

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

'finally' suggests he is constantly haunted by his experiences, this allows him to escape.

Sibilance, emphasises the dark nature of the photos and their content.

Connotations with blood and violence, the red light and glow can also symbolise a womblike safe place.

'church', 'priest' and 'mass' - an extended metaphor.

Juxtaposes the idea of church with the warzones he has seen. Highlights the horror. Reinforces the religious imagery as well as emphasising the fragility of life.

Irony -he had a steady hand taking the photos, in danger. But now at home in safety he trembles. Hints that he is suffering PTSD.

Stereotyping the typical British highlight of weather, contrasting with the events in warzone. Juxtaposes the dull stability of home.

Couplet places emphasises on the vulnerability and danger.

Caesura changes tone and builds tension.

Double meaning the photo itself is taking form, however the subject themselves may have been in pain, twisting.

Metaphor shows the still faint origins of the photo but also implies that the subject may well now be dead.

Personal Pronoun 'he' emphasises a namelessness, that he is one of many.

Adjective emphasis on the fact it is far away.

Pun dark humour, bitter. Black and white in the newspapers.

Juxtaposes 'tears' with the very comfortable images of 'bath' and 'pre lunch beers'. Can be read almost angrily, their tears are meaningless and this is a small pause in their life, not of worth to them.

'Impassive' without emotion.

Collective pronoun: accusation-like tone. Final lines emphasise his resentment.

Context/Main Ideas

Duffy was inspired to write this poem by her friendship with a war photographer. She was especially intrigued by the peculiar challenge faced by these people whose job requires them to record terrible, horrific events without being able to directly help their subjects.

Duffy perhaps shares an affinity with these photo-journalists - while they use the medium of photography to convey certain truths about the human condition, she uses words and language to do the same job. Throughout the poem, Duffy provokes us to consider our own response when confronted with the photographs that we regularly see in our newspaper supplements, and why so many of us have become desensitised to these images.

By viewing this issue from the perspective of the photographer, she also reveals the difficulties of such an occupation. By the end of the poem, it is clear her subject straddles two vastly different worlds yet increasingly feels he belongs to neither.

War Photographer Carol Ann Duffy

Structure/Shape of poem

The poem is laid out in four regular six-line stanzas, with each stanza ending in a rhyming couplet. This structure is interesting since its very rigid order contrasts with the chaotic, disturbing images described in the poem.

This organisation mirrors the actions of the photographer, who lays out his films in "ordered rows", as though in doing so he can in some way help to restore order to this chaotic world. The poem moves through a series of observations in the first three stanzas to a conclusion of sorts in the fourth.

The style is almost clinical and matter of fact, perhaps to imitate the clinical approach required by people in this line of work to allow them to do their jobs under extreme pressure. Unlike the readers of the newspaper he works for, this sense of distance is a necessary requirement for the photographer.

Unsurprisingly, in a poem that is so focused on images of human suffering, Duffy concentrates on the sense of sight throughout the poem and the final image is almost like a photograph itself, depicting the journalist surveying the landscape and its inhabitants below impassively as he travels to his next assignment.

Feelings/Attitudes

The horror of war

Duffy's skilful yet understated imagery helps to convey the terrible personal stories that lie behind every conflict. Perhaps almost in an attempt to counter the graphic imagery that we have become so used to seeing, her depictions are subtle and understated and she often leaves the reader to compose their own images.

For example, in the line to fields which don't explode beneath the feet /of running children, she takes an image that we would usually associate with something innocent and happy and subverts it into something much more sinister.

Similarly, her description of the dying man contains almost no visual imagery and instead focuses on the sense of sound through the word choice cries and the unspoken communication between the photographer and the victim's wife

By focusing on just one image rather than the countless others that were taken, Duffy forces us to confront the personal cost of war. In doing so, Duffy again exposes another paradox inherent in the coverage of modern conflict, implying that we have lost the capacity to view the subjects of war as real human beings, each with unique, individual stories and tragedies.

