

# The World's Wife: an EMC Study Guide



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## **Credits**

Written and edited by Barbara Bleiman and Lucy Webster

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## **A note on the text**

Please note, this is an edited version of the print publication (2007). Copyright restrictions prevent the inclusion of text extracts in the download edition. Where necessary activities have been adapted.

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# Introduction

## The scope of the material

'Studying *The World's Wife*' is divided into four main sections:

- Before Reading
- Reading the Collection
- After Reading
- Criticism and Sources

**Before Reading** includes activities on the literary context and the dramatic monologue, placing Duffy's work in the context of both earlier feminist re-writings of traditional tales and the history of the monologue from Tennyson and Browning onwards.

**Reading the Collection** provides activities on the individual poems, integrating critical and contextual material into the study of Duffy's poetic and linguistic techniques, the creation of character and voice, and the exploration of key themes. Recognising that students need to balance detailed knowledge of the individual poems with an appreciation of the whole collection, this section includes activities 'Looking outwards', placing each particular poem in the context of the collection as a whole.

**After Reading** builds on this overview approach encouraging students to range around the collection, developing insights into the collection and the discrete poems.

Throughout the material a wide range of approaches is used, including creative and critical writing, role-play, close analysis, charting, diagrammatic representations and so on.

## Ways of using the material

It is not expected that any student will work through all the work on any one poem, nor indeed that all the poems will be studied in the same amount of detail in class. The material in this pack could be used in the following ways:

- in class as individuals, pairs or groups working on on the same poem, with selected support from this pack
- in class as individuals, pairs or groups working on different poems, followed by whole class feedback or sharing/expert groups
- whole class work on a key poem followed by individual/pair/group work on related poems
- homework preparation followed by sharing groups
- homework preparation followed by groups teaching their poem to the class.

## Before Reading

### Contextualising *The World's Wife* – the dramatic monologue

The poems in *The World's Wife* are all written in the form of the dramatic monologue.

#### Definitions of a dramatic monologue

A kind of poem in which a single fictional or historical character other than the poet speaks to a silent 'audience' of one or more persons. Such poems reveal not the poet's own thoughts but the mind of the impersonated character, whose personality is revealed unwittingly; this distinguishes a dramatic monologue from a lyric, while the implied presence of an auditor distinguishes it from a soliloquy.

Chris Baldick: *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*

a speech by a single fictional character that reveals an aspect of the narrator's personality - usually a defect of character that the speaker himself is not aware of.

Lee T. Lemon: *A Glossary For the Study of English*

This poem is dramatic, in that in it we are presented with a character addressing another character, as in a play or drama. (The addressee can be plural, multiple, since more than one character may be present in the scene. But in this case we fairly naturally slip into supposing that the speaker is talking to just one person.)

Note that the term 'dramatic' as incorporated in the term dramatic monologue has nothing to do with 'dramatic' in the sense of 'sensational' or even 'emphatic' or 'obvious' – as when the newscasters breathlessly announce some 'dramatic events' in London or wherever. A dramatic monologue, whether on stage or in a poem or story, can be quite unassuming or subtle. It need only be interesting.

Lyman A. Baker, Kansas State University, [www.k-state.edu](http://www.k-state.edu)

The dramatic monologue has been used by many writers, as a poetic form. The two examples included here will give you a context in which to place Carol Ann Duffy's collection. Tennyson's 'Ulysses' and Browning's 'My Last Duchess' are very well known examples from the 19th century. While Tennyson adopts the character of a figure from Greek mythology, Browning's persona is based on a 16th-century Italian Duke, Alfonso II d'Este, fifth Duke of Ferrara.

- Read the two dramatic monologues and note down your response to each.
- As a class, discuss anything that strikes you about the monologues, particularly the way in which each poet creates the voice of the speaker.

## Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,  
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink  
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd  
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those  
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when  
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades  
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;  
For always roaming with a hungry heart  
Much have I seen and known; cities of men  
And manners, climates, councils, governments,  
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;  
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,  
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

I am a part of all that I have met;  
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move.  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains: but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle, –  
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil  
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild  
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
Subdue them to the useful and the good.  
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
Of common duties, decent not to fail  
In offices of tenderness, and pay  
Meet adoration to my household gods,  
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:  
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,  
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought  
with me

That ever with a frolic welcome took  
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
Free hearts, free foreheads – you and I are old;  
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;  
Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.  
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:  
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the  
deep

Moans round with many voices. Come, my  
friends,

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
Push off, and sitting well in order smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all the western stars, until I die.  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.  
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we  
are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1842)



## Features of a dramatic monologue

Below are some typical features of the dramatic monologue form that you might want to think about, whatever monologue you are reading.

- In pairs, apply these features to one of the monologues on pages 6 and 7, then feed back your ideas in class discussion.

**1**

### Addressee – a listener

Is the listener ever mentioned? Is there any sense of who it might be and whether it is just one individual, or more than one?

**2**

### Sense of place

Does the monologue clearly take place in a particular environment or is this left open?

**3**

### Openings

Does the monologue have a formal opening or does it seem as if you're breaking into a conversation that's already part way through?

**4**

### What kind of voice is it?

- use of idioms
- idiolect
- colloquial phrases
- slang and swearing
- the same voice throughout or different at different stages in the poem
- repeated phrases
- tone of voice

**5**

### The narrator and the poet behind the narrator

Does the narrator reveal him or herself unintentionally? Is the reader expected to take away a different view of the narrator to the one he/she thinks he/she is putting across? Is there a degree of irony in this?

**6**

### What's the point?

Are we simply being given a view of a 'character' or is there more to it than this? Is the poet raising themes, or ideas about the way people live, through the character?

## Exploring the titles

Carol Ann Duffy's 1999 collection of poems is called *The World's Wife*.

- In pairs, brainstorm your responses to, and ideas about, the title.
- Looking at your responses to the title, discuss your expectations of the poems in this collection.

Printed below are the titles of all the poems in the collection.

- Read through the titles a couple of times, making a note of anything which strikes you as interesting, strange, amusing, puzzling and so on.
- In pairs, group the titles into as many different clusters as you can, noting the reasons for your choice. For example, you might decide to divide the titles into two groups: those women who are referred to as 'Mrs' and those who are not.
- Join up with another pair. Take it in turns to introduce and explain the reasons for the groupings you have chosen. Make a note of any new ideas.

Little Red-Cap

Thetis

Queen Herod

Mrs Midas

*from Mrs Tiresias*

Pilate's Wife

Mrs Aesop

Mrs Darwin

Mrs Sisyphus

Mrs Faust

Delilah

Anne Hathaway

Queen Kong

Mrs Quasimodo

Medusa

Circe

Mrs Lazarus

Pygmalion's Bride

Mrs Rip Van Winkle

Mrs Icarus

Frau Freud

Salome

Eurydice

The Kray Sisters

Elvis's Twin Sister

Pope Joan

Penelope

Mrs Beast

Demeter

The Devil's Wife