

War photographer,
valentine and before
you were mine essay



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Carol Ann Duffy has written many poems and many of them are linked but in different ways, to substantiate this I am going to refer to three of her poems and compare them with one another. The poems that I have chosen are 'War Photographer', 'Valentine' and 'Before You Were Mine'. My first impression of 'War Photographer' was that it was really sad, lonely and cold this is because it is about people dying during a war and a photographer taking photographs of it, and seeming oblivious to anything else but getting a good picture for his employer, the press.

Initially I did not sympathise with the war photographer because he did not seem to have any emotion whilst taking the photos, but as I read on I realised how the photographer really did become affected by the job he had to do. As an example, the phrase 'beneath his hands which did not tremble then, though seem to now', showed how he felt slight guilt and emotion. Carol Ann Duffy is very clever with the words she uses and how they are used, she uses alliteration a couple of times in her poems to emphasise a number of things, for example with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows', the alliteration in this sentence emphasises the number of rows.

The first line of the poem reads, 'In his darkroom he is finally alone' Carol has chosen the word 'finally' in that sentence simply showing that the war photographer has been waiting to be alone and a sense of relief is given when it is read. Carol uses the same words in some of her poems but they can have different meanings such as on the third line of the first stanza in War Photographer is said, 'The only light is red and softly glows' The meaning of red in this sentence comes across as danger, war, blood or an alert but in 'Valentine' the first line says, 'Not a red rose or a satin heart' The meaning of

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red in this sentence comes across as totally different for it seems to mean, flowers- rose, love and happiness, and in ' Before You Were Mine' on the third line of the third stanza it says, ' I remember my hands in those high-heeled red shoes', ed in this sentence just seems to suggest the shoes were bright and stand out.

I feel that Carol Ann Duffy sympathises with the war photographer because of the things she says seem very true and make you think of how the photographer must feel sad, lonely and even guilty. Carol also anticipates the reader's feelings when they would read the article in the paper with the photo that the war photographer would have taken, and I feel that she is exactly right with what she says, The readers eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers. '

Meaning that they would be just following their normal routine, see the photo in the just delivered paper lying on the floor and then be upset whilst reading and seeing the photo, but then once they had finished with the paper, they would forget all about it and resume their normal life. Carol Ann Duffy finishes off War Photographer really well when she says, ' from the aeroplane he stares impassively at where he earns his living and they do not care', his effectively brings us back to the beginning because no-one cares about his feelings and they do not realise that he has emotions such that he would probably be feeling again like being in a room alone just as he was at the beginning, the editor would just want good photos not caring about the photographer who has become a fellow sufferer.

There are many hidden meanings in 'Valentine' and you have to read between the lines sometimes to work out what is being said, in this poem Carol uses different words to mean different things, 'Not a red rose or a satin heart. I give you an onion'.

I feel that onion is an extended metaphor of love, partly because it is being given on Valentines Day because red roses and satin hearts are typical presents one would give on Valentines Day, but this person feels they want to be different and give something totally different which could mean love in a different way to anyone else's thoughts. Carol Ann Duffy must have thought about choosing an onion very carefully because when you consider it, in a strange way, an onion could symbolise love because an onion can make you cry like love, it has many layers like a person and it is totally different on the outside than it is on the inside.

In 'Valentine' there is no apparent rhythm in the stanzas, which is very similar to 'Before You Were Mine', but they both seem to flow. In the second stanza the whole of it seems to prove a bad experience of traditional love, which could have been the result of the giving of the onion, also in the second stanza Carol uses pronouns (it) which strips down the stanza. In the middle of the poem there is a line that reads, 'Not a cute card or a kissogram'. The alliteration in this shows the poet's anger or emotion and the repetition suggests increased desperation.

Carol Ann Duffy's language in this poem seems gentle and soft at the beginning but as it ends it seems rather fierce; also the whole poem seems very quick and to the point with the short sentences and many full stops

used. Near the end there is a hint of a split between the two, a divorce, or death. 'For as long as we are'. 'Take it' is in the last stanza, it is a command that shows aggression in the person and a sense of emotion. 'lethal' is also there which is very aggressive too, it is a traditional symbol of reduced love and the last lines of the stanza to finish off the poem reads, 'Its scent will cling to your fingers, cling to your knife'.

The word cling has many connotations, something unwanted, unworthy, weak and desperate. These finishing lines give the impression that the person will always be there and you can never get rid of them, and their scent will stay with them forever. 'Before You Were Mine' seems to be the most different of the three poems I have chosen, the whole poem refers to different moments in time and it refers back to the past with many references, 'polka dot dress', 'Marilyn', 'ball room'.

It is about distance of mother and daughter and the daughter wanting the mother to be as she was before. In the third stanza Carol Ann Duffy uses lots of descriptive words that appeal to the senses, 'see', 'scent', 'red', 'clatters', 'possessive yell'. She also links many words with meanings and memories, e. g. 'fizzy', fizz does not last like the beauty of Marilyn and the tragedy, or the happy memories of the red shoes when she was little, and 'cha cha cha' when she would teach dance steps to her daughter.

There is light in this poem but the voice of the poem seems sad and upset. The poem links to being abandoned it is like a monologue there is no feedback coming from anywhere else. 'Before You Were Mine' ends with the title which shows no progress and that there is nothing that can be done, she

has referred straight back to the start again, as if going around in circles. All Carol Ann Duffy's poems are linked in some way. I find them quite hard to understand and have to read them through a couple of times reading between the lines before understanding better.

I like the way that Carol links words with others and uses a word that you would think of to mean something else, E. g. an onion symbolises love and, when you give yourself time to think about it, links with it well. I think that 'War photographer' was the most effective poem because it had a lot of emotion in it and it all seemed very real, it had a set form and had some good points that I had never thought about before.