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UNMASKING MISANDRY: A NEW HISTORICIST READING OF CAROL ANN DUFFY'S "MRS AESOP" AND "EURYDICE"*

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Abstract

The new historicism theory propounds that history is inherently textual, is composed of texts, and thus no such thing as absolute truth is possible while recounting the past. As a form of text, poetry stands out as a tool to reflect the society of which it is a product. As the first female poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy encapsulates both fictional and nonfictional women from history and successfully manipulates what has already been narrated by men into something novel to give voice to women's concerns in her poetry. This study, employing a new historicist approach, examines "Mrs Aesop" and "Eurydice" from Duffy's poetry collection *The World's Wife* to explore the prevailing sense of misandry among women in the late-twentieth-century Britain with the potential motivations behind the social dynamics that might have resulted in hostility towards men.

Keywords: *Mrs Aesop, Eurydice, New historicism, Misandry.*

YENİ TARİHSELCİ BİR OKUMA: CAROL ANN DUFFY'NİN "MRS AESOP" VE "EURYDICE" ŞİİRLERİNDE ERKEK DÜŞMANLIĞI

Öz

Yeni tarihselcilik teorisi, tarihin doğası gereği metinsel olduğunu, geçmişi anlatırken mutlak hakikat diye bir şeyin mümkün olmadığını, dolayısıyla tarihin metinlerden ibaret olduğunu savunur. Bir metin biçimi olarak şiir, toplumu yansıtmak için bir araç olarak öne çıkar. İlk kadın kraliyet şairi ünvanını taşıyan Carol Ann Duffy, tarihten hem kurgusal hem de kurgusal olmayan kadınları bir araya getirerek, erkekler tarafından anlatılmak yerine kadınlara, kendilerine ses olma olanağı sağlar. Bu çalışma, yeni tarihselci bir yaklaşımla, Duffy'nin *The World's Wife* adlı şiir koleksiyonunda yer alan "Mrs Aesop" ve "Eurydice" şiirlerini inceleyerek, yirminci yüzyılın sonlarındaki Britanya'da kadınlar arasında hâkim olan erkek düşmanlığı duygusunu ve bu düşmanlığa sebebiyet vermiş olabilecek toplumsal dinamiklerin ardındaki potansiyel motivasyonları ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Mrs Aesop, Eurydice, Yeni tarihselcilik, Erkek düşmanlığı.*

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INTRODUCTION

New historicism, a prominent theory in literary criticism since the 1980s, was pioneered by the American literary critic Stephen Greenblatt. In contrast to the New Critics who evaluate a text as a self-contained piece of work, Greenblatt's approach focuses on interpreting and examining texts within their sociocultural contexts to unveil the interconnected nature of textuality and sociohistorical conditions. He names this literary theory as "a poetics of culture" (1988: 5), a term interchangeable with "new historicism", both serving the same theoretical purpose: equal treatment of both literary and non-literary texts to approach the subjective nature of history. Greenblatt adopts the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description" in a more complex and sophisticated form and adapts it to literary criticism. To quote Geertz, "culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly-described" (1973: 14). In order to reach elements of culture to determine the power relations, new historicists delve into a wide range of subject matters such as "obscure, even bizarre" such as "dreams, […] festivals, denunciations of witchcraft, sexual treatises, diaries and autobiographies, reports on disease, birth and death records", and even "accounts of insanity" (Cohen, 1990: 33-34). All these textual sources shed light on the inherent power structures within a particular society, thereby serving as equally important evidence of the past.

Literary texts, too, just as the textual elements in Cohen's above statement, hold equal importance in shaping our understanding of the past. The reason for this is the new historicist claim that history is a product of written texts, and it is comprehended through the parallel reading of any kind of text. Furthermore, literary works are part of a culture since a literary work inevitably holds a mirror to the conditions of the context in which it is set. In this study, a new historicist reading of poetry is presented as a deconstruction of the already-told past, with poetry functioning as a co-text of history and thus is utilised for the purpose of reconsidering the very same history. New historicism aims to scrutinize any specific detail as an indicator of the social practices among people, providing the reader with historical and sociocultural details for a relatively more credible sense of truth since "all social life is organized and controlled down to its oddest and smallest details" (Lentricchia, 1989: 234). In so doing, new historicists reconstruct the past with a new outlook on history, liberated from the constraints of the then powerholders. New historicism in literary criticism differs from the former criticisms in that it does not consider literary works self-sufficient entities relying on the internal structures of a work. The new critics, mostly known for their theories of "Intentional and Affective Fallacies," W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, for instance, assert that the success of poetry as a literary genre stems from its 'being' rather than 'meaning' something since "what is irrelevant has been excluded" (1946: 469) from the text. This, eventually, contradicts the fundamental stance of the new historicists, who vehemently reject the notion that historical and autobiographical background and contextual analysis of a literary work are ineffective in understanding a literary work. As Greenblatt states, in literature, "a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, […] the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and […] a reflection upon those codes" (1980: 4) function in tandem. In light of these three interlocked elements, this study delves into the social and power dynamics prevalent in late twentieth-century Britain. The methodology employs the new historicism theory for the scrutinization of two poems by Carol Ann Duffy, notable as the first woman, the first lesbian, and the first Scottish poet laureate. The main objective of this study is to reveal the potential motivations of British women leading to misandry in the late twentieth century, with a delicate emphasis on the life of the author and the sociocultural issues of the time. The results propound the previous social, cultural, and political issues concerning women's role in society that paved the way for hostility towards men. This study thus argues that "Mrs Aesop" and "Eurydice" encapsulate the elements that might raise hostile attitudes towards men, offering numerous examples and contextual references from these two poems that demonstrate how misandry is integrated into British culture.

The life of the author is another key point for new historicists due to the belief that the author's experiences substantially contribute to the formation of the text. As Lois Tyson states, new historicism seeks an answer to the question "[w]hat do the interpretations tell us about the ideological forces in play for the interpreters?" (2015: 268). The potential answers to the question serve as the representatives of the culture in a particular society, and, in return, these representatives perform as part of the elements of the culture. Hence, the text cannot be evaluated outside the conditions under which the author has lived. For this very reason, Carol Ann

Duffy's background and perception of life play crucial importance in the analyses of "Mrs Aesop" and "Eurydice" in this study. Consequently, as the author of the poems, Duffy is a product of the then culture, and in return, she has contributed to the reconsideration of the era in which the poems were published. Context is also of paramount importance for new historicists. Jeremy Hawthorn, a new historicist, elucidates that a text heavily relies upon the context even though not necessarily on the time and the place (1996: 11). It indicates that it is the context that renders literary works timeless and universal. This study will focus on the context instead of the restricted emphasis on time and the place since a new historicist analysis seeks to understand literature as a product of its historical and cultural milieu, expanding the notion of context to include a wide array of social, political, economic, and cultural factors that shape and influence both the creation and reception of literary works. Consequently, the context in this study is the late-twentieth century in Britain with social, political, and cultural events. From a more transparent stance than approaches that isolate literature from history, the study will demonstrate how Duffy's poetry reconstructs history by offering a unique perspective on sociocultural and historical events in the mentioned era.

