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English Department

Power and Conflict Poetry
Knowledge Organisers



Kamikaze GARLAND

Summary

In this poem, Garland explores the idea of a Kamikaze pilot who didn't carry out his suicide mission but returned home, where he was shunned (excluded/ignored) for the rest of his life. The event is viewed through the eyes of his grown up daughter, who questions the way Japanese society treated men like her father.

Context

- Japanese Kamikaze pilots flew planes into US war ships in WW2.
- It was a great honour to be a Kamikaze Pilot. There was huge social pressure on this role, and it was seen as the ultimate dishonour if the mission was not completed.

Structure

- Written from a dual perspective – italics signify granddaughter and normal text omniscient narrator.
- Use of free verse and enjambment highlight the pilot's decision to break away from social norms. Also highlights the pilot's isolation and lack of security. Also highlights the speaker's remorse and regret

Themes

Conflict
Memory
Nature
Loss/absence
Identity
Personal conflict

Message: Garland criticises societies where those in power force and brainwash soldiers into committing acts of atrocity. We are encouraged to remember that life is precious and shouldn't be thrown away blindly.

Language

- Listing at start reflects orders given **“flask of water, a samurai sword”**
- **“Shaven head full of powerful incantations”** suggests the pilot is being brainwashed by the spells and dark magic of Japanese honour and society
- **Juxtaposition** between “A one way journey into history” and images of sunlight and the beauty of the natural world that the pilot would be leaving behind.
- **Colour imagery** – “A green blue translucent sea” and “fishes flashing silver” – the natural world is beautiful, precious, peaceful and this is what he'd be leaving behind. The fish turn to face the sun = image of life.

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, awash
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.



Poppies WEIR

Themes

Conflict
Loss/absence
Memory

Summary In this poem, Weir writes from the perspective of a mother, who is visiting a war memorial. She considers her son who is growing up and is perhaps now a soldier. It is deliberately unclear if her son has died or not. In either case, Weir examines a mother's pain at the idea of losing her son.

Context

- Weir is writing as the mother of teenage boys during modern times, when conflict still rages across the world – Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria etc.
- She wants to give 'voiceless' women a voice, and examine the impact of war and loss on families, especially women

Form and Structure

- **Ambiguous use of time** throughout the poem shows how memories and the present day blend into one in times of anxiety and isolation
- **Irregular free verse and enjambment** reflect the mother's inability to structure or bring order to the powerful emotions of loss she feels. It also reflects the sense of chaos of a world in conflict, which the mother is powerless to control. She also won't be able to control & order everything that happens to her son as he grows up.

Message: The message of the poem is that the world should recognise the impact of conflict on women and families. Women may not actively fight and are often stuck in the home powerless, whilst their men go out to fight. Weir wants us to understand that these women suffer too, even if they are not actually fighting.

Language

- Use of fabric imagery, texture to show the layers of her emotions "**tucks, darts, pleats**" and the stabbing pain of her anxiety
- Metaphor of releasing a "**songbird from its cage**" reflects the mother having to allow her son to be free and out of her control
- "**Steeled the softening of my face**" shows the mother's need to be strong in difficult times
- "**The dove pulled freely against the sky**" – metaphor highlights the son's freedom
- **Images of love, care & protection** – the mother 'bandages' the sellotape around her hand, as if wanting to care for wounds (her own emotional wounds as well as any hurts her son might face in life)

Poppies

By Jane Weir

Three days before Armistice Sunday
and poppies had already been placed
on individual war graves. Before you left,
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
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
blackthorns 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.



The Prelude

WORDSWORTH

Themes

Nature
Memory
Human Power
Personal conflict

Summary In this poem, Wordsworth recalls a night when, as a boy, he stole a boat and rowed it across a lake. He felt powerful until he saw a mountain, when he got scared and rowed back. He realised that nature was bigger, more powerful and potentially scarier than he'd previously understood.

Message: The message of the poem is that Nature is powerful and sublime human power is ephemeral in comparison.

Context

- Wordsworth was a **Romantic** poet who believed in the sublime power of Nature. He saw Nature as God's creation.
- He thought that Nature should be more appreciated and that man should learn to live in tune with it and appreciate its power.

Form and Structure

- Part of a longer autobiographical 'epic' poem which are usually the story of medieval heroes on journeys meeting beautiful women. Here the speaker loses his "heroic" pride after experiencing the beauty of nature. This journey teaches him humility.
- Poem begins with boy feeling in control. Pivotal moment = seeing mountain. Ends with his retreat and realisation that he's not as powerful as he thought he was.
- Starts peacefully but ends with a more tense atmosphere.