Throughout the poem, Duffy conveys the increasing separateness and isolation the photographer feels both towards his own country and the newspaper he works for.

Unlike us and his editor, he is unable to protect himself from the horror of the subjects he photographs and there is a sense of growing bitterness as he continues to feed the voracious need for news in the knowledge that we are increasingly unmoved and unaffected by the images. His contempt for his editor is revealed in the careless, thoughtless way he notes how he chooses photographs for the paper, picking out five or six/for Sunday's supplement.

Ironically, in an almost parallel response to our desensitisation, the photographer too feels increasingly indifferent towards his homeland and fellow countrymen as he stares impassively at where/he earns his living and they do not care.

Poetic Devices

- Emotive language used to convey the photographer's troubled memories: "a hundred agonies"
- Imagery: "a half-formed ghost" – evidence that the photographer continues to be 'haunted' by the memory of what he photographed.
- Plosive sounds "Belfast. Beirut. Phnom. Penh". Could reflect click of camera / could reflect explosions
- Monosyllabic in places – emotionless?
- Irony "which did not tremble then". Does he suggest the memory is worse than the moment in time?

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land

'antique'

Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

'trunkless' suggests the statue is barely standing. The rest is ruined and missing. Suggests it is being eaten away by time and the desert.

Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,

Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,

'shattered visage'- broken face, it is unrecognisable so it has no purpose anymore.

And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

'sneer', 'cold command'- suggest Ozymandias was powerful and arrogant. Ironic as now nothing left.

Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,

The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:

And on the pedestal these words appear:

'Mock' as in to make a model of, but also to make fun of. This is a pun because of the double meaning.

'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Exclamation makes the tone strong and authoritative. Irony is that nobody is listening.

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away."

'colossal'- meaning vast or huge. A metaphor for his ego rather than the statue.

Percy Bysshe Shelly

'lone and level sands' outlast the statue. Juxtaposed to the power and ego of the statue. Sands are also iconic of time.

Context/Main Ideas

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) is one of the most famous poets in all of English literature. He was one of a group of poets who became known as The Romantics.

Shelley was well known as a 'radical' during his lifetime and some people think Ozymandias reflects this side of his character.

Although it is about the remains of a statue of Ozymandias (another name for the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses II) it can be read as a criticism of people or systems that become huge and believe themselves to be invincible.

Written by Shelly in a collection in 1819, it was inspired by the recent unearthing of part of a large statue of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Ramesses II. The Egyptian Pharaohs like Ramesses believed themselves to be gods in mortal form and that their legacy would last forever. The reference to the stone statue is likely a direct reference to the statues and sculptures like the one which was unearthed, which the ancient Egyptians made. On the base of the statue is written (translated) *"King of Kings am I, Ozymandias. If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works."*

The narrator of Shelley's poem says he met a traveller from an "antique" (ancient) land and then tells us the story the traveller told him. The man had seen the remains of a huge statue in the desert. There were two enormous legs without a trunk and next to them lay a damaged "visage" (face). At the foot of the statue were words which reflected the arrogance and pride of Ozymandias. Those words seem very hollow now as the magnificent statue is destroyed and none of the pharaoh's works have lasted.

Feelings/Attitudes

Looking at power and conflict we can imagine Ozymandias as a powerful ruler who sees himself as a 'king of kings', perhaps a great warrior and one of the most powerful men in the world.

The poem is almost being ironic, pointing out that now all that remains is an arrogant boast on a ruined statue. Perhaps the poet feels sorry for him or is laughing at his expense. Either way it looks about the inevitable downfall of all rulers and tyrants, and how nothing, not even power, lasts forever.

The statue in the poem, broken and falling apart in the desert with nobody to care is an allegory of Ozymandias and of every powerful man or woman, the idea that they will also drift away until they are just another grain of sand.