What new historicism fundamentally objects to is historicism's marginalisation of literature, isolating it from history (Barry, 2017: 146) as well as new criticism's prioritising literature over history. A new historicist literary critic focuses on the power dynamics pierced in the text by means of textualizing history. By whom and why power is wielded is vital, as well as the threat of the possibility of the marginalised to take possession of the power. The whole power transfer can reflect the historical and cultural events which may have an effect on the text and on what the literary text could reveal about the language, knowledge, and power in the specific culture with the kind of reality and power pattern it sets up. All these points provide a new historicist critic with a relatively reliable account of the past with no privileging of either the centre or the margins, and this forms the core of this study, concerning Duffy's background in relation to her poems that include 'misandry'. This study uniquely juxtaposes literary texts with other cultural elements in the form of texts, offering an original perspective that contributes to advancing the understanding of conducting a new historicist analysis of poetry. By examining Carol Ann Duffy's poetry through a new historicist lens, the study diverges from previous studies, providing a fresh exploration of her work. Specifically, the research delves into two poems from *The World's Wife*, placing emphasis on the dominant theme of misandry and aiming to indicate motivations rooted in the sociocultural dynamics of the late twentieth century in Britain.

In light of the information summarised above, this study aims to reveal the sense of misandry depicted in Duffy's "Mrs Aesop" and "Eurydice" with the namesake re-invented characters drawn respectively from pre-literary history and mythology. The reason these particular poems, among many others with similar themes in *The World's Wife*, have been chosen is that the wife in the former poem is a completely new and re-invented character, demonstrating what a neglected Mrs Aesop would be like. As for the latter poem, the wife figure offers an interpretation of Eurydice that directly opposes her portrayal in male-authored mythological narratives. "Mrs Aesop" explores various issues including the condition of women in the religious domain, self-defence as in the case of Aileen Wuornos, a rise of crimes committed by and against women, women's abusive language to refer to men, the growing number of working women, the portrayal and narration of women by men, and lack of intimacy and effort in marriage that upsets women and stirs enmity towards the male gender. The poem also alludes to the 1999 laureateship rivalry between Andrew Motion and Carol Ann Duffy, providing additional layers to the exploration of gender dynamics in the social domain. The poem delves into the motivations behind misandry by examining specific elements, including Duffy's relationship with Adrian Henri, portrayed through acts of stalking, the protagonist's use of offensive language, and the constrained career paths available to women in late twentieth-century Britain, notably as personal secretaries or typists. Through a new historicist analysis of these poems with the emphasis on contextual analysis, power dynamics, and subversion of the marginalised, the study seeks to shed light on the manifestations and implications of misandry embedded within the fabric of the literary works of Duffy, who was also left on the margins as a lesbian poet with the belated laureateship due to her sexual orientation. The research thus endeavours to enrich our comprehension of how misandry is conveyed and manifested within the encompassing cultural and historical backdrop portrayed in Duffy's poetry.

1. MISANDRY

Misandry, often seen as a type of sexism, is defined as "dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men (i.e. the male sex)" in The Oxford English Dictionary (OED). As the "sexist counterpart of misogyny" (2006: 214), misandry can be stated as "a collectively shared and culturally propagated worldview" (2006: x), the statement which Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young states to define hatred. One example of it may be provided as follows: "I feel that 'man-hating' is an honorable and viable political act, that the oppressed have a right to class-hatred against the class that is oppressing them" (Morgan, 1978: 178). This statement by Robin Morgan, an editor of the feminist *Ms. Magazine* in the 1970s, demonstrates her suppressed desire finally fighting back, though in a hostile way. As a token of new historicist analyses, subversion is evidenced in her statement. Morgan is embodied as the representative of the silenced and marginalized women in history, and this renders contextual the sense of misandry since it is a reaction to the conventional role of women in British history. Misandry inevitably encapsulates women who were primarily standing against the inequalities stemming from sex discrimination in the public domain. In response to this, various women's organisations were established in Britain, and some of their members went to extremes to disregard men much the same as women held in contempt by men throughout history. It is widely acknowledged that some feminists hold misandrist beliefs, just as some individuals who do not identify as feminists may also hold negative opinions about men (Hopkins-Doyle et al, 2024: 9). In comparison to misogyny, misandry as a systematic attitude was relatively new, and it can be argued that it occurred as a reaction against the prevailing misogynistic culture until the twenty-first century. It is possible that all these approaches and attitudes, as well as many other discriminations to women's rights and nature might have paved the way for the beginning of misandry as a means of revenge in the poems "Mrs Aesop" and "Eurydice", which Duffy rewrites by subverting history and giving voice to women left on the margins. Since "reading is itself a culturally situated exchange" (Booker, 1996: 138), it might have the stimulating effect on the mass of people.

2. "MRS AESOP"

Before exploring the theme of misandry in "Mrs Aesop", it is of importance to highlight the factual account of Aesop, the figure on whom Duffy's poetry is based. Aesop mid-6th BCE is a controversial figure in history as the details concerning his life were not elaborately recorded by historians. Furthermore, the records of the time he was active as a writer and whereabouts he lived contradict the information that was recorded by other historians. In fact, the mere authentic information about his existence can be found in Herodotus' *The Histories,* where he is mentioned as a slave as well as a "fable-writer" who was murdered (2013: 153). Herodotus wrote that Aesop was murdered due to his fables' allegorical connotations which were interpreted as oratorical weapons targeting the tyrants of his time (Compton, 2006: 63). Moreover, an anonymous writer c.a. 2 BCE describes Aesop as "potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped," (Gibbs, 2009) and a further emphasis is put on his speech disability with the focus on his wittiness and the talent in rhetoric which rewarded him with regaining his speech ability. Duffy, too, remarks in a speech that she could not reach many details about Aesop's life except that he was a slave and physically small for his age (*The Lost Lectures*, 2014). As a child, Duffy had an interest in the fables and stories with animals though she was "disappointed" by "the moral tacked" at the end of Aesop's fables, which, she believes, "never seemed to be truthful" (*The Lost Lectures*, 2014). Duffy's engagement with fables in her childhood potentially reflects the author's autobiographical influence on the text, a facet of analysis deemed significant within the framework of new historicism.