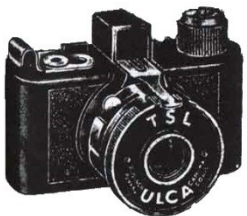
Language

- **Images of power at the start** show the boy's pride – "Lustily I dipped my oars", "I fixed my sight" "Straight I unloosed her chain"
- **Images of the boy's power are juxtaposed with images of the power of nature**
- **Personification** used to depict the mountain, symbolising nature, as monstrous and terrifying "**upreared its head**" "**huge peak black and huge**"
- **A semantic field of light** "glittering" "sparkling" "moon" allows us to recognise and admire the beauty of Nature.
- "**No familiar shapes remained, no pleasant images of trees, of sea or sky, no colours of green fields**" - repetition of "no" shows how his attitude to nature has changed
- "**trouble to my dreams**" highlights the power nature has over his mind

The Prelude: stealing the boat
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,
Upreared 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.



War Photographer

DUFFY

Themes

Conflict
Memory
Anger
Guilt
Personal conflict

Summary In this poem, Duffy describes a war photographer who is preparing photographs that he has taken of war zones, ready for publication in Western newspapers.

Context

- Duffy has a friend who is a war photographer. Her poem records moments of suffering in modern warfare – eg children running has echoes of the famous picture of a girl running after napalm attack in Vietnam

Message: Duffy wants readers to feel both sympathy and guilt – sympathy for the victims of war, sympathy for the photographer whose work isn't valued & is powerless to prevent suffering, and guilt because we can go about our lives without being affected by the horrors of war.

Form and Structure

- Regular structure of stanzas and rhyming shows how photog. tries to put order into chaos of war.
- The structure of the poem contrasts with the chaos of war that the poem describes
- The structure and control also highlights the security and peace that British society can enjoy, away from the danger of war
- Third person narrative distances us from the photographer, showing how removed we are from war

Language

- Image of order & control** – “**Ordered rows**” = a sense that the war photographer is trying to feel in control & create order out of chaos due to guilt and the pain of war.
- Juxtaposition with images of chaos & horror** – “**fields that don't explode beneath the feet of running children in a nightmare heat**” = contrast between the ordered rows of photographs & pleasant English fields, and a hellish image of terror & suffering in war
- “**A thousand agonies in black & white**” = the terrible suffering of victims of war, making us **sympathise** for their pain. “**black and white**” shows how the true pain and colour has been lost, making these photos seem unreal
- Metaphor “**Half formed ghost**” - highlights the suffering of those in warfare
- The poem describes the **journey of the people reading the newspapers**, going from ‘**tears**’ to ‘**beers**’. We feel **angry** at them that it is so easy to walk away from the suffering they see in the newspapers, **sympathetic** with the photographer whose work is so easily forgotten, and **guilty** because we also can walk away.

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.



London BLAKE

Themes

Human power
Loss and absence
Fear
Anger
Pride

Summary In this poem, Blake describes London being controlled by corrupt institutions: government, monarchy & church. He portrays ordinary people being oppressed & controlled, as if they have become chained/enslaved and have given up the fight to try to make their lives better.

Context

- Blake was anti-establishment and a revolutionary – he was strongly critical of the government
- Blake was writing at the time of the Industrial Revolution and he examines its impact on the growing urban population.
- Power was in the hands of the rich & institutions such as the government, monarchy, church & business owners
- Similar conditions led to the French Revolution but there was no revolution in Britain. Blake thought that the French Revolution should be an inspiration to the British people.

Form and Structure

- Strict ABAB rhyme scheme – nothing changes, just like nothing changes for the people of London
- The rhythm is steady & plodding, highlighting the sense of harsh & unending misery
- Written in first person – highlights the speaker's shock and anger at the state of London and makes the feelings powerfully felt by the reader

Language

- **Repetition** - “**Marks of weakness, marks of woe**” = emphasises the idea that the city damages & stains its people
- **Metaphor** – “**Blights with plague the marriage hearse**” – death & disease are so common in London that even happy events like weddings are overshadowed by death & disease
- **Metaphor** – “**Chartered streets**” “**Chartered Thames**” = the whole city is oppressed by laws & controlled, even the river which should flow naturally.
- **Metaphor** – “**Mind forged manacles**” = the Londoners have been so oppressed that their minds feel chained, but Blake wants us to see that the chains are only in their minds and a change of attitude could break them
- **Metaphor** – “**blackening church appals**” highlights the hypocrisy of the church – suggests that it is stained by the cry of innocent exploited children

Message:

London is a city of national shame because the powerless (the poor, the young) suffer & die. Blake's message is that ordinary people could break their chains and free themselves, but they don't because they have become mentally weakened by the corrupt system.

