

GCSE Poetry Anthology

Power and Conflict



Name:

Class:

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Language

Words and how they sound.



Motivation

What a character wants and **why** they want it.



Genre

A way to describe the content of a text
E.g. Gothic or Sci-Fi



Structure

...is the way that a text is put together.



Setting

The place **where** a story is set.



Theme

A theme is a 'big' idea at the heart of the text.



Form

The **format** of a text.
E.g. Play, Prose, Verse, e-mail, poster.



Conflict

When characters face an **opposing force**

Man vs man



Man vs nature



Man vs self



Man vs society



Protagonist

The **main** character.
The audience usually sympathises/ identifies with this character.



Antagonist

A character or force **opposing** the protagonist.



Symbol

A symbol represents a bigger idea.



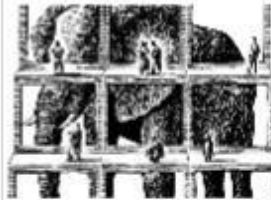
Implication

A suggested meaning of a text.



Context

Additional information that helps you to understand the full meaning of a text.



Voice / Tone

The **mood** of the writer / narrator.



Climax

A **moment** of greater tension



Resolution

The **ending** or **conclusion** of a text.



Imagery

Vivid images created by a word or phrase.



Simile

A comparison made using the words "like" or "as."



Metaphor

A comparison - made without using "like" or "as."



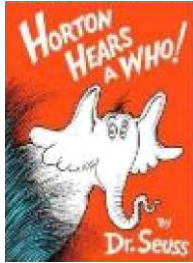
Personification

Giving human characteristics to something which is not human.



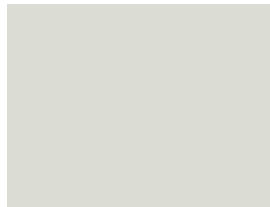
Alliteration

A repetition of consonant sounds



Assonance

A repetition of vowel sounds.



Onomatopoeia

Words which attempt to imitate sounds.



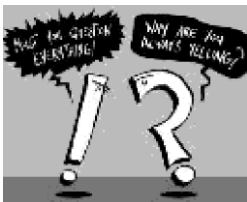
Repetition

A word, phrase or idea repeated more than once for effect.



Syntax

The way that ideas are broken up and put together in sentences.



Hyperbole

Exaggeration



Juxtaposition

A contrasting effect



Allusion

A reference to a person, place, thing or idea of historical, cultural or literary significance.



Pathetic Fallacy

Feelings, thoughts or emotions symbolised by the environment.



Meter

A pattern of beats (syllables) in a poem. Used to create a poem's rhythm.

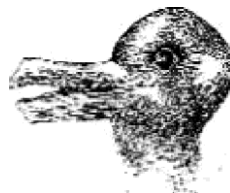
Feet: Names and Stress

» - -
tr iochaic foot - / .
a * e lit Inst - . .

soon: Jaic fat = //
pm a

Ambiguity

Two or more possible meanings. It is unclear which is the correct one.



Pun

A joke that makes a play on words. It uses words that have several meanings.



Sonnet

A poem of 14 lines written in iambic pentameter.

Rhyming couplet

Two lines of the same length that rhyme and complete one thought.



Semantic field

A set of words relating to the same topic.

Chiasm

A phrase or idea that has been used so much it has become a cliché.



Advanced poetic language	
Poetic structures and forms	Meaning
Rhyme	The repetition of syllable sounds – usually at the ends of lines, but sometimes in the middle of a line (called internal rhyme).
Couplet	A pair of rhyming lines which follow on from one another.
Stanza	A group of lines separated from others in a poem.
Enjambment (run on lines)	The running over of a sentence from one line to the next without a piece of punctuation at the end of the line.
Caesura	A stop or a pause in a line of poetry – usually caused by punctuation.
Blank verse	Poetry written in non-rhyming, ten syllable lines.
Dramatic monologue	A poem in which an imagined speaker addresses the reader.
Elegy	A form of poetry which is about the death of its subject.
End stopped	A line of poetry ending in a piece of punctuation which results in a pause.
Epigraph	A quotation from another text, included in a poem.
Lyric	An emotional, rhyming poem, most often describing the emotions caused by a specific event.
Ode	A formal poem which is written to celebrate a person, place, object or idea.
Parody	A comic imitation of another writer's work.
Quatrain	A four line stanza.
Sestet	A six line stanza.
Sonnet	A fourteen line poem, with variable rhyme scheme, usually on the topic of love for a person, object or situation.
Free verse	Non-rhyming, non-rhythmical poetry which follows the rhythms of natural speech.
Volta	A turning point in the line of thought or argument in poem.

Literary Context

Romantic Movement

The Romantic movement flourished in the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century and celebrated emotion, wildness and nature above reason and science.

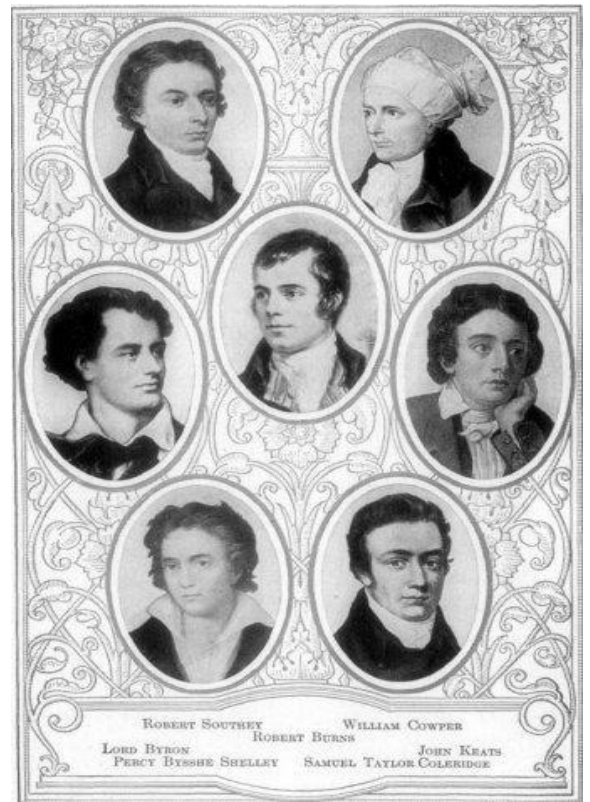
Romantics stressed the awe of nature in art and language and the experience of the sublime (something majestic, impressive or intellectually valuable) through a connection with nature.