In "Mrs Aesop", Aesop's wife is presented as the narrator. Aesop seems to have no voice in the poem despite his fame for his oratory skills. The tone is offensive and ironic as Mrs Aesop strives to humiliate him by making use of his own lines and proverbs from fables by questioning the very nature of the morals he is supposed to teach. Thus, misandry is salient throughout the poem as it is directed at the husband through whom she humiliates the male sex. Despite her Catholic upbringing, Duffy also satires the male-dominated institution of religion. By making use of anachronism, the poem opens with a blasphemous allusion to Christianity which Mrs Aesop reproaches: "By Christ, he could bore for Purgatory…" (line 1). In the opening line, Duffy seems to criticise the Church, where men have held higher positions. Aesop's preaching of religious morals in his fables seems to be

the reason behind Mrs Aesop's intolerance of him. This mainly stems from the androcentric nature of Christianity which has bestowed favours on men to the detriment of women. Aesop and Duffy lived in different epochs, yet the same attitude towards women in religion seems to have prevailed. This is evidenced by the words spoken by Patrick Cormack during a session of the Commons Sitting of 29 October 1993 on the ordination of women:

[I]t is not possible for a woman to be a priest. In using the word 'possible,' I ask those hon. Members of the female sex to accept that it is a question not of equality, but of difference. I do not believe that a woman can be a priest any more than she can be a father. To me, it is as simple as that—[Interruption.] My hon. Friends may mutter in disagreement, but that is a view which is held by the vast majority of practising Christians in the Church. If we want to be tolerant of people's beliefs, we must recognise that fact (Priests (Ordination of Women), 1993).

The above lines clearly demonstrate Cormack's belittling of women in the religious domain. Unsurprisingly, the members present in the session were all male except for the "Madam Speaker", the moderator of the sitting. As in Duffy's introductory line, the male members who were gathered have the same aim: to "bore" the rest of the members to the end of Christianity, the religion whose doctrines had not promoted women's ordination until recently. Furthermore, despite women's having the opportunity to step among men in the religious domain, men's allegations of women's incapacity to become a religious authority dominated the whole session, which eventually provoked women to become hostile against men: "By Christ, he could bore for Purgatory. He was small, didn't prepossess. So he tried to impress…" (lines 1-2). The same line contains Mrs Aesop's mocking of Aesop through the adjective "small" in order to remark his unappealing physical appearance, the size of his genitals, and intellectuality which he "didn't prepossess". The issue of power and height and the extent to which it reflects one's power is salient in the poem. The short height by which Mrs Aesop humiliates Aesop serves as a negative attribute in Duffy's era, too. The findings of a survey conducted by Hatfield & Sprecher about height and career success relationship also support the social implication of shortness: "Our day-to-day vocabulary has an apt phrase for describing a very short man who, burdened from often an early age by his little-valued and sometimes deprecated shortness, invests extraordinary energy in demonstrating that he is at least equal to, and possibly better than, any taller man" (1986: 199). The understanding of the relationship between shortness and success in the 1980s provide us with contextual evidence, which might have prompted Duffy to focus on the physical appearance of a short man in her poem to give voice to women's hostility against men. It aligns with the notion that new historicism aims to overthrow the hierarchy of the grand narratives and by the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts of the same historical period.

Throughout the poem, Duffy makes use of cultural events of her era and creates a fictional Mrs Aesop through whose voice she declares open contempt for husbands. Aesop, in order to compensate for his physical distortion, utilises his talent in storytelling to exceed other men, and this is the same motive behind a successful man in his career as stated above. While compensating for his short height by overwork, he neglects his wife and their marriage. As a result, he is constantly belittled by Mrs Aesop for not putting effort into their relationship. Even in their intimate moments, such as an evening stroll which is anticipated by Mrs Aesop to be rather romantic, he pauses and takes note of the animals they pass by in order to use them as materials in the formation of a future story (lines 14-15).

The narrator concedes to Aesop's attempts to make an impression through storytelling, but her choice of words in the poem suggests a lack of sincere admiration. The absence of romantic feelings between the couple is subtly reinforced when Aesop addresses her as "Mrs Aesop" with a title instead of affectionate terms couples tend to use. Aesop seems cognizant of Mrs Aesop's preference for the time he is no longer alive. Additionally, Aesop's mention of "dead men who do not tell lies" (line 3) alludes to the "authoritative voice of the narrator" (Veenstra, 1995: 182) of grand narratives and prevailing in history, often overshadowing or othering women from these accounts. These narrators seek or even create evidence to bolster their own claims, aiming to construct universal truths that wield significant influence over historical narratives, which are predominantly patriarchal. "Mrs Aesop", in this sense, is a cultural reproduction with the interpretation of Duffy, who as a cultural construct, a member of the female minority, expresses discontent with male domination in history.

Mrs Aesop's growing tension is evident, possibly leading her to harbour a strong detestation and a desire for his death. This sentiment is highlighted by her emphatic words, "let me tell you now", and begins to voice her own ideas in a relatively aggressive tone. Duffy, following the news of her time, likely encountered reports of women murdering men, particularly within spousal or partner relationships. Thus, there may be an allusion to the late twentieth century, when women committed crimes against men. A notable example is Aileen Wuornos, a sex worker convicted of multiple males murders, seven of which she confessed to in the 1980s. In 1992, she was sentenced to death by an electric chair, though she proposed the murders to be due to "self-defence" against extreme abuse from random men (Crime Investigation, n.d.). Correspondingly, Mrs Aesop, too, is depicted as having the potential to resort to violence against her husband, possibly justifying it as an act of "self-defence" on behalf of women marginalized in historical narratives. The rising incidence of crimes committed by women seems to have played a role in shaping Duffy's portrayal of Mr. Aesop, including the Bobbitt case, in which Lorena Bobbitt cuts off Wayne Bobbitt's penis, claiming it was out of self-defence during yet another marital rape (John Wayne and Lorena Bobbitt Trials: 1993 & 1994). Duffy also alludes to the Bobbitt case in an interview, drawing a connection between real-world events and the characterization of Mr. Aesop (Wood, 2005: 11). It indicates Duffy's awareness of contemporary events as she was "living in the twentieth century in Britain and listening to the news every day and going out every day and reading the newspapers every day" (qtd. in McAllister, 1988). Such crimes committed by women put forward the cause-and-effect relationship of the sense of misandry, which seems to have resulted from women's former suppression. The criminal cases Duffy refers to in her lines may also serve as examples of the legal rights afforded since marital rape became illegal in the UK following the enactment of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1994. Consequently, Duffy, as an observer of her era, incorporates such social and cultural events in her lines.

