‘War Photographer’ by Carol Ann Duffy

The British Poet Laureate, Carol Anne Duffy, writes the powerful poem War Photographer. It reflects on the work of a photographer, the dangerous situations behind his creations and the attitudes of the public and himself at the finished results.

Stanza 1

The reader is introduced to an unnamed photographer who is "finally alone" This immediately tells us he is glad of this tranquillity to focus on printing his photographs. There is almost something sacred about this kind of work as references to "Church" "Mass" and "Priest" are made. The red glow is like the red light known as a Sanctuary lamp in the [Catholic Church](http://christianity.helium.com/topic/8209-catholic-church). Also red can hint to the bloodshed by War victims. Dangerous environments are introduced "Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh" (Line 6) for me the most evocative line in this stanza must be. "All flesh is grass" as it creates a vivid image of suffering.

Stanza 2

Here, it is as if the man is justifying his work when Carol Ann Duffy writes, "He has a job to do." Suddenly it is matter of fact but the irony is that the after effects are now catching up with him. When he was in the middle of danger he wasn't afraid. It is now he is back home in his "Rural England" that he finds his hands shaking. It is as if the panic has been delayed. There is a contrast between city and village. You have calmness whereas in his work he has seen children running from danger.

Stanza 3

The photos bring back memories. As the picture develops he sees the "half-formed ghost" of a man. It isn't literally a ghost but it is someone who has died slowly forming in a photograph. It is the man's wife he remembers screaming. There is pain and suffering behind his work. He wants approval for what he is doing. He believes it is important but there is the idea of guilt when we are told, "how the blood stained into foreign dust"

Stanza 4

The final stanza echoes the matter of fact tone of the first stanza. Behind every photo there are so many different stories that are described as "A hundred agonies" but only a small selection will be chosen to make an impact on the reader. They will have some effect. They will have enough to make the reader perhaps have tears in their eyes indicated when with "The reader's eyeballs prick," but it is only transitory. For that moment when they read the paper it will stir them but quickly the reader will be thinking of something else such as "pre-lunch beers" The pain and suffering is trivialized in the ordinary lives people have.

Once again the photographer has to move on with his work. As he sets off to a new location, he knows that what he does won't make a difference. It is his career but the public aren't bothered shown in the final line that sums up the whole poem, "they do not care"

Overall this poem is powerful because Carol Ann Duffy creates images that resonate long after the poem has finished. What is chilling is the fact that after all the photographer has experienced to capture these photos they still don't make enough of an impact to change the world.