

The Long Queen

Context: (Duffy, allusions in the poem: gender, class, society, history etc.)

-Engages with the long reign (longevity) of Elizabeth 1 and Queen Victoria – They established their own era (being Elizabethan and Victorian). It hints at their generative differences: Elizabeth had no children (the 'Virgin Queen') and Victoria married Albert and has children.

Cycle of Femininity – a broad viewpoint upon 'womanhood' goes through the process of; menstruation, childbirth, motherhood, then menopause. This process is seen as a 'success' once reached a position into Motherhood (duty/role).

Allusion to Fairytale genre – Semantic field within 3rd stanza ("ruled and reigned", "a castle", "tower in the black heart of a wood" – reinforcing the message (power of female vs male).

Language: (Important methods and devices, linguistic choices. What imagery is created?)

-Idiom – The use of the idiom within the relative clause "who wasn't the apple of the Long Queen's eye" – concept of seeds, always relating back to female generative function – vivid colour imagery of red (poison/toxic)

-Asyndetic Listing – The asyndetic listing of the abstract nouns "confession, or gossip, scandal or anecdote, secrets..." – all connote deviant acts/sins, suggesting that females are not appropriate/ suit the role of authority.

-> The listing of the common nouns "godmother, aunt, teacher, teller of tales" – all hold significance due to that they all provide a service of nurture/motherly instincts.

Critical Voices: (Which critical ideas can be used in analysis of the poem and why?)

-Simone De Beauvoir - Claims that a girl is taught to be a woman, and she has no maternal instinct. However, this is not the case for the female persona who hold the royal title of "The Long Queen", suggesting that authoritative figures (usually being males) do not hold nurturing dutiful roles.

Form: (Is the poem in a particular form? Does it reference any forms of poetry? Why?)

-The use of caesura throughout the poem – whether it be a semi colon, a colon, a question mark, or an end stopping – it is representative of the hesitation to fulfil the responsibility of a high female figure. The continuous use of enjambment is indicative of the fleeting nature of power, creating a further sense of irony as the female persona's lineage is not fulfilled. This could also be indicative of the female persona's dedication to balance the impact of female power against masculine power.

Structure: (How is the poem structured: stanzas, rhyme scheme etc? How are ideas explored?)

-Sestets - The regularity of the sestets throughout the poem is representative of the cycle of femininity – menstruation (naivety), childbirth (awakening), motherhood (complacency), menopause (self-actualisation). The element of regularity reflects the patriarchal expectations of the female generative function (to produce/provide and nurture). Repeated motif of "The Long Queen" ("the Queen" and "Long Queen") – the noun phrase "The Long Queen" loses the definite article 'the' within the last stanza, suggesting the cyclical nature of female entrapment and creating a paradox between the Queen and a 'damsel in distress'.

Compare: (Summarise the main links and comparisons to other poems and THT)

-Lack of Physical Voice – In THT, the Handmaids hold no individual voice, only when in secret ("We learned to lip-read" C1) – In TLQ, the repetition of "some said" in Stanza 3 highlights the traditional communication of passing knowledge is oral, lack of individuality/identity within the quantifier 'some'

=Assigned female roles – THT has Marthas, Wives, Handmaids etc. & TLQ lists "matrons, wet nurses, witches, widows, wives, mothers..." – all hold a sense of nurture and a dutiful role, participating within the generative function of females

History

Context: (Duffy, allusions in the poem: gender, class, society, history etc)

- Reference to the concentration camps / children leaving for the countryside during the war ("the children waved their little hands from the trains"). The ambiguity suggests how history can be so easily repeated and misconstrued.
- Biblical allusions; crucifixion of Jesus Christ - capitalisation of "history" and "Cross".
- Nostalgic vision of 10th C AD - The rising "basilicas" of Jerusalem, Constantinople, Sicily after Christ's death when the religion of Christianity spread - persona is living in a time of grand aspiration.

Language: (Important methods and devices, linguistic choices. What imagery is created?)

- The semantic field of physical/mental decay from ageing – within the dynamic verbs, "limped", "wheezed", "coughed", "gasping" – implication that women who suffer the most have to endure the grief that is followed. Hence, "his mother gasping" highlights the eternal effort that women give shows that women are a reliable historical source – hinting at the sacrificial love/nurture that is necessary within Motherhood.
- The repeated motif of waking up mimics the cyclicity of history, as she wakes up two times.
- "When they rang on her bell there was nobody there" suggests that people are constantly bringing back history without realising it; they don't know the consequences of their actions.

Critical Voices: (Which critical ideas can be used in analysis of the poem and why?)

- Butler – gender performativity – women are bound by gendered expectations of role (being the embodiment of acknowledgment; having to obey and remember) and therefore there is less space for a woman to occupy the traditionally male sphere of writing and literature.

Form: (Is the poem in a particular form? Does it reference any forms of poetry? Why?)

- The repeated use of caesura - by the use of hyphens, commas, and end stoppings, imitates the act of stopping and reminiscing over past events in history. This is further emphasised within the simple declarative "She was history.", symbolising that women are an embodiment of neglect and exclusion within society.
- The use of the spondee 'half dead' as part of the apposition puts a focus upon the concept of age, personifying history to be the assumed elderly persona. This implies that, alongside the spondee "half dead" connoting a partial deterioration, the body may be deteriorating but the mind is 'alive', supporting the masculine perspective of 'His-story' as a further exclusion of women.

Structure: (How is the poem structured: stanzas, rhyme scheme etc? How are ideas explored?)

- The use of parhyme of '...head, half dead' is suggestive that the persona is of ill-health. Rather than being 'dead', the effect of this parhyme is heightened by the metaphor 'bones in a bed', creating a sense of grotesque, agonising discomfort – implies that women are seen as senile, fragile figures.
- The extended metaphor of history being personified as an old woman infers that a feminine perspective is untrustworthy, due to the stereotypical concept of the elderly's memory being poor/lacking in substance.
- The asyndetic listing of "Jerusalem, Constantinople, Sicily" gives a prayer-like/sense of focus upon directed religions – direct attack on religion as a concept.

Compare: (Summarise the main links and comparisons to other poems and THT)

- The brutality of oppressive regimes – the elderly, female persona exclaims the fatal punishment of being "hung by the neck". THT; expresses this punishment, in hyperbolic tone, when Offred says she'd "confess to any crime, I'll end up hanging from a hook on the Wall". This shows that the 'unjustness'/brutality of the regime becomes so mentally damaging, that the women feel as if these 'punishments' will help them escape the regime.