

# Bitter About Pay, Poet Laureate Strikes Catty Tone

by Con Chapman

LONDON. It took Britain 341 years to name a woman to the highly-prestigious but low-paid post of poet laureate, but Carol Ann Duffy, the first female and the first openly bisexual holder of the post as well, has made up for lost time.



*Duffy: "Come real close, within your hearing—what is the deal with those goofy earrings?"*

"It's always been dead white males like Dryden and Tennyson before me," the plainspoken 54-year-old said in an interview, "although some were still alive when they were writing their pap."



*Tennyson: "Sure I'm dead now, but I used to be alive."*

The poet laureate has traditionally composed verses for state occasions, such as the coronation of a monarch or the opening of a new wastewater treatment plant. "You need to keep your poet laureate busy," said Culture Secretary Andy Burnham, the official

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who officially made the official appointment when Duffy ascended to the office. "We like to motor them around to ribbon-cuttings, easter egg hunts and dog shows, so they don't stagnate."



*"Here we sit all broken-hearted; turned the key and couldn't start it."*

But Duffy struck an adversarial tone from the outset, offering up as her first poem a 14-line sonnet about improper expenses submitted by members of Parliament, whose opening lines ruffled feathers across party lines:

*Your paid that much for cabfare from Heathrow?  
You really paid through the nose!  
Methinks instead you spent the swag on your mistress  
upgrading her to silk stockings from panty hose.*

Duffy has used her position to rain down scorn upon fashion *faux pas* by the Royal Family, saying she'd "rather be dead in a ditch" than be confined to writing "polite little rhymes" about Prince Charles, his consort Camilla Parker Bowles, and Charles' sons by Lady Diana Spencer, William, the older one, and Harry, the Nazi one.



*"If it's all the same to you I'd rather not be petted  
by someone who has yet to be properly Scotland Yard vetted."*

"Take the Queen, for example," Duffy said to this reporter. "I've got something for her right here," she adds as she dashes off a couplet with a mood she refers to as the "New Cattiness" on a scrap of paper she pulls from her purse:



*You like Corgis, I like cats-  
Where do you get those god-awful hats?*  
Duffy is, if anything, less charitable about Parker-Bowles, who has failed to replace Lady Di in the hearts of most Britons:



*Camilla Parker-Bowles and Roger Daltry: Separated at birth?  
Your taste is deficient, your sense of style paltry  
You look like a drag version of The Who's Roger Daltrey.*



*Fun couple*  
The poet laureate receives an annual honorarium of 5,750 pounds, about \$8,561, and unlimited free coffee refills at the British Department of Culture, Media and Sports cafeteria. "We had to tell the last laureate that enough was enough," says lunch lady Colleen

Durley. "All that caffeine was giving his poems a brittle, jumpy tone."

