful unity but a symbol of entrapment in the patriarchal society since the marriage of Helen to Menelaus is decided on behalf of her name. However, the meaning of her action to run away with her lover "was [w]ar" (Duffy, 2002, l. 25) and this war has become the symbol of the destructive side of beauty. Moreover, according to the patriarchal understanding, Helen is the stolen object who must be returned to her owner immediately. Therefore, to bring the stolen object back to its owner, "[a] thousand ships – / on every one a thousand men / [...] braggad and shoved across a thousand miles of sea" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 26-41). Blondell states that "[a]s the iconic errant woman who must be reincorporated into patriarchal social structures, she is also the foundation of Greek masculinity, insofar as this is grounded in the control of women" (2013, p.IX). Actually, Duffy portrays patriarchal society's sexualization of women for the patriarchy's own benefit. Women's bodies become an area for men where they can justify their power, secure their name, and actualize their position as a man and a hero in society. Thus, the soldier's alacrity to take back the adulterous wife at the cost of their lives is to purify themselves from the embarrassment of losing the ability to rule a woman. Accordingly, Helen becomes the mighty symbol of masculine honour and victory in the patriarchal order.

Helen's objectification is also reflected at another point in the poem where "she lay high up /in a foreign castle's walls" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 42-43) waiting to "become the lawful possession of the winner" (Roisman, 2006, p.4). She has no control over her fate and she is the award to be taken regardless of her choices. Yet, her objectification by society saves her from the consequences of her action to flee with Paris since "[a]gency entails responsibility, and responsibility entails susceptibility to blame and, most importantly, punishment" (Blondell, 2010, p.4). As a result, Paris is deemed as the sole perpetrator of the abjection. Therefore, she is able to return to her husband without being subjected to any punishment. Moreover, Duffy pictures the tragedy more broadly in the lines between 49-57. It is not only Helen who suffers, the lover<sup>3</sup> is deserted (Duffy, 2002, l. 54-55), and the cuckolded husband grieves with his wife whose tears fall upon his face (Duffy, 2002, l. 52-53). Now the wife suffers even more than before. Helen is deserted, her lover is dead and her husband has experienced the shame of being cuckolded as represented in the poem with a sorrowful tone.

In this unhappy atmosphere, Duffy employs the maid (2002, l. 67) as a symbol of female solidarity. The web of oppression of females at the hands of patriarchy creates a strong bond of loyalty among women. The maid's devotion to her lady in keeping her secrets (2002, ll. 69-72) from the curious public is Carol Ann Duffy's retaliation to the male oppression of women based on their attractive beauty which results in Helen's entrapment in the end which was symbolized by Duffy with "bird inside a cage" (ll. 73-74) since caged birds are often used as a symbol of imprisonment (de Vries, 1976, p.49), as in the case of the female protagonist of *Aurora Leigh* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She has become an object which is caged to be displayed for its beauty. However, women's objection and the idea of control are not limited only to the sufferings of Helen.

### **Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator; Duffy's "Tough Beauty"**

In "Beautiful," Duffy depicts Helen as the woman with a face that launched a thousand ships, nonetheless; Cleopatra is depicted as the woman who gets the rulers down on their knees (2002, l. 80). Again, a strong clue is given that the mysterious woman is Cleopatra VII Philopator<sup>4 5</sup>. "She never aged" suggests that neither the beauty of her face fades and changes her character, nor her popularity decreases within years. She has a thirst for political supremacy leading her to kill her brother-husband Ptolemy XIII (Jones, 2006, p.XIV), and commits adultery with Caesar and Antony (Jones, 2006, p.XIV). Even though her intellectual merits outpace her beauty in her control of men, patriarchy stereotyped her as dangerous beauty and an enchantress, and seduction rather than intelligence has been depicted as the only way to outsmart men. Her stereotypification as a seductress or a sorceress has been caused by men who fear losing control over women since Cleopatra has become the personification of patriarchs falling from power.

