

# THE JEALOUSY IN CAROL ANN DUFFY'S "MEDUSA"

Submitted by:

Widyanto Tulus Prihermawan

NIM: 13020110130057

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## ABSTRACT

Carol Ann Duffy "Medusa" is a poem which emphasizes the human's emotion, jealousy. The objectives of this thesis are to show the jealousy in the poem through intrinsic elements, also to explain the jealousy and its effect towards human's psyche. This thesis uses library research as the method of collecting data. To analyze the extrinsic elements of the poem, this thesis uses mythological and psychological approach in order to understand further about the symbolism and concepts of jealousy. The result of this thesis is that jealousy can cause an adverse change to one's nature and behavior, emerge an extreme hatred, and lead one into her/his self downfall. It can be concluded that jealousy is an emotion which has negative effects towards human's psyche.

Keywords: jealousy, mythology, psychology, self downfall

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## 1. Introduction

Jealousy is one of human's emotions and it commonly refers to negative feelings and thoughts of fear, insecurity, betrayal, and anxiety. In literary works, jealousy can also be an interesting theme. Written by Carol Ann Duffy, this dramatic poem describe about a women's jealousy which leads her into self-loathing and destruction. In this poem, by using the figure of a gorgon, "Medusa", Duffy tries to show us how powerful this emotion is that can turn someone into a horrifying thing.

The writer chooses to analyze the jealousy in the poem because as part of human's emotion, jealousy is considered to be one of the most frequently perceived emotions among humans and it is needed to know how this emotion can occur in our vessel and affect our psychological condition. For those reasons, the writer chooses "The Jealousy in Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" as the title of the thesis.

There are several methods that can be used to analyze this thesis. The writer uses library research to support the analysis of structures of Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa". Books and articles

from internet sources are used by the writer in gathering the data. This thesis analyzes the effects of jealousy through figurative language; they are imagery, metaphor, and symbol for the intrinsic elements. As it is stated by Mary W. George that library research “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point.” (2008:6). Books and articles from internet sources are used by the writer in gathering the data.

In the extrinsic elements, the study focuses in the jealousy reflected in Carol Ann Duffy’s “Medusa” and the effect of jealousy itself. The study uses mythology approach which “explores the artist’s common humanity by tracing how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols common to different cultures and epochs” (Padgett: par. 8) to understand the jealousy symbolism comes from Greek mythology in the poem. The study also uses psychology approach which “reflects the effect that modern psychology has had upon both literature and literary criticism” (Padgett: par. 6) to analyze the type and effects of jealousy reflected in the poem.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Intrinsic Elements**

In the intrinsic elements, this study uses imagery, metaphor, and symbol. Imagery is a vivid descriptive language that uses one or more of the human senses. According to Perrine, imagery may be defined as “the representation through language of sense experience” (1956: 54). There are seven kinds of imagery. They are: visual (something seen in the mind’s eye), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste), organic (internal sensation), and kinesthetic (movement and tension) (Perrine; 1956: 54). The study will only discuss three kinds of imagery in the discussion: visual, olfactory, and kinesthetic.

Perrine states that “metaphor and simile are both comparison between things essentially unlike” (1956: 65). In metaphor, the comparison is implied- that is, the figurative term is substituted for or identified with the literal term (Perrine, 1956: 65). While symbol, according to Perrine, is “a symbol may be roughly defined as something that means more than what it is” (1984:83).

## 2.2 Extrinsic Elements

Extrinsic elements of poetry are supporting elements of poetry that come from outside of the created work. Extrinsic elements in a poem may concern the situation or background within the poem itself, such as social and psychological circumstances when the poem is made. Mythology is part of human's society which has close relation with literature. De Bonald says that literature is an expression of society (Wellek & Warren: 95). Literature also has a relation with psychology, and works of literature may present the study of psychological types and laws (Wellek & Warren: 81). This thesis discusses about Medusa in Greek mythology, Eros or Amor in Greek mythology and jealousy in psychological concept. The three extrinsic elements are chosen because this study finds that Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" shows the power of jealousy by using the figure of "Medusa"

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. Intrinsic Elements

#### 3.1.1 Imagery

##### 3.1.1.1 Visual Imagery

In the following stanza, the study considers the use of visual imagery.

My bride's breath soured, stank  
in the **grey** bags of my lungs.  
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,  
**yellow** fanged.  
There are bullet tears in my eyes.  
Are you terrified? (Stanza 2, line 6-11)

Both the word *grey* and *yellow* in the stanza above shows the color of lungs and fangs. Carol Ann Duffy tries to show the readers that the speaker's mind is taken over by the bad emotions, which occurs under the force of jealousy.

