

# 43. Women writers and emancipation

## Carol Ann Duffy *Mean Time* (1993)

### Havisham 174

*Inspired by a character from Great Expectations by Dickens, the poem gives voice to a secondary character, who would conventionally be considered irrelevant because she is a woman and a spinster.*

Beloved sweetheart bastard. Not a day since then  
I haven't wished him dead. Prayed for it  
so hard I've dark green pebbles<sup>1</sup> for eyes,  
ropes on the back of my hands I could strangle with.

5 Spinster. I stink<sup>2</sup> and remember. Whole days  
in bed cawing<sup>3</sup> Nooooo at the wall; the dress  
yellowing, trembling if I open the wardrobe;  
the slewed mirror<sup>4</sup>, full-length, her, myself, who did this

to me? Puce curses<sup>5</sup> that are sounds not words.

10 Some nights better, the lost body over me,  
my fluent tongue in its mouth in its ear  
then down till I suddenly bite awake. Love's

hate behind a white veil; a red balloon bursting  
in my face. Bang. I stabbed<sup>6</sup> at a wedding-cake.

15 Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon.  
Don't think it's only the heart that b-b-b-breaks.

1. **pebbles:** it. *sassolini*
2. **stink:** smell very bad
3. **cawing:** it. *a gracchiare*
4. **slewed mirror:** it. *lo specchio sbronzato*  
(as if her image were distorted)
5. **Puce curses:** it. *Minuscole maledizioni*  
(lett. *come pulci che non la fanno dormire*)
6. **stabbed:** it. *ho dato una pugnalata*

## Equal Pay? Time to Close the Gap!



Although gender equality is one of the founding principles of the EU and the principle of equal pay for equal work was introduced more than 60 years ago, women in Europe are still paid less than men.

### What is the gender pay gap?

The gender pay gap is the difference between the gross hourly earnings between working men and working women.