Ozymandias Percy Bysshe Shelley

Structure/Shape of poem

Written in a **sonnet** with loose iambic pentameter. **iambic pentameter** is pairs (iamb, of sounds *da-dum*) with 5 (pentameter, think of pent like in pentagon) in a line making 10 syllables overall.

Sonnets were generally popular romantic or love poems, perhaps this being a love poem about Ozymandias, a joke about the ruler's ego. Or simply to capture the romantic and exotic tone of a lost legend.

The Rhyme scheme is irregular, perhaps symbolic of the broken statue itself, no longer perfect.

The first line and a half up to the colon are the narrator's words, the rest are those of the traveller he meets. There are no clear stanzas as such. Instead, it is one, 14-line block of text that is split up with lots of punctuation throughout.

Poetic Devices

Imagery

Shelley creates a memorable image of this "vast" and once great statue, now in ruins. He also places it in the middle of a huge desert with nothing else around it, which highlights its fall from grace. What was once so magnificent - a symbol of the king's great power - is now "sunk... shattered... lifeless". We have no sympathy whatsoever with the statue or the king though, due to some of Shelley's descriptions: "sneer of cold command... hand that mocked them" and the arrogance of the words displayed at the bottom

Sound

Although it doesn't have an easy, memorable rhyme scheme, the poem is **powerful when read aloud**. The end of lines one and three rhyme ("land / sand") but so do the first and last words of line three ("stand / sand") which gives it extra power. Lines 12 and 14 also rhyme and words such as ("decay / away") mean that the poem ends with a feeling of mystery and emptiness. The use of iambic pentameter means that it has a regular sound.

London

I wander through each chartered street

'chartered' is something listed and regulated. The streets are clearly controlled but it suggests the Thames is also controlled. Nature is controlled by man.

Near where the chartered Thames does flow,

And mark in every face I meet

Blake is suggesting that everyone is without power and in misery. 'mark' is a metaphor for a brand, to show their place in society.

Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,

In every Infants cry of fear,

In every voice: in every ban,

Repetition of 'in every' used to show scale of suffering.

The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the Chimney-sweepers cry

Juxtaposition of cries of children made to sweep chimneys and church bells. Blake saw religion as a tool to keep the people down and therefore was wrong— 'black'ning'. This contrasts the cries of the innocent dirty children with the supposedly clean but corrupt church.

Every black'ning Church appalls,

And the hapless Soldiers sigh

Runs in blood down Palace walls .

Link to war at this time. The 'blood' running down palace walls signifies their sacrifice to protect the power of those who live in palaces.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

How the youthful Harlots curse

'Harlots' is slang for prostitutes or low class women. Blake is corrupting the idea of childbirth with sexual exploitation. The new born infant is born into a broken world.

Blasts the new-born Infants tear,

And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

Oxymoron which juxtaposes the joy of marriage with the misery of death. Blake is suggesting that society has destroyed all the good things in life.

William Blake

Context/Main Ideas

William Wordsworth was a romantic poet, we don't mean he wrote love poems, but he wrote poems about the world we live in which challenged people and the way they thought at the time. During this time 'epic' poems of large length were common, as were poems which looked at the world and man's place within it. This extract is from a much larger poem, it looks at the spiritual and moral development of a man growing up.

In 1789, the French people revolted against the monarchy and aristocracy, using violence and murder to overthrow those in power. Many saw the French Revolution as inspirational - a model for how ordinary, disadvantaged people could seize power. Blake alludes to the revolution in London, arguably suggesting that the experience of living there could encourage a revolution on the streets of the capital.

London

William Blake

Structure/Shape of poem

London is presented in a very regular way, much like a song. There is a strict abab rhyme scheme in each of the four stanzas.

The poem offers a glimpse of different aspects of the city, almost like snapshots seen by the speaker during his "wander thro" the streets.

As the poem progresses the journey the poet is on becomes rougher and words like 'and' are repeated to give it a breathless pace and feel.

Feelings/Attitudes

There is conflict between man and nature where nature is eventually shown to be more powerful in the end.