In the subsequent section of the poem, Aesop employs his storytelling prowess, which has failed to impress Mrs Aesop, as a subtle plea to dissuade her from harming him. Despite this covert appeal, Mrs Aesop remains unaffected, and her anger intensifies. At this point, she seizes control of the narrative, reclaiming ownership as she begins to tell her own story: "that the bird in his hand shat on his sleeve, / never mind the two worth less in the bush. Tedious" (4-5). The use of abusive language directed at Aesop's own fables becomes evident in the lines derived from Aesop's proverb "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". The bird that "shat on his sleeve" symbolizes the narrator, rebelling against Aesop's authority, while the other two birds represent other women deemed less worthy. This displays Aesop's clear disdain for women, a sentiment that contributes to Mrs Aesop's profound loathing for men. Furthermore, the bird symbolizing the woman in the household, referred to as "the bird in the hand", carries the connotation of women being confined by men as a result of their limited financial independence. This perspective aligns with the sentiments expressed by economist Richmond Trapp in an article discussing the growing number of working women. Trapp's derogatory comments, such as propounding that women could not efficiently work together since "most of them are short and they have these squeaky voices" (qtd. in Dullea, 1977) exemplify the demeaning attitude towards women. In the poem, Mrs. Aesop's critique of the proverb attributed to Aesop illuminates the perceived devaluation of women, a sentiment echoed by Duffy's contemporary, Trapp. This suggests that men's disdain for women during the 1970s may have contributed to a culture of misogyny and is mirrored by Duffy in "Mrs Aesop".

The lines 8-13 make reference to the moral lessons embedded in some of Aesop's fables. Mrs Aesop juxtaposes animals like "a shy mouse", "a sly fox", "a swallow", and "an eagle" from these fables with specific actions attributed to these animals. Using the phrase "according to him" (10-11), Mrs Aesop derisively points out the inconsistency between Aesop's own behaviour and the supposed morals derived from his fables. Through this mockery, she diminishes the perceived significance of these tales, indicating her disagreement with the moral points he asserts in these stories. In lines 14-19, recounting an evening memory, which the narrator seems reluctant to share, once again draws on one of Aesop's most famous fables, possibly the most well-known: "The Hare and the Tortoise". The inclusion of this specific fable in the poem suggests that the narrator is criticising the institution of marriage and the potential hardships—such as domestic violence, divorce, or even murder—that it may bring for women. It is expected from Duffy, as a feminist, to touch upon issues concerning women and the challenges they have confronted. The use of the pronoun "he" in line 15 might signify the male gender and the patriarchal structure, reinforcing claims of male superiority over women as the architects of the present,

which will eventually become history. However, the poem suggests that men take no actions to improve the current situation; hence women's fuelled resentment toward them. In the lines "On one appalling evening stroll, we passed an old hare/snoozing in a ditch – he stopped and made a note –" (14-15), Aesop is portrayed as an observer who pauses to record events without intervening to bring about change. Instead of assisting or advocating for women to overcome this inertia, men are depicted as merely recording events from their own perspective both in the poem and in the late twentieth century. To demonstrate, in Shere Hite's trilogy, "The Hite Report", women are questioned about female sexuality in order to compile a comprehensive report. One contributor expresses a desire for an "authentic" compilation of records on female sexuality and emotions, criticizing men who write about women's experiences without truly understanding them: "I get annoyed at all these men who write about women and how we should or shouldn't feel. They can't possibly know how we feel" (1981: 48). The criticism here echoes the situation with Aesop, highlighting men who observe and write about women but often overlook the challenges women confront as in the 1980s, when domestic violence was not treated by the police as "real policework" (Edwards, 1986: 1989). Since the law enforcements were in the hands of the male-dominated institutions, Duffy subverts the situation by giving voice to a female narrator talking about domestic violence, resituating the power issues "in relationship to contemporaneous social institutions and non-discursive practices" (Montrose, 1989: 17) in her own era.

One reason for Mrs Aesop's annoyance with Aesop may be his tendency to write about things without consulting her for opinion, a similar criticism echoed by Duffy in "Mrs Darwin" and "Mrs Sisyphus". Aesop's overall attitude towards Mrs Aesop reflects a broader pattern of how he perceives women in society. This indifference to seeking women's perspectives and experiences is evident in Aesop's act of mere notetaking on the snoozing hare, disregarding the severity of the situation. In Duffy's era, women were predominantly the voices writing empathetically about women's feelings rather than subjecting them to harsh criticism. In the poem, Mrs Aesop desires more effort and attention from Aesop in their marriage as "[s]he'd like less stories and more passionate love. She wants him to stop strutting about and being big-headed and spend more time on their relationship" (Wood, 2005: 11). She expresses a wish for less storytelling and more passionate love, urging Aesop to cease his self-centred behaviour and devote more time to their relationship. The lack of intimacy and care in their marriage ultimately leads to Mrs Aesop's sense of misandry. Consequently, the marriage institution is criticised here since the power exercised in such institutions situates women on the margins. Instead of mere criticism of husbands' doings, Duffy presents an alternative voice through the narrator, which can serve as a function of new historicism regarding subversion and representation of the once silenced by the existing powerholders.

The following lines of the poem emphasize the bleak outlook on marriage by establishing a parallelism between the tortoise in the fable and the institution of marriage itself: "and then, about a mile further on, a tortoise, somebody's pet, / creeping, slow as marriage, up the road. *Slow / but certain, Mrs Aesop, wins the race*. Asshole." (16-19) Aesop's primary focus seems to be on marriage, viewing it as a source of stability and comfort despite its perceived monotony. The use of the insult "asshole" at the end of the stanza conveys the wife's discontent with the marriage, evoking a sense of generalized resentment toward men. This resentment is reminiscent of Duffy's own experiences, particularly in her relationship with Adrian Henri, where she desired to have a child with him. Henri, however, "was too bohemian to want a baby" (qtd. in Carpenter, 2009) and thus reluctant to embrace parenthood. This allusion adds depth to the theme of slow-paced relationships and unfulfilled desires within the context of marriage, resulting in a sense of contempt for men. Duffy's portrayal of marriage as slow and monotonous, with the wife expressing dissatisfaction and contempt for her husband, reflects a departure from traditional notions of female submission within matrimony. Instead, it highlights the complexities and tensions inherent in gender relations, specifically within marriage.