### Understanding the gender

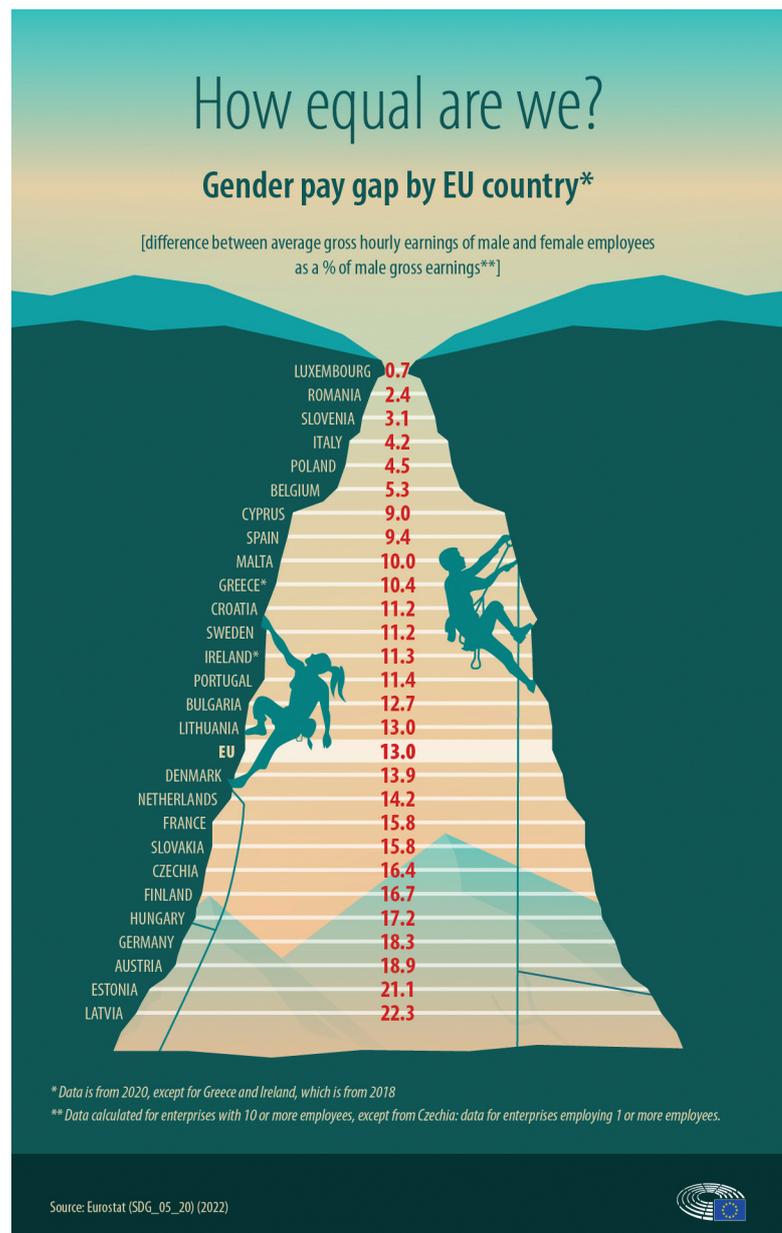
#### 5 pay gap

Women in the EU earn on average almost 13% less per hour than men. There are large differences between member states: in 2020, the biggest gender pay gap was recorded in Latvia (22.3%), while the EU country with the lowest gender pay gap was Luxembourg (0.7%).

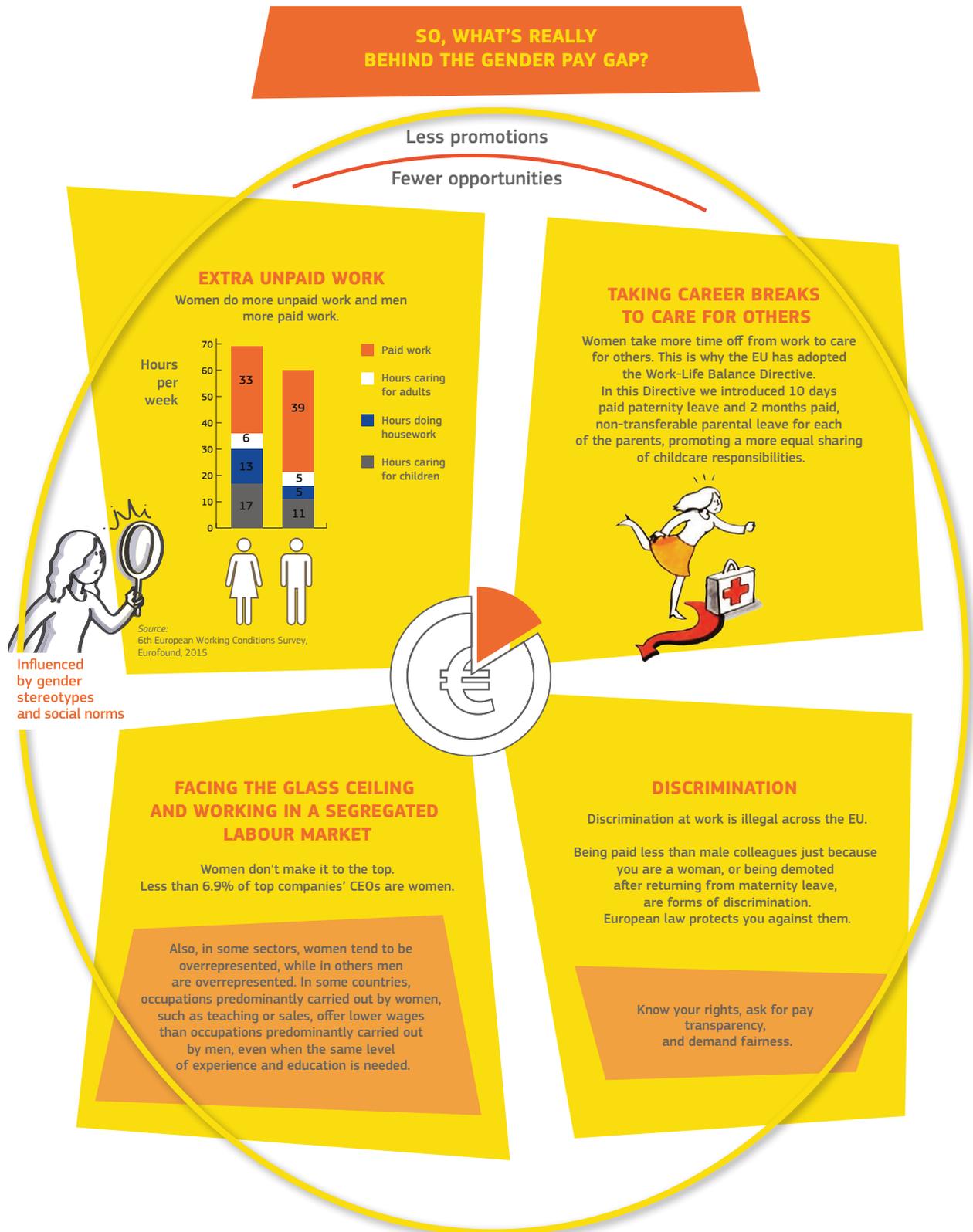
A narrower gender pay gap does not necessarily mean more gender equality. It often occurs in countries with lower female employment. A high pay gap may indicate that women are more concentrated in low-paid sectors or that a significant proportion of them work part-time.