Historically, during her power struggle with her brother-husband Ptolemy XIII, Cleopatra wins the favour of Caesar, and with his help, she heightens her position as the Queen of Egypt. Therefore, Caesar holds a significant place in her life. Similarly, Duffy makes use of these historical power relations throughout her part of the poem related to the Egyptian Queen as proof of Cleopatra's vicious nature. Duffy describes Cleopatra's encounter with Caesar as follows: "[s]he'd tumbled from a rug at Caesar's feet, / seen him kneel to pick her up / and felt him want her as he did" (2002, l. 79-81). It is said that followers of Cleopatra

<sup>2</sup> In Homer's *Iliad* Helen waits for the result of the fight between Menelaus and Paris (2006, pp. 56-72).

<sup>3</sup> In Homer's *Iliad* Paris is fatally wounded by an arrow shot by the rival archer Philoctetes. When the war is won by the Greeks, Helen returns to her home while Paris is left alone in his grave (2006, p.69)

<sup>4</sup> Cleopatra VII was born in 69 B.C.E., the second of the five children of Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos who had ruled Egypt since the death of Ptolemy X Alexander II in 80 B.C.E. (Burstein, 2004, p.11).

<sup>5</sup> Cleopatra VII, is the last of the Ptolemaic queens (Jones, 2006).

smuggled her into Caesar's chamber under bedclothes (Burstein, 2004, p.18), or in a sack by surprising him at the most unexpected moment which reflects the cunning and intelligent side of Cleopatra. Moreover, as she is intelligent, she is a "particularly beautiful woman and, at the time, being in her prime, she [i]s conspicuously lovely" and most significantly she knows "how to use her charms to be attractive to everyone" (Jones, 2006, p.56). The impact of her allure and wit on Caesar makes "him kneel to pick her up" (Duffy, 2002, l. 80) in the poem suggesting power relations between the two. She is able to use her femininity to get what she wants, even reducing Caesar to "gibbering" (l. 82) in bed shows the power that she possesses. In her relationship with Caesar, Cleopatra has become "Caesar's ally and mistress, she was also his dominant partner" (Jones, 2006, p.XIV). In that sense, Cleopatra represents feminine strength in the patriarchal order and it is evident that Duffy dismantles the historical myth of women being passive receptors of any sexual intimacy.

The Egyptian Queen has been historically portrayed as a woman of seductive nature rather than a woman of quick wit. In the poem, the lines between 83-87 set the scene of a deliberate seduction with the symbolism of "grapes and honey, yoghurt, / [...] gleaming figs, soft wines" (2002, ll. 85-86) which are known for their aphrodisiac quality (Hospodar, 2004, pp.84-91). It is also mentioned that the queen "soaked herself in jasmine-scented milk" (Duffy, 2002, l. 87). The jasmine flower is "known as one type of aphrodisiac or a substance that can stimulate sexual arousal, which can also provide a calming effect" (Lestari, 2019, p.195). The use of food and a flower contributes to the sensuality and the witty side of Cleopatra. Yet, the most significant part is she knows how to use these foods, beverages, and a flower to her benefit to accompany her beauty. As a result of the deliberate seduction, Cleopatra nullifies the man "ten times her strength" by bringing him down to "nothing, zilch" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 89-92). In that sense, the oxymoronic "[t]hough beauty" (Duffy, 2002, l. 96) summarizes Cleopatra's character in the best way. To epitomize the character of the "[t]hough beauty" (Duffy, 2002, l.96), Carol Ann Duffy uses "Nile" (2002, l.95) to explore the destructive power of beauty. This suggests that the beauty that Cleopatra had was both powerful and dangerous, like a river that could sweep away everything in its path. Therefore, Duffy pictures Cleopatra as a woman not easy to be overthrown and as a threat to men.

Sexual implications and the idea of control continue throughout the part concerning Cleopatra. Duffy develops a non-sexual female gaze watching him hunting and exercising (Duffy, 2002, ll. 115-118) making the mysterious "him" the object of the narration. Slowly, Cleopatra's story with Caesar dissolves into her story with Antony with whom Cleopatra "found a powerful new patron and protector" (Burstein, 2004, p.24). Mark Antony was a highly influential cavalry officer in the army when he first met Cleopatra in Tarsus (Burstein, p.23). It is a known fact that "Antony, struck by her intelligence as well as her appearance, was captivated by her as if he were a young lad, although he was forty years old" (Jones, 2006, p.103). Cleopatra used his weaknesses well to have control over him which is described in the poem as "[s]he waved him off to war, / then pulled on boy's clothes, crept / at dusk into his camp, his shadowed tent, / touched him, made him fuck her as a lad" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 123-126). Especially, the last line suggests the Queen's sexual power over him.

