



Original article

## The Perception of War in Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet" and Carol Ann Duffy's "War Photographer"

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### ABSTRACT

Throughout history, poets presented different accounts of war as well as its profound impact on human existence. Their accounts serve as a medium for conveying its atrocities and also raising empathy and sensitivity among people. Brian Turner and Carol Ann Duffy are among others who use their poetry to shed light on this traumatic event. They viewed war from different perspectives. Turner is a soldier poet who offers a firsthand portrayal of the brutalities of war whereas Duffy presents a mediated representation of war from another civilian's perspective, the photographer. The current study shaped by trauma theory as both combatants and civilians suffer from PTSD. It sheds light on the physical, psychological, emotional, and ethical aspects of war. The study also presents the role of media in shaping public perception. In conclusion, the poets' verses serve as means of recovery from trauma as they attempt to give voice to the unvoiced.

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**Keywords:** War Poetry, Trauma, Memory, Brian Turner, Carol Ann Duffy

## ادراك الحرب في قصيدة براين تيرنر "هنا، رصاصاً" وقصيدة كارول ان دافي "مصور الحرب"

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## المُستخلص

عبر التاريخ، قدم الشعراء نتاجات شعرية مختلفة عن الحرب واثارها الكبيرة على الوجود الإنساني. تعمل هذه النتاجات كوسيلة لنقل فظائع الحرب وتحفيز التعاطف والوعي الإنساني. يستخدم كل من براين تيرنر وكارول ان دافي قصائدهما لتسليط الضوء على هذه الاحداث الصادمة، لكن من منظورين مختلفين. يقدم تيرنر بوصفه شاعر وجندي تصويراً مباشراً لفظائع الحرب بينما دافي تصور الحرب من منظور مدني آخر وهو مصور الحرب. تستند الدراسة الحالية الى نظرية الصدمة النفسية لأن كلا من المقاتلين والمدنيين يعانون من اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الابعاد الجسدية و النفسية والعاطفية والأخلاقية للحرب. كما تبين أيضاً دور وسائل الاعلام في تشكيل تصور الجمهور عنها. في الختام. تبين الدراسة دور الشعر كوسيلة للتعافي من خلال التعبير عن من لا يستطيعون التعبير عن انفسهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شعر الحرب، الصدمة، الذاكرة، الاعلام، براين تيرنر، كارول ان دافي

**Introduction:**

War is a complex experience which effects all aspects of human life including literature. Through literature, fragmented pictures, memories, and intricate emotions find means of expression. The perception of war in literature encompasses not only its physical impact but also its psychological, emotional, and ethical dimensions. Poetry is a branch of literature which assists those who have experienced war and violence to express their own experiences and communicate with others about the severe realities they have witnessed and observed (Mihsin, 2025). Thus, war poetry enables people to share their experiences and bridge the gap between combat and home (Mashab and Mankhi, 2024).

Many soldiers have become psychologically traumatized because war has not only damaged their bodies but it has also traumatized their psyches and their minds. So, a large number of veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Civilians are also influenced by war. They observe the trauma and destruction caused by war. Trauma theory forms the basis for this paper. According to Cathy Caruth as pointed by Ismael trauma means "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena." (p. 5) Traumatized persons are not able to deal with this condition so this task stays for them incomplete. They forget traumatic events momentarily but after that they start to remember vivid and fragmented images. Reliving these events again entails what Freud argues as pointed by Ismael "a fixation to the moment of the traumatic event." (p.6) So, repetition, flashbacks, dreams, and memories are the result of this entrapment. The repetition of traumatic events re-traumatize survivors and can affect their brains not only their bodies. Thus, trauma theory tackles the origins of certain kinds of psychic distress in relation to actions in real world. Trauma can be healed only when translated into words. In such case, literature and poetry in particular act as psychoanalytical tools which help traumatized people reach catharsis of their

repressed emotions. So poetry helps war victims and survivors transfigure their trauma into verses and gives evidence to the experience of war. (Ismael,2016)

Brian Turner and Carol Ann Duffy used their verses to convey the brutalities of war from distinct perspectives. Through an American veteran's eye, Turner shows the destruction, miseries, and terror of war. He attempts to give voice to the unspoken reality of war. Turner born in (1967), is an American poet and a former U.S. army infantry team leader. His direct experience in combat profoundly shaped his debut poetry collections, *Here, Bullet* (2005), *Phantom Nosie* (2010), and *My Life as a Foreign Country* (2014) which talk about his experiences as a soldier of the American army in Iraq. In these collections, he writes about the Iraqi culture, landscapes, daily life of soldiers and civilians, and atrocities of war. He finds a release for the contradictory emotions raised by his direct engagement in the battlefield. He uses his poetry to communicate his traumatic experiences (Hassan , and Ayyed 2022). In his poetry, Turner tries to convince readers that individuals and soldiers of the other side are human beings not monsters. His accounts range from his firsthand experience in combat. His experiences in battlefield inspired him to tackle themes such as the profound impact of war on people's lives as well as his own personal history (Jasim, 2024).