Furthermore, a tone of cynicism is salient in the lines "I could barely keep awake as the story droned on/ towards the moral of itself. *Action, Mrs A., speaks louder than words*. And that's another thing, the sex" (22-24) as Aesop asserts the significance of taking action though he fails to practice it. Instead, he persists in storytelling without applying the moral principles he emphasizes, which displays him as a hypocrite. In line 24, the narrator contends that he is preoccupied with sex, but she also implies her dissatisfaction with his performance. The brevity with which she mentions sex may be indicative of her frigidity, subtly conveying her lack of enthusiasm or satisfaction in that aspect of their relationship. In the subsequent line, she mentions sex as "diabolical", casting

doubt on the moral lessons to be gleaned from his fables. His lax morals are further clarified by his use of the religious word "Christ" in the poem's opening line, yet his behaviour does not align accordingly. The disparity between the first line and the twenty-fifth highlights his hypocrisy, revealing a lack of correlation between his actions and words. The attempt to reveal such inconsistencies in the husband's actions is deliberate, pointing to the multiplicity of truth, a principal tenet of new historicism. Thus, the abuse of patriarchal power within the institution of marriage is inverted in the poem with the changing roles of the wife and the husband characters. Reading the poem as a new historicist work allows us to delve deeper into the socio-cultural context of Duffy's time and the influences that shaped her perspective. Critiques of patriarchal structures and the misandrist discourse in the poem may have drawn inspiration from Duffy's feminist traits. It resonates with Montrose's view that the author, the narrator, and the reader are all "historical subjects" with their own understandings, analyses, and interpretations proceeding from their own "historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points" (1989: 23). That is, all histories are textually reconstructed when retold by the author and read by the reader, who are embodied as the very critics themselves.

The conclusion of the poem is impactful, with the narrator issuing a threat to kill her husband, reminiscent of spousal homicide cases from the 1980s and 90s: "[Sex] was diabolical I gave him a fable one night / about a little cock that wouldn't crow, a razor-sharp axe" (25-26). Research from 1994 indicates that a significant number of spousal murders in couples' homes occurred at night (Associated Press, 1994). This shows parallelism with the emphasis on the evening time in which Mrs Aesop shares a fable with Aesop, following which a violent act might occur. Furthermore, the implied castration of Mrs Aesop through the fable about "a little cock" carries a dual meaning. On the one hand, it alludes to her inclination to harm her husband, and on the other hand, it suggests a rejection of sexual activity with him, possibly due to the small size of his penis. The intertwining of violence and sexuality shatters his ego. In the final lines "I'll cut off your tail, all right, I said, to save my face. / That shut him up. I laughed last, longest" (28-29), Duffy makes an allusion to the Bobbitt case which she summarises as the case "where the wife cuts the husband's penis off" (Wood, 2005: 11). According to "John Wayne and Lorena Bobbitt Trials: 1993 & 1994" (n.d.) from Great American Trials, the Bobbitt case, occurring in 1993, involved Lorena Bobbitt cutting off John Bobbitt's penis with a carving knife and later revealing its location to the police. Lorena testified that she had been a victim of marital sexual assault, and the rape at 3 a.m. was the breaking point. Drawing on this global news event, Duffy employs the word "tail" as a euphemism for the penis as both anatomically hang down the thighs. The homonyms "tail" and "tale" create a pun, referring simultaneously to the male anatomy and a narrative (Wood, 2005: 11). Through this play on words, Duffy remarks on and mocks the concept of literary patriarchy as seen in the "pen and the penis" metaphor (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984: 4), criticising the historical dominance of men in literary power. As a co-text of history, the poem gives ground to Mrs Aesop, who seeks revenge by threatening Aesop for their unfulfilling marriage. Her retaliation could take the form of actual harm, potentially leading to his death, or symbolic emasculation by dismantling his "small" penis. The source of her frustration and loathing is rooted in a deep love for Aesop, as expressed by Duffy in the statement, "she's still married to him, she hasn't left him, she's still making love to him, she's just disappointed" (Wood, 2005: 24). Through her act of intimidation, Mrs Aesop, the new powerholder, experiences a sense of fulfilment, turning the tables against men and reclaiming a semblance of power in a relationship that has caused her extreme hatred for men in general in the same vein as women in the late-twentieth-century Britain with political rights increasing in number, including the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976, which advanced victims of domestic violence, mostly women, legal protections against abusive spouses as part of divorce or separation proceedings (Thane, 2010: 45). With a new historicist reading, the poem reflects socio-cultural dynamics of late-twentieth-century Britain, where shifting gender roles, evolving power dynamics within relationships, and the struggle for agency and autonomy are foregrounded. By examining historical events such as the Lorena Bobbitt case and legislative advancements like the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976, Duffy's poem emerges as a text intricately woven into its historical fabric. Through this lens, the poem not only reflects but also interrogates the broader social and political landscape of its time. By juxtaposing contemporary issues with timeless themes of power, gender, and violence, the poem invites readers to engage critically with the intersections of literature, history, and society, thus challenging prevailing narratives and perspectives.

3. "EURYDICE"

"Eurydice", too, resembles "Mrs Aesop" regarding the theme and the attitude towards husband figures. It differs from "Mrs Aesop" in that Eurydice represents a re-created version of an already-existing character from mythology. The myth of Eurydice and Orpheus, the inspiration for Duffy's "Eurydice", stands out as one of the most well-known stories depicting the tragic fate of a married couple deeply in love in Greek mythology. According to Hamilton, the beginning of the tale, covering the encounter of Orpheus and the Argonauts, is found in Apollonius' narratives, with the rest narrated by Virgil and Ovid. The considerable influence of Apollonius on Virgil is evident in the continuation of the story, maintaining a pattern that corresponds to what one might expect from Apollonius. The similarity in style between Virgil and Ovid suggests that any of the three men could have written the myth in the manner it has reached the present day (2012: 106).

In "Eurydice", the narrator frequently stresses the dominance of male poets symbolized as "gods" (lines 52-53) within the realm of poetry and (non)fiction. According to Virgil's rendition of the story, the newlywed Eurydice is bitten by a serpent and succumbs to the Underworld while fleeing from a swarm of bees in a meadow. In deep sorrow, Orpheus, devastated by the loss of his wife, ventures into the Underworld, playing his lyre in an attempt to take her back to Earth. He is granted the opportunity to bring Eurydice back to the earthly realm on one condition: he must not look at her until they have fully returned. However, overcome by curiosity, he glances back at Eurydice, causing her to vanish into thin air. Before disappearing, she delivers a poignant speech about being deprived of life (Maro, n.d.). This tragic episode encapsulates the theme of loss and the consequences of succumbing to curiosity in the narrative of Eurydice and Orpheus. Duffy herself has referred to "Eurydice" as her "least favourite poem in the book" (Wood, 2005: 31), in which the entire story is retold, but this time from Eurydice's perspective. Notably, Duffy's target audience in this poem is women as it begins with a callout to "girls" (line 1). At the beginning of the poem, Eurydice vividly depicts not only herself in the Underworld but also the Underworld itself as follows: "It was a place where language stopped, a black full stop, a black hole / where words had to come to an end" (4-6).The portrayal of the Underworld in the excerpt above evokes the concept of male-dominated literature, where the destiny of literary tradition is determined by male writers and publishers. Duffy's subtle criticism of grand narratives, exclusively authored and published by men, is underscored in lines 7-9, highlighting the futility of these narratives being either the "last" or "famous" words. In doing so, she diminishes the pride of men who have asserted their superiority over women, illustrating how they ultimately find themselves in the Underworld alongside these very women. This commentary challenges the traditional power dynamics in literature and questions the assumed permanence and significance of male-authored narratives. The main reason for such issues dealt with in the poem stems from Duffy's feminist ideas, which reflect her subjectivity and personal truths ingrained in her poetry. As Linda Hutcheon argues, "The past is not an 'it' in the sense of an objectified entity that may either be neutrally represented in and for itself" (1989: 57); rather, the retelling of past events is subjective, depending on the narrator's standpoint. Similarly, Duffy's poems reject the objective notion of past events. Intertwined with her feminist views, the poems narrate her sense of reality concerning women situated socially and culturally in twentieth-century Britain.