Duffy brings the last tragedy of a woman of politics in the world of men into the light and raises the tension of the poem with another historical reality. As can be seen in the last lines of Cleopatra's part, her political moves captured the attention of Rome since Cleopatra had an alliance and romantic relationship with a Roman soldier, Mark Antony whose devotion to Cleopatra surpasses his patriotism. Duffy portrays Antony's love for Cleopatra since the Queen waves Anthony into the war with his own country (Duffy, 2002, l.124) as it has taken part in history, (Jones, 2006, pp.147-149) to give the lands belonging to the Roman Empire to her and her heirs (Burstein, 2004, p.65). She decided to use her political intellect and her beauty not to secure Egypt from an invasion of Rome, but to subjugate Rome by using Antony and this act of the Queen alerted men in Rome (Burstein, p.65) since it was an embarrassing situation for men losing the control of woman as in the case of Helen.

Therefore, the Roman legions marched to Egypt to bring down the queen and her lover (Jones, 2006, pp. 147-149) which convinced Cleopatra that her end was too near. As a result, she committed suicide by the bite of a "snake" (Duffy, 2002, l. 134), "depriv[ing anyone] of the opportunity to lead her into the city in chains" (Burstein, 2004, p.66). Thus, Duffy presents the gallant decision of the Queen since the uraeus, which was the royal emblem of Pharaohs (Griffiths, 1961, p.113) signifying sovereignty; and divine authority. Committing suicide by the bite of a serpent was the right end for the last Pharaoh of Egypt since she was determined not to surrender herself to the yoke of patriarchy, the moment, she understood that she could not be the winning side of the battle. Therefore, Duffy combines historical reality with her "Beautiful" by mentioning the snake which actually symbolizes Cleopatra's rejection of being the token of the glory of men or being the object of desire.

Cleopatra is often regarded as merely a beautiful woman who seduced men to achieve power rather than a woman who grasped a powerful political position for herself by using her intellect in the world of men. Thus, according to some historians, she is notably famous for being "the greatest of seductresses, who drove men to their doom, [yet] she had only two known relationships in 18 years, hardly a sign of promiscuity" (Roller, 2010, p.2). Both in actuality and in Duffy's poem, Cleopatra is a woman of intellect and great power. Yet, her desire for power brings her own tragedy in the patriarchal society since she is a tremendous threat to the patriarchal order. As a result, she was pushed to her tragic end by Cleopatra being left with no choice other than to commit suicide. No matter how powerful she was, she was the victim of the patriarchs, and her victimization is epitomized in every line of Carol Ann Duffy's "Beautiful".

### **Beautiful Dumb Blond and the Numb Viewers; Monroe vs. the Scrutiny of Media**

As opposed to Cleopatra's power over men, Marilyn Monroe has been presented by Carol Ann Duffy in "Beautiful" as a captive of the male fetishist scopophilia which is "the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object" (Mulvey, 1975, p.9). Again in the third part of the poem, the name of the addressee is not given explicitly, yet a strong clue is given that it is Marilyn Monroe (born Norma Jeane Mortenson), through her vivid description of the objectification by the changing film industry. With the changing mindset towards women's sexuality and liberty of sexual expression (Escoffier, 2004, p.1), Marilyn Monroe emerged as a new type of sex symbol (Rollyson, 2014, p.157) in the 1950s and 1960s in Hollywood. Even though her actual hair colour is reddish brown, Marilyn was the world's most famous blonde whose screen image is based on a naïve woman who comes into prominence with her look, not her intellectual capabilities which made her earn the title of the dumb blonde (Sherrow, 2023, pp.351-352) as represented by Duffy as "dumb beauty" (2002, l.153). Furthermore, she was undeniably a taboo breaker (Dyer, 2004, p.24) with "her cheesecake modelling; her typecast roles as the 'dumb blonde' and 'blonde bombshell'; the exploitation of her body as an erotic object in film and popular culture; her famous hip-swinging walk, breathy voice, ecstatic laugh, and quivering upper lip" (Scheibel, 2013, p.5) and Duffy makes use of these overt qualities to create a sense that the mysterious third "she" in the poem is Monroe (2002, ll.136-138). Moreover, she was sexualized, and her sexuality was used as an instrument for white men's pleasure (Dyer, 2013, p.40) through the satisfaction of the voyeuristic male gaze that "projects its phantasy on to the female figure" (Mulvey, 1975, p.11). Duffy criticizes this dehumanizing effect of the male gaze on women exemplified by Monroe, as a prove of the curse upon beauty since the women's personalities and dignity are reduced to an instrument of sexual pleasure.

