

Student 3

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Dr. Kikendall

EN201 SP17

Midterm Creative Project Reflective Essay

At the beginning of the semester, the class was asked to read three different versions of the familiar story “Little Red Riding Hood”. Carol Ann Duffy’s version, “Little Red Cap”, immediately caught my attention. It is a skillfully written poem taken from a new perspective in the story. It gives Little Red Cap the power and paints her as a savvy young woman who controls her own destiny. Dr. Kikendall informed us that this poem was taken from a collection of poems written in similar ways by Carol Ann Duffy called *The World’s Wife*.

For my creative project I decided to create portraits of the women from some of the poems in *The World’s Wife* by Carol Ann Duffy. The first thing I did to prepare for this project was skim through the book and pick out some of the poems that stuck out to me. There were a lot that I enjoyed but I had to narrow it down to 4 or 5 because I knew I wouldn’t have the time to create that many portraits. My top 2 picks were “Mrs. Lazarus” and “Delilah”. I chose these two because I was very familiar with the Biblical theme. I proceeded to engage in background research over these two characters.

In the Bible, Judges explains the birth of a man named Samson (Judges 13 KJV) . God blessed him with incredible strength to deliver Israel from their enemies (Judges 13). However, he fell in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah (Judges 14). The Philistines were enemies of Israel but Samson stayed with Delilah anyway (Judges 14). He decided to disclose to

her his weakness which was his hair (Judges 16). If it were to be cut, he would lose all of his strength (Judges 16). One night, she betrayed him and cut his hair while he was sleeping (Judges 16). Carol Ann Duffy's spin on this story shows Delilah as a loving woman who cut Samson's hair because Samson wanted to be more tender and loving towards Delilah. With this idea in mind, I started to draw Delilah's figure. Her face was modeled after the singer, Regina Spektor. She wrote a beautiful song entitled "Samson" that is from a similar perspective. I painted her figure as nude to show vulnerability and that she had recently had sexual relations with Samson as in the poem. In her right hand, she holds a pair of dull, silver scissors that can be assumed to have recently cut Samson's hair. Her left arm is folded across her body and eyes looking down at the scissors to show a small amount of regret. If she loves him as much as she is letting on, it must be difficult for her to have the control to change the direction of his life. The background is a mix of blue and black. The darkness gives a mood that is mysterious, shows power, and implies death. Although a physical death does not occur in this poem, Samson's spiritual death does.

The second piece I created is based on Duffy's poem, "Mrs. Lazarus". Lazarus is another character from the Bible who, in the book of St. John, dies and is raised from the dead after four days (John 11). It is unclear in scripture if Lazarus had a wife but Duffy creates this character for a specific reason. Duffy's poem has many stages to it, but I focused on the earlier stages for most the artwork. At the beginning of the poem, Mrs. Lazarus has lost her identity after her husband died. I painted the canvas with watercolors outside of the lines in an abstract way to show her lack of identity. The colors were also deliberate. The only color mentioned in the poem is the gold on her ring. I used a semi-gold color around the area of the ring I drew on

her hand and in the area of the moon. This is to show that she has some certainty that her marriage is still preserved indicated by the line, "But I was faithful for as long as it took" (Duffy 24-25). The color blue grey is symbolic of Mrs. Lazarus' grievous state. Blue is supposed to emphasize the sadness while grey is a neutral color symbolizing her ability to transition to a new place in her life where she can let the death of her husband go. I chose to do this piece with mixed media. Watercolors, to me symbolize the fluidity of life. Water takes the shape of the container that it is in. Circumstances in life represent the container in this way. It is out of the control of the water and the water is forced to move and change in order to fit in its surrounding. The line work represents things that are definite. In Mrs. Lazarus' life, there are very few things that seem definite to her. I used as few lines as possible to emphasize this. The outline of the crescent moon is in direct reference to the line in the poem "to watch the edge of the moon occur to the sky" (28). In the stanza that this is pulled from, she describes things that are real and definite to her in that moment.

The biggest problem encountered in this project was my eagerness. I desperately wanted to create more portraits but didn't have the time to do so. Painting in acrylics has proved difficult for me every time and it took a lot of effort and time to paint the nude portrait of Delilah. I really wanted to add columns in the background behind Delilah but ran out of time. Luckily, I was able to paint the background in a way that gave a lot of meaning to the piece itself.

The main intent of this project was to show a completely different meaning of well-known stories. For example, Delilah, had to make a very difficult decision, but ultimately it was for love. Duffy wrote these stories not so they would be seen as an alternative truth, but to

expose a new truth or idea from a familiar story. Personally, I chose this project because I think there is a lot to learn from a woman's perspective. By exposing different sides of these well-known stories, people begin to notice the important roles that women play. Women can have power and control over a situation and women lose identity in grief.

Discussion Questions:

What do the visual arts, such as painting and drawing, show that poetry or other forms of literature do not? And vice versa?

How do the original stories that Carol Ann Duffy's poems were based on add a new dimension of meaning to her poems? (as opposed to stand alone poetry)

Works Cited:

Duffy, Carol Ann. *The World's Wife*. New York City: Faber and Faber, 2001. Print.

First Baptist Church of Milford, Ohio. *The Holy Bible*. Milford, Ohio: First World, 1611. Print.