

Examine the use of the dramatic monologue in the poetry of carol ann duffy essay ...

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



Unlike the soliloquy, the dramatic monologue speaks directly to the reader and voices a single character or persona's thoughts, this offers a better understanding of the ideas and message the poet is trying to express. The dramatic monologue is used to form a bond or relationship between the speaker and the reader, taking the poem to a personal level, and in turn more effective in conveying a certain message. This essay will explore the way the dramatic monologue is used in both *Demeter* and *Mrs. Midas* by Carol Ann Duffy, taken from her collection of poems *The World's Wife*.

The phrase, 'Behind every great man there is said to be a great woman' comes to mind when reading *The World's Wife*. The title of this collection reveals much about its content and Duffy's intentions. *The World's Wife* places emphasis on the wife, giving the woman the centre stage and allowing her the chance to speak through the medium of the dramatic monologue. From *Mrs. Midas* to *Mrs. Beast*, Duffy explores the thoughts and feelings of the women behind famous men, be it through history or through myth or fairytale, Duffy makes it very clear that every woman has a tale to tell.

Mrs. Midas tells the untold story of the well-known Greek myth King Midas, who is miraculously, granted the wish of turning everything he touches into gold. As with all the poems in *The World's Wife*, the title is a clear giveaway of what the poem is about to entail, and this is no different. *Mrs. Midas*, the wife of King Midas is the persona of this particular monologue and here she voices her thoughts on her husband's newfound ability.

“ The kitchen filled with the smell of itself.” This personification continues through the first stanza of Mrs. Midas. “ It’s steamy breath” and “...wiped the other’s glass like a brow”, personifies the kitchen Mrs. Midas is in to help you relate to the familiar homely setting that surrounds her. The effect of this is that you feel how she feels at that time, safe, happy and without a care in the world. The lines “ begun to unwind” and the imagery of her relaxing to a “ glass of wine” enforce this feeling. The use of dramatic monologue helps to dramatise the final line of the stanza, “ He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig”, the descriptive lines before this contrasts with the abrupt change of topic, this prepares you for the turning point in her story, where the twist to her tale begins.

Within the next few stanza’s Mrs. Midas’s tone dramatically changes from feeling relaxed and happy to shocked and horrified at what her husband has done. “ He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed. He drew the blinds.” The short sentences evoke a feeling of everything happening too fast, supporting the shocked and horrified mood, which continues to the next stanzas. The first point of the poem in which you hear of her husband’s reaction is where he laughs in reply to her question, “ What in the name of God is going on?” Duffy has intended his initial reaction to be laughter instead of explaining himself to portray the stereotypical man that doesn’t show consideration or take the situation or his wife seriously when she clearly needs it.

The poem is set out in a structure of eleven stanzas consisting of six lines where only two exceptions of this rule is made. “ He toyed with his spoon,

then mine, then with the knives, the forks.” The word “ forks” takes a line by itself to help you imagine the way in which Mrs. Midas is speaking to you, she is clearly still in a state of shock and this new line marks a short pause in her speech where she is struggling to stay calm. “ You see, we were passionate then”, where “ then” is on a line by itself it is as though Mrs. Midas has taken a short moment to imagine those happy times when they were passionate, appreciating them as those days are now long gone.

“ I locked the cat in the cellar”, “ The toilet I didn’t mind.” Like in much of her work, Duffy implements short spouts of humour throughout the poem, the effect of this is that the colloquial language engages the reader and helps to support the idea that Mrs. Midas is actually voicing her tale to the reader personally.

Mrs. Midas speaks bitterly about the fatal consequences her husband has bought to their marriage, “ Separate beds. In fact, I put a chair against my door, near petrified”, she also reminisces of the days when they were happy and uses words such as “ unwrapping” which connotes the excitement she once felt. Contrasting the good times they had together with the breakdowns of their marriage they are experiencing now highlights the selfishness and lack of thought her husband had for their relationship.

The poem ends with Mrs. Midas being forced to separate from her husband. He is left secluded on his own “ in the wilds” away from people he can potentially harm. The irony of this is that he had hoped the power of ‘ the golden touch’ would win him prosperity, popularity and love and respect by

all, and yet it has forced him to live alone for the rest of his life, unable to ever be intimate with his wife again, and unable to enjoy the things he had hoped money would buy him. "...but the lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness."

Duffy's feminist style of writing criticises the man as selfish and greedy, a common theme echoed throughout *The World's Wife*. "Duffy's women monologists are frequently powerful, vengeful women whose assertiveness, violence and aggression parodies stereotypes of male behaviour" (Jones, 2005: 158) In contrast to Duffy's male criticism, Jones believes she is empowering the women in her collection *The World's Wife* - I disagree. I feel that she isn't trying to parody their behaviour to the stereotypes of men's, but rather highlight their bravery and what they have to cope with on their own, I think Duffy's true message is to show just how much we as women need to deal with.