Duffy, on the other hand, observed war from the perspective of a war photographer. The first female poet Laureate of the United Kingdom from (2009-2019), Carol Ann Duffy is born in (1955) in Scotland. She has no direct experience as a soldier; instead, her poetry often adopts the perspective of observers, victims, and individuals indirectly affected by violence. Her work is known for its emotional depth and rich imagery especially in the context of war (Johnson, 2024). She uses imagery to make her poems come alive as she discusses social and political issues. Her collections of poetry include *Standing Female Nude* (1985), *Selling Manhattan* (1987), and *The Other Country* (1990). In these collections, she shows her concern about speaking for the unvoiced. She speaks for the public to show the social and emotional experience of living in Britain. She attacks politicians and highlight public concerns (Oztruk, 2023).

### 1-1 Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet"

Turner's first collection of poetry *Here, Bullet* for which he awarded nine awards based on his military experience in Iraq. His narration serves as testimony of the violence and destruction happened during and after war. War leaves an everlasting scar on those who witnessed its dilemma. It effects their psyche and mentality. They are not able to regain their pre-war identities. They feel separated and alienated from their society. As a soldier-poet, Turner attempts to give voice to those traumatized individuals, reports their suffering and also, sheds light on the human cost of warfare (Swirsky, 2015).

Turner explores themes of alienation, trauma, destruction, and healing in his title poem " Here, Bullet." In this poem, as well as the whole volume, he doesn't tackle patriotism associated with war, instead; he explores its physical and psychological destruction. The poem starts with the soldier's confrontation with the bullet which is personified as a force of death: "If a body is what you want, then here is bone and gristle and flesh..." (Turner, 2005, L1,2). Through such personification, the poet challenges its power by showing his acceptance of mortality and also sheds light on the brutality

of war. He uses vivid imagery to describe the traumatic nature of war and establishes that the speaker is about to die. The speaker describes in visceral detail the damage done to him by the bullet, damage which will eventually lead to his death. He describes the deadly path of the bullet as it passes through and destroys his collarbone, aorta, and brain: "the clavicle-snapped wish/ the aorta's opened valves," and "the leap/ thought makes at the synaptic gap," (ll. 3-5). Though it is impersonal tool, and devoid of emotion, the bullet is personified as a violent criminal (Jasim, 2014).

The climax of the poem occurs when the poet directly dares the bullet to finish its unholy work and ends its journey: "And I dare you to finish/ what you've started. Because here, Bullet, here ..." (ll. 8 and 9). He challenges the bullet instead of a person. Through the repetition of "here" trauma repeats itself again and again. His choice to address the bullet rather than the shooter, creates a subtle, yet complex message about the immoral nature of war. The speaker addresses the object that is most directly responsible for killing him, and a representative of the larger concept of war "the bullet." The bullet is a simple, detached, and unfeeling implement made for the sole purpose of killing. It is literally inhumane, and is personified as a malicious killer. Like a snake, it "hisses through the air," seeking "bone and gristle and flesh" (ll. 2 and 13). Its path is described as "that inexorable flight," (L. 7) commenting on the fact that weapons are only made to brutally end life. Every bullet is ultimately designed and meant to be fired at a target, whether living or not. The bullet exists for purely malicious reasons, for the "adrenaline rush" and the "insane puncture into heat and blood" (ll. 6-8). The bullet is his ultimate enemy (Jasim, 2014).

