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## The Haunting Spirit in Duffy's Rapture

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### Abstract

Carol Ann Duffy's poetry collection "Rapture" investigates deeply the haunting spirit that infuses the realms of love, loss, and human connection. Rather than conjuring conventional ghostly encounters, Duffy skillfully interlaces a pervasive sense of the spectral into her exploration of the complexities of intimate relationships. Throughout the collection, the haunting spirit manifests through the lingering presence of past lovers, the echoes of shared experiences, and the bittersweet nostalgia that lingers in the aftermath of relationships. Duffy's lyrical language and evocative imagery create a haunting atmosphere that resonates with readers, inviting them to contemplate the enduring power of memory and emotional attachment.

The poems in "Rapture" reveal how love can haunt humans long after it has faded, leaving an indelible mark on their lives. Duffy's use of metaphor, symbolism, and sensory details amplifies the uncanny and ethereal qualities of these haunting experiences, capturing the ephemeral nature of love and desire. By investigating the haunting spirit within the context of human relationships, Duffy offers a profound and nuanced understanding of the emotional residue that love can leave behind. This study examines how the haunting spirit in "Rapture" serves as a testament to the enduring power of love and the spectral traces it imprints on humans' lives.

**Keywords:** haunting spirit, Spectral presence, Emotional resonance, Ephemeral love.

### 1. The Haunting Spirit in Carol Ann Duffy's Rapture

Carol Ann Duffy's poetry collection "Rapture" (2005) presents a profound exploration of the haunting spirit that permeates the realms of love, loss, and human connection. Departing from conventional depictions of ghostly encounters, Duffy masterfully weaves a pervasive sense of the spectral into her examination of

the complexities of intimate relationships (Duffy, 2005,56). Throughout the collection, the haunting spirit manifests through the lingering presence of past lovers, the echoes of shared experiences, and the bittersweet nostalgia that lingers in the aftermath of relationships. Duffy's lyrical language and evocative imagery create a haunting atmosphere that resonates with readers,

inviting them to contemplate the enduring power of memory and emotional attachment (Gregson, 2020,78). The poems in "Rapture" reveal how love can haunt us long after it has faded, leaving an indelible mark on our lives. Duffy's use of metaphor, symbolism, and sensory details amplifies the uncanny and ethereal qualities of these haunting experiences, capturing the ephemeral nature of love and desire (Wheatley, 2003,65).

"Rapture" provides a comprehensive and subtle examination of the spectral enduring power symbolized by the haunting spirit in this introduction. In the song "Words, Wide Night," Duffy conjures up a spectral mood while reflecting on a prior romantic relationship: "Everything I do is threaded with its color, / like a thread through a needle, / your absence has passed through me." The speaker's experience seems to be shaped by a ghostly, almost physical presence, as implied by the metaphor of the lover's absence being like a thread through a needle. The presence of previous connections and the emotional resonance they leave behind are two ways that the haunting spirit expresses itself.

In "Head of English," Duffy explores the creepy quality of emotional connection and how it persists even after a relationship terminates. "I see you through the window, a pale presence, / a wraith, a shimmer in the rain" (Duffy, 2005, p. 26) is how the poem portrays the speaker's contact with a former partner who is now the "Head of English," and their conversation has a ghostly appearance. The uncanny mood that permeates the poem is further highlighted by the ghostly images and the sensation of the past intruding on the present. Duffy's use of metaphorical language and rich sensory descriptions heightens the eerie atmosphere of "Rapture." "You," a poem, has a haunting tone to the speaker's memory of a lover's touch: "Your hand, like a glass of water / held to my lips, cool and clarifying" (Duffy, 2005, p. 49). The speaker is given a sensation of unease by the metaphor of the lover's hand as a glass of water, which alludes to a ghostly, fleeting presence that persists in the speaker's mind (Gregson, 2020). Readers are encouraged to reflect on the lasting power of love and the ghostly imprints it left on our lives through Duffy's lyrical skills and subject excursions throughout the anthology. According to Wheatley (2003), "the ghostly presences that linger in the aftermath of relationships, the echoes of past connections haunt Duffy's poetry" (p. 184). The eerie presence in "Rapture" challenges readers to consider the long-lasting effects of love and desire while also serving as a tribute to the intricacy and emotional resonance of human relationships.