Marilyn Monroe was a sensuous and highly provocative beauty and "[t]he camera loved her" (Duffy, 2002, l. 135) and so did the public. It is actually Hollywood that created the image of Marilyn Monroe for the public since the real person behind the persona was Norma Jeane Mortenson. The persona was the doll created to gratify the wish-fulfilment of heterosexual male desire through gazing. For instance, Duffy refers to Marilyn Monroe's famous rendition

of "Happy Birthday Mr. President" which is for President J. F. Kennedy (2002, ll.159-160). There is a beautiful woman, who is Monroe, on stage to gratify male scopophilia and a male gazing eye which belongs to J.F.K. taking pleasure from what he sees. This powerful allusion which has taken place in real life exemplifies how Monroe's beauty is used and exploited by men to gratify their pleasures. In addition to that, it is no surprise that both the film industry and the newly emerging consumer culture "adored the waxy pouting of her mouth, / her sleepy, startled gaze. [As] [s]he breathed / the script out in her little voice" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 136-138). Also, in these lines of the poem, Duffy uses Monroe's image taken from *Life* magazine to describe her. When she is photographed for the first time for *Life* magazine, she is photographed with "half-closed eyes and slightly parted lips, [Philippe] Halsman makes her into a sex goddess" (Belmont, 2007, p.49). This image of her as a sex goddess looked orgasmic and contributed to her perceived sexual naturalness due to her atomic blondness. To be clear, she is the dumb blonde, and "[t]he dumbness of the dumb blonde is by tradition natural, because it means that she is [...] untouched by the corruption of the world" (Dyer, 2004, pp.33-34). Therefore, with her "combined naturalness and overt sexuality" (Dyer, 2004, p.34), she is neither the femme fatale nor a home girl. As a result, she becomes the ultimate object to be displayed to please men's scopophilia through Hollywood. The looking eye of the men has found both innocence and lust in her. Furthermore, her objectification by the media is explicitly given in the lines where Duffy wrote: "[t]hey filmed her / famous, filmed her beautiful. / Guys fell in love (2002, ll. 138-140). Mulvey makes the analysis of the male gaze and female objectification as follows:

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: [...] she holds the look, lays to and signifies male desire. (1975, p.11)

In that sense, Monroe was used as an object to complete erotic contemplation by the media. In short, the intrusive quality of the mass media manipulated her and usurped the woman's subject quality with the projection of the male gaze.

Marilyn Monroe and her overt sexuality become an indispensable feature of popular consuming culture. She is filmed "harder, harder" (Duffy, 2002, l. 144) as if she is being raped by the media since Monroe with her desirability was a valuable money-making machine for them. The poem lists these as in the following lines: "till her hair / was platinum, her teeth gems, her eyes / [...] / She sang to camera one, gushed / at the greased-up lens, her skin investors' gold, / her fingernails mother-of-pearl" (ll. 144-149). Monroe's most outstanding quality is her blondness, yet it is not any type of blondness but "platinum (peroxide) bloneness, [that is] the ultimate sign of whiteness [...] frequently associated with wealth, [...] the term 'platinum' or in pin-ups where the hair colour [was] visually rhymed with a silver or gold dress [...] and with jewellery" (Dyer, 2004, p.40). Through her looks and beauty, she drew the image of the person everyone would want to have. She is represented as the embodiment of ultimate beauty. With her hair and her pieces of jewellery, she is taken as a commodity to be explored and to be made use of especially by the male public. The expression "her skin investor's gold" (Duffy, 2002, l. 148) actually reveals the brutality in her treatment and how beauty is used in the newly emerging media attention.