When Carol Ann Duffy and Andrew Motion were nominated for the laureateship in 1999, it made headlines. During this period, Duffy and Motion praised each other, with Duffy expressing her admiration for both Motion and his poems (qtd. in Viner, 1999). According to Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate preceding Carol Ann Duffy, "[t]here is a sense [in *The World's Wife*] that as a member of the gender one is under attack but I [he] didn't feel her face was turned against me [him]" (qtd. in Forbes, 2002). While Duffy may not have specifically targeted Motion due to their rivalry, it is salient that some of the poems in *The World's Wife* criticise male (literary) figures and publishers. Duffy elaborates on it as follows:

It's transformed totally and continues to transform. Every few years there are more advances and, I suppose, power-taking by women writers. […] And then there's a whole range of different women, different ages, different cultures, different classes, writing throughout these islands—England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland—and that has sort of leaked into the male way of writing which has become much more female, so it's perhaps not fully reflected in the publishing world. So that needs to change. (Wood, 2005: 32)

The excerpt highlights Duffy's discontent with the situation regarding the visibility and influence of women writers. This perspective corresponds to the principles of new historicism, as Duffy's dissatisfaction with the exclusion of female voices in publishing reflects a broader socio-cultural struggle for gender equality, a central concern of new historicist analysis. Through characters like Eurydice, depicted outside conventional mythological tropes, Duffy subverts established narratives and offers new insights into the social and cultural realities of women's lives. Duffy's Eurydice serves as a tool to show how poetry can both reflect and shape historical realities as it offers new insight into the characterization of Eurydice free from the constraints of patriarchal narration. In so doing, Duffy engages with the historical context of gender inequality and asserts the importance of women's voices in shaping literary discourse.

In the following section of the poem, Eurydice refers to the Underworld, and consequently, death, as a "safe" place (line 16). However, she is persistently pursued by "the kind of man" (17) who writes poems and labels her "His Muse" (22). This may allude to Duffy's own relationship with the poet Adrian Henri, as their relationship was founded on both "poetry and sex" (qtd. in Langley, 2009). The constant pursuit of Eurydice by "the kind of man" can be interpreted as a form of stalking, where women are objectified and subjected to assault, reduced to mere objects. Gavin de Becker defines a stalk as "a crime of power, control, and intimidation very similar to date rape" (1997: 198). In "Eurydice", it can be seen in the way that the narrator experiences persistent pressure from Orpheus' stalking, creating a gradual disturbance. Interestingly, Duffy herself has acknowledged being "terribly in love" with Adrian Henri (qtd. in Stephenson, 2016) during her teenage years, whom she "followed" and even "went to university in Liverpool to be with" (qtd. in Viner, 1999). Therefore, the characterization of Orpheus as a stalker in the poem could be seen as a satirical reflection on Duffy's own experiences during her teenage years, where she made significant changes in her life for a man with whom her relationship eventually ended. It is parallel to Hutcheon's notion that both historical narratives and literary works are "human constructs, […] and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity" (1989: 93), the identity constructed by individuals in accordance with their personal history.

In the lines "a familiar knock-knock-knock at Death's door. / Him. / Big O. / Larger than life" (28-31), although not explicitly stated, the narrator mentions Orpheus for the first time with the capitalized "o". It becomes apparent that she is bothered by his unexpected visit, and there is an implicit suggestion that she cannot escape him, who he stands "at Death's door" even after death. The deliberate use of "Him" refers broadly to all men who intrude upon and constantly remind their wives of their presence, symbolizing a pervasive influence. In the sociocultural context of Duffy's era, especially as an active writer, "Him" can be seen as a reference to the negative impact of Adrian Henri, who passed away the year following the publication of *The World's Wife*, in which "Eurydice" is included. Henri's shadow looms over Duffy, serving as a constant reminder of their past relationship. Roger McGough, who witnessed Duffy and Henri's relationship, describes Duffy as "a strong person, funny and sharp but we'd assumed she was under Adrian's influence" (qtd. in Forbes, 2002), further justifying Henri's enduring influence and inspiration on her. The autobiographical elements present in the poet's works serve as clear evidence of her being shaped by the sociocultural context of her era, a viewpoint strongly endorsed by the principles of new historicism. Since the author is an "actual person", her text mirrors both the individual and public concerns, as well as the "behavioural social codes" (Bressler, 2003: 189), under which the author has been formed. For this very reason, the poem contains autobiographical bits with a broader criticism on gender dynamics, which initially stem from Duffy's personal experiences.

The use of "Big O" as a sarcastic reference to Orpheus reflects the narrator's belittling attitude towards him, ironically employing the word "big". The description of Orpheus as "larger than life" carries a dual implication. On the one hand, it can signify his exceptional ability to be in the realms beyond death like a shadow, as demonstrated by his visit to the Underworld. On the other hand, it might allude to his physical stature, which may not be appealing to the narrator. The narrator and, by extension, Duffy herself, reminisce about the decades preceding Duffy's adulthood, a time when women had limited awareness of the gender inequalities they had faced. As Duffy expresses in "Eurydice", "Things were different back then. For the men, verse-wise, / Big O was the boy. Legendary" (34-36); the lines could suggest Carol Ann Duffy's nomination for the laureateship in 1999 when Andrew Motion was appointed to the post. The statement "Things were different back then" alludes to a historical context where women were a minority in poetry and literature, potentially fostering a sense of

inferiority compared to male writers. This historical backdrop might have led women to nurture a grudge against men. Even though Duffy does not appear to harbour personal resentment against Andrew Motion, there could still be a sense of dissatisfaction with the hetero-patriarchal system that granted privileges to men, especially impeding her laureateship.