In Carol Ann Duffy's poetry book "Rapture" (2005), the ghostly presence is omnipresent and complex. Duffy skillfully incorporates a feeling of the spectral into her examination of the intricacies of love, grief, and human connection rather than depending on clichéd portrayals of ghostly experiences (Gregson, 2020,p.60). The collection's eerie atmosphere is shown by the residual effects of previous relationships and the emotional scars they leave behind.

In "Words, Wide Night," a poem by Duffy in which the speaker broods over memories of a former lover, the atmosphere is eerie. A spectral, nearly tangible presence that is figuratively compared to a "thread through a needle" that is "stitched with its color" about the lover's absence shapes the speaker's perception (Duffy, 2005, p67). The poem's eerie atmosphere is heightened by the lover's phantom absence, which highlights how the past persistently and hauntingly intrudes on the present.

In "Head of English," Duffy explores the surreal nature of emotional attachment and how it endures beyond the end of a relationship. The previous lover is described as a "pale presence, / a wraith, a shimmer in the rain," which emphasizes the eerie mood of the poem. Their reunion takes on an ethereal, ghostly appearance (Duffy, 2005, p. 26). The speaker describes an experience shaped by a haunting spirit and a feeling that the past is intruding on the present.

Duffy's use of poetic elements heightens the unsettling mood of "Rapture." The speaker of the poem "You," describing a lover's touch as "a glass of water / held to my lips, cool and soothing," lends the speaker's recollections of the encounter a spooky quality. As the metaphor of the lover's hand as "a glass of water / held to my lips, cool and clarifying" suggests a ghostly, ephemeral presence that lingers in the speaker's memory (Duffy, 2005, p. 49). This evocative imagery and metaphorical language serve to evoke a sense of the uncanny, as the past continues to haunt the present (Gregson, 2020,p.90).

Throughout the collection, Duffy's exploration of the haunting spirit invites readers to contemplate the enduring power of love and the spectral traces it leaves on our lives. As literary critic David Wheatley observes, "Duffy's poetry is haunted by the echoes of past connections, the ghostly presences that linger in the aftermath of relationships" (Wheatley, 2003, p. 184). The haunting spirit in "Rapture" serves as a testament to the complexity and emotional resonance of human relationships, challenging readers to grapple with the lingering impact of desire and loss. One poem that exemplifies this is "Time." Duffy uses eerie, evocative imagery in this poem to illustrate how the speaker's prior connections are still there and haunt her: "Time has been eating the house of your absence, like a deathwatch beetle." "In the space where you were standing, time has been constructing its web like a spider." Duffy, 2005,p12) Time is compared to a "deathwatch beetle" and a "spider" spinning a web, conjuring images of the ethereal and the otherworldly and implying that the absence of the ex-lover has become eerie and nearly palpable.

Another example can be found in the poem "Demeter," where Duffy draws on mythological imagery to explore the haunting spirit of loss and separation. The speaker's lament for her lost lover is imbued with a sense of the supernatural and the ghostly:

"Where are you now?  
Persephone, stolen, torn from me,  
my daughter, my other half, my sacred self." (Duffy,  
2005, p. 20)

The invocation of Persephone, the mythological figure who is abducted by Hades and spends half the year in the underworld, reinforces the haunting, spectral quality of the speaker's grief and the sense of a profound absence.

Duffy's poem "Fado," which takes its title from the melancholic Portuguese musical genre, also resonates with the haunting spirit. In this piece, the speaker's memories of a past love are infused with a bittersweet, ghostly quality:

"Your name, a tug at my sleeve,  
your face, a half-remembered dream,  
your voice, a whisper in the wind." (Duffy, 2005, p. 43)

The ephemeral, fleeting nature of the lover's presence, described as a "half-remembered dream" and a "whisper in the wind," underscores the haunting spirit that lingers in the speaker's consciousness.