A key Romantic poet, Wordsworth, summed the approach up by stating that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”



Key Romantic Poets

- William Blake
- William Wordsworth
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Lord Byron
- Percy Bysshe Shelley
- John Keats



Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley

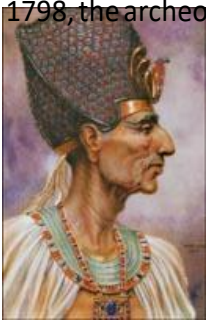
Context

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was one of a group of poets who became known as **The Romantics**.

He came from a wealthy family and was in line to inherit both riches and his grandfather's role as an MP. He was expelled from university for writing about atheism (not believing in God) which led to him to fall out with his father who disinherited him. In the same year, 1811, he eloped and married aged 19.

Shelley was well known as a 'radical' during his lifetime and some people think *Ozymandias* reflects this side of his character. Although it is about the remains of a statue of Ozymandias it can be read as a criticism of people or systems that become huge and believe themselves to be invincible.

Shelley's friend the banker Horace Smith stayed with the poet in the Christmas season of 1817. One evening, they began to discuss recent discoveries in the Near East. In the wake of Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798, the archaeological treasures found there stimulated the European imagination. The power of pharaonic Egypt had seemed eternal, but now this once-great empire was (and had long been) in ruins; a feeble shadow.



The Roman-era historian Diodorus Siculus described a statue of Ozymandias, more commonly known as Ramses II. Diodorus reports the inscription on the statue, which he claims was the largest in Egypt, as follows: "King of Kings Ozymandias am I. If any want to know how great I am and where I lie, let him outdo me in my work." (The statue and its inscription do not survive, and were not seen by Shelley.)

Stimulated by their conversation, Smith and Shelley wrote sonnets based on the passage in Diodorus. Smith produced a now-forgotten poem while Shelley's contribution was "Ozymandias," one of the best-known sonnets in European literature.

summary

A traveller tells the poet that two huge stone legs stand in the desert. Near them on the sand lies a damaged stone head. The face is distinguished by a frown and a sneer which the sculptor carved on the features. On the pedestal are inscribed the words "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: / Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" Around the huge fragments stretches the empty desert.

Vocabulary

Visage (noun): the form or structure of a person's face, or is a person's facial expression

Sneer (verb): to look at someone with a disdainful expression, as though you think they are worthless

Sculptor (noun): a person who sculpts (builds or creates things out of a material – ie clay)

Colossal (adjective): enormous in size

Wreck (noun): a ruined object or person

Boundless (adjective): endless; having no boundary

Ozymandias

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown, And
wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, Tell that
its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things, The
hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed; And on
the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look
on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair! Nothing
beside remains. Round the decay Of that
colossal Wreck, boundless and bare The lone
and level sands stretch far away.”



London by William Blake

Context

William Blake was another key romantic poet. He specialised in poems of a religious nature but he rejected established religion. One of the main reasons was the failure of the established Church to help children in London who were forced to work. Blake lived and worked in the capital, so was well placed to write clearly about the conditions people who lived there faced.

He published a book of poems called 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' in 1794, this collection of poems aimed to show the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul". The *Songs of Innocence* section contains poems which are positive in tone and celebrate love, childhood and nature. The *Songs of Experience* poems are obviously intended to provide a contrast, and illustrate the effects of modern life on people and nature. Dangerous industrial conditions, child labour, prostitution and poverty are just some of the topics Blake explores.

In 1789, the French people revolted against the monarchy and aristocracy, using violence and murder to overthrow those in power. Many saw the French Revolution as inspirational - a model for how ordinary, disadvantaged people could seize power. Blake alludes (makes subtle reference to) to the revolution in the poem *London*, arguably suggesting that the experience of living there could encourage a revolution on the streets of the capital.

Summary

The poem describes a journey around London, offering a glimpse of what the speaker sees as the terrible conditions faced by the inhabitants of the city. Child labour, restrictive laws of property and prostitution are all explored in the poem.

The poem starts with a criticism of laws relating to ownership. The 'charter'd Thames' is a bitter reference to the way in which every aspect of life in London is owned, even the river, so often in other poems a symbol of life, freedom and the power of nature.

Blake's poem also criticises religion and its failures. The speaker draws attention to the cry of the chimney sweeper and the blackening of church walls, implying that the church as an institution is inactive, unwilling to help those in need. It ends with a vision of the terrible consequences to be faced as a result of sexually transmitted disease.

Vocabulary

Wander (verb): to walk without definite purpose

Chartered (adjective): to describe when an organisation or institution is given specific rights, powers or privileges by the overall authority.

Mark

1) (Noun): is a sign, symbol, indication or a stain.

2) (verb): to put an indication or symbol on something in order to identify it.

3) (verb) to notice something

Woe (noun): a feeling of deep sorrow or grief.

Ban (noun): is a ruling that forcibly stops something.

Forge (verb): to give form or shape to something.

Manacles (noun): handcuffs

Hapless (adjective): unlucky

Appal (verb): to shock or amaze in a negative way.

Blight (verb): to spoil or destroy something or to cause an urban area to become run-down and neglected.

plague

1) (noun): a widespread disease that is deadly.

2) (verb): To pester or annoy continually.

hearse (noun): a funeral car (or horse drawn cart in Blake's day)

London

BY WILLIAM BLAKE

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man, In
every Infants cry of fear, In
every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse



Extract from the Prelude by William Wordsworth

Context

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is one of the most famous poets in the history of English Literature. HewasborninCumbria,partoftheregioncommonlyknownastheLakeDistrict,andhis birthplacehadahugeinfluenceonhiswriting.Sodidthefactthatthismotherdiedwhenhewasonly eight yearsold.Hisfatherwasn'talwaysaround,althoughWilliamdidusehislibraryforreading. WilliamspenttimewithhisgrandparentswholivedinnearbyPenrith,anevenwilderandmore rugged place.