The last part of the poem shows the reaction of the soldier's body to getting shot. The bullet, now an aggressor rather than a simple projectile, has triggered a series of events, firing its own "gun" through the speaker, and at the same time it fires off a scream from the speaker, "triggering/ my tongue's explosives" (ll. 12 and 13). This role reversal of soldier and weapon makes the bullet, the soldier, and the enemy. The soldier is a blameless weapon of war, and the bullet the enemy that deserves the blame for the tragedy of war. By the end of the poem, the poet mocks the bullet by asserting the fact that its power diminishes once soldiers pass away. They achieve victory over the weapons " here is where the world ends, every time" (L. 16) the bullet's power ends where the soldier will start. The soldier's world ends in a state of strength, not in one of pain and surrender, a sense of triumph rather than defeat. The end of this poem serves as a grim reminder of the futility of war. (Cubak, 2014).

The poet delivers the unmediated trauma through writing this poem. He responds to the inevitable possibility for bodily destruction in war zones with the poem that offers a form of control, by replacing the uncontrollable end of being with the controllable end of making. This creative power produces an imagined space for re-living difficult experiences. The speaker finds control inside the poem as an alternative "here" of the poem creates space that Turner could visit as a re-reader haunting his past. Language is a medium between the real space of "here" in the physical and mental body, and the also real space of the imagined "here" which refers to the poem. The imagination associates past experiences with present ones by allowing one to visit the past with some control (Tracy, 2021).

Turner's rejection to isolate moments with in the poem speaks to the chaos and continuity of battle. The lack of formal punctuation, of a full stop, gives a frenzied energy to the final sentence, and helps

intensify the tone of the poem and the tone of the speaker's voice as he confronts the bullet and then dies. Through the use of figurative language and tone, Brian Turner's "Here, Bullet" gives a complex message about the immorality of war by antagonizing a bullet as it is killing the speaker. (Cabuk, 2014)

### **1-2 Carol Ann Duffy's "War Photographer"**

Ranging from those who witness war, to observers who document the frightening realities of war, and even the innocent bystanders who find themselves helplessly trapped its chaos, Duffy introduces a different perception of war. Instead of discussing war from the perspective of soldiers, she tackles this topic from the perspective of a war photographer. She relies on the photographer's memory as an influential narrative tool to bridge the past and the present. Memory plays an important role in trauma studies as it shapes how individuals and societies come to understand and live with the aftermath of traumatic events. It allows individuals to relive and their suffering and also helps them in their journey towards healing and recovery. For Duffy, memory serves as a dynamic source that holds the power to both haunt and heal at the same time. In her war poetry, Duffy highlights the psychological and emotional impact of war on individuals (Johnson, 2024).

"War Photographer" introduces a tragic interpretation on the part of media in forming civilian perception of war. In this poem, Duffy investigates the ethical values of spectatorship and the political morality of presenting violence. Though photographs have the capacity to evoke compassion they carry the risk of simplifying the traumatic experience into mere artistic creation. Combat photographers tend to follow the professional rules of conduct including truthfulness, responsibility, and minimization of harm. Susan Sontag as pointed out by KS, and Monika (2025) contends that "exposing viewers to pictures of suffering on a regular basis might cause desensitization", thus it turns them from being active participants into passive recipients of information. They are not able to sympathize with others in distance because they haven't seen the violence as it occurs in reality (KS, and Monika 2025).

Duffy depicts a photographer sitting alone in his darkroom with all photos taken in war zones in front of him. "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 (War Photographer, 1985, ll. 1-3). In the act of developing these photographs, he confronts the haunting memories of war. Each photograph serves as a poignant, frozen memory, and a firm evidence of pain, suffering, and death witnessed in conflict. He arranges his films in attempt to impose order to the chaotic images he has recorded, handling them with the reverence with which a priest would prepare for communion, there by infusing the process with a sense of spirituality "as though this were a church and he a priest preparing to intone a Mass" (ll. 4-5). The red light signifies his exposure to blood, suffering, and death. Beyond its functional role in film development, the light transforms the darkroom into a sanctuary, offering the photographer a space in which he can seek emotional and psychological solace. He concludes the first part by the Biblical reference: "All flesh is grass." (L.6) which emphasizes the fleeting nature of human existence against the backdrop of permanence of memory and also highlights the juxtaposition between temporal beauty and fragility of life and the immutable weight of memories that remain longer after the moments have passed (Johnson, 2024).