##### 3.1.1.2 Olfactory Imagery

The writer sees olfactory imageries in the second stanza below. The words *breath soured*, *stank* are words containing an olfactory imagery which explains the smell of something. It clearly explains that the smell of the breath is stinky and sour

My bride's breath **soured, stank**  
in the grey bags of my lungs.  
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,  
yellow fanged.  
There are bullet tears in my eyes.  
Are you terrified? (Stanza 2, line 6-11)

In addition, olfactory imagery can be seen in the following stanza

And here you come  
with a shield for a heart  
and a sword for a tongue  
and your girls, your girls.  
Wasn't I beautiful?  
Wasn't I **fragrant** and young? (Stanza 7, line 36-40)

The word *fragrant* is also considered as an olfactory imagery, which explains a smell of something; the smell of fragrant body comes from a young and beautiful body, as the speaker mentions herself.

### 3.1.1.3 Kinesthetic Imagery

The following stanza contains kinesthetic imageries

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy  
**grew** in my mind,  
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes  
as though my thoughts  
hissed and **spat** on my scalp. (Stanza 1, line 1-5)

Both words *grew* and *spat* show the movement of an object. Those are the movement of the speaker's negative emotions, which actually do not move. Therefore, the writer depicts it as something that can be moved using the word *grew*. The word *spat* is an actual movement of a snake, the behavior of spitting poison into its enemy.

### 3.1.2 Metaphor

Direct comparison or commonly called as "metaphor" is often employed in a literary work. In Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa", some words or phrases are indicated as a metaphor as it

can be seen in the following explanations. The destructive power of jealousy that turns Medusa's hair to 'filthy snakes' is the metaphor of rage and unhealthy thoughts. In other words, the poet tries to show us about a feeling of rage which is literally animated upon the speaker's scalp. The most destructive emotion is driving her crazy, as written in the first stanza.

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy  
grew in my mind,  
which turned the hairs on my head to **filthy snakes**  
as though my thoughts  
hissed and spat on my scalp. (Stanza 1, line 1-5)

As far as the speaker is fixated by her lover's behavior, the negative energies take over her mental space and feed into many unhealthy thoughts. This is then expressed into the same unhealthy attitudes; which are later explained on the next stanzas. The word *filthy snakes* which hiss, spit and grow over the speaker's scalp successfully draws our attention to what Duffy's means by "Medusa". As when one becomes uneasy with his/her emotion, one will feel the emotional discomfort as a feeling that takes out his/her energies of mind; one thinks about it over and over until one is heated up, as well as the speaker in the poem. From that idea, the writer assumes that the "filthy" head of "Medusa" depicted in the first stanza also works as the representation of the source of self-awareness: a place of an acute anxiety.

The words *bride's breath soured, stank*; the familiar term, *foul-mouthed* and *foul tongued* is metaphorically used to describe a person who uses a lot of obscenities, as can be seen in the following stanza.

**My bride's breath soured, stank**  
in the grey bags of my lungs.  
**I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,**  
yellow fanged.  
There are **bullet tears** in my eyes.  
Are you terrified? (Stanza 2, line 6-11)

This study assumes that the use of *My bride's breath* in the stanza could actually emerge and strengthen the impression of the speaker which is the "lover" or even the real "bride" being fooled or at least feeling fooled by her man. In another way, the "breath" itself being tainted by the poison came from the beloved's lies. That makes the lungs turned into "cumbersome bag"

because the air that once was shared is corrupted by bitter truth, and closed by the harsh image of *bullet tears* in the speaker's eyes, which is a metaphor reflecting the speaker's stony feeling

### 3.1.3 Symbol

The speaker in the poem is suffering from mental burden coming from her own negative emotion, from her jealousy. This study considers that Carol Ann Duffy uses symbols, even the symbols from Greek mythology, which is in contrast to each other to describe the speaker's feelings. The explanations of these symbols in each stanza are written below.

This study assumes a symbol in the first stanza of Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" above. The word *filthy snakes* is used by the poet as a symbol of the speaker's minds and emotions which is "transformed" into something evil and dangerous, just like snake.

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy  
grew in my mind,  
which turned the hairs on my head to **filthy snakes**  
as though my thoughts  
hissed and spat on my scalp. (Stanza 1, line 1-5)

The writer assumes that these emotions have successfully turned into "rage". The whole stanza also refers to a symbol resembles one of the creatures from Greek mythology, Medusa. Since the old time, "serpents" (snakes), are widely known as the symbol of hatred and jealousy. Its hissing voice is considered as a symbol of hurt, and its serpentine venom is considered as a symbol of hatred, which is spitted out once it becomes a burden to us, humans. The use of snake as the symbol of jealousy also appears and it is recorded on the Holy Bible, by referring to the allusion of "The Serpent", which is actually an evil force that motivated from its jealousy towards human. The Serpent comes into life and successfully seduces Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Genesis, 3: 4-6).