The gender pay gap increases with age: it might increase as a result of career breaks by women, although these patterns vary between countries. It also differs by industry and in 2020 was higher in the private sector than in the public sector in the majority of EU countries.

An important reason for the gender pay gap is the

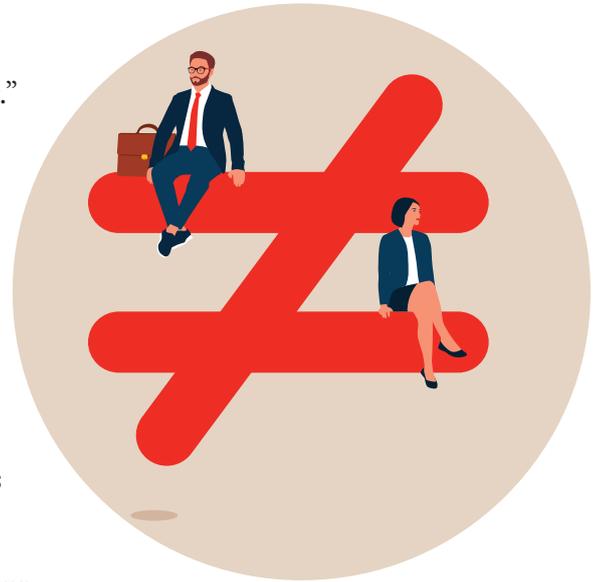


overrepresentation of women in relatively low-paying sectors and underrepresentation in higher-paid sectors. For example, on average in 2020, women held 34% of managerial positions in the EU and 41% of positions in the science and engineering sectors. The gender pay gap means women are at higher risk of poverty in old age. In 2020, women in the EU aged over 65 received pensions that were on average 28.3% lower than pensions received by men.



**Myths around gender pay gap**

- 45 1. “More women work part-time, so they should earn less.”  
WRONG: Working fewer hours a week means you should take home less pay per month, NOT less pay per hour.
- 50 2. “Women earn less because they choose lower-earning jobs.”  
WRONG: Women tend to earn less per hour than men for the same job whether it is a highly-skilled profession like a doctor or nurse, or a lower-skilled job such as a salesperson. The gender pay gap exists across our economy and in all sectors and occupations.
- 55 3. “Men are better educated, so should earn more”.  
WRONG: Today almost 60% of graduates in the EU are women.
- 60 4. “The gender pay gap has been around for so long, there is nothing we can do about it.”  
WRONG: The European Commission has developed an Action Plan which prioritises eight areas for action to address the underlying causes of the gender pay gap.