The filmmakers continue to make money through Monroe not only while she was alive, but also when she was dead. Initially, they filmed Monroe repeatedly till it became for her a monotonous routine (Duffy, 2002, ll. 163-164) while she was alive. Accordingly, the phrase "dumped what they couldn't use" (Duffy, 2002, l. 162) suggests that the filmmakers, directors, scriptwriters, and others, all together, created a certain stereotype but they missed the whole (Rollyson, 2014, p.35). The persona signifies her character lacks development due to the expectations of her as a "dumb blonde". The image of her body is presented by filmmakers in a way that will make money and nobody cares for the rest.



Moreover, the fact that they filmed Monroe "till she couldn't die when she died / couldn't get older," (Duffy, 2002, ll. 165-166) meant that her image recorded by the cameras grants her immortality and connects her with the contemporary spectators/viewers. She has already immortalized herself when she died of "substantial amounts of the barbiturate" (Rollyson, 2014, p.239). However, when she died, people were too greedy to show respect for her dead body. The photographs of her dead body lying in bed nude were taken and printed on the very pages of magazines. Even after her death, the press was making use of her. As a reference to the disrespectful treatment of her dead body, the last line of the poem mentions "the dark roots / of her pubic hair" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 169-170) displaying the intrusive quality of the greedy media seeking any sort of information for its own benefit by leaking something that Marilyn Monroe would want to keep as a secret. The indifference of the media takes the form of flesh and bones (figuratively) with Duffy's inclusion of "the smoking cop" into the poem who is watching the zipping of Monroe's dead body into the body bag without showing respect (2002, ll. 167-170). Duffy does not only point to the systematic disrespect and lack of empathy Monroe experienced during her life but also depicts her posthumous commodification and devaluation in the poem. The hounding aspect of the press is realistically defined by Carol Ann Duffy in the part related to Marilyn Monroe, yet Monroe was not the only woman consumed by the media both in real life and in "Beautiful".

### **Beautiful and the Beast; Princess Diana and the Intrusive Power of the Media**

The invasion of privacy is not limited to the glamour queen, Marilyn Monroe, and the presumptuous power of the media takes another level when the fairy tales' most wanted character, the princess comes into Duffy's poem. It is blindingly obvious that the final woman of the poem is Diana Princess of Wales (born Diana Frances Spencer; 1 July 1961 – 31 August 1997) every corner of whose life was favourably displayed under the spotlight. Allegedly, Princess Diana was the most photographed person while she was alive due to her marriage to Prince Charles. She was chosen as the future queen of England by Prince Charles to produce heirs, not as a beloved wife since she captured Prince Charles' attention based on her beauty that she had (Gitlin, 2008, p.56) as Duffy also suggests in "Beautiful". In this respect, she was the captive of the Prince, a male monarch, at first, and then, became the captive of the media as a result of her place in the royal family. However, as the princess was taking her power from the media, it was the same source that led her to her own destruction. As her brother, Charles Spencer suggested in her funeral "a girl given the name of the ancient goddess of hunting was, in the end, the most hunted person of the modern age" (6 September 1997/2017). She was born as a lady and became a princess, yet she was led to her death as an animal chased by the press.

Diana, the late Princess of Wales, who wed Queen Elizabeth's son and heir, Prince Charles has been the object of charm in the growing mass media. As the Princess herself said in an interview with the BBC, the union "was a fairy story that everybody wanted to work" (personal communication, 20 November 1995). Therefore, in the re-writing of fairy tales in the contemporary work of Duffy's "Beautiful", the media took the form of articulation of mass desire of the obsessive and intrusive public who wants to know the Princess' life imagining her as if she was a fictional character of a much-dreamed fantasy work. Eventually, she was a common girl with a well-esteemed background chosen to be the princess, like Cinderella, (Helmets, 2001, p.438), and to be the future queen of England. This image of a fairy tale princess was feeding the fantasies of the public and leading to "a consumerist desire that paradoxically can only be satisfied by continuous consumption" (Conrad, 1999, p.126) can only be satisfied through the daily news of the couple emerging in the media. However, this story was an unhappy one. Even though Diana looked like a fairy tale princess, Prince Charles was not the prince charming. Their marriage as Diana suggested "was a bit crowded" (personal communication, 20 November 1995) with the inclusion of Camilla Rosemary Shand (later Parker Bowles). The tale was a tragedy from the