Based from that idea, the study assumes that the famous symbolism of serpent as the symbol of jealousy really affects the strength of the stanza above. One can imagine how a single “Serpent” seduced Eve and Adam, and how the “snakes”, a large number of filthy snakes in Medusa’s head depicted by Carol Ann Duffy symbolizes the amount of jealousy “living” and “grew” on the speaker’s head.

## 3.2 Extrinsic Elements

### 3.2.1 Normal Jealousy: Referring to Eros (Amor) Personality

As a common wisdom, it makes sense that there will be no jealousy if there is no love between people. As the love goes into one’s heart, his/her heart and mind will be really vulnerable towards jealousy as well. Normal jealousy, especially the romantic one, commonly occurs as the cause of first ever fights between couples. The question is then “in this poem, what makes this emotion occur?” the study assumes that love is the answer, by referring to the Roman and Greek’s god personality: Amor, as well known as Eros, or Cupid’o, by referring to the following stanza

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 for me if you were stone (Stanza 3, line 6-11)

Eros, as commonly known as Cupid, is portrayed as blind or blindfolded chubby boy (boyish) as the representation of love’s characteristic: love is blind and irrational. The other attribute of Eros is his pair wings, as the representations that love is flighty. One can easily change minds because of love. In mythology, Eros is often depicted holding arrows and bow, or a torch while wearing a war helmet or roses crown. Arrows and torch represent that love wounds and inflames the heart, while a rose crown represents the “pleasure”.

The jealousy caused by love can be seen in the following stanza

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy  
grew in my mind,  
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes  
as though my thoughts

hissed and spat on my scalp. (Stanza 1, line 1-5)

As the personality of Eros depicts the characteristic of love, the first stanza of Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" above shows us that under the force of love, a suspicion, and a doubt can grow into terrible jealousy, as respond to an existence of threat towards the speaker's love.

The second stanza later makes us understand that love does not only inflame and give warmth to human's heart but also hurts and wounds.

My bride's breath soured, stank  
in the grey bags of my lungs.  
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,  
yellow fanged.  
There are bullet tears in my eyes.  
Are you terrified? (Stanza 2, line 6-11)

The way the writer describes the speaker's mental condition in the stanza above is actually terrifying. The term *foul mouthed*, and *foul tongued* are used to describe a person who does a lot of obscenities, metaphorically. Therefore, a literal sense of the speaker's mouth being filthy with words and curses are emerging to our sense. The word *bullet tears* comes at our visual senses as tear's drops. Carol Ann Duffy tries to show us how the speaker in the poem is crying sadly, and her tears are about to run down her cheek. This magnificent imagery shows us the terrible feelings between anger and sadness which is developed in the speaker's mind.

### **3.2.2 The Analysis of Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa": Jealousy Reflected in the Poem**

The writer concludes that the reason Duffy chooses to take the figure of Medusa in the poem is that this is a character full of fascinating imagery and symbolism. Therefore, by using that she shows us the jealousy; which is concluded as female jealousy by the writer and its great effects.

Medusa is a woman who is persecuted by both men and women and she is cursed for a combination of her youthful beauty and pride. It is for this reason that Medusa makes such a good metaphor for aging, the bitterness of betrayal and the fleeting nature of youth and beauty. The character of Medusa is lonely. Her curse does not only make her ugly, but also feared by humans. The poem "Medusa" depicts a woman's jealousy in a dark way, just as we know and understand that jealousy can turn someone into something which is ironically different.



In the first stanza below, the speaker in the poem starts to feel uncomfortable, as she realizes that there is another girl who can break her love apart.

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy  
grew in my mind,  
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes  
as though my thoughts  
hissed and spat on my scalp. (Stanza 1, line 1-5)

These feelings of discomfort are really bad that Carol Ann Duffy uses a terrific imagery to show the readers another level of discomfort felt by the speaker. Many of bad and unhealthy thoughts which literally appear in her mind are depicted as evil as snakes on the Medusa's head.

My bride's breath soured, stank  
in the grey bags of my lungs.  
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,  
yellow fanged.  
There are bullet tears in my eyes. 10  
Are you terrified?

Be terrified.  
It's you I love,  
perfect man, Greek God, my own;  
but I know you'll go, betray me, stray 15  
from home.  
So better by for me if you were stone.

The fourth and fifth stanza above shows that the speaker starts to understand that her lover is actually about to betray her love. The insecurity starts to fill her heart, and brings the hatred and anger to appear within the jealousy. The strong sense of belonging in the speaker's heart also appears as a possessive thought, which is shown by *So better by for me if you were stone*.

