

Carol Ann Duffy's "Queen Kong"

Context

Duffy's poem "Queen Kong" depicts the female counterpart to the giant gorilla King Kong. In the original King Kong movie, an Actress named Ann Darrow travels with the rest of the film crew to a faraway island in the Indian Ocean to find a location to film the director's new action movie. However, Ann is taken hostage by the natives of this mysterious island as they plan to sacrifice her to the enormous ape Kong who rules the jungle. Yet, Kong falls in love with Ann and the movie ends with him being taken back to New York where he climbs the Empire State Building and is famously shot down by the military as he carries Ann, who ends up empathising with the *monster*.

In Duffy's poem, Queen Kong falls in love with a documentary film-maker who has come to her island to study a new species of toad. She lavishes her attention on him and, distraught when he returns home, pursues him to New York. After twelve years together, he dies, and in memory she preserves him and hangs him around her neck as though he were a piece of jewellery.

The poem consists of eleven septets (seven-line stanzas). There is no particular rhyme scheme or metrical pattern meaning the poem is written in free verse.

I remember peeping in at his skyscraper room and seeing him fast asleep. My little man. I'd been in Manhattan a week, making my plans; staying at 2 quiet hotels in the Village, where people were used to strangers and more or less left you alone. To this day I'm especially fond of pastrami on rye.	Annotate here
I digress. As you see, this island's a paradise. He'd arrived, my man, with a documentary team to make a film. (There's a particular toad that lays its eggs only here.) I found him alone in a clearing, scooped him up in my palm, and held his wriggling, shouting life till he calmed.	Annotate here

For me, it was absolutely love at first sight.	
I'd been so lonely. Long nights in the heat of my own pelt, rumbling an animal blues. All right, he was small, but perfectly formed and gorgeous. There were things he could do for me with the sweet finesse of those hands that no gorilla could. I swore in my huge heart to follow him then to the ends of the earth.	Annotate here
For he wouldn't stay here. He was nervous. I'd go to his camp each night at dusk, crouch by the delicate tents, and wait. His colleagues always sent him out pretty quick. He'd climb into my open hand, sit down; and then I'd gently pick at his shirt and his trows, peel him, put the tip of my tongue to the grape of his flesh.	Annotate here
Bliss. But when he'd finished his prize-winning film, he packed his case; hopped up and down on my heartline, miming the flight back home to New York. Big metal bird. Didn't he know I could swat his plane from these skies like a gnat? But I let him go, my man. I watched him fly into the sun as I thumped at my breast, distraught.	Annotate here
I lasted a month. I slept for a week, then woke to binge for a fortnight. I didn't wash. The parrots clacked their migraine chant. The swinging monkeys whinged. Fevered, I drank handfuls of river right by the spot where he'd bathed. I bled with a fat, red moon rolled on the jungle roof. And after that, I decided to get him back.	Annotate here
So I came to sail up the Hudson one June night,	Annotate here

with the New York skyline a concrete rainforest of light; and felt, lovesick and vast, the first glimmer of hope in weeks. I was discreet, prowled those streets in darkness, pressing my passionate eye to a thousand windows, each with its modest peep-show of boredom or pain, of drama, consolation, remorse.	
I found him, of course. At 3 a.m. on a Sunday, dreaming alone in his single bed; over his lovely head a blown-up photograph of myself. I stared for a long time till my big brown eyes grew moist; then I padded away through Central Park, under the stars. He was mine. Next day, I shopped. Clothes for my main, mainly, but one or two treats for myself from Bloomingdale's.	Annotate here
I picked him, like a chocolate from the top layer of a box, one Friday night, out of his room and let him dangle in the air between my finger and my thumb in a teasing, lover's way. Then we sat on the tip of the Empire State Building, saying farewell to the Brooklyn Bridge, to the winking yellow cabs, to the helicopters over the river, dragonflies.	Annotate here
Twelve happy years. He slept in my fur, woke early to massage the heavy lids of my eyes. I liked that. He liked me to gently blow on him; or scratch, with care, the length of his back with my nail. Then I'd ask him to play on the wooden pipes he'd made in our first year. He'd sit, cross-legged, near my ear for hours: his plaintive, lost tunes making me cry.	Annotate here
When he died, I held him all night, shaking him like a doll, licking his face, breast, soles of his feet, his little rod. But then, heartsore as I was, I set to work.	Annotate here

He would be pleased. I wear him now around my neck,
perfect, preserved, with tiny emeralds for eyes. No man
has been loved more. I'm sure that, sometimes, in his
silent death,
against my massive, breathing lungs, he hears me roar.

You might also be interested in...

[The most recent film adaptation from 2005](#), starring Jack Black, Naomi Watts, Adrian Brody, and Andy Serkis.

Alternatively, read [Angela Carter's short story "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon"](#) and ["The Tiger's Bride"](#) for excellent examples of **revisionism** (reworking *Beauty and the Beast*) to compare to "Queen Kong")