London
by William Blake

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackening church appalls;
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot's curse
Blasts the newborn infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.



My Last Duchess

BROWNING

Themes

Human Power
Memory
Pride
Identity

Summary In this poem, Browning depicts a Duke who disliked what he viewed as his former duchess' inappropriate behaviour and gave orders which 'removed' her. He's now speaking to an envoy from a Count, about a proposed marriage to the Count's daughter.

Context

- Based on a real life duke (Alfonso II) in Italy who was rumoured to have killed his wife. Poem is set in 1564 (3 years after her death)
- Browning was a Victorian poet who was interested in masculine power. He was strongly critical of patriarchal views due to his beloved wife having to escape her controlling father.

Form and Structure

- **Dramatic monologue form** = only one voice / he dominates just as he believes he's entitled to dominate over people.
- One long stanza gives no breaks, again as if there's no room for anybody else to have a say.
- Tight rhyme scheme is regular and controlled, again echoing Duke's desire for control.
- Poem begins & ends with works of art = duchess as just another possession to brag about.

Language

- Personal pronouns – he is only concerned with himself and his possessions “**I**” “**My**” the Duke is portrayed as feeling that the duchess was his possession.
- **Metaphor** – “**My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old-name**” = he sees his social position and family name as a present which he chooses to bestow on people.
- **Images of the Duchess as innocent victim** – “**white mule**” “**heart too soon made glad**” “**smiles**” – makes us feel sympathy for her and hatred towards the Duke

Message: The poem examines how men with high status in society are able to abuse the power they have over women. Browning wants readers to feel disgust and loathing towards the Duke, and scandalised at a society that allowed such an abuse of power.

My Last Duchess

By Robert Browning

FERRARA.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fr Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
``Fr 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
Fr 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 an 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
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
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!



Remains ARMITAGE

Themes

Conflict
Memory
Guilt
Personal
Conflict

Summary In this poem, Armitage writes from the perspective of a modern day soldier, who has killed men in conflict & is now haunted with guilt.

Context

- Armitage = modern poet. Wrote a collection of poems called 'The Not Dead' & also made a TV series of same name, examining the impact of war on soldiers who 'return in body but never wholly in mind'.
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder now recognised as affecting a significant numbers of soldiers returning from wars such as Gulf, Iraq & Afghanistan.

Form and Structure

- Poem written in **irregular free verse**, which creates a sense of disorder & mirrors the soldier's confused emotions both during & after the incident.
- **Enjambment** creates a sense of a lack of control, highlighting the idea that the soldier can't stop the images of the looter's death from recurring – the experience will never leave him
- **Regular stanzas** could mirror how the soldier attempts to hide his emotions by trying to look controlled on the surface

Language

- Use of **plural pronouns at start "we"** contrast to **singular pronouns at end "I" "my"** show the isolation of the soldier and his individual guilt
- **Metaphor – 'His bloody life in my bloody hands'** – the soldier, like Macbeth & Lady Macbeth, imagines his hands are still bloodstained; symbolises his sense of guilt about what he was driven to do in conflict.
- **Metaphor – 'Blood shadow'** – the 'stain' also haunts the soldier, following him like a shadow, just like the stain that Lady Macbeth imagines on her hands when she sleepwalks.
- **The graphic, brutal images ("inside out" "rips through his life")** serve to highlight the gory horror and brutality of war. The depiction of the way the looter's body is treated (**"tosses his guts" "carted off"**) make it seem more like a piece of meat than human, highlighting the idea that soldiers are desensitised
- **Metaphor "he's here in my head when I close my eyes, dug in behind enemy lines"** – highlights the speaker's inability to forget his experiences. Even when he's home he still uses the language of war, showing his inability to distance himself.

Message:

The message of the poem is that conflict has an on-going impact on those affected by it. The soldier has been damaged and made powerless by his actions in war. Armitage wants us to feel **sympathy** for the soldier, whose experiences in conflict have damaged him & are haunting him.

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 carted 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.



The Emigrée RUMENS

Summary In this poem, the speaker is an emigrée, a woman who left her country as a child and now lives across the world. The country shines on in her memories.

