

Duffy Poetry : National 5 Revision Notes

Thoroughly study your notes / annotated copies of all six poems:

<i>War Photographer</i>	<i>Originally</i>
<i>Anne Hathaway</i>	<i>Havisham</i>
<i>Valentine</i>	<i>Mrs Midas</i>

Three of the six poems are written in persona of the wives/women 'behind' their (possibly better known) men:

- *Anne Hathaway*: wife of William Shakespeare (persona of real, historical character)
- *Havisham*: jilted bride of Mr Compeyson in Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* (persona of fictional character)
- *Mrs Midas*: wife of King Midas in Greek mythology (persona of fictional mythological character)

Duffy offers a female perspective as these personae reflect on their relationships with these men.

- Shakespeare's widow Anne Hathaway reflects fondly on precious memories of a happy, passionate marriage in which she sees herself integral to husband's creativity and career as dramatist.
- Jilted bride Miss Havisham – widow, in a sense, as former fiance dies later in novel - reflects bitterly, vengefully on ruination of her life, hopes of being a wife, etc.
- Presumably now widow, since husband last seen emaciated and hallucinating through starvation, King Midas' wife reflects wryly, bitterly on husband's folly, greed and selfishness that ruined their marriage and her hopes of having a baby.

As well as three poems – *Anne Hathaway*, *Havisham*, *Mrs Midas* - written in persona, therefore in first person, other poems dealing with reflection on past are:

- *War Photographer* – written in third person, showing photographer, reflecting with delayed shock after returning home to England, on experiences of working, taking pictures, capturing horrific images, in war zones around the world.
- *Originally* – written in first person, from poet's own perspective, reflecting resignedly on inevitability of change in process of growing up and identity loss after moving away from place of origin and settling elsewhere.

Key ideas: four of the six poems deal with the theme of love.

- *Anne Hathaway* portrays love that is mutual, passionate, fulfilling: “spinning world...shooting stars...drama...”
- *Mrs Midas* portrays love that was mutual and passionate but ruined by husband’s “idiocy...greed...selfishness” and is unfulfilling by ending their sex life and preventing her from having the baby she longed for.
- *Havisham* portrays love that has been ruined by the fiance jilting the bride, turning love to festering, vengeful hatred.
- *Valentine* pragmatically portrays love that is initially mutual, passionate, but shows it can be ruined in time by infidelity or destroyed by possessiveness which becomes dangerous, “Lethal” to relationships.

Key ideas: four of the six poems deal with the idea of marriage.

- *Anne Hathaway* is about a happy marriage, an equal partnership, ended only by widowhood, leaving happy memories.
- *Valentine* suggests that marriage is optional; “platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring” hints marriage is perhaps too possessive, constricting.
- *Mrs Midas* portrays a marriage that ends in separation which the wife would not have wanted, due to the unreasonable behaviour of her husband.
- *Havisham* is about a marriage called off at the last moment and the devastating effect on the remainder of the jilted bride’s life.

Key ideas: four of the six poems deal with the idea of the ending of relationships.

- *Anne Hathaway* shows a happy relationship brought to an end only because of the death of Anne’s husband. She treasures happy memories of their time together.
- *Valentine* suggests relationships can bring unhappiness, in some cases due to a partner being unfaithful, or danger, in a partner’s extreme possessiveness, thereby requiring someone to be cut out of another’s life.
- *Mrs Midas* shows the unhappy demise of a relationship due to a partner’s behaviour and presumably the death of the husband.
- *Havisham* shows much frustration over aspects of a relationship and life with status as married woman denied the bride by a relationship abruptly ended almost before it had begun.

Key ideas: five of the six poems deal with time and memory.

- *War Photographer* shows time bringing about delayed shock when the developing photographs remind the photographer of the horrific original experiences. His memories don't fade over time. The photographs preserve his memories.
- *Anne Hathaway* shows memories of her time with her husband being preserved, not fading, stored in the "casket" own mind as Shakespeare's body in his coffin.
- *Mrs Midas* shows how certain insignificant things like sunlight or apples can jolt her memory of her husband both at the time and before the breakup of their marriage and bring back vivid recollections that haven't faded.
- *Havisham* shows how time can prevent memories from fading: over time the wedding dress has yellowed – ironically, a kind of fading - and the wedding cake remained uneaten, not just jolting but existing as constant reminders of an unhappy event.
- *Originally* shows time bringing about identity loss due to gradual assimilation into, homogeneity with, a new community. Her memories of Glasgow gradually fade over time, a change that causes some guilt.

Key ideas: all of the poems deal with the theme of loss.

- In *War Photographer*, photographs document loss of life – children presumably die in minefields; dead man whose wife assented to the photograph being taken is described as a "ghost". Also he "stares impassively" at war zones he works in as if having lost power to be shocked or moved.
- In *Anne Hathaway*, widow speaks of lost husband.
- In *Havisham*, jilted bride has lost fiancé and all happiness and fulfilment she expected in later years from marriage: status as wife, experience of sex. She has lost youth and years of life, stagnating, festering with hatred.
- In *Mrs Midas*, wife speaks of lost marriage, lost physical closeness with husband, lost opportunity to have baby.
- In *Originally*, Duffy herself has lost her original home, accent, and ultimately Scottish, Glaswegian identity.
- In *Valentine*, it is shown that couples can lose fidelity and ultimately relationships.

