

How does carol ann
duffy convey how
grief changes over
time in mrs lazarus



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The poem Mrs Lazarus, by Carol Ann Duffy, portrays a woman (Mrs Lazarus) going through the stages of grief after her husband passes away. In this essay, I will be exploring the ways in which Duffy conveys how grief changes over time.

The poem begins with Mrs Lazarus's state of anguish over her husband's death. The words " howled, shrieked, clawed" evoke a sense of rawness in the reader, and the image that comes to mind is of an animalistic nature. The triplet serves to show the extent of her grief, and the harsh sounds that they make only serve to further the image of Mrs Lazarus's desperate grief.

At the end of the stanza, the words " dead, dead" are used. The words are written at the end of the sentence and come with an abrupt, jarring effect, due to it being at the end of a sentence with a softer mood. This helps the reader to visualise Mrs Lazarus as she repeats the name of her husband " over and over again", only to realise that he is gone and no longer here.

In the next stanza, Duffy writes, " slept in a single cot, widow, one empty glove". The words " single", " empty" and " widow" give emphasis to the idea of aloneness. When Mrs Lazarus describes herself as " one empty glove", the reader can infer that she feels like her " other half" is missing, and she feels useless without the other half of her pair, much like how a single glove is useless.

In the same stanza, Mrs Lazarus exhibits signs of her loneliness in other ways. She shuffles " in a dead man's shoes", showing that her desire for companionship has lead her to adopt her husband's role. This is further emphasised by the line " double knot of a tie around my bare neck", where

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Mrs Lazarus wears her husband's clothes to assume his role. The line can also be interpreted as the first sign of suicidal thoughts, a suggestion that she can no longer go on as the grief is suffocating her. From this stanza, the reader can see that Mrs Lazarus is still in mourning over the loss of her husband, though the initial wild state of grief is over and she has shifted into a quiet way of mourning.

In the next stanza, the memory of her husband dwindles “ to a shrunk size of a snapshot, going, going”. By describing the memories as a snapshot, Duffy brings to mind a short, fleeting moment in time. This allows the reader to see things from Mrs Lazarus's perspective, as her husband becomes little more than jumbled and vague memories.

By now, Mrs Lazarus is learning to overcome her grief. The little pieces of Lazarus that are left behind are slowly disappearing, shown by the line “ last hair on his head floated out from a book” and “ his scent went from the house”. Whilst the words themselves have a melancholy feeling to them, the reader can see that the presence of Lazarus is diminishing from within Mrs Lazarus's mind.

Like this, Lazarus slowly fades away, until we can see, from stanza five, that “ he was gone”. The line is written at the very beginning of stanza five, and shows the reader that now Lazarus is gone, and Mrs Lazarus is going to start a new beginning. The reader can see now that Mrs Lazarus is ready to move on, and she tries to develop a relationship with a “ schoolteacher”, justifying her actions by saying she was “ faithful for as long as it took”.

By the sixth stanza, Mrs Lazarus is completely over her grief. In the entire stanza, Lazarus is not mentioned once, which furthers the reader's view of Mrs Lazarus as someone who is finally at peace. In the line " the edge of the moon", we can see that Mrs Lazarus is learning to recognise the beauty around her again, and that she can now appreciate the beauty in nature after her extreme grief. This change from looking inside of her mind (her memories with Lazarus) to looking outside at the moon shows the reader that she is calm and is finally beginning to look up.

However, at the end of the stanza, tension is suddenly created. This can be seen in the line " village men running towards me, shouting". The verse suddenly changes in tone, expressing how sudden the change in mood is. The beginning of the sixth stanza was the calmest, showing that Mrs Lazarus has gotten over her grief, but the ending suddenly breaks in and steals away the moment of calm.

In the sixth stanza, the reader finds out what the village people have been thinking of Mrs Lazarus. The lines " I knew by the sly light" and " shrill eyes of the barmaid" show that the village people feel that Mrs Lazarus is being unfaithful and are judging her behaviour for that. They believe that women should stay faithful forever, and that she should remain monogamous.

At this point, the reader finds out that Lazarus, the man whose death Mrs Lazarus has been mourning for the entirety of the poem, has been brought back to life. Whilst the reader expects Mrs Lazarus to be overjoyed, she isn't. Instead, she describes " his stench", which brings to mind negative imagery, and allows the reader to empathise with her feeling of disgust.

In the line “ out of his time”, Mrs Lazarus shows the readers that Lazarus has had his time, that she has grieved enough for him and now she has no time left for him. This shows how long it takes to get through the mourning process, and leaves the reader empathising with Mrs Lazarus, as they have been through the various stages of grief with her.

In the last stanza, Carol Ann Duffy draws attention to societal expectations of female widowers. By allowing her readers to empathise fully with the character Mrs Lazarus, she brings them through the entire journey of grief, only to show that the man who died is suddenly back again, after leaving Mrs Lazarus behind. The reader knows that Mrs Lazarus has finally triumphed over her depressive state of grief and can now feel for her and think that the societal views are incorrect, and that Mrs Lazarus shouldn't be bound to Lazarus anymore, despite him having been resurrected.