Wordsworthisbelievedtohavestartedwritingpoetrywhenhewasatschool;duringthistimehe was orphaned by the death of this father.

HewenttoCambridgeUniversityandjustbeforefinishinghisstudieshesetoffonawalkingtourof Europe, coming into contact with the French Revolution, which influenced his writing. He fell in love with a French woman and she had a child. Wordsworth returned to England before his daughter, Caroline, was born and war between Britain and France meant that he didn't see his daughter or her mother for many years.

In 1802, shortly after visiting his daughter in France, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson, a friend from his school days. They had five children together. 1812 was a terrible year for them as two of their children died.

The Prelude is one of the greatest works of literature ever written in English. It is a long **autobiographical** poem in 14 sections. The first version was written in 1798 but he continued to work on it throughout his lifetime.

The poem shows the **spiritual growth of the poet**, how he comes to terms with who he is, and his place in nature and the world. Wordsworth was inspired by memories of events and visits to different places, explaining how they affected him. He described *The Prelude* as "a poem on the growth of my own mind" with "contrasting views of Man, Nature, and Society".

Summary

This **extract** describes how Wordsworth went out in a boat on a lake at night. He was alone and a mountain peak loomed over him; its presence had a great effect and for days afterwards he was troubled by the experience.

Vocabulary

Cove (noun): a small area on the beach shielded by rocks.
Stealth (noun): being secretive or cautious in movement and action
Idly (adverb): doing something without purpose.
Craggy ridge (adjective noun): the rough and rugged edge of a rocky bit of land.
Utmost (adjective): something that is most important, most extreme or greatest.
Elfin (adjective): like an elf; tiny, delicate
Pinnacle (noun): a small sailing ship

Lustily (adverb): to describe something done in a 'lusty' manner (lusty describes someone or something that is filled with passion, or someone strong and full of vigour.)
Uprear (verb): to lift up
Stature (noun): height
Grim (adjective): something that is so unpleasant it pushes you away
Covert (adjective): secret or hidden
Spectacle (noun): something amazing, interesting or exciting to see that attracts attention.
Mode (noun): a way of doing something or acting.

Extract from the Prelude

By William Wordsworth

One summer evening (led by her) I found A little
boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in Pushed
from the shore. It was an act of stealth And troubled
pleasure, nor without the voice Of mountain-
echoes did my boat move on; Leaving behind her
still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon, Until
they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows, Proud
of his skill, to reach a chosen point With an
unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above Was
nothing but the stars and the grey sky. She was an
elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake, And,
as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan; When,
from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge, As if with
voluntary power instinct,
Up reared its head. I struck and struck again, And
growing still in stature the grim shape

Towered up between me and the stars, and still, For so it
seemed, with purpose of its own

And measured motion like a living thing, Strode
after me. With trembling oars I turned, And through
the silent water stole my way Back to the covert
of the willow tree;

There in her mooring-place I left my bark, -
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave And
serious mood; but after I had seen

That spectacle, for many days, my brain Worked
with a dim and undetermined sense Of unknown
modes of being; o'er my thoughts There hung a
darkness, call it solitude

Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees, Of sea or
sky, no colours of green fields;

But huge and mighty forms, that do not live Like living
men, moved slowly through the mind By day, and were a
trouble to my dreams.



My Last Duchess by Robert Browning

Context

Robert Browning (1812-1889) was heavily influenced as a youngster by his father's extensive collection of books and art. His father was a bank clerk and collected thousands of books, some of which were hundreds of years old and written in languages such as Greek and Hebrew. By the time he was five, it was said that Browning could already read and write well. He was a big fan of the poet **Shelley** and asked for all of Shelley's works for his thirteenth birthday. By the age of fourteen, he'd learned Latin, Greek and French. Browning went to the University of London but left because it didn't suit him.

He married fellow poet **Elizabeth Barrett** but they had to run away and marry in secret because of her over-protective father. They moved to Italy and had a son, Robert. Father and son moved to London when Elizabeth died in 1861.

Browning is best known for his use of the *dramatic monologue*. *My Last Duchess* is an example of this and it also reflects Browning's love of **history** and **European culture** as the story is based on the life of an Italian Duke from the sixteenth century.

The characters mentioned in this poem are based on real life, historical figures. The narrator is **Duke Alfonso II** who ruled a place in northern Italy called Ferrara between 1559 and 1597. The Duchess of whom he speaks was his first wife, **Lucrezia de' Medici** who died in 1561 aged 17, only two years after he married her. In real life, Lucrezia died in suspicious circumstances and might have been poisoned.

Summary

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The poem is set in 1564, three years after the death of the Duchess. An emissary (messenger or representative) has been sent to see the Duke from the Count of Tyrol. The Count is the father of the Duke's next wife (he married three times in all). The Duke shows the emissary a picture of his late wife and remarks on her character, suggesting that she was unfaithful to him - and hinting that he might have killed her because of it. During his speech, the Duke makes himself look arrogant, insensitive and selfish.

Vocabulary

Countenance (noun): the look on a face that shows expression.

Earnest (adj): to describe someone or something serious and not playful.

Mantle (noun): a shawl or a cloak

Officious (adj): is offering unwanted advice or services, often in an overbearing way.

Trifling (adj): of little importance or worth

Munificence (noun): generosity

Dowry (noun): the property and wealth a woman brings to a marriage in some cultures or in historic times, or a natural talent or gift.

Warrant (verb): to guarantee, assure or give someone authority to do something.

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said "Fra
Pandolf" by design, for never read Strangers like
you that pictured countenance, The depth and
passion of its earnest glance, But to myself they
turned (since none puts by The curtain I have drawn
for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, How
such a glance came there; so, not the first Are you to
turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot Of joy
into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never
hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff Was
courtesy, she thought, and cause enough For calling up
that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad, Too
easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.



Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast, The
dropping of the daylight in the West, The bough
of cherries some officious fool Broke in the
orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each Would
draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name With
anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame This sort
of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will Quite
clear to such a one, and say, "Just this Or that in you
disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse— E'en
then would be some stooping; and I choose Never to
stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without Much
the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; Then all smiles
stopped together. There she stands As if alive. Will't please
you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence



Isamplewarrantthatnojustpretense Of
minefordowrywillbedisallowed;
Thoughhisfairdaughter'sself,aslavowed At
starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go Together
down, sir. Notice Neptune, though, Taming a sea-
horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning



The Charge of the Light Brigade BY ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Context

The poet:

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) was one of 11 children born to an upper-middle class country vicar. He received a good literary education. Alfred started writing poetry from a young age and published his first poems while still a student at Cambridge. In 1850 he became **poet laureate**. This meant he had to write important poems about events that affected the British nation. He held this post until his death in 1892, making him the country's longest ever serving laureate.

Historical context

The Crimean War was fought between Britain and Imperial Russia from 1853-1856. For the first time in history, newspapers carried eye-witness reports as well as detailing **not just the triumphs of war but the mistakes and horrors as well.**

The most significant moment in the Crimea came during the **Battle of Balaklava**. An order given to the British army's cavalry division (known as the Light Brigade) was misunderstood and 600 cavalrymen ended charging down a narrow valley straight into the fire of Russian cannons. Over 150 British soldiers were killed, and more than 120 were wounded. At home the news of the disaster was a sensation and a nation that had until then embraced British military exploits abroad began to question the politicians and generals who led them.



Summary

The poem tells the story of a brigade consisting of 600 soldiers who rode on horseback into the “valley of death” for half a league (about one and a half miles). They were obeying a command to charge the enemy forces that had been seizing their guns. Not a single soldier was discouraged or distressed by the command to charge forward, even though all the soldiers realized that their commander had made a terrible mistake. The 600 soldiers were assaulted by the shots of shells of canons in front and on both sides of them. Still, they rode courageously forward toward their own deaths. The soldiers struck the enemy gunners with their unsheathed swords (“sabres bare”) and charged at the enemy army while the rest of the world looked on in wonder. They rode into the artillery smoke and broke through the enemy line, destroying their Cossack and Russian opponents. Then they rode back from the offensive, but they had lost many men so they were “not the six hundred” anymore.

Vocabulary

Charge (verb): to attack with great force and speed
Brigade (noun): a unit of soldiers.
League (noun): a unit of measurement; about 1.5 miles
Dismayed (adjective): to describe someone experiencing a loss of courage
Blundered (verb): made a big mistake

Shell (noun): explosives from a large gun.
Sabres (noun): swords
Cossack (noun): Russian Soldier
Reeled (verb): fell backwards with a dizzy feeling
Sundered (verb): broke apart, separated or split.

The Charge of the Light Brigade BY
ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

I

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
“Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!” he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

II

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

III

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
Rode the six hundred.



IV

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
 All the world wondered.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right through the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from the sabre stroke
 Shattered and sundered.
Then they rode back, but not
 Not the six hundred.



V

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
 Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell.
They that had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

VI

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
 All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
 Noble six hundred!

Exposure

BY WILFRED OWEN

Context

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) is one of the most famous English poets to emerge from the First World War. He was born on the borders of England and Wales and was interested in becoming a poet from an early age.

War broke out in 1914 and he joined the army the following year, aged 18. Before long he had to return to England to get treatment for shell-shock (what today we would call Post-traumatic Stress Disorder – severe anxiety brought on by a stressful situation like war).

He was sent to a hospital in Edinburgh and there he met the already well-known poet and writer Siegfried Sassoon. Sassoon had encouraged Owen to put more of his own personal experiences into his poetry. He had also turned him against the war. Instead of seeing the war as a justified attempt to free Belgium, Owen now saw the war as a struggle between Imperial powers looking to expand their lands overseas. Owen returned to the trenches a year later and wrote some of his best-known poems. He was also decorated for his courage in battle, before being killed on 4th November 1918, just a week before peace was declared and the war finally ended.

Summary

A company of soldiers suffers the bitter cold of a night at the front. The troops keep nervous watch during a bitterly cold night though despite the distant sound of guns, “nothing happens”. They question why they are there. Dawn brings only gloomy relief; the enemy’s bullets seem less dangerous than the snow. In their dreams, they see a peaceful spring scene though it is one from which they are excluded. Their fate is, instead, to lie out in the trenches.

Tonight, the cold will claim more lives. Still nothing happens.



Vocabulary

<p>Wearied (adjective): tired and exhausted</p> <p>Drooping (verb): hanging down, bending down or to losing strength.</p> <p>Salient (adjective): something that is very noticeable or is prominent</p> <p>Sentries (noun): guards</p> <p>Gusts (noun): a small burst of wind.</p> <p>Incessantly (adverb): continually; without stopping; endless.</p> <p>Massing (verb): to bring together into a mass (a large grouping)</p> <p>Melancholy (adjective): feeling sad and depressed</p> <p>Ranks (noun): orderly lines</p> <p>Successive (adjective): one after the other.</p>	<p>Shudders (verb): shivers</p> <p>Flock (verb): group together</p> <p>Renew (verb): to make new, reawaken, reestablish or start over</p> <p>Nonchalance (adjective): indifference; not seeming to care</p> <p>Cringe (verb) to draw back or to move your face or body in order to shrink from danger or fear.</p> <p>Daze (noun): a state of stunned confusion or bewilderment.</p> <p>Dowse (verb): cover completely in water.</p> <p>Glozed : deceived</p> <p>Loath (adjective): someone or something unwilling or reluctant.</p> <p>Puckering (verb) to draw up into wrinkles or small folds.</p>
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Exposure

BY WILFRED OWEN

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knive us . . .

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent . . .

Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient . . . Worried by
silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire, Like
twitching agonies of men among its brambles.

Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles, Far
off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow . . .

