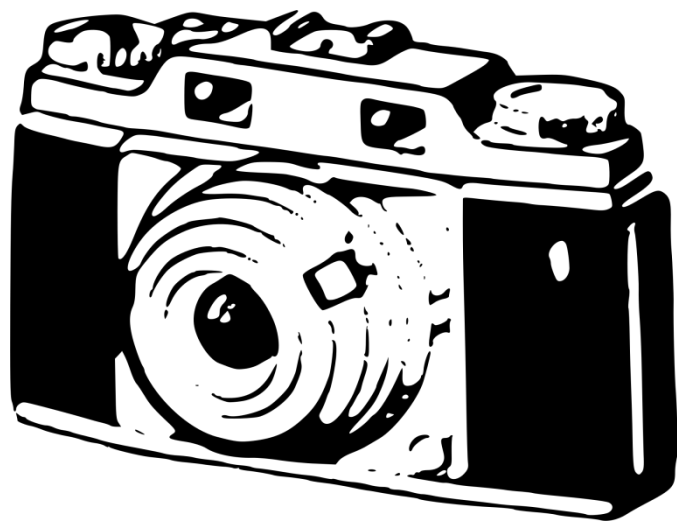


War Photographer

By Carol Ann Duffy



War Photographer

In his dark room he is finally alone
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.
The only light is red and softly glows,
as though this were a church and he
a priest preparing to intone a Mass.
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays
beneath his hands, which did not tremble then
though seem to now. Rural England. Home again
to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,
to fields which don't explode beneath the feet
of running children in a nightmare heat.

Something is happening. A stranger's features
faintly start to twist before his eyes,
a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries
of this man's wife, how he sought approval
without words to do what someone must
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black and white
from which his editor will pick out five or six
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where
he earns his living and they do not care.

Carol Ann Duffy

From *New Selected Poems 1984-2004* (Picador, 2004).

Originally published in *Standing Female Nude* (Anvil, 1985). Reproduced by kind permission of the author.

National 5 English Critical Reading: *War Photographer*

Practice Questions

1. Many of the main ideas or concerns of the poem come across clearly in the first stanza.
 - (a) Identify **two** of these main ideas or concerns from stanza one. (2)
 - (b) Show how **two** examples of the poet's use of language in stanza one help to clarify or illustrate his meaning. You should refer to two of word choice, structure or imagery (4)
2. Show how any **three** examples of the poet's use of language in stanza two effectively contribute to the main ideas or concerns of the poem. You should make reference to imagery, word choice and one other technique. (6)
3. With reference to word choice and imagery, explain how the poet conveys their ideas in stanza 3 of the poem. (4)
4. How effective do you find any aspect of the final stanza as a conclusion to the poem? Your answer should deal with ideas and and/or language. (4)
5. With close textual reference, show how the ideas and/or language of this poem are similar **OR** different to another poem or poems by Duffy which you have read. (8)

National 5 English Critical Reading: *War Photographer*

Practice Questions - Possible Answers

1. Many of the main ideas or concerns of the poem come across clearly in the first stanza.

- (a) Identify **two** of these main ideas or concerns from stanza one. (2)
Suffering/ The effects of war (1)
Dealing with the emotional impact of war (1)
The job/ role/ experience of the war photographer (1)
- (b) Show how **two** examples of the poet's use of language in stanza one help to clarify or illustrate his meaning. You should refer to two of word choice, structure or imagery (4)

Word choice 'darkroom' (1) reflects the troubled state of mind the photographer has because of his experiences of war (1)

'finally alone' - word choice (1) suggests that the photographer has been longing to be on his own, perhaps because of the traumatic experiences he has had doing his job (1)

'with spools of suffering' - metaphor (1) suggesting the endlessness of the misery the photographer has witnessed (1)

'ordered rows' word choice (1) suggests the idea that the photographer is trying to make sense or create order from the 'senseless' war. (1)

'the only red light is red and softly glows' - word choice 'red' (1) suggests the hate and anger involved in war, making us think of those who have suffered (1)

'red light' (1)- word choice reminds us of a sanctuary light in a church and suggests the photographer is ... (1)

'as though this were a church' or 'a priest preparing to intone a mass' imagery suggests ... (1)

...the photographer is reflecting on the memories of those who have died/ has a duty to reflect on the suffering. (1)

'all flesh is grass' (1) biblical imagery (metaphor) making us think of the transient nature of life - particularly in war (1)

2. Show how any **three** examples of the poet's use of language in stanza two effectively contribute to the main ideas or concerns of the poem. You should make reference to imagery, word choice and one other technique. (6)

'He has a job to do.' This short, simple sentence placed at the start of the line (structure) (1) creates the effect that he has no other choice/ that he must remain detached from his work (1)

'Solutions slop' word choice (1) reveals the idea in the poem that there are no simple, easy resolutions to war. (1)

'ordinary pain' Oxymoron (1) - reveals the idea that the discomfort experienced by people in England are trivial compared with those who suffer at war. Pain cannot be 'ordinary' (1)

'fields which don't explode...' Shocking imagery (1) again revealing the contrast between peaceful home of photographer and violent war torn countries he has visited. (1)

3. With reference to word choice and imagery, explain how the poet conveys their ideas in stanza 3 of the poem. (4)

'Something is happening.' Ambiguous word choice (1) suggests picture appearing on photo, but also that the photographer is having an emotional response to the horror he has seen. (1)

'faintly start to twist' - Word choice 'twist' (1) implies the pain and suffering felt by the person in the photo (the look of pain on their face)(1)

'half formed ghost' - imagery (1) We imagine an picture beginning to appear. However, description is also a metaphor for the soul of the person in the photo - it is implied they have died. (1)

'remembers the cries/ blood stained into foreign dust' Word choice (1) 'cries' and 'stained' appeal to different senses showing impact of war on photographer. (1)

4. How effective do you find any aspect of the final stanza as a conclusion to the poem? Your answer should deal with ideas and and/or language. (4)

'A hundred agonies' - Word choice (1) emphasises the vast number that have suffered which sums up the idea of the pain caused by war. (1)

'pick out five or six for Sunday's Supplement' (1) Duffy sums up her criticism of the editors of newspapers who trivialise the suffering of war to sell papers - 'pick out' suggests some are more important than others. 'Supplement' suggests news item is not important. (1)

'prick with tears' - Word choice (1) 'sums up Duffy's criticism of the readers' reaction to photos - they only care for a moment. (1)

'Between the bath and pre-lunch beers' - as above - readers quickly forget photos as they indulge in luxuries... (1)

'stares impassively' - word choice(1) Sums up impact of job on photographer - he feels disconnected from people in his own country as 'they do not care' (1)=