Despite being safe now in his home, the photographer is not able to escape what he has experienced in war zones. The speaker exposes the photographer's fragility while developing his photos which trigger his traumatic memories "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" (ll. 7-9). His hands once steady in warzones reflect his ability to suppress his empathy and emoting until competing his assigned task. Those same hands seem shaking now which indicate symptoms of trauma. The photographer is trapped between fulfilling his duty and understanding other's pains. The nature of his work is dreadful which involves documentation of death and suffering. Yet he had a hope that through capturing such scenes, he may find solutions to the political problems and prevent further destruction and conflict (Hickman, 2024). His dilemma mirrors the broader, social struggle as he is trapped to balance between his sincere duty to document the raw truths of war and the intuitive human instinct to seek consolation in forgetting. Through the photographer's personal journey, and remembrance of the atrocities of war, Duffy highlights the powerful desire to heal and move beyond the past to embrace the future (Johnson, 2024)

Duffy enables readers to "see" the horrific photograph gradually materializes before their eyes. This photograph depicts a man on the verge of death, whose emerging figure is described as a "half-formed ghost"(L.15). This imagery not only reflects the way the picture slowly develops on paper but also suggests that the man, having already died, and has effectively become a ghost. Such image shows the consequences of war and also highlights that his memories re-traumatize him again. In this sense, the photographer's role resembles that of a priest, ministering to people in their final moments. He views his work less as a profession and more as a vocation. Despite being aware of the intrusive nature of his task, the photographer performs it with deep compassion and sensitivity (Mautadin, n.d.).

In the end of the poem, Duffy offers a strong criticism of the detached manner in which war and human suffering are consumed by distant audiences. She explores engagement with the ethics of viewing violence, suffering, and the moral dilemmas of war representation. The speaker reflects on how those images are treated with casual indifference by newspaper editors as they choose only five or six images to be published for the audience who also respond with temporal empathy: " The readers' eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers." (ll.21, 22). Both the editors and readers remain largely unmoved, skimming over the photographs without acknowledging their true significance or the realities they represent (KS, and Monika, 2025).

The poem ends with the photographer preparing to travel to another warzone, continuing unending cycle of conflict and documentation. Observing the English countryside from the airplane, he gradually accepts that despite his dedicated efforts, his photographs are unlikely to make any real change. This cyclical structure creates a sense of futile repetition and continuation of past mistakes. Thus, the poem ends on a defeated note. The photographer's sense of the reader's indifference and superficial sentimentality differs from the firm sense of vocation that he expresses earlier. In the final scene of the poem, he forgets how to sympathize with victims that's why he stares indifferently at where he gets his living and "they don't care " (L.24). The photographer lacks the power to change everything as his work falls upon unreceptive audience ( Hashim, 2017)

### 1.3 Comparing a witness to an observer's perception of war:

The American Poet Brain Turner is a former soldier in the USA army so his poem is based on his real experience in war zones especially in Iraq. He presents war from veterans' perspective as immediate embodiment shaped by his direct participation in combat. Thus, he experiences trauma physically and psychologically. In "Here, Bullet," he directly addresses the bullet and personifying it as a destructive force. Its destruction starts from the flesh and bones until it reaches the mind creating a sense of continuous traumatic awareness. Though the poem ends with a sense of triumph, Turner presents war as a lived trauma rather than a heroic action and in this way the poem becomes a call to end war (Jasim, 2014).

In contrast, Duffy appears as a detached observer rather than a witness. She views war through the lens of mediation and spectatorship. She offers indirect perception of war as witnessed by the photographer who translate the chaotic events and suffering into images that can be presented to the audience safely. He records dreadful and horrific events during combat and use them as a medium to convey certain truths about the human conditions. Duffy also, uses words and language to do the same job. The poem presents a critique of how war is consumed by distant audiences who show momentarily sympathy while watching the selected images of war. "War Photographer" investigates the psychological impact of war on the photographer and shows the insensitivity and indifference of the audience who consume the chosen photos and then forget them. Duffy presents psychological, ethical, and emotional trauma. It challenges audiences to move beyond passive consumption and engage with violence and conflict in a manner that acknowledges moral responsibility (KS, and Monika, 2025). The poem ends with a sense of defeat because the selected images change nothing. The poem is a call for peace, reconciliation, and understanding of others' suffering.

### Conclusion:

Both poets aforementioned present war as an overwhelming experience which destroy individuals and society. They use highly evocative language to explore their perceptions of war. Turner from within the battlefield and Duffy from the civilian's perspective come up with a conclusion that war is a traumatic action affects those who are directly or indirectly involved. It influences their bodies, minds, ethics, and emotions. They portray the multifaceted human experience during times of conflict. Both poems serve as a part of the healing process that poets have undergone as they give voice to the unspoken realities associated with combat. Their poems are a call to stop war and sympathize with others in distance.

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