The final line of *Mrs. Midas*, "I miss most, even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch." brings the poem to a rather melancholy ending where Mrs. Midas, despite everything is still expressing her love for her husband and how much she misses him. Contrary to this point, Duffy has added a pun at the final two words, "his touch." symbolising both the loving and destructive touch he had on their time together. The subtle dose of humour at the end lightens the mood slightly so you are not feeling entirely disheartened by the tragic ending to Mrs. Midas.

The final two words of the poem are possibly designed to lift the mood from the tragic tale slightly. The pun, "... his touch." Symbolises both his literal loving touch and his destructive touch that he had on their relationship. Although this light use of humour is designed to soften the harsh criticisms Duffy makes towards men's implied destructive behaviour, it doesn't detract from the tragic ending, " I miss most, even now, his hands..." where Mrs. Midas expresses her love for her husband despite everything, I feel that this is intentionally designed to maximise the dislike towards the male role.

The final poem of *The World's Wife* is *Demeter*, arguably the most intriguing of the collection, for it takes on a unique style that sets itself aside from the other poems. Rather than follow the satirical themes throughout the collection, *Demeter* takes on a celebratory style that gives a satisfied and pleasant ending to the book. *Demeter* tells the tale of her grief at the loss of her own daughter and the eternal motherly love she has for her.

Demeter is the Greek goddess of the harvest. According to myth, *Demeter's* daughter, *Persephone*, is kidnapped by *Hades* and forced to live in the Underworld with him for 4 months of each year. " Where I lived - winter and hard earth", *Demeter* is so overcome by grief for the loss of *Persephone* that she plunges the world into winter until the return of her daughter. " I sat in my cold stone room." is a metaphor for her feeling trapped and helpless - her world has become a tomb without her daughter's presence. This poem speaks out particularly to mothers, but also to anyone with a loved one, the dramatic monologue is used to relate to anyone who has experienced the loss be it temporary or permanently, of a loved one. Perhaps the lack of

rhyme is due to the complete hopelessness Demeter feels at the beginning of the poem, and the rhyming couplet at the end is a signal of her mourning coming to an end.

Janet Lewison comments on the line, " to break the ice. My broken heart -", " Words resist involvement and connection: nothing and no one get to reach her. She cannot bring her daughter (and by implication herself) back from the place of the dead. Her words are arid and lifeless" (Lewison, 2005)

I agree with Lewison's comments on this line, I also think it applies to the entire first half of the poem. I particularly think it is true that Demeter feels as though she is in the land of the dead, just like her daughter, as she has plunged the world into winter so that everyone else can suffer and feel the pain she is suffering. I think this is where Duffy is trying to outline how out of control we can become when struck by grief and how it will only get worse when echoing those feelings onto others. The hyphen at the end of that line creates a feeling as though Demeter has faltered or gasped, it shows she can barely think about it.

At the third stanza a noticeable change has occurred in the poem, the mood is lifting. The repetition in the line " She came from a long, long way" communicates both the distance Persephone has come from and the time Demeter has endured without her, it's almost like an exhale of relief. Using the word ' She' instead of directly referring to her daughter shows there was no ambiguity over who it could have been. The final line of that stanza, " my

daughter, my girl, across the field's" uses romantic and maternal language which speaks out to the reader so that you can relate to Demeter's situation.

As Demeter's daughter returns from the land of the dead, in "bare feet, bringing all spring's flowers" this symbolises the season of spring settling in, and "bare feet" connotes rebirth and innocence. "with the small shy mouth of a new moon" acknowledges that Persephone's return is apart of a cycle, and she must return to the Underworld once again, but she will be back. The use of the word "mouth" I also think conveys Demeter meeting her daughter and kissing her with relief.

The structure of this poem takes on the form of a fourteen-line sonnet, which Duffy has adapted slightly. Most of the poem contains no rhyme but includes a rhyming couplet at the final two lines to symbolise the joy Demeter is now feeling. A sonnet seems the perfect type of structure for this poem, as it is essentially a love poem from Demeter to her daughter.

The final lines of the poem brings *The World's Wife* as a collection full circle with the line, "in bare feet, bringing all spring's flowers" which mirrors "Out of the forest I come with my flowers" taken from *Little Red Cap*, the very first poem of the book, this supports Demeter's themes of rebirth and renewal.

Mrs. Midas and Demeter are similar in that they are both based on mythological tales. I feel that using myth to base the dramatic monologues on creates a deeper and more fulfilling message. Both poems follow the themes of marriage, motherhood and the female voice. In terms of the structure of the mood they are both very similar, they both start off with a

very heavy and melancholy tone, but end on a slightly lighter note. Duffy has used the dramatic monologue to convey her feminist message of the not so positive stereotype of men, but I feel this is to mask the deeper hidden meanings of love, relationships, betrayal and motherhood that Duffy has herself experienced.

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