



COMPARISON OF *WAR PHOTOGRAPHER* AND *POPPIES*

100% Essay Sample

By Sophicly

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'War Photographer' and 'Poppies' both delve into the suffering of conflict's forgotten people; Carol Ann Duffy asks us to observe a 'War Photographer's' moral dilemmas regarding his job and England's apathy towards foreign conflict, while Jane Weir explores mothers' internal conflicts about letting their sons go to war - to their deaths - only to be replaced by symbolic 'Poppies'.

'War Photographer' begins '[in his dark room... finally alone](#)'; it is his literal place of work, but it also creates a symbolic mental link, suggesting the protagonist is in psychological darkness because of his work. The adjective '[alone](#)' denotes, and emphasises, separation as well as isolation because he experiences this darkness separately from society. However, the possessive pronoun, '[his](#)', implies, paradoxically, an intimate relationship with '[his dark room](#)', as if it is a cherished place of private mourning; Duffy's quote comes to mind, that she is 'interested in the dilemma of someone who has that as a job... to go to these places and come back with these images.'

In contrast, Weir begins with a time, - after a non-specified '[Armistice Sunday](#)' - rather than a place; the past perfect tense in '[poppies had already been placed](#)', indicates the speaker is looking back at how, '[three days before Armistice Sunday... poppies... on individual war graves](#)' had '[already](#)' triggered the overwhelming memories of when her son '[left](#)'. The adverb, '[already](#)', seems to emphasise the pain caused by WWI symbols: '[Armistice Sunday](#)' and, especially, '[poppies](#)'; Weir appears to be introducing us to the excruciating pain felt by the women who lose sons to war and are left behind to mourn their deaths, out of view from society.

Both authors give us a glimpse into the world of the protagonists by infusing 'everyday language' with rich metaphors of war and grief. The War Photographer's '[spools of suffering](#)' force him to relive the '[pain](#)' and '[cries](#)' of the victims of conflict, '[alone](#)' '[in his dark room](#)' but '[the reader's eyes](#)' only '[prick with tears](#)', suggesting their pain is superficial - easily forgotten with a '[bath](#)' and '[pre-lunch beer](#)'. Duffy's contrasting metaphors signify she wants us to sympathise with the photographer's moral dilemmas and is critical of the rest of us, who only seem to use the imagery of foreign suffering as a form of fleeting entertainment in the '[Sunday supplement](#)'.

However, Weir's metaphor, '[spasms of paper red](#)' features syntactic inversion; 'red paper' becomes '[paper red](#)' - we are subconsciously forced to notice only the '[spasms](#)', its connotations of suffering, and the colour '[red](#)', which symbolises blood and danger; therefore, the '[paper](#)' (the symbolic poppy) falls into the background and is dismissed, together with everything it stands for. While Duffy uses metaphors to criticise our apathy towards foreign conflict, Jane Weir's metaphors and similes encapsulate her critical perspective of the patriotic symbols, politics, and propaganda of war: a view reinforced by the simile '[the world overflowing / like a treasure chest](#)'. She appears to be pointing out how WWI propaganda '[intoxicated](#)' young men into giving up their lives for honour and patriotism, leaving their mothers behind in never-ending grief.

While Duffy does not use any traditional form, she employs a '[trembling](#)' ABBCDD rhyme scheme which, on one hand, mirrors the protagonist's desire for control over his emotions and his morals, yet the juddering reflects moments of weakness and uncertainty about his 'job'.

In contrast, Weir uses no rhyme scheme but employs the traditional dramatic monologue form to create a narrative-driven poem that takes us on a journey through a mother's mind, from the moment a painful memory is triggered, through all the





motherly actions, heightened emotions and scenes of letting go, to finally hanging on to delusion, 'hoping to hear his voice', as a way of keeping sane.

However, both poems' cyclical structures reflect the repetitive and never-ending nature of their pain, because war is never-ending; the enjambment in both cases reflects the inexorability of time driving these cycles forward, as well as the speaker's troubled stream of consciousness in 'Poppies'; after the 'War Photographer' has sold his photos to be published in the 'Sunday supplement', he must return to the conflict zones, 'where he earns his living'; similarly, Weir's poem begins with 'war graves' and ends with 'war memorial', suggesting that every year, around 'Armistice Sunday', her protagonist must relive her nightmare because she is reminded by its futile symbols of the inexpressible pain she feels.

Ultimately, both authors call on the reader to not only be aware of the suffering of all, but to increase our capacity for sympathy, in the real world, for the forgotten voices - like the grieving mother and the photographer who foregoes his own moral sanctity to raise awareness of the realities of conflict. Duffy wants us to also be aware of our own apathy, while Weir wants us to be wary of intoxicating propagandist symbolism, which throws open the doors to unnecessary grief.