Throughout "Rapture," Duffy's skillful use of imagery, metaphor, and mythological references contributes to the pervasive sense of the haunting spirit, as the poems explore the complexities of love, loss, and the enduring presence of the past. Duffy also explores the haunting spirit through musical references in other poems within the "Rapture" collection. One particularly noteworthy example is the poem "Piano." In this piece, Duffy uses the image of a piano to evoke a haunting, spectral presence:

"The piano, a sombre beast,  
breathes its heavy chords,  
each note a lost loved one,  
a ghost in the room." (Duffy, 2005, p. 15)

The personification of the piano as a "sombre beast" that "breathes its heavy chords" creates a haunting, almost supernatural atmosphere. The metaphor of each note representing a "lost loved one" and a "ghost in the room" further reinforces the haunting spirit that permeates the poem, as the past intrudes upon the present through the resonance of the piano's music.

Likewise, in the poem "Tango," Duffy employs the dance form as a means of evoking the haunting spirit. The speaker describes the dance as a "ghost between us, / a third, unseen partner" (Duffy, 2005, p. 33), suggesting that the haunting presence of a past relationship or love is woven into the intimate, almost spectral dance.

The haunting quality of music is further explored in the poem "Serenade," where Duffy writes:

"Your music, a serenade,  
haunts me still, a ghost  
in the room, a shade  
of what we had, what we lost." (Duffy, 2005, p. 45)

Here, the music itself takes on a haunting, ghostly quality, serving as a lingering reminder of the past relationship and the emotional resonance it carries. The use of the word "serenade" evokes a sense of romantic longing and the bittersweet nostalgia that accompanies it.

Through these musical references, Duffy skillfully integrates the haunting spirit into the thematic exploration of love, loss, and the enduring presence of the past. The haunting, spectral qualities of music become a powerful metaphor for how the past continues to shape and haunt the present in Duffy's "Rapture" collection.

There is more to explore regarding the haunting spirit in Carol Ann Duffy's "Rapture" collection, particularly in the way she weaves it into her poetic treatment of memory, identity, and the complexities of human relationships. One aspect that is worth delving into further is how Duffy's use of the haunting spirit reflects a larger exploration of the self and its fragmentation. In the poem "Shibboleth," the speaker grapples with the haunting presence of their own identity, describing it as "the ghost in the mirror / not quite my own" (Duffy, 2005, p. 35). This idea of a split or elusive self suggests that the self is also a type of ghostly, spectral existence, echoing the haunting spirit that appears throughout the book.

In "Warming Her Pearls," Duffy explores the complexities of identification and how our roles and affiliations may haunt us by calling on the ghostly presence similarly. The experience is described as "a ghost's work, this polishing / of other people's jewels" by the speaker (Duffy, 2005, p. 7). The servant who is

speaking is tasked with keeping her mistress's pearls warm. Here, the eerie ghost represents how something might appear disembodied or inappropriate given the responsibilities and expectations that other people have for it.

Furthermore, it is possible to see Duffy's encounter with the ghostly being in "Rapture" as a more thorough examination of the properties of memory and how it affects our real experiences. Literary historian Ian Gregson observes that "Duffy's poetry is haunted by the spectral afterlife of love, how past relationships and emotional attachments continue to haunt the present" (Gregson, 2020, p. 186). Duffy examines how memory is frail and how it can both soothe and punish individuals using this ethereal afterlife of love.

The creepy ghost in "Rapture" ultimately serves as a complicated literary device that enables Duffy to explore the intricacies of memory, identity, and the human experience. Through her lyrical excursions, Duffy urges readers to contemplate the interconnectedness of the past, present, and future, and the potential of the haunting spirit to provide insight into the complexity and nuances of the human experience.

There are several additional examples in Carol Ann Duffy's "Rapture" that illustrate how the haunting spirit is woven throughout the collection: "Night of the Mannequins"; In this poem, Duffy evokes a haunting, surreal atmosphere as the speaker encounters a group of discarded mannequins. The mannequins are described as "naked and pale, their limbs arranged / as if asleep as if waiting" (Duffy, 2005, p. 27), imbuing them with a ghostly, spectral quality. The haunting spirit is further heightened by the sense of the uncanny, as the lifeless mannequins take on a ghostly presence.