We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army

Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey, But

nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence. Less

deadly than the air that shudders black with snow, With

side-long flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance, But

nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed, Deep into
grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
—Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed With
crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs; Shutters and
doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,—
We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Noweversun smile true on child, or field, or fruit. For
God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born, For
love of God seems dying.

Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, and puckering foreheads crisp. The
burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp, Pause
over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.

Storm on the Island by Seamus Heaney

Context	
<p>Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland in 1939, the eldest child in what was to become a family of nine children. His father farmed 50 acres in rural County Derry and was a cattle dealer. Much of Heaney's poetry is centred on the countryside and farm life that he knew as a boy.</p> <p>In the 1960s he belonged to a group of poets who, he said, used to talk poetry day after day. He has written many collections of poetry, the first of which was published in 1966. His later works capitalise on his knowledge of Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Gaelic and explore words and their significance. His translation of Beowulf, an Old English narrative poem, was published in 1999.</p> <p>In 1982 he began teaching for one semester a year at Harvard University in the USA. He was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford University in 1989 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. He has lived with his family in Dublin in the Republic of Ireland since 1976.</p>	
Summary	
<p>The poem describes the experience of being in a cliff-top cottage on an island off the coast of Ireland during a storm. Heaney describes the bare ground, the sea and the wind. The people in the cottage are extremely isolated and can do nothing against the powerful and violent weather.</p>	
Vocabulary	
<p>Squat (adjective): someone or something that is short and thick.</p> <p>Wizened (adjective): dried up, shrivelled</p> <p>Stacks (noun): haystacks</p> <p>Stooks (noun): bundles of straw</p> <p>Gale (noun): a very strong wind</p>	<p>Pummel: (verb): to hit or punch repeatedly</p> <p>Flung (verb): thrown carelessly</p> <p>Strafes (verb): bombards, harasses with artillery shells</p> <p>Salvo (noun): simultaneous firing of artillery</p>



Storm on the Island

By Seamus Heaney

We are prepared: we build our houses squat, Sink
walls in rock and roof them with good slate. The wizened
earth has never troubled us
With hay, so as you can see, there are no stacks Or
stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees

Which might prove company when it blows full Blast:
you know what I mean - leaves and branches Can raise a
tragic chorus in a gale
So that you can listen to the thing you fear
Forgetting that it pummels your house too.

But there are no trees, no natural shelter.
You might think that the sea is company,
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs But no:
when it begins, the flung spray hits The very
windows, spits like a tame cat

Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives And
strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo.
We are bombarded by the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

'Bayonet Charge' by Ted Hughes

context

Ted Hughes (1930-1998) was born in Yorkshire, in the North of England, and grew up in the countryside. After serving in the RAF for two years, he won a scholarship to Cambridge University where he studied Archaeology and Anthropology. The themes of the countryside, human history and mythology therefore already deeply influenced his imagination by the time he started writing poetry as a student.

He made his name as a poet in the late 1950s and 1960s and also wrote many well-known children's books including *The Iron Man* (which was filmed as *The Iron Giant*). It is for his poetry that he remains important. He was **poet laureate** from 1984 until his death from cancer in 1998.

Summary

Bayonet Charge focuses on a nameless soldier in the First World War (1914-18). It describes the experience of 'going over-the-top'. This was when soldiers hiding in trenches were ordered to 'fix bayonets' (attach the long knives to the end of their rifles) and climb out of the trenches to charge an enemy position twenty or thirty metres away. The aim was to capture the enemy trench. The poem describes how this process transforms a soldier from a living thinking person into a dangerous weapon of war.

Vocabulary

Khaki (adjective): a dull yellowish-brown color; army clothing.

Clods (noun): lumps of earth

Lugged (verb): carried something heavy with difficulty

Molten (adjective): melted

Bewilderment (noun): a state of confusion

Statuary (adjective): something made necessary by law

Furrows (noun): a shallow trench or a deep wrinkle

Threshing (verb) to beat out (grain) from its husk, as with a flail.

Luxuries (noun): something that is not essential but is expensive, desirable or valuable and provides comfort



'Bayonet Charge'

by Ted Hughes

Suddenly he awoke and was running—raw In
raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,
Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge That
dazzled with rifle fire, hearing
Bullets smacking the belly out of the air— He
lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm;
The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye
Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest, —

In bewilderment then he almost stopped —
In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations
Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running

Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs
Listening between his footfalls for the reason
Of his still running, and his foot hung like
Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows

Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame And
crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide Open
silent, its eyes standing out.

He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,
King, honour, human dignity, etcetera
Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm To
get out of that blue crackling air
His terror's touchy dynamite.

Remains by Simon Armitage

context

Simon Armitage was born in 1963 in West Yorkshire, where he still lives. He studied Geography at Portsmouth University and completed an MA at Manchester University, where he wrote his **dissertation** on the effects of television violence on young offenders. Afterwards he worked as a probation officer, a job which influenced many of the poems in his first collection, *Zoom!* (1989).

His poetry demonstrates a strong concern for social issues, as well as drawing on his Yorkshire roots. Armitage is often noted for his "ear" – holding a strong sense of rhythm and **metre**.

summary

Remains is focused on a soldier haunted by a violent memory. The poem is told anecdotally and begins with 'On another occasion', implying that this account is not the only unpleasant account the soldier has in his memory. He tells how he and 'somebody else and somebody else' opened fire on a looter who may or may not have been armed. They shot him dead and one of them put the man's 'guts back into his body' before he's carted away.

Later the soldier thinks about the shooting every time he walks down the street. Then later again, when he returns home he is still haunted by the thought of what he has done. He tries drink and drugs to drown out the memory, but they do not work. The line 'he's here in my head when I close my eyes' indicates this.

The final lines show that the memory was not left behind in the place of war in a distant land, but is with the speaker all the time. He feels as though he will always have blood on his hands.

Vocabulary

Looters (noun): One who **loots**, who **steals** during a general disturbance such as a **riot** or natural disaster.

round (noun): a bullet shot from a gun



Remains by Simon Armitage

On another occasion, we get sent out to
tackle looters raiding a bank.
And one of them legs it up the road,
probably armed, possibly not.

