



The World's Wife: Poems

By Carol Ann Duffy

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The World's Wife: Poems By Carol Ann Duffy

*Be terrified.
It's you I love,
perfect man,
Greek God, my own;
but I know you'll go,
betray me, stray
from home.
So better by far for
me if you were stone.*
--from "Medusa"

Stunningly original and haunting, the voices of Mrs. Midas, Queen Kong, and Frau Freud, to say nothing of the Devil's Wife herself, startle us with their wit, imagination, and incisiveness in this collection of poems written from the perspectives of the wives, sisters, or girlfris of famous -- and infamous -- male personages. Carol Ann Duffy is a master at drawing on myth and history, then subverting them in a vivid and surprising way to create poems that have the pull of the past and the crack of the contemporary.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The voices of Mrs. Tiresias, Mrs. Faust, Mrs. Quasimodo and other wives wittily recast myth and history from a woman's point of view in the pages of Manchester-based Duffy's fifth collection. Self-contained Penelope is not waiting for her Odysseus; frustrated Mrs. Sisyphus is married to a workaholic; Pygmalion's statue, tired of being pestered by her groping suitor, "changed tack/ grew warm, like candle wax/ kissed back"--and after sex gets dumped. But while Duffy's revisionist dramatic monologues are rife with clever twists, this material has been well mined by such poets as Alta, Margaret Atwood and Alicia Ostriker. Even references to Viagra, sheep-cloning and Monica Lewinsky seem an updating of Transformations (1971), Anne Sexton's deadpan fairy tales studded with cultural references, with the poems trapped in a similarly polarized conception of gender relations. Thus Thetis is brutalized in a new way each time she changes form--man is cross-bow to her albatross, charmer to her snake, fisherman to her mermaid--and to Queen Herod, the Christ child is simply a threat to her infant girl: he's "The Wolf. The Rip. The Rake. The Rat./The Heartbreaker. The Ladykiller. Mr. Right." The luckiest in love is Mrs. Beast, married to a devoted creature that's hung like a mule, and just as hardworking: "And if his snot and trotters fouled/ my damask sheets, why, then, he'd wash them. Twice." The flippant tone elicits chuckles, but one imagines these characters would've come a longer way by now, baby. (Apr.) FYI: Duffy's anthology Time's Tidings: Greeting the 21st Century includes 50 contemporary poets, each of whom is represented by a poem of his or her own on "time," and by a favorite poem on the same subject. (Anvil [Dufour, dist.], \$18.95 paper 160p ISBN 0-85646-313-2).
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From [The New Yorker](#)

" . . . The élan of this volume sets it apart, the characters (and poems) triumphant."

From [Booklist](#)

Duffy's dramatic monologues expressing the perspectives of famous men's wives resemble the potato chips in the old ad campaign, for it is hard to read just one. "Mrs. Aesop" tells us what an excruciating bore the old moralist was. "Mrs. Sisyphus" bitterly complains about her hubby's job. "Frau Freud" reveals no penis envy at all. Yet, not all these wives' tales are funny. "Mrs. Lazarus" is as horrified as he by his resurrection. "Circe," after the disappointing experience with Odysseus, says she has lost her appetite for men, but not for "sizzling pig." "Mrs. Midas" yearns for his touch again, even as she rues marrying such a thoughtless, greedy man. And then there is the startling allegory of the power of poetry that Duffy makes out of "Little Red-Cap" (aka Little Red Riding Hood). Although intentionally more humorous than Anne Sexton's fairy tale retellings or Ann Stanford's re-envisionings of Greek myths, Duffy's takes on the stuff of legends are as richly rewarding as those much-admired poems. *Ray Olson*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Brian Street:

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Nichole Gibson:

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Kristy Lange:

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Garry Brown:

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