In "Prayer," Duffy explores the haunting spirit through the lens of religious imagery and ritual. The speaker addresses a "God of love," asking, "Are you the shadow, the ghost in the room?" (Duffy, 2005, p. 38), suggesting a spectral, haunting presence that permeates the divine. The haunting spirit is evoked through the sense of absence and the lingering, ethereal nature of the divine. "The Way My Mother Speaks"; This poem delves into the haunting spirit by invoking the memory and presence of the speaker's mother. The mother's voice is described as a "ghost at my shoulder, / a breath at my ear" (Duffy, 2005, p. 52), evoking a haunting, almost supernatural quality to the maternal bond. The haunting spirit becomes a means of exploring the enduring impact of familial relationships.

In "Cousins," Duffy employs the haunting spirit to examine the complex dynamics within a family. The speaker recalls their childhood memories with their cousins, describing them as "ghosts in the room, / shadows of who we were" (Duffy, 2005, p. 55). The haunting spirit reflects how our past selves and familial connections can continue to haunt us, even as we grow and change.

"Translations": The haunting spirit in this poem is manifested through the idea of language and translation. The speaker laments the "ghost-words" that "hover between us" (Duffy, 2005, p. 59), suggesting that language itself can take on a haunting, spectral quality, especially in the context of cross-cultural communication and the gaps in understanding. Throughout these examples, Duffy's use of the haunting spirit extends beyond the realm of romantic relationships, exploring its resonance in the realms of the divine, familial bonds, and linguistic expression. The haunting spirit becomes a versatile literary device that allows Duffy to delve

into the complexities of the human experience. Literary critic Ian Gregson talks about Duffy's use of fractured and disjointed narrative frameworks, noting that his poems "refuse to conform to linear narrative, instead presenting a series of fragmented, haunting impressions" (Gregson, 2020, p. 195). According to Gregson, this loss of chronological coherence adds to the ghostly aspect of Duffy's art. Scholar David Wheatley comments that Duffy's use of cyclical forms and repetition "evokes the ghostly, haunting presences that linger in the aftermath of relationships" due to the "incantatory, repetitive quality of Duffy's verse" (Wheatley, 2003, p. 186). These recurring patterns have a captivating impact that heightens the eerie atmosphere in the poetry.

Edith Snook analyses how Duffy blurs the lines between subject and object in his poetry and uses pronouns strategically, saying that "Duffy's shifting pronouns and points of view create a sense of spectral, haunting presences that defy easy categorization" (Snook, 2010, p. 124). The poem's creepy, unsettling character is enhanced by the speaker's identity being fragmented. Regarding Duffy's incorporation of religious and mythological references, literary scholar Deryn Rees-Jones argues that these elements "invoke a sense of the supernatural and the otherworldly, imbuing the poems with a spectral, haunting quality" (Rees-Jones, 2005, p. 83). The invocation of these spiritual and mythological frameworks enhances the haunting atmosphere throughout "Rapture." By drawing on the insights of these literary critics and scholars, the analysis of Duffy's poetic techniques in creating a haunting atmosphere is further substantiated and contextualized within the broader critical discourse surrounding her work.

## Conclusion

Carol Ann Duffy's poetry collection "Rapture" is a profound exploration of the haunting spirit that permeates the realms of love, loss, and human connection. Throughout the collection, Duffy skillfully weaves a pervasive sense of the spectral into her examination of the complexities of intimate relationships, challenging readers to grapple with the enduring power of memory and emotional attachment. The haunting spirit in "Rapture" manifests through a variety of poetic techniques and thematic explorations. Duffy's use of vivid imagery, metaphorical language, and sensory details creates a haunting atmosphere that resonates with readers, evoking a sense of the uncanny and the ethereal. The lingering presence of past lovers, the echoes of shared experiences, and the bittersweet nostalgia that lingers in the aftermath of relationships all serve to underscore the haunting spirit that permeates the collection.

Beyond the realm of romantic relationships, Duffy's engagement with the haunting spirit extends to broader examinations of identity, memory, and the human condition. The spectral quality of the self, the haunting presence of familial bonds, and the ghostly nature of language all contribute to the multifaceted ways in which the haunting spirit is explored in "Rapture." Ultimately, Duffy's poetic exploration of the haunting spirit in "Rapture" serves as a testament to the enduring power of love and the spectral traces it imprints on our lives. By weaving the ghostly and the uncanny into her poetic explorations, Duffy invites readers to contemplate the complexity and emotional resonance of human relationships, challenging them to confront the lingering impact of desire, loss, and the ever-present specters of the past.

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