very beginning since it was believed that Prince Charles married Diana not because he loved her, but because it was his responsibility to marry one (Gitlin, 2008, p.35). All in all, Diana was a Princess, a wife never loved, a mother, and a divorcee who was chased by the media till her death.

Echoing the princess' tragedies in classic fairy tales, the poem starts with the announcement of Diana's status as "[d]ead" (Duffy, 2002, l. 171). Duffy presents Diana as the "elegant bone," (2002, l.171) referring to her disease called bulimia. Princess Diana confessed on TV "I had bulimia for a number of years. And that's like a secret disease. You inflict it upon yourself because your self-esteem is at a low ebb, and you don't think you're worthy or valuable" (personal communication, 20 November 1995). She suffered from the public's growing attention to her and her new responsibilities as a new member of the royal family. She was growing "painfully thin, courtesy of bulimia nervosa. Her waist size shrunk from 29 inches to 23½ inches during the five months between the day her engagement was announced and the day of the wedding" (Gitlin, 2008, p.36). Therefore, she used binge eating and vomiting as a defense mechanism. That was the cry for help that nobody heard in her unhappy marriage. As Diana suggested, she and the Prince were a "good team" (personal communication, 20 November 1995) but not lovers. Consequently, she is criticized by the media and the public as an "empty head[ed]" (Duffy, 2002, l. 174) princess and Duffy inserts this criticism into her poem. However, besides all these, Diana was the people's beloved princess and the love of common people from all around the world turned her into an icon as Duffy presents in "Beautiful".

Princess Diana's docile manners made her earn the title of the queen of hearts in people's hearts and Duffy does not abstain from reflecting this admiration of the Princess that convinced people to be like "her". She was mostly defined as "(1) a humanitarian, (2) someone who reached out to people (she was real, vulnerable, nice, sincere), (3) the people's princess, (4) a mother [...], (5) a media icon" (Hermes & Noordhuizen, 1999, p.78) who set the new trends. Especially, women loved her and "under / her spell, swore that what she wore / they'd wear, coloured their hair (Duffy, 2002, ll. 176-178). Under her enchantment, women all around the world "started to style their hair the same way that Diana did. They admired the young princess's clothing, her jewelry, and her worldwide status" (Poprocki, 2009, p.48). The admiration for her was so strong that ladies wanted to be like her, and they followed her in every way. Unfortunately, this seemingly innocent admiration, made the Princess the victim of the gazing eye that led to her final catastrophe. In "Beautiful" Duffy reflects the love of people for the Princess in a realistically accurate way, as well as reflecting her commodification in modern life in the poem. While every line of the poem figuratively shouts out that Diana is a victim of the media, Duffy also reveals that people's love for her actually paved the way for her tragedy.

Duffy proclaims the unjust suffering of the Princess by inserting her image at the balcony into the poem which reflects the painful part of Lady Diana's life that had been spent under the gaze of the public. This was reflected in "Beautiful" as "[t]he whole town came / to wave at her on her balcony, / to stare and stare and stare" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 179-181). Like every member of the royal family, all she could do was wave and smile to the public even when she was suffering. Furthermore, the staring eye of the media made her an prisoner of the public eye. In her interview with the BBC, which created the di-namite effect, the Princess states that

[t]he most daunting aspect was the media attention [...] I seemed to be on the front of a newspaper every single day, which is an isolating experience, and the higher the media put you, place you, is the bigger the drop. And I was very aware of that [...] it was isolating, but it was also a situation where you couldn't indulge in feeling sorry for yourself: you had to either sink or swim. And you had to learn that very fast (personal communication, 20 November 1995).

