The World’s Wife: an EMC Study Guide
Credits
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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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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 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.
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

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)
My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive, I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf’s hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said
‘Frà Pandolf’ by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ‘twas not
Her husband’s presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say ‘Her mantle laps
Over my Lady’s wrist too much,’ or ‘Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat’: such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, ‘twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but
thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who’d stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, ‘Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark’ – and if she let
Herself belessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
– E’en then would be some stooping, and I
choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
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
Mrs Midas
Mrs Aesop
Mrs Faust
Queen Kong
Circe
Mrs Rip Van Winkle
Salome
Elvis’s Twin Sister
Mrs Beast

Thetis
from Mrs Tiresias
Mrs Darwin
Delilah
Mrs Quasimodo
Mrs Lazarus
Mrs Icarus
Eurydice
Pope Joan
Demeter

Queen Herod
Pilate’s Wife
Mrs Sisyphus
Anne Hathaway
Medusa
Pygmalion’s Bride
Frau Freud
The Kray Sisters
Penelope
The Devil’s Wife