When Duffy states that "[p]oetry now is much more part of the fabric of people's lives than it was, say, 30 years ago. There weren't any women poets around then" (qtd. in Viner, 1999), she is highlighting two key points. First, she implies that "things were different back then", alluding to a time when the role of female poets was significantly less prominent. Second, she emphasizes the progress made over the previous decades in terms of the female poets' active involvement in the literary landscape. However, she suggests that this progress was still not "big" enough. Through these lines, Duffy draws attention to the historical lack of representation of women in central positions in the social domain. Likewise, by giving voice to these concerns in her poetry, Duffy brings to light the experiences of women marginalized by history, while also challenging traditional notions of historical narratives. New historicism suggests the interpretation of the past is inherently subjective, influenced by biases and cultural perspectives. As Judith Newton propounds, objectivity in historical representation is unattainable, individuals are culturally situated, and their understandings of the world are shaped by cultural codes and politics (1988: 88). Therefore, sociocultural and political concerns are deeply embedded in Duffy's poetry.

The following section of the poem provides us with the narrator mentioning the extent to which Orpheus' poems were appreciated by other creatures and how they reacted. She collectively refers to all these beings as "bollocks", a term signalling a peak of sexist attitude towards men, which suggests her awareness of the overrated nature of his works. The word "bollocks" in the 1970s was broadly defined as testicles (De Jongh, 1977), and it still holds that meaning. This choice of language serves as a reflection on women not having overcome the psychological inferiority they have endured for decades, even after gaining some political and civil rights. The term carries a confrontational and humiliating tone, highlighting the frustration and resentment the narrator feels towards the perceived overemphasis on male characteristics in general and male-dominated perspectives in the literary and cultural spheres. In the lines "Bollocks. (I'd done all the typing myself, / I should know.)" (45-46), the narrator's typing Orpheus' poems can be interpreted within the context of a power dynamic, where Orpheus assumes the role of the boss and Eurydice that of the employee. The narrator's exasperation and the implied desire to escape from this situation might indicate dissatisfaction with the perceived unequal power dynamics between men and women. The power issue further highlights the limitations placed on women's professional advancement, particularly in roles that had been attributed to the male-only. As described in the historical context, women tended to encounter limitations, relegated to positions like personal secretaries, while men experienced wider prospects for career advancement, ascending to influential roles. It serves as a perspective through which we can grasp the narrator's emotions in the poem, revealing a yearning to liberate themselves from the confinement imposed by conventional gender roles.

Duffy's elucidation that "if she (Eurydice) had her time again, the one thing she might do is write for herself rather than type his poems" (Wood, 2005: 32) emphasises the condition regarding inequality in employment between men and women. It aligns with the historical reality where women's career prospects were limited, which Morgan Robinson highlights: "The 'female only' have a structure of promotion which is entirely limited. You go from junior typist to senior typist to personal secretary, stop" (1978). The idea that Eurydice, if granted another opportunity, would strive to express herself through writing signifies a longing to transcend the limited career options available to women during the late twentieth century. Through Eurydice's voice, Duffy implies women's readiness to confront conventional gender norms once they are able to. The observation made by Robinson noting that the highest position women could attain in the work field was that of a "personal secretary" corresponds to Eurydice's role in Orpheus' life. During the 1980s, a significant number of women expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs as secretaries, which could have inspired Duffy to conceive the notion of Eurydice as a secretary. To secure a job, they had to attend the Katharine Gibbs School, a school focused on training "well-mannered" and conservative-looking secretaries (qtd. in Charles, 1983). This cultural and professional environment is mirrored in the portrayal of Eurydice's position in Duffy's poem, emphasizing the broader societal challenges faced by women during that era. The depicted conditions and rhetorical questions are equally applicable to Eurydice, reflecting the limited and stereotypical options in employment available to women during

that time. Eurydice's situation is even more restrictive as she works for her husband, Orpheus. While Orpheus appears to be passionately fond of her, Eurydice's reluctance to return to the earth suggests that Orpheus' insistence may be driven by his use of her as an asset. This dynamic ultimately fosters hostility against men, both in the case of Eurydice in the poem and in the broader context of women's experiences during Duffy's era. Nonetheless, Duffy aims for a higher purpose: she presents an alternative narrative in which Eurydice refuses the destiny prescribed for her by Orpheus. Unlike traditional interpretations of the story, Duffy emphasizes the act of retelling it as a departure from the original narrative, influenced by the social, cultural, and political developments in Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century. The echoes of the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, enacted in the 1970s, resonate in Duffy's poetry, symbolizing a time when women, including Duffy herself, could assert their legal rights in the workforce. In Duffy's version, Eurydice herself serves as the narrator, portrayed as a voiced, independent woman capable of refusing the role of a personal secretary upon her return to Earth with her husband.

In the following part of the poem, the narrator reacts to her story's being told by a man, laying stress on the necessity of her following him to a life where she feels like a captive: "Like it or not, / I must follow him back to our life – Eurydice, Orpheus' wife –" (61-63) This sentiment resonates with the feelings of women who have experienced financial dependence on their husbands. The societal expectations for women historically leaned towards marriage for the sake of social and economic security. It was perceived for a young woman to join her life with a man for financial prosperity. However, over time, women gradually entered the workforce, challenging traditional gender roles. As Esther Watstein, the director of public relations in the New York office in 1983, notes, "Years ago women went to college to find a husband; now they know they are going to work" (qtd. in Charles, 1983). Duffy's personal experience mirrors this shift, as she left her job at a hairdresser's (Preston, 2010) and pursued higher education at the university in Liverpool to be with Adrian Henri (qtd. in Viner, 1999). This change in mindset regarding women's social status and standards is also evident in "Eurydice". Frustrated with having no voice, Eurydice begins to assert herself by telling the story in her own words from her own perspective: "Girls, forget what you've read. It happened like this – / I did everything in my power / to make him look back" (79-82). Once again, Duffy addresses women, expressing her belief about the necessity of this kind of motivational speech to realize their potential. Thus, Eurydice asserts that she "did everything in her power", highlighting the possibility of not being successful, yet she manages to succeed. The reference to going "back" might allude to the past when women were considered inferior to men. The intentional effort to make Orpheus look back serves as a metaphor for the progress women have made against men, who historically did not recognize women as individuals with their own rights and identities separate from men's presence.

