

The woman who shopped

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Duffy's title 'The Woman Who Shopped' displays women to be predisposed to a loss of identity, whereby they are objectified or dehumanised to fit social convention. The poem initially establishes a woman's desire for materialistic acquisitions over interpersonal relationship. Duffy warns against the dangers of modern day consumerism, which extends to all modern capitalist societies, to prevent females from being consumed themselves. The poem is potentially 'an indictment of western consumerism and our addiction to shopping' (1)

Duffy's strategic structuring of her poem is able to inform women of the dangers of consumerism and how it can transform you into an image of feminine stereotype. Duffy undertakes an almost balladic form, which consists of enumeration coupled with enjambment and few caesuras, creating a fast pace and a tone of breathlessness, elucidating how women don't stop to think about the consequences of consumerism and they just merely act on impulse, building up to the climax. This transformation is rather comical and it can be viewed as Duffy's criticism of modern day consumerism.

A key message Duffy attempts to convey is the inevitability of punishment as a result of what can be considered a sin. The opening quatrain reveals a biblical illusion of the "apple" reflecting the Garden of Eden. God warned Adam and Eve that if they were to eat from the tree they would die, however Eve disobeyed his demand, eating the fruit of the tree and thus she was punished with pain in childbirth. This biblical connotation is perhaps Duffy's way of foreboding that consumerism is a sin, guiding modern day women to deviate from social convention before they can be stereotyped as

consumerists. Similarly, Duffy's 'The Diet' from her 'feminine gospels' collection also makes biblical reference to the "apple" denoting women to be guilty of original sin. Duffy's message for women to transform is once again reiterated through various poems in her collection.

Furthermore, a rapid pace is created via the internal rhyme of "silver shilling" and its sibilance creates a harsh sound, demonstrating that time will move at such a speed without being able to realise it. It's clarified that women need to stop obsessing before it physically destroys them. Physical destruction as a result of obsession is something Duffy focuses on in her 'feminine gospels' collection. In her poem 'The Diet', Duffy hints at the pressures on the female body and in this case, how their bodies are used as commodities. The media is a modern day issue, which presents us with the 'ideal' body type, creating an immense amount of pressure on women to appear in a particular way, in order to 'gratify the senses of man'. (3) It was acknowledged, "Should they be beautiful, everything else is needless" (Wollstonecraft, 1792) (6), yet still to this modern day, there still appear to be issues with femininity and women being defined purely by men, and objectified as possessions. Duffy's 'The Map Woman' also follows a lyrical, rhythmic tone. As seen in 'The Woman Who Shopped', a great emphasis is placed on a woman's physical appearance. This is achieved through the listing "dress...shawl...hat", whereby when the woman is visible to other people, she is expected to conform to societal values, appearing in a presentable manner that is socially accepted.

'The Diet' uses sibilance, "she starved on, stayed in, stared in the mirror, svelter, slimmer" also to emphasise the cruelty of expectation and its harsh sound reflects the pain of her body physically disappearing. Through the regularity of dynamic verbs, "willing", "applied", "flew", Duffy is evidently suggesting that women are ultimately in control of their own bodies and should not be lead into temptation to please men. This further consolidates women's' obsession with money and how the cycle of consumerism manifests feminine life. A parallel idea is portrayed again in 'The Diet', where the dynamic verbs "rolled", "crawled", "raved", all implicate the importance of women making a positive transformation before they can be defined by society.

Moreover, the listing of "furniture, travel goods, luggage" and consecutive caesuras are reflective of the excessive compulsion to buy new objects. The frequent enjambment here, adds to the feeling of frenetic purchasing, which seems to be cyclical, with no end, just like the lines of poetry. Furthermore, there is no consistent rhyme, suggesting a lack of control in her expenses, yet the poem adopts a stringent 12 syllable rhythmic structure, alluding to the consistency of the shopaholic's addiction. Thus Duffy is successful in presenting the dangers of addiction and how it inflicts a lack of control.

In order to reduce and generalise consumerism to all females, Duffy is extremely strategic in her reference to "her" and "she", maintaining a third person narrative throughout. It is evident that the woman had "unopened cartons, over-stuffed bags", the juxtaposition of the amount of items she owns with the emptiness she actually feels, is a stark contrast created by the

prefixes “ over” and “ un”. Moreover, due to the colloquialism and listing of “ a fiver, a tenner”, it can be suggested that every woman is guilty of at least some consumerism and it dictates how it is an inescapable continuous cycle. A Semantic field of gambling is apparent “ shuffle” and “ deal”, confirming that the woman is blinded by the effects of her consumerism and its danger. When gambling, there’s always a risk present and conceivably she only sees it as a game.

Overall, from Duffy’s collective responsibility placed on women, she is able to encourage women to make a positive transformation within their behaviour, rejecting societal views that are forced upon them through patriarchy. Duffy’s collection is able to illustrate the injustices placed upon women throughout history to our modern day society.