**Why should we fix it?**

Because:

- 65 1. equality is at the root of European values;
2. reaching pay equality would send a positive message about the fairness and transparency of our labour market;
3. when a woman's work is valued less, simply due to her gender, it affects her motivation, her efficiency and ultimately our overall productivity;
- 70 4. women are part of our economy. Paying them fairly will have a positive economic impact;
5. tackling unequal pay also makes sure attracting the best talents, whatever their gender is, in organisations and companies.

(Adapted from [https://safety4sea.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EU-Equal-Pay-2019\\_11-1.pdf](https://safety4sea.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EU-Equal-Pay-2019_11-1.pdf);  
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200227STO73519/gender-pay-gap-in-europe-facts-and-figures-infographic>)

## Alice Walker

### *The Color Purple* (1982)

#### Letters 1-5 176

*The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel based on the letters written to God by a fourteen-year-old black girl, Celie, who is the protagonist of the book. The story begins with her cry for help: her stepfather has repeatedly raped and brutally beaten her and she is now terrified, because, after becoming pregnant twice by him, she is now sure that he has set his sights on her younger sister, Nettie.

#### Letter 1

*You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy.*

Dear God,

I'm fourteen years old. ~~I am~~ I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.

5 Last spring after little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say It too soon, Fonso, I ain't well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again: She say Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead, an all of these children.

10 She went to visit her sister doctor over Macon. Left me to see after the others. He never had a kine word to say to me. Just say You gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his things up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle<sup>1</sup> it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me<sup>2</sup>, saying You better shut up and git used to it.

But I don't never git used to it. And now I feels sick every time I be the one to cook.

15 My mama she fuss at me an look at me. She happy, cause he good to her now. But too sick to last long.

#### Letter 2

Dear God,

20 My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing<sup>3</sup>. She scream at me. She cuss at me. I'm big. I can't move fast enough. By time I git back<sup>4</sup> from the well, the water be warm. By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I git all the children ready for school it be dinner time. He don't say nothing. He set there by the bed holding her hand an cryin, talking bout don't leave me, don't go.

25 She ast me bout the first one Whose it is? I say God's. I don't know no other man or what else to say. When I start to hurt and then my stomach start moving and then that little baby come out my pussy chewing on it fist you could have knock me over with a feather.

1. **wiggle**: it. *lo faceva ondeggiare*

2. **choke me**: shut me up rudely

3. **cussing**: cursing

4. **git back**: get back

Don't nobody come see us.  
 She got sicker an sicker.  
 Finally she ast Where it is?  
 I say God took it.

30 He took it. He took it while I was sleeping. Kilt it out there in the woods. Kill this one too, if he can.

### Letter 3

Dear God,

He act like he can't stand me no more. Say I'm evil an always up to no good. He took my other little baby, a boy this time. But I don't think he kilt it. I think he sold it to a man an his wife over Monticello. I got breasts full of milk running down myself. He say  
 35 Why don't you look decent? Put on something. But what I'm sposed<sup>5</sup> to put on? I don't have nothing.

I keep hoping he fine somebody to marry. I see him looking at my little sister. She scared. But I say I'll take care of you. With God help.

### Letter 4

40 Dear God,

He come home with a girl from round Gray. She be my age but they married. He be on her all the time. She walk round like she don't know what hit her. I think she thought she love him. But he got so many of us. All needing something.

My little sister Nettie is got a boyfriend in the same shape almost as Pa. His wife died.  
 45 She was kilt by her boyfriend coming home from church. He got only three children though. He seen Nettie in church and now every Sunday evening here come Mr -. I tell Nettie to keep at her books. It be more then a notion taking care of children ain't even yourn. And look what happen to Ma.

### Letter 5

Dear God,

50 He beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got something in my eye but I didn't wink. I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them. Maybe cause my mama cuss me you think I kept mad at her. But I ain't. I felt sorry for mama. Trying to believe his story kilt her. Sometime he still be looking at Nettie, but I always git in his light. Now I tell her to  
 55 marry Mr -. I don't tell her why.

I say Marry him, Nettie, an try to have one good year out your life. After that, I know she be big.

But me, never again. A girl at church say you git big if you bleed every month. I don't bleed no more.

5. **sposed:** supposed