The difference between Medusa and Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" is that Medusa is cursed so that her physical appearance became horrifying while Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" is a great imagery and symbolism of the "terrifying mental state" inside a woman after being influenced by jealousy. Jealousy acts just like a "curse" towards the woman's heart in the poem, which is likely to give powers, but ironically destruct her.

### **3.2.3 The Effect of Jealousy towards the Speaker in the Poem “Medusa”**

This study concludes that the kind of jealousy depicted in the poem can be considered as a female jealousy. The effect of jealousy that Duffy tries to emphasize is considered by the writer as follows.

The first effect of jealousy is that when jealousy strikes, it can change a person's behavior and nature towards the others, as well as herself/himself, especially to those who are being devoted by her/his jealousy. In scope of psychology, it is said that jealousy strikes both men and women when there is third party interference towards their precious relationship. This emotion often comes as a combination of any presenting emotions like anger, resentment, and disgust. Therefore, jealousy gives a horrible effect towards the one suffering from it. Jealousy can slowly “take control” of someone's mind, replacing the logic in someone's mind and making him/her feel devastated and lonely which can lead them to their own loathing.

The second effect of jealousy is that jealousy can even bring extreme hatred to occur as well as other bad emotions, thus worsens the condition of the one who is suffering from it. Fear, suspicion, and insecurity felt by the speaker in this poem are able to lead her to experience an illogically heavy anger and envy. Based on the analysis of the imagery and symbols in the previous sub chapter, female jealousy can be considered as something which brings a tremendous negative power, and it is only something leading the one suffering closer to the worst outcome.

The third effect of jealousy which is reflected in the Carl Ann Duffy's “Medusa”, is that jealousy can lead the sufferer into his/her own self downfall. The worst outcome of female reflected in this poem is the self-downfall. Ironically, this tremendous negative power that the speaker bears is nothing when the female has to face her lover. The lover, who turns into someone cruel and heartless, successfully cut off the Medusa's head. Knowing that there is no hope for her lover to go back into her arms, the feelings of self-downfall emerge in the heart of a female. All of things and emotions experienced as the effects of jealousy will only lead someone to the worse condition, the feel of guilt, despair, and regret. Someone will compare herself or himself towards the factor which make them feel betrayed, in this case the third person who takes their precious one as a form of losing the self esteem and envious feelings which is appears within the heart. Thus, those feelings are formed in the heart due to the third person's existence.

In the closing line, Duffy manages to make the readers think about what they just feel about the jealousy in this poem, and make an ambiguous choice of idea for the readers, either they have to follow their resignation and sadness just like the speaker and be like what she has become, or neglect our negative feelings and emotion to control our self so that we will avoid self-loathing and regret.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" is one of the poems which emphasizes human's emotions, and Duffy uses jealousy which is one of the common emotions perceived by humans as her object to describe the power of jealousy and its effect towards human's psyche.

Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" tells the condition of a woman suffering jealousy which is slowly drowning her in destruction. Duffy also states in her work that when a woman suffers from jealousy, it is not only the jealousy that the woman experiences but also another presenting feelings like anger, resentments, and disgust. Duffy explains that a woman start to feel suspicion, and doubt towards her lover whenever a third party disturbance appears as threat to her relationship. This suspicion and doubt later bring the woman to experience insecurity: the fear of being replaced and betrayed. This feeling is really strong that causes extreme anger and disgust in the woman's heart, but ironically, the woman can not do anything but drown in her own deep destruction.

Carol Ann Duffy uses imagery, metaphor, and symbol in the intrinsic aspects which come from the figure of a gorgon, Medusa. She creates the "dark" sense and horror with the disturbing physical description of Medusa. The love which once beautiful and passionate is corroded by distrust and cruelty coming from the beloved's betrayal. This is causing an adverse change mentally and physically to the woman in the poem. For the analysis of the extrinsic aspects, this study considers the effect of jealousy in the poem. The extrinsic aspects indicate that the jealousy in the poem is a normal jealousy caused by romantic reason, and it has terrible effects towards the one suffering it. Jealousy can potentially be the cause of self loathing which the sufferer will experience later, as the accumulation of other presenting negative emotions. It stereotypically supports the old typical idea, that woman cannot do much when her precious relationship being interrupted by another, or when she fails to protect her precious relationship from a third party interferences.

In brief, Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" creates sympathy that comes from the conclusion that the woman's lover in the poem is most likely cheating on her. By arranging such a strong yet beautiful words, Duffy explains her feelings and idea that humans should choose wisely whether they have to follow their emotions, or not. It may be better to not follow the emotion in order to avoid something that will worsen the condition. Since, the emotion will appear later as one calls "regret", which is the result of accumulation of those emotions and also the one emphasized by Duffy in the poem.

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