Well myself and somebody else and somebody else are
all of the same mind,
so all three of us open fire.
Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear

I see every round as it rips through his life – I
see broad daylight on the other side.
So we've hit this looter a dozen times
and he's there on the ground, sort of inside out,

pain itself, the image of agony.
One of my mates goes by
and tosses his guts back into his body. Then
he's scarted off in the back of a lorry.

End of story, except not really.
His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol I
walk right over it week after week.
Then I'm home on leave. But I blink

and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.
Sleep, and he's probably armed, possibly not.
Dream, and he's torn apart by a dozen rounds. And
the drink and the drugs won't flush him out –

he's here in my head when I close my eyes, dug
in behind enemy lines,
not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land or six-
feet-under in desert sand,
but near to the knuckle, here and now,
his bloody life in my bloody hands.

Poppies by Jane Weir

Context

Jane Weir, born in 1963, grew up in Italy and Northern England, with an English mother and an Italian father. She has continued to absorb different cultural experiences throughout her life, also living in Northern Ireland during the troubled 1980s. As well as writing she runs her own textile and design business. The influences of her broad cultural experiences as well as her knowledge of and interest in other art forms can be seen throughout her work.

The poem is set in the present day but reaches right back to the beginning of the Poppy Day tradition. Armistice Sunday began as a way of marking the end of the First World War in 1918. It was set up so people could remember the hundreds and thousands of ordinary men who had been killed in the First World War. Today, the event is used to remember soldiers of all wars who have died since then.

When *Poppies* was written, British soldiers were still dying in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a way of trying to understand the suffering that deaths caused, the **poet laureate** Carol Ann Duffy asked a number of writers to compose poems,

Weir describes being surprised by the 'overwhelming response' she had from readers across Europe to 'Poppies'. Many of the readers who contacted her were mothers of soldiers killed in action in recent conflicts. She commented in an interview that, 'I wrote the piece from a woman's perspective, which is quite rare, as most poets who write about war have been men. As the mother of two teenage boys, I tried to put across how I might feel if they were fighting in a war zone.'

Weir has acknowledged that 'A lot of my poems are narrative driven or scenarios', and in 'Poppies' she tells the 'story' of a mother's experience of pain and loss as her son leaves home to go to war. She has indicated that: 'I was subliminally thinking of Susan Owen [mother of Wilfred]... and families of soldier killed in any war when I wrote this poem. This poem attempts on one level to address female experience and is consciously a political act.'

Weir has commented that she likes the adventure of 'cross dressing' in terms of her use of language, often borrowing from the 'language of other genres, be it fashion, art... and soon'. This is apparent in 'Poppies' where the tactile language of fashion and textiles seems to permeate the text. Her poems have been described as 'multi-sensory explosions'.

Vocabulary

Armistice (noun): an agreement for a temporary stop to a war

Spasm (noun): a sudden and often involuntary feeling or movement, particularly a muscle contraction.

Blockade (noun): a shutting off or a blocking.

Bias (noun)

- 1) a line sewn or cut diagonally across
- 2) a tendency to mentally lean in a certain direction.

Steeled (verb): made something strong or tough or unfeeling.

Felt (noun): a fabric made of animal fibers that have been twisted and pressed together

Intoxicated (adjective): excited; or muddled with alcohol:

Skirting (verb): avoiding, or being on the edge of.

Poppies by Jane Weir

ThreedaysbeforeArmisticeSunday and
poppieshadalreadybeenplaced
on individual war graves. Before you left,
Ipinnedoneontoyourlapel,crimpedpetals,
spasms ofpaperred,disruptingablockade of
yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs as I
could, smoothed down your shirt's
upturned collar, steeled the softening of
my face. I wanted to graze my nose across
the tip of your nose, play at being
Eskimos like we did when

you were little. I resisted the impulse to
run my fingers through the gelled
black thorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated.

After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.

Later a single dove flew from the pear tree, and
this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.

On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.

The dove pulled freely against the sky,
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear
your playground voice catching on the wind.



War Photographer by Carol Ann Duffy

Context	
<p>Carol Ann Duffy is the first female Poet Laureate (2009), and probably the best known female poet working in Britain today. She was born in 1955 in Glasgow. Duffy is well known for poems that give a voice to the dispossessed (people excluded from society); she encourages the reader to put themselves in the shoes of people they might normally dismiss.</p> <p>Her poetry often engages with the grittier and more disturbing side of life, using black humour like a weapon to make social and political points</p> <p>Duffy was inspired to write this poem by her friendship with a war photographer. She was especially intrigued by the peculiar challenge faced by these people whose job requires them to record terrible, horrific events without being able to directly help their subjects. Throughout the poem, Duffy provokes us to consider our own response when confronted with the photographs that we regularly see in our newspapers supplements, and why so many of us have become desensitised (reached the point where we no longer feel strong emotions) to these images.</p>	
Summary	
<p>The poem starts with a description of the war photographer standing alone in his darkroom. All the photos that he had taken of the war are contained within the rolls which are organized into neat rows. He thinks of all the places he has been to, places which had been torn apart by war, and remembering all the bloodshed he has witnessed he feels that everything has to in the end die and return to the earth. He then carries on with his works, but the ironical fact is that he who wasn't afraid while amidst gunfire and death, now trembles in the safety and sanctuary of his home in Rural England, where the most troubling thing is the constantly changing weather and where he does not have to worry about the ground blowing up beneath his feet.</p> <p>The third stanza starts off mysteriously, and the half developed photograph is described. The vague features of the man seem like the spirit of the soldier and he remembers the moment when he took that picture; the hopeless wailing of the soldier's wife as he had silently sought her permission to take her dying husband's photograph and he remembers clearly how the blood from his wound had seeped into the earth.</p> <p>The final stanza takes on a detached tone, as the photographer thinks of how from the hundred photos that he has taken, each telling its own chilling tale of agony and pain, his editor will randomly select a handful to print in the newspaper. He knows that people back at home would glance at these, in the afternoons and feel sorrow for a minute before moving on with their lives. By the end of the poem, even he shrugs off all feelings towards his work and looks upon the war torn land from his high altitude in the plane, where such suffering happens on a day to day basis and the world doesn't care.</p>	

Vocabulary	
<p>Dispel (verb): to drive away or make disappear.</p> <p>Supplement (noun): in addition to; magazines that accompany the Sunday papers</p> <p>Impassively (adverb): in an impassive manner (impassive describes someone who is calm and not feeling pain)</p>	<p>spool solution</p>

War Photographer

By Carol Ann Duffy

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,
as though this were a church and he a
priest preparing to intone a Mass.

Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

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 to
ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel, to
fields which don't explode beneath the feet
of running children in a nightmare heat.

Something is happening. A stranger's features
faintly start to twist before his eyes,
a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries of
this man's wife, how he sought approval
without words to do what someone must
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black and white
from which his editor will pick out five or six
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick with
tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where he
earns his living and they do not care.



Tissue by Imtiaz Dharker

context
<p>Imtiaz Dharker was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and grew up in Glasgow, Scotland. As well as being a recognised poet she is a well-known documentary film-maker. She is interested in global social issues such as health and education, including the impact of war and politics on everyday family life. These themes were explored deeply in her 2006 collection of poems 'A terrorist at my table', which included The Right Word.</p>
summary
<p>Tissue explores the varied uses of paper and how they relate to life itself. The speaker in this poem uses tissue paper as an extended metaphor for life. She considers how paper can 'alter things' and refers to the soft thin paper of religious books, in particular the Qur'an. There are also real life references to other lasting uses we have for paper in our lives such as maps, receipts and architect drawings. Each of these items is connected to important aspects of life: journeys, money and home.</p> <p>These examples demonstrate how important but also how fragile paper is.</p> <p>In the final stages of the poem, the poet links the idea of a building being made from paper to human skin, using the words 'living tissue' and then 'your skin'. This is quite a complex idea, and the meaning is open to interpretation. She may be suggesting that the significance of human life will outlast the records we make of it on paper or in buildings. There is also a sense of the fragility of human life, and the fact that not everything can last.</p>

Vocabulary	
<p>Tissue (noun): group of cells or an absorbent paper</p> <p>Drift (noun)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a driving force or pressure, the ocean's movement due to winds and currents 2) general meaning (as in 'I catch you or drift') <p>Borderlines (noun): a boundary; dividing line</p>	<p>Luminous (adjective): giving off a very bright light or a person or trait considered glowing</p> <p>Script (noun)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the written words of a play, movie or show, or a standard message to deliver on the phone or in person. 2) handwriting <p>Monoliths (noun): a large upright stone column or monument, or a large building without character, or a large corporation considered to be solid, uniform or imposing.</p>

Tissue by Imtiaz Dharker

Paper that lets the light
shine through, this
is what could alter things.
Paper thinned by age or touching,

The kind you find in well-used books, the
back of the Koran, where a hand has
written in the names and histories, who
was born to whom,

The height and weight, who
died where and how, on which sepia date,
pages smoothed and stroked and turned
transparent with attention.

If buildings were paper, I might
feel their drift, see how easily
they fall away on a sigh, a shift in
the direction of the wind.

Maps too. The sun shines through
their borderlines, the marks
that rivers make, roads,
railtracks, mountain folds,

Fine slips from grocery shops
that say how much was sold
and what was paid by credit card
might fly your lives like paper kites.

An architect could use all this,
place layer over layer, luminous
script over numbers over line,

and never wish to build again with brick

or block, but let the daylight break
through capitals and monoliths,
through the shapes that pride can make,
find a way to trace a grand design

with living tissue, raise a structure
never meant to last,
of paper smoothed and stroked
and thinned to be transparent,

turned into your skin.



The Emigrée by Carol Rumens

Summary

A displaced person pictures the country and the city where he or she was born. Neither the city nor the country is ever named and this lack of specific detail seems intentional. It is as if Rumens wants her poem to be relevant to as many people who have left their homelands as possible.

Emigrants are people who have left the country of their birth to settle elsewhere in the world. The spelling of the word Rumens chooses -émigrée- is a feminine form and suggests the speaker of the poem is a woman.

The exact location of the city is unclear and precise details of it are sparse. Perhaps it only ever really existed in the émigrée's imagination.

Rumens suggests the city and country may now be war-torn, or under the control of a dictatorial government that has banned the language the speaker once knew. Despite this, nothing shakes the light-filled impression of a perfect place that the émigrée's childhood memories have left. This shows the power that places can have, even over people who have left them long ago and who have never revisited since. Though there is a clear sense of fondness for the place, there is also a more threatening tone in the poem, suggesting perhaps that the relationship with the past and with this place is not necessarily positive for the speaker.

Vocabulary



Paperweight

Tyrants (noun): a cruel ruler or authority figure

Branded (verb): marked with a heated stamp.

Graceful (adjective): something that is beautiful, well formed and moves with ease.

Frontiers (noun): a border between two countries, or the outer limit of what has been explored.

Grammar (noun): the study of the way words are used to make sentences.

Molecule (noun): the smallest amount of something, particularly of a chemical substance, that can exist on its own.

State (noun):

1) a territory with its own government and borders within a larger country.

2) your current status or condition.

Docile (adjective): a passive person or thing.

Mutter (verb): to speak or chatter in a low voice or under your breath in a way that is hard to hear.



The Emigrée by Carol Rumens

There once was a country... I left it as a child but
my memory of it is sunlight-clear
for it seems I never saw it in that November
which, I am told, comes to the mildest city.
The worst news I receive of it cannot break
my original view, the bright, filled paperweight. It
may be at war, it may be sick with tyrants, but I
am branded by an impression of sunlight.

The whitest streets of that city, the graceful slopes
glow even clearer as time rolls its tanks
and the frontiers rise between us, close like waves.
That child's vocabulary I carried here
like a hollow doll, opens and spills a grammar. Soon I
shall have every coloured molecule of it.
It may by now be a lie, banned by the state
but I can't get it off my tongue. It tastes of sunlight.