It was no doubt that she was "portrayed as a star" (Hermes & Noordhuizen, 1999, p.78) due to her beauty and elegant manners. Yet, her beauty reflected in the poem is interpreted as an instrument that shaped and controlled her fate which brought the Princess agony. Accordingly, by dissolving the phrase "Beauty is fame" that is used at the beginning of the poem into "Beauty is fate", Duffy attributes to the unusual destructive quality that leads to the destruction of women. Moreover, Duffy continues to support her claim she presents in "Beautiful" the real events in the Princess' life. For instance, Lady Diana's isolation in her marriage can be explicitly seen during their tour to Bharat (India) during which Prince Charles did not accompany her to the Taj Mahal, the token of love. Duffy refers to the released images of Diana in the poem as she "posed alone / in front of the Taj Mahal, / betrayed, beautifully pale" (Duffy, 2002, ll 187-189) "could prove depressing and a testimony to a failing marriage" (Gitlin, 2008, p.87). The image of the Princess, standing alone, is taken by Duffy as if she was embracing the falling of the fairy tale marriage. However, the media demanded more from her as the image of her loneliness was not enough for them.

The most brutal side of the media is reflected in the poem by Carol Ann Duffy with these words; "[a]ct like a fucking princess — / how they loved her, / the men from the press — / Give us a smile, cunt" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 191-194). Even Princess Diana was aware of her commodification by the media, and she commented upon it as "as a good product that sits on a shelf and sells well, and people make a lot of money" (personal communication, 20 November 1995). Finally, Duffy ends the poem with a bleak image of Princess Diana, whose "face" is smeared with "[h]istory's stinking breath" (Duffy, 2002, l.198). This image of the princess suggests that Diana's beauty was ultimately destroyed by the scrutiny of the media and the growing public's obsession with her. Like Marilyn Monroe, she was an object and a money-making machine for the press. They never cared about the negativities that they inflicted upon these ladies for their own capitalistic endeavours. Sadly, she was haunted by the media till her most horrifying death. On 31 August 1997, Diana died in a car crash in Paris while the driver was trying to get away from the paparazzi.

## Conclusion

The "[h]istory's" (Duffy, 2002, l. 198) pattern of exploitation and the bitter fate of women repeat themselves at every age with different people. By bringing together four women of different times, Carol Ann Duffy shows how women are exposed to history's suffocating "stinking breath" (2002, l. 198) of inflictions blown upon them. She makes a bitter criticism of the history of women through the depictions of four different historical figures. Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Diana, Princess of Wales were all victims of the male gaze due to their admitted beauty and each story is severe in its own bitter ending created by the patriarchal society. Helen was caged, Cleopatra died by the bite of an asp, Marilyn Monroe died of an overdose, and Diana died in a car accident. As their beauty connected them, their sufferings and tragedies also reflected in the poem have a unifying quality. Their bodies were sexualized to gain control and were used to get benefits out of it such as earning money.

In Carol Ann Duffy's "Beautiful," historical reality meets literature and the multi-dimensional oppression of women takes the form of a literary expression in every line of the poem. Duffy's poem challenges the traditional view of beauty as something desirable. Instead, she presents how beauty can be a destructive force that can lead to women's suffering and even death. Thus, in the poem, "Beauty is fame" is accompanied by "Beauty is fate" in and the accompaniment of these phrases is used to reflect the objectification and restrictions that women endure throughout history are epitomized by these four women of four different times. While Helen is animalized by being put in a cage like a bird for its beauty, Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana are objectified by the media by being iconized. In such a case, the concept of privacy disappears, and they become public property available to be used by everyone (figuratively) as represented in the poem. Eventually, their human status

is usurped. Cleopatra, on the other hand, considers death as a freedom and she kills herself in a most sacred but painful way which is the bite of an uraeus rather than being under the yoke of patriarchy. By not overtly giving the names of Helen, Cleopatra, Marilyn Monroe, and Princess Diana, and presenting them as the unified "she," Duffy proves that the sufferings of the women remain the same even though the time, place, and names are changing and reflects the degradation of the female body which is commodified by their gender. To sum up, the moment the historical destruction of women based on the idea of control meets with Carol Ann Duffy's pen, the concept of beauty and what is "Beautiful" gain destructive meaning epitomized by these four women.

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