Blake's speaker has a very negative view of the city. For Blake, the conditions faced by people caused them to decay physically, morally and spiritually.

For Blake, buildings, especially church buildings, often symbolised confinement, restriction and failure. In this poem, the lines "the Chimney-sweeper's cry / Every blackening church appals" provide an association which reveals the speaker's attitude. Money is spent on church buildings while children live in poverty, forced to clean chimneys - the soot from which blackens the church walls. To Blake, this makes a mockery of the love and care that should characterise the Christian religion.

The "blackening" church walls are also linked to the running of "blood down Palace walls" - a clear allusion to the French Revolution. The speaker is perhaps arguing that, unless conditions change, the people will be forced to revolt.

The poem as a whole suggests Blake sees the rapid urbanisation in Britain at the time as a dangerous force. Children are no longer free to enjoy childhood; instead working in dangerous conditions. Charters restrict freedoms, ultimately resulting in the restriction of thinking.

The poem is pessimistic. It is without hope for the future.

Poetic Devices

The tone of the poem is at times biblical, reflecting Blake's strong interest in religion. It is as if the speaker is offering a prophesy of the terrible consequences unless changes are made in the city.

In the first stanza, Blake uses repetition twice, firstly using the word "charter'd". This is a reference to the charters that allocated ownership and rights to specific people. Many, including Blake, saw this as robbing ordinary people of their rights and freedoms.

The second use of repetition is with the word "marks". This has a dual meaning: it refers to the physical marks carried by people as a result of the conditions they endure, and is also suggestive of the speaker recording evidence during his walk through the city streets.

In the first three lines of stanza two, the speaker makes it clear that "every" sound he hears is evidence of the "mind-forg'd manacles". Manacles are like handcuffs. The speaker is suggesting that people's minds are restricted and confined - that the city has robbed them of the ability to think.

The poem is full of negative words: "weakness", "woe", "cry", "fear", "appals", "blood", "blights", "plagues" and "hearse" are just some of them.

The poem ends with a startling contrast in the language chosen: "marriage hearse". To Blake, marriage should be a celebration of love and the beginning of new life. Yet here it is combined with the word "hearse" - a vehicle associated with funerals. To the speaker of the poem, the future brings nothing but death and decay.

MY LAST DUCHESS

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

'my' is a possessive pronoun. The speaker is laying claim to her as a possession, she is used to show off his control and power.

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands

He is referring to a famous artist of the time. The suggestion is that he values the name of the artist more than the Duchess it is a painting of.

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

He is showing his power in the bracketed aside by suggesting that he is giving the messenger a rare privilege to see the Duchess in this way, exercising his control. In fact the irony is that he needs to show off.

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

If they 'durst': If they dare, he is showing off his power again and how others fear him.

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not

Her husband's presence only, called that spot

He implies that people believed it was not only him who could make her happy (though he couldn't) the 'spot' is a pun between a mark, showing her face had some joy in it, but also spot as in a small amount, she was not happy. Hints he was jealous.

Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps

Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps

Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Sinister tone, 'dies along her throat' the words are also semantically linked to murder 'die' and 'throat'.

Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

He is trying to be polite, using a rhetorical question to indicate a lighter tone to the conversation, in fact he is trying to avoid showing his jealousy and rage, at conflict with himself.

A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

He is angry that she would find the same level of joy in the expensive gifts he bought her and the cheap or simple gifts of the poor or nature. Angry at his lack of control. He juxtaposes the two things though the irony is that his are without sincerity.

Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked

Exclamation and change of structure, the verse is broken with caesuras to show his rising anger. He is losing control, his personality now angry.

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill

The poet is ironically mocking how vain the Duke is, he cares more about his heritage and cannot understand that she did not see that as important.

In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this

Here he clearly states how even if he was good with words and could ask her to stop giving everyone else so much attention, he would choose never to stoop so low. He is showing his believed power as above asking for things from women. Ironically she is in control.

Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

The use of semicolons gives a sense of finality to the statements. It is suggesting she was killed on his request. This is the culmination of the conflict in the relationship. Euphemism to suggest the fact she was killed?

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,

Her in a painting satisfies him as much as she did in real life, as a possession. The question shows a change of tone to return to the civil and polite way in the start. This helps give the poem a circular structure.

The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense

'munificence' means generosity. He is counting on being given the money.

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed

'dowry', money paid by the bride's parents. Suggests he is more interested in the money than his planned future bride. It is sinister as is again suggests a repeat in his actions.

At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Taming' suggests he likes to control things such as his wives. As with the start he uses an allusion to another famous artist in order to show off his wealth and power. It is used to show how he quickly forgets about his dead wife who he was previously claimed to be so devoted to.

Context/Main Ideas

Robert Browning was a poet in the 19th century. The son of a wealthy bank clerk, he didn't fit in as much in London society, he left the country and went to Italy to marry fellow poet Elizabeth Barrett because of her over protective father. As a result they were both familiar with over controlling patriarchs in the family as well as Italy itself.

The poem is loosely based on the Duke of Ferrara who was an Italian Duke from the sixteenth century. It is written from his perspective, talking to a messenger about arranging his next marriage. The Duchess of whom he speaks was his first wife, Lucrezia de' Medici who died in 1561 aged 17, only two years after he married her. In real life, Lucrezia died in suspicious circumstances and might have been poisoned.

The poem is set in 1564, three years after the death of the Duchess. An emissary (messenger or representative) has been sent to see the Duke from the Count of Tyrol. The Count is the father of the Duke's next wife (he married three times in all). The Duke shows the emissary a picture of his late wife and remarks on her character, suggesting that she was unfaithful to him - and hinting that he might have killed her because of it.

During his speech, the Duke makes himself look arrogant, insensitive and selfish.

My Last Duchess

Robert Browning

Structure/Shape of poem

The poem is an example of dramatic monologue (a speech given by one character).

It uses a large number of pauses (caesuras) in the poem along with lines that flow into one another (enjambment) in order to try and capture the tone of the speaker talking away to the messenger and adding in tangents (small opinions and asides).

The poem uses rhyming couplets and iambic pentameter this reflects the style of romantic poets at the time, despite how this poem is much more sinister and dark. It is another façade for the Duke of Ferrara's character. He is the only character that speaks despite the fact he is talking to someone, he never lets them speak.

Feelings/Attitudes

The idea of Power and Conflict is shown in the way the speaker (the Duke of Ferrara) is showing off his power and also suggesting the control he had over the Duchess's life. There is also conflict between who he presents or wants himself to be and who he really is as a character.

Pride is not an attractive quality: the Duke's arrogance comes across quite clearly when talking about himself and his things.

Being upper class and having good morals don't necessarily go together: people of great wealth and breeding often considered themselves to be morally superior to others - the Duke shows that isn't the case.

Money and possessions aren't everything: he might have a wonderful house, terrace, orchard, paintings and statues but his paranoia about his late wife comes across and reflects his insecurity. In real life, Duke Alfonso II married three times and didn't produce an heir to his fortune - money can't buy you everything.

Browning shows, in a clever way, that commenting on a certain subject can reveal more about the person making the comments than the subject itself. The Duke spends a lot of time criticising his late wife but the reader finishes the poem feeling sorry for her and disliking the Duke a great deal.

Poetic Devices

There are lots of personal pronouns in this poem, as one might expect in this situation but in this case they are significant as one of the themes is the narrator's high opinion of himself and his selfishness. Many of the words also relate to his love of possessions - including his former wife ("My last Duchess").

The narrator, in a rare moment of humility, says he is not very good with words "Even had you skill/In speech - (which I have not)" and, in a sense, he's right.

This is not a poem full of wonderful imagery and it would reflect a capable, intelligent and sensitive soul if it was; this certainly does not describe the Duke.