Key ideas: all poems except *Anne Hathaway* deal with idea of destruction.

- *War Photographer* deals with violent destruction of war: children being victims of landmines, a husband dying in front of his wife, blood soaking into ground.
- *Havisham* deals with vengeful violence towards the fiance who jilted bride: her desire to strangle, bite and stab. Her life, hopes, youth, heart, have been destroyed by him and she longs to destroy him in return.
- *Mrs Midas* shows a marriage and potential family destroyed by stupidity, greed and thoughtless selfishness of a husband.
- In *Valentine*, possessiveness and infidelity can destroy relationships. “Lethal” and “knife” suggest violent, wounding, hurtful ends to relationships.
- In *Originally*, Duffy’s memories of Glasgow as home, Glaswegian accent, Scottish dialect, sense of identity are destroyed by moving to England.

Key ideas: all poems except *Anne Hathaway* deal with idea of pain, whether emotional or physical.

- *War Photographer* deals with the physical and emotional pain of war victims remembered and captured in pictures; idea of pain being on a scale, comparing extreme pain suffered in war zones to “ordinary pain”, trivial annoyances, of rural England; lack of pain felt by Sunday supplement readers on seeing images of war; disguised pain felt by photographer on returning to work in war zone.
- *Havisham* deals with extreme emotional pain and heartbreak felt by jilted bride; physical pain she imagines being able to inflict in revenge.
- *Valentine* suggests intense emotional pain, wounding caused by break up of relationship.
- *Mrs Midas* shows wife’s regretful emotional pain at a marriage so needlessly, thoughtlessly ruined; husband’s physical pain during starving to death, thin and hallucinating.
- *Originally* shows Duffy’s family’s emotional pain – anxious parents, crying brothers – at leaving familiarity of home; Duffy’s guilty pain at eventually becoming assimilated in new surroundings.

Key ideas: all poems deal with theme or idea of loneliness or solitude.

- *War Photographer* begins with photographer being “finally alone”, having peace and solitude to develop pictures and deal with feelings of shock about war zones he has experienced.
- *Valentine* suggests that relationships eventually bring “grief”, are not permanent fidelity lasts only up to a point, leading to break ups which leave former partners alone.
- *Havisham* shows a lonely spinster, abandoned by former fiance, unable to move on with her life, imagining what she has lost, her former love twisted to violent hatred.

- *Originally* shows Duffy lonely at first moving to England where all is unfamiliar and where “no one you know stays”.
- *Anne Hathaway* shows a widow left alone but consoling herself with precious memories of a happy life with husband.
- *Mrs Midas* portrays both husband and wife lonely – he dying in solitude in isolated caravan, she alone at home, missing him and opportunity to be family with a baby.

Structure: ways in which the construction of the poems reflect the content of them.

- *Valentine* is written in free verse, seemingly unstructured, rather than any conventional form or pattern, in keeping with idea that love should not be constricted by marriage or possessiveness.
- *Havisham* is written in 4 stanzas of 4 lines each. The regularity of stanza pattern suggests social conformity of marriage but unequal length of the lines, fact that many are run-on lines and lack of any regular rhyme scheme suggest random, irrational thoughts and feelings of persona and her unconventional existence as perpetual spinster amongst mouldering remains of wedding paraphernalia.
- *Mrs Midas* is written in 11 stanzas of 6 unequal length lines each and with no regular rhyme scheme. Poem is a dramatic monologue and length of it reflects in how much detail persona wants to confide in us. The irregular line length and lack of rhyme make it sound like natural speech, a friend telling all to a friend.
- *Originally* is written in 3 stanzas of 8 lines each. This regularity suggests continuity of being Scottish despite outward changes while lack of end rhyme suggests changes, differences. Stanza 1 describes journey from Glasgow; stanza initial isolation in England; stanza 3 assimilation and acceptance of change. Each stanza is a stage in a progression, in keeping with progression of growing up and changing described in poem.
- *War Photographer* is written in 4 stanzas of 6 lines each, with regular rhyme scheme of abbcdd pattern in every stanza, i.e: 2 tercets per stanza comprising single line unrhymed followed by rhyming couplet. This very strict pattern, exactly repeated, suggests every print from film exact replicas, every photograph exact record of horrific events. Regularity of stanzas and rhyme scheme also suggest orderliness of life at home in England in contrast to chaos of war abroad.
- *Anne Hathaway* is written in 14 lines, like sonnet traditionally associated with love poetry, used extensively by Shakespeare – very appropriate as poem is about love. Many lines traditional 10 syllable length and iambic pentameter rhythm **but not all** and rhyme scheme not exact, so does not conform precisely to sonnet form, supporting Duffy’s view of Anne as not conforming to traditional idea of her as illiterate, abandoned wife at home in Stratford while Shakespeare pursuing career in London. Run-on lines between quatrains suggest close connection and continuous flow of love between couple. Final rhyming couplet used in Shakespearean style makes emphatic, clinching conclusion to poem: declaration that she hold on to treasured memories of him in same way as he treasured her physically in life.