Duffy comments on Orpheus in "Eurydice" rather as an arrogant husband and a male poet whose "vanity as a poet, his ego, is the one thing that will make him turn round" (Wood, 2005: 32). In fact, Andrew Motion became the first Poet Laureate to retire voluntarily because he spent "10 years feeling quite often that I [he] was being asked to write about things which I [he] had no strong feeling about" (qtd. in BBC News, 2015). Perhaps, when Duffy did not reveal any grudges against Andrew Motion during all those years of his laureateship, she did what was supposed to be done. Just as Eurydice praises Orpheus in the lines "Orpheus, your poem's a masterpiece. / I'd love to hear it again …" (103-104), Duffy also says, "I like him. I have known him for years, I like his poems very much" (qtd. in Viner, 1999) about Motion. In return, just as Orpheus returns Eurydice's compliments in the best way, which is an eternal disappearing, Motion makes incredible comments about Duffy, and, instead of keeping the title until he passes away, he voluntarily retires following a decade of laureateship: "Carol Ann Duffy is a very, very bright, appealing, clever, ingenious, approachable and generally heartwarming writer. She's a Good Thing, capital G, capital T, one of the poets I most enjoy reading, and I felt that there was a completely false antithesis created in the press about what we would both do with the laureateship" (qtd. in Viner, 1999). The mutual complimenting evident in the poem mirrors Duffy's social interactions, thereby reflecting her personal experiences within the poem.

In the poem's conclusion, Eurydice achieves her objective. She successfully frees herself from the imperious control of her husband by manipulating him into looking back through false flattery. To avoid sounding sexist, the narrator extends a compliment to women through a generalization, referring to them as "the dead": "The dead are so talented. / The living walk by the edge of a vast lake / near the wise, drowned silence of the dead"

(lines 111-113). In doing so, she implies that men can be overwhelmed by women at any time, suggesting that it is only a matter of time before women unite against men under the umbrella of misandry. According to Duffy, the final lines of the poem are "the best lines of the poem" since "that's the beginning of her [Eurydice's] own poem" (Wood, 2005: 33). She further asserts "the source of poetry" to be utter silence, and a poem functions as a means to "frame silence" since "the dead" and "the vast lake" stand for the very silence (33). Furthermore, "the living" symbolizes male poets who can be overthrown by powerful women. The poem, in this context, becomes a vehicle for women to express prevalent hostility towards the male sex, rooted in the systematic inequality between men and women throughout history and has resulted in misandry.

CONCLUSION

History, according to the new historicism theory, is inherently partial. New historicism necessitates the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts to reach not an absolute and universal truth but rather a fair understanding that incorporates the voices of marginalized individuals. To that end, new historicism, unlike the movements that isolated texts from their contexts, focuses on unravelling the constructed human subjectivity in literary texts. This study centres on the poems "Mrs Aesop" and "Eurydice" from the poetry collection titled *The World's Wife*, a literary text that is embedded within the context of the late twentieth century in Britain. These poems adopt the viewpoint of women who have been historically silenced in literature and mythology. In doing so, Duffy skilfully re-appropriates irony and utilizes dramatic monologue to bring to the forefront the voices of women who have been overlooked by the victorious figures in history and acknowledged only in relation to their husbands. Consequently, Duffy takes a stance in favour of those who have been marginalized and positioned on the fringes of societal recognition. Moreover, it is argued in the present study that Duffy's portrayals of the characters in the poems depend very much on the poet's own experiences of the sociocultural dynamics in Britain since poems' interpretation within the framework of new historicism has necessitated the biographical study of Duffy since both Duffy and the poems can be perceived as the cultural products and co-texts of their own societies. In response to the hostility directed towards lesbianism and the infliction of violence on women, Britain in late twentieth century witnessed the inevitable emergence of a sense of misandry among women. Consequently, the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act were enacted in the 1970s, though these legal measures proved insufficient in alleviating women's contempt for men. Women continued to be confined to traditional roles, expected to fulfil husbands' sexual needs without their consent. Moreover, the number of femicides increased. Women still needed an authorial husband or father figure to achieve financial equality. Due to such attitudes towards women, misandry has developed as a means of revenge in society and reverberates in some of Duffy's poems in *The World's Wife*.

In "Mrs Aesop", traces of misandry are evident, with Mrs Aesop's strong aversion to Aesop primarily stemming from his neglect of their marriage. She insults the fable writer Aesop for failing to practice the moral principles he preaches. The hypocrisy of Aesop underlies Mrs Aesop's disdain for him. Duffy further criticises the male-dominated Church for its refusal to include women in its ranks, despite the potential presence of women who may be more devout than men. Mrs Aesop further emphasises Aesop's physical attributes, often portraying him as short. Making a correlation between shortness and power, she seeks to diminish his influence derived from his oratory skills. Mrs Aesop goes so far as to express a deep desire for Aesop's demise, emphasizing the intensity of her animosity. This sentiment finds parallel in real-life cases of men being fatally attacked by women, such as Aileen Wuornos, and the notorious severity of the Bobbitt case, which had an impact on Duffy's sensibilities during that era. The ending of the poem with a reference to Mrs Aesop's metaphorically cutting of Aesop's penis shows a resemblance to the Bobbitt case and indicates her frustration with the unfulfilled marriage.

In "Eurydice", Duffy criticises the male dominance within the realm of literary publication through the lens of the Eurydice and Orpheus myth. Despite the traditional interpretation of the myth, the poem portrays Eurydice as content in the Underworld by calling it "safe" (line 16). Orpheus, however, stalks her down to the Underworld to bring her back to life, which Eurydice avoids due to his existence in it. The poem might have been influenced by Duffy's teenage years where she, in a way, stalked Adrian Henri to Liverpool and moved. Henri's impact on Duffy's poetry was acknowledged by their literary circle, mirroring the shadow of Orpheus over Eurydice in both the myth and the poem. Despite the timid portrayal of Eurydice, Duffy boldly empowers her by using strong

language, such as "bollocks," to denounce male writers. The poem suggests that Eurydice played a significant role in composing and typing the poems, yet Orpheus took sole credit, reminiscent of other famous husbands in history. Duffy further highlights the secretary vacancy often related to educated women as the ultimate and top position in which they could be employed in the past. Gender discrimination in the workplace persisted in some places despite the law, and it aroused hostility towards men who worked in the same position, did the same job, yet earned much more money than their female colleagues. The poem also criticizes male writers and historians who approach women's stories without empathy. For this very reason, Eurydice reclaims the narrative, narrates her own story, and manages to send back Orpheus, whom she associates with the shadow of patriarchy.

The analysis of the present study suggests that the theme of misandry was shaped by the dominant ideologies in late twentieth-century Britain. The socio-cultural and political forces of the given era played a significant role in Duffy's composition of the poems, which, in turn, articulated the power dynamics and prevalent ideologies of the time. Through a deliberate act of subversion, including past stories and narratives with fictional female protagonists in the form of dramatic monologues, Duffy gives voice to the inferior individuals overwhelmed by the power of the male oppressors. Consequently, Duffy's works serve as a subversion of history for the manifestation of 'her'story. Further studies on the scrutinization of all the poems in *The World's Wife* within a broader scope may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of power relations surrounding misandry, providing concrete examples that illuminate the dynamics of this theme in the context of Britain during that time.

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