I have no passport, there's no way back at all but
my city comes to me in its own white plane. It lies
down in front of me, docile as paper;
I comb its hair and love its shining eyes.
My city takes me dancing through the city
of walls. They accuse me of absence, they circle me. They
accuse me of being dark in their free city.
My city hides behind me. They mutter death,
and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight.

Kamikaze by **Beatrice Garland**

Context

During the Second World War, the term 'kamikaze' was used for Japanese fighter pilots who were sent on suicide missions. They were expected to crash their warplanes into enemy warships. The word 'kamikaze' literally translates as 'divine wind'.



Summary

A poem about a kamikaze pilot who returns home and faces rejection. In this narrative poem, Beatrice Garland explores the testimony of the daughter of a kamikaze pilot. Unlike many of his comrades, this pilot turns back from his target and returns home.

The poem vividly explores the moment that the pilot's decision is made and sketches out the consequences for him over the rest of his life. Not only is he shunned by his neighbours but his wife refuses to speak to him or look him in the eye. His children, too, gradually learn that he is not to be spoken to and begin to isolate and reject him.

Vocabulary

Embark (verb):

- 1) to start something.
- 2) to leave on a trip, often on a ship or airplane.

Incantations (noun): a series of words used in a chant, in magic or used to cast a spell.

Translucent (adjective): partially see through; not quite transparent.

Arcing (verb): moving in a curved path

Shoals (nouns): a large group, particularly of fish

Cairn (noun): a heap of stones built as a memorial or landmark

Turbulent (adjective): something characterized by chaos, confusion, disorder or conflict.

Breakers (noun): a wave that breaks into foam against a shore or reef.

Kamikaze

By Beatrice Garland

Her father embarked at sunrise
with a flask of water, a samurai sword in
the cockpit, a shaven head
full of powerful incantations
and enough fuel for a one-way
journey into history

but half way there, she thought,
recounting it later to her children,
he must have looked far down
at the little fishing boats
strung out like bunting
on a green-blue translucent sea

and beneath them, arcing in swathes
like a huge flag waved first one way
then the other in a figure of eight,
the dark shoals of fishes
flashing silver as their bellies
swivelled towards the sun

and remembered how he
and his brothers waiting on the shore
built cairns of pearl-grey pebbles
to see whose withstood longest
the turbulent inrush of breakers
bringing their father's boat safe

– *yes, grandfather's boat* – safe
to the shore, salt-sodden, a wash

with cloud-marked mackerel,
black crabs, feathery prawns,
the loose silver of whitebait and once
a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous.
*And though he came back
my mother never spoke again
in his presence, nor did she meet his eyes
and the neighbours too, they treated him
as though he no longer existed,
only we children still chattered and laughed
till gradually we too learned
to be silent, to live as though
he had never returned, that this
was no longer the father we loved.*
And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered
which had been the better way to die.



Checking Out Me History by John Agard

Context

John Agard was born in British Guiana (now called Guyana) in the Caribbean, in 1949. He moved to the UK in the late 1970s and is well known for powerful and fun performances of his work.

He uses non-standard phonetic spelling (written as a word sounds) to represent his own accent, and writes about what it is like being black to challenge racist attitudes, especially those which are unthinking.

summary

This poem draws on Agard's experience to make us look at the way history is taught, and at how we conceive our identity as we learn about cultural traditions and narratives. It becomes clear that Agard had to follow a history curriculum biased towards whites, especially British whites, so that he learned about mythical, nursery rhyme characters instead of living black people from the past.

He challenges this view of history and cites some major black figures to balance the bias and create a basis for his own identity.

vocabulary

Beacon (noun): a person or thing that warns, guides or offers support.

Checking Out MeHistory

by John Agard

Demtellme

Demtellme

Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history

Blind me to me own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat

DemtellmeboutDickWhittingtonandhecat

But ToussaintL'Ouverture

No dem never tell me bout dat

Toussaint

A slave

Withvision

Lick back

Napoleon

Battalion

And first Black

Republic born

Toussaint de thorn

To de French

Toussaint de beacon

Of de HaitianRevolution

Demtellmeboutdemanwhodiscoverdeballoon

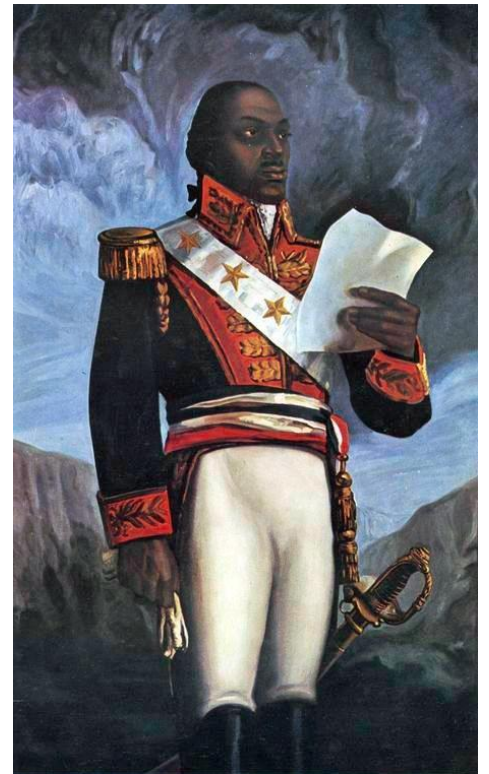
And de cow who jump over de moon

Demtellmeboutdedishranawaywithdespoon But

dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

Nanny

See-far woman



Of mountain dream
Fire-woman struggle
Hopeful stream
To freedom river

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo But
dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu Dem
tell me bout Columbus and 1492
But what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp And
how Robin Hood used to camp
Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul But
dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

From Jamaica She
travel far
To the Crimean War
She volunteertogo
And even when de British said no
She still brave the Russian snow A
healing star
Among the wounded A
yellow sunrise
To the dying

Dem tell me
Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me
But now I checking out me own history I
carving out me identity



