**War Photographer**

This poem is about a person who is clearly not the poet. The surface subject of the poem is the war photographer of the title but at a deeper level the poem explores the difference between "Rural England" and places where wars are fought (Northern Ireland, the Lebanon and Cambodia), between the comfort or indifference of the newspaper editor and its readers and the suffering of the people in the photographs. War Photographer (from Standing Female Nude, 1985) comes from Duffy's friendship with Don McCullin and Philip Jones Griffiths, two very well-respected stills photographers who specialised in war photography. But the photographer in the poem is anonymous: he could be any of those who record scenes of war. He is not so much a particular individual as, like the poet, an observer and recorder of others' lives. He is an outsider ("alone/With spools of suffering") who moves between two worlds but is comfortable in neither. The "ordered rows" of film spools may suggest how the photographer tries to bring order to what he records, to interpret or make sense of it.

The simile which compares him to a priest shows how seriously he takes his job, and how (by photographing them) he stands up for those who cannot help themselves. His darkroom resembles a church in which his red light is like a coloured lantern (quite common in Catholic and some Anglican churches). The image is also appropriate because, like a priest, he teaches how fragile we are and how short life is. ("All flesh is grass" is a quotation from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isaiah contrasts the shortness of human life with eternal religious truths - "the Word of the Lord" which "abides forever"). In the poem, the sentence follows a list of names. These are places where life is even briefer than normal, because of wars.

The second stanza contrasts the photographer's calmness when taking pictures with his attitude as he develops them. If his hands shake when he takes pictures, they won't be any good, but in the darkroom he can allow his hands to tremble. "Solutions" refers literally to the developing fluid in the trays, but also suggests the idea of solving the political problems which cause war - "solutions" which he does not have, of course. Duffy contrasts the fields in England with those abroad - as if the photographer thinks English fields unusual for not being minefields. The image is shocking, because he thinks of land mines as exploding not under soldiers but under "the feet of running children".

What "is happening" in the third stanza is that an image is gradually appearing as a photo develops. "Ghost" is ambiguous (it has more than one meaning). It suggests the faint emerging image, but also that the man in the photo is dead (which is why the picture was taken). The photographer recalls both the reaction of the wife on seeing her husband die. He is not able to ask for permission to take the picture (either there is no time or he does not speak the language or both) but he seeks "approval without words". It is as if the wife needs to approve of his recording the event while the blood stains "into foreign dust".

"In black and white" is ambiguous: it suggests the monochrome photographs but also the ideas of telling the truth and of the simple contrast of good and evil. The photographer has recorded some hundred images which are only a small sample of what has happened, yet only a handful will ever appear in print. Although the reader may be moved, to tears even, this sympathy is short-lived, between bathing and a drink before lunch. Duffy imagines the photographer finally looking down, from an aeroplane, on England (either coming or going). This is the country which pays his wages ("where/he earns his living") but where people "do not care" about the events he records.

In writing about the poem try to focus on some of these details. Look also at the poem's form. This form is quite traditional - the rhyme scheme and metre are the same in each stanza (there are rhyming couplets on the second and third lines and on the last two lines; each line is a pentameter, which will be familiar to you from Shakespeare's plays).

Finally, make a judgement: Duffy obviously feels something in common with her subject - she uses his experience to voice her own criticism of how comfortable Britons look at pictures of suffering, but do not know the reality. She sees the photographer (far removed from the paparazzi of the tabloids) as both priest and journalist. The reader's response to the Sunday newspaper is almost like going to church - for a while we are reminded of our neighbour's suffering, but by lunchtime we have forgotten what we learned.