

By the end of studying the poem War Photographer I need to know;

Meaning: The speaker says that when people see an image they often assume it has been sought out. However, if it is a pleasant image it is seen as the norm. The poem describes two photos' - one of two wealthy women at the races and another of a little girl in a war-torn street carrying a baby. It is revealed that after the speaker took the second photo, a bomb went off and the terrified girl ran for her life, abandoning the baby she was looking after. The final stanza reveals that the second photograph didn't tell the whole story when it was published.

Ideas: The poem highlights how the modern media can construct messages and meanings through images; it highlights the discrepancy between reality and the artifice created in images.

Vocabulary	<p>Absurd (adjective) - senseless, ridiculous Ascot (noun) - a racecourse in Berkshire, England Gilded (verb) - covered in a layer of gold Arbitrary (adjective) - random, decided for no reason</p>
Context	<p>A British poet (born 1939) who now lives in London after many jobs abroad, including North America, Singapore and Uganda. She is a sociologist with an interest in social processes and the stories people tell about themselves. This poem was first published in a collection of poems called Broken Moon in 1987, when there were a number of conflicts around the world. It was later republished in a collection called Stitching the Dark in 2005, while the poem is not about a particular war, it's interesting to consider that this was when the Iraq war was happening.</p> <p>The poem was written in 1987- at a time where travelling abroad was reserved for the wealthy elite. Therefore, the fact that the girls at Ascot are 'sun-gilded' helps to place their supreme wealth. Equally, Ascot is famous for horseracing and common amongst the elite. This helps to draw a contrast between the wealthy elite and the impoverished girl in an unnamed war-torn country.</p> <p>The poem criticises the modern media and the way in which it uses content and image for manipulative or deceitful circumstances. The opening of the poem establishes this theme of deception and manipulation, with the narrative serving as an example.</p>
Themes	<p>Pity of war Inequality Attitudes War presentation</p>
Deeper understanding	<p>Detachment - the speaker is trapped behind the camera and unable to help the little girl. All they can do is follow, watch from a distance and record the events as they unfold. There's also a sense of desensitisation from the persona's perspective- the matter of fact tone she uses reflects her lack of guilt, potentially as a result of these experiences appearing common. Perhaps what is most shocking is the persona not being aware of what happened to the girl- she 'began to run...' - the ellipsis signifying how the girl didn't stop, or that the persona does not know what happened with the girl</p> <p>Wealth vs poverty- The persona juxtaposes the lifestyle of the wealthy elite at Ascot with the girl in the warzone. The descriptions of the girls is important here- they are clearly adult (being at Ascot and also drinking) but the description of them suggests youthfulness and immaturity. The persona calls them 'girls' and describes how they 'roll...in champagne giggles'- the verb choice having connotations of childishness. By contrast the girl is young: 'small girl' and her 'hip [is] thrust out under a baby's weight'- which implies her youth and inability to naturally carry a child. After she drops the baby, the persona describes how her 'mouth [is] too small for her dark scream'- to imply that the horrors she experiences should not be experienced by a child. However, this also combines to construct the idea that she has been aged by her experiences, in direct contrast to those in privilege who can remain immature for longer.</p> <p>Desensitisation- The persona has become desensitised to the conflict and tragedy that she sees. The comparison of a scene of tragedy with a scene of joy. Equally, the fact that we never find out about what happened to the girl- we are left knowing that she 'started to run...', the ellipsis suggesting that the girl didn't stop but also suggesting that the persona has no idea about what happened to the girl afterwards.</p>

Comparisons to other poems:

- Belfast Confetti
- What Were They Like?
- The Man He Killed
- Exposure
- The Charge of the Light Brigade

	<p>Artifice- The poem is careful to highlight the artifice involved in creating news- even though people readily believe that an image is real. This is initially evident within the opening line: 'the reassurance of the frame is flexible'- the metaphor here reflecting how it is the idea that images are interpreted by the recipient, and that any image can be interpreted to what someone wants to believe. She then lists the example of us assuming that outside of a tragic image people 'eat, sleep laugh normally' whereas in a joyous picture the 'firmness... of its edges' reassures us that this is the case. The example she goes on to give is one that reflects this idea that the deconstruction of an image is in the mind of the reader. This is shown when she says how the photo showed the 'young mother an almost smile'- the image shows two false things: the baby does not belong to the girl, therefore she is not the mother, and the smile implies that 'even in hell' there is joy. However, the persona played a role in this image: she looks at the girl before taking the picture- it is quite probable that the persona smiled at the girl in order to get her to smile back- to then construct the image that she is happy. This is also shown through the verbs choices. At the start of the poem the persona states that she 'seek[s] out the tragic, the absurd to make a subject'- she is aware that only the tragic and absurd will sell and therefore deliberately 'seeks' this out. Her dehumanising of those she takes pictures of as a 'subject' suggests the disconnect she feels for them, they are merely pieces to arrange together to create an impression. Equally, she 'followed' the girl down 'some devastated street'- rather than helping, she follows knowing she will be able to create a picture to sell. The generalised 'some' and 'girl' reflect the persona's lack of care; she has a job to do.</p>
<p>Quotes</p>	<p>'People eat, sleep, love normally / while I seek out the tragic'- the persona deliberate looks for images that will sell a story. This reflects the artificial nature of the images that she takes, even though there would be a general belief that these are an honest reflection of reality.</p> <p>'I took a pair of peach, sun--gilded girls / rolling, silk--crumpled, on the grass / in champagne giggles'- This highlights the wealth of the girls at Ascot, as well as their care-free life. This serves as a contrast to the girl who wanders down 'some devastated street' in an unknown country.</p> <p>'a small girl / staggering down some devastated street'- The description of the girl highlights her youth, poverty and also suggests she may be in pain, either that or struggling to carrying the baby she has found to safety.</p> <p>'my finger pressed'- This signifies the persona taking the image; it seems almost like an action taken without thought, it is natural to the persona to take the picture because it is her job and she has become desensitised to what she does.</p> <p>'the first bomb of the morning / shattered the stones'- The 'first' bomb suggests that there will be many more, highlighting the dangers of this war-torn country. The idea that the bomb has shattered the stones implies that the rubble is what has been blown up, indicating a cycle of violence and destruction that will never be broken.</p> <p>'mouth too small for her dark scream'- The scream that the little girl gives, at having dropped the baby, is too loud and shrill for someone of her youth. This reflects how she has been somewhat aged by her experiences, or been robbed of a childhood herself. Again, this juxtaposes with the depiction of life for the girls at Ascot- who haven't had to grow up because they lived such sheltered existences.</p> <p>'Their caption read / 'Even in hell the human spirit / triumphs over all'- The newspaper article constructs a story, one that those at home will believe, based on the image- however, the persona has revealed to us the truth behind the image.</p> <p>'As arbitrary as a blood stain on the wall.'- The random pattern of blood on a wall is symbolic of the random nature of people's own interpretations- of heaven, of hell of images. It reflects how there are no boundaries to interpretation, in the same way that there are no real boundaries of a photograph.</p>
<p>Terminology</p>	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sibilance Emotive language Verbs Adjectives Imagery Vague language <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repetition Ellipsis Caesura <p>Form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dramatic Monologue First person Present tense

Past tense
Free verse