

Duffy – little red essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The poem starts with a fast paced first line, commas are used frequently to fasten the pace of the poem. The enjambment also helps to increase the speed by showing the flow of the lines and show a continuity, and it's only when she first sees the wolf that a full stop is used suggesting that she is startled or in awe of the wolf.

She describes her first glimpse of the wolf as "clapping" suggesting that it happened suddenly and hence brings an end to her long fast paced sentence which provides a contrast with the monosyllabic "It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf." In the next stanza, the pace is fastened again; the use of commas makes the sentences longer as does the enjambment. The rhyme of "paw" and "haw" also increases the pace suggesting that she is excited by his "verse" and even when the lines are ended with exclamation marks, the repetition of 'What big..' which both allows the continuing speed and allows the reader to parallel the lines from the original Little Red Cap, but Duffy uses it as a compliment.

Duffy then lists all the things which can describe her, this list builds up the speed showing the on going excitement that poetry allows her to have (which later becomes her reason "why" for going through the ordeal). In this list she mentions that she's "never been", the phrase is supposed to end with 'kissed' however the absence of the word implies that she is willing to go further than a kiss to learn, also "waif" is added to her list which ominously could refer to being removed from her home through the hardship that she will experience with the wolf. The wolf's lair is described as "tangled" suggesting that life is complicated and if we were to take this from a autobiographical approach, this would be understandable considering how

he she was barely an adult who had started an affair with a famous poet. Further, it is described as a “ thorny” place suggesting that she can not move figuratively (in the sense that she can not grow academically); this also creates a strong picture in the reader’s mind of a “ babe” vulnerable to be hurt. It however is “ lit by the eyes of an owl” which represents why she is there, knowledge (which is traditionally twined with an owl) the fact that it is lit by the “ eyes” suggests that she is conscious, the entire time she is there, of the knowledge staring at her. The “ wolf’s’ lair” seems to suggest more than the primitive and animalistic tendencies in the man, ‘ lairs’ are used by animals to hide and thus suggesting that he has a reason to hide, this arouses suspicion in the reader and makes him seem criminal and the fact he consciously buys “[her] a drink” and leaves “ murder clues” suggests a cold blooded calculated criminal - or even a paedophile, this is reinforced by the double entendre of being at “ childhood’s end” which could either mean adolescence or the death of a child, the fact she “ crawls” in his wake - much like a child and the “ blazer” she is wearing which has connotations of schoolgirl.

His “ thrashing” paints a violent picture of her “ first time”, and the fact that she “ clung” on, suggests that she is holding on for her survival. She then sarcastically and rhetorically asks “ for what little girl doesn’t dearly love a wolf? “, this question not only draws attention to the fact that she is a “ girl” (and not a ‘ woman’) but the endearing “ love” she is referring to seems to be in stark contrast to the violent clinging and thrashing aforementioned. The wolf thus appears in an incriminating way and Duffy does this to show how the male literary world is somewhat corrupt and exploitative, in the

sense that here is a “ girl” who wants to learn and yet she must leave “ scraps of red” where she has been violated. She then goes in search of a “ living bird”, which the reader would assume would be the “ owl”, however like all novices she must start small before she gets to the complete knowledge, she gets a “ white dove” which shows her innocence not only in poetry (compared to an ‘ owl’) but in the situation she is in (being in an affair).

However her attempt at poetry is stolen and into his “ open mouth” suggesting that he (as a poet) claims it is his or more literally, it is his “ breakfast in bed” which suggests that she is now providing for him, the way a mistress would. Her amazement at a book collection is then shown by the fact she is amazed that is a “ whole” wall of books which are “ gold” and “ aglow” suggesting something valuable. Again, like in the first stanza where a full stop is used to show her shock at seeing the wolf, it is also used here to show how much she is in awe. In the next line the “ words” of the book cause her excitement which is expressed through the fast paced sentences - which again is shown through the amount of commas and the full stop at the end of all of this suggests the change that is about to occur in her words and in her actions. Duffy uses imagery to create a picture of how she had been suppressed, a “ mushroom stoppers the mouth of a dead corpse” not only showing how she physically silenced but the inability to express herself made her feel as though she was dead.

Duffy then uses repetition to show how he has the “ same old song” and a lack of new poetry material, the words “ same”, “ season” and year” are all repeated showing how unoriginal the “ aging” wolf’s material is. She hurts

him like he did her, by silencing him (a cut to the "throat") and also cutting his "scrotum", which symbolises two things, how he used her for sex and also making sure that this traditional male poetry world does not produce seed so that it carries on and in doing so she liberates the "bones" of the women who came before her, the fact they are "glistening" shows that they like the books and the eyes of the owl are knowledgeable and also shows how much better they are compared to the wolf's "aging" and "grey" fur even after all these years. Duffy also uses colloquial language to show how she got her own back, she "stitches" him up, this can also be said to be her own personality coming out for in her poems she often speaking mockingly of the middle class and by using the colloquial language it provides a contrast to them. The structure of Little Red Cap, is eight sestets, this regularity allows her to show her narrative in a structured way and a way in which her rise to being a good poet is done in stages much like her journey.