Context

- Carol Rumens is from London, a multicultural melting pot of all different nationalities, many of whom are immigrants who have emigrated from other countries.
- The poem deliberately avoids specific context – the city isn't named and we don't know the nationality of the speaker – the poem serves as a 'voice' for any displaced person & the pain & conflict moving country can cause within them

Form and Structure

- **Every stanza ends with sunlight** – Rumens is 'brand'ing us with the sunlight – it's what the speaker wants us most to remember about her memories of her city
- **Three tightly contained stanzas** appear controlled and **regular** but poem is **actually free verse** with **no regular rhyme or rhythm** – it suggests that maybe the speaker wants to feel a sense of control and order but actually underneath there is a sense of uneasiness and powerlessness

Language

- **Extended Metaphor** – Images of positivity, life & hope - **"Sunlight"** The speaker is "branded" with the "impression of sunlight" & her city has left a positive mark upon her. The city shines out in her memories.
- **Contrast** with images of conflict & darkness - **"November"** **"Sick with tyrants"** – however, the speaker keeps returning to "sunlight" as she refuses to let these dark memories cloud her view of her city.
- **Metaphor** of **"Time rolls its tanks"** makes the passing of time seem like an enemy, because time passed, war began & the city was no longer the beautiful place it once was.
- **Metaphor** of the city as a **"bright filled paperweight"** makes it seem beautiful & precious. A paperweight holds papers down & keeps them safe, & we empathise/sympathise with the speaker's desperation to hold down her precious memories of her city & keep them safe.
- **Personification of the city** – **"my city takes me dancing"** suggests the speaker's joy and almost romantic relationship with her city

Themes

Loss
/Absence
Identity
Memory
Personal
Conflict

Message:

Displaced people, who have to leave their own country possibly because of conflict, suffer inner conflict and pain as a result. Rumens wants us to sympathise with her speaker and to empathise with her need to hold onto the positive memories of her country, before it was destroyed by conflict.

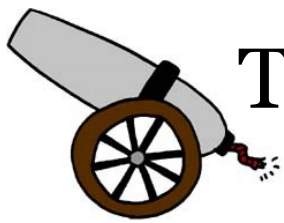
The Émigrée

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 white 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.



The Charge of the Light Brigade

TENNYSON

Themes

Human Power
Conflict
Loss
Anger

Summary In this poem, Tennyson describes the Battle of Balaclava and the horrific conditions the grossly outnumbered British Light Brigade faced against a Russian army. The soldiers rode into a valley, where they were essentially cornered, due to a miscommunication of orders.

Context

- The poem remembers the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War – Britain v Russia. Hundreds of British soldiers killed/injured when their brigade forced to ride into a valley full of Russian cannons as a result of mixed up orders.
- Tennyson was inspired by the work of a war correspondent, who described the battle in great detail.

Form and Structure

- Strong rhythm reflects the sound of galloping horses.
- Repetition of “**six hundred**” at the end of every stanza shows how he wants them to be remembered
- Six stanzas reflect 600 men who died.
- Ends with many dead and the poet’s final urging/main message – we should remember the soldiers & their sacrifice

Language

- Military imagery “**cannons**” “**guns**” “**sabres**”
- Biblical allusion “**Valley of death**” highlights the hell that soldiers went through
- Sibilance used to reflect sound of shots “**shot and shell**”
- **Rhetorical question** “**When can their glory fade?**” shows the poet’s view that the soldiers should be immortalised and remembered
- **Metaphors** “**valley of death**” “**jaws of death**” “**mouth of Hell**” These work together to paint a picture of the valley as a death trap; like a monster devouring innocent lives; like the gates of Hell

Message:

The message of the poem is that the soldiers and their sense of duty should be honoured. Tennyson remembers their sacrifice but does not glorify it. He doesn’t criticise war but he mourns the mistake that led to so many unnecessary deaths.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

By Alfred Lord Tennyson

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.

'Forward, the Light Brigade! '

Was there a man dismay'd?

Not tho' the soldier knew

Some one had blunder'd:

Their's not to make reply,

Their's not to reason why,

Their's but to do and die:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,

Cannon to left of them,

Cannon in front of them

Volley'd and thunder'd;

Storm'd at with shot and shell,

Boldly they rode and well,

Into the jaws of Death,

Into the mouth of Hell

Rode the six hundred.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,

Flash'd as they turn'd in air

Sabring the gunners there,

Charging an army, while

All the world wonder'd:

Plunged in the battery-smoke

Right thro' the line they broke;

Cossack and Russian

Reel'd from the sabre-stroke

Shatter'd and sunder'd.

Then they rode back, but not

Not the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,

Cannon to left of them,

Cannon behind them

Volley'd and thunder'd;

Storm'd at with shot and shell,

While horse and hero fell,

They that had fought so well

Came thro' the jaws of Death,

Back from the mouth of Hell,

All that was left of them,

Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?

O the wild charge they made!

All the world wonder'd.

Honour the charge they made!

Honour the Light Brigade,

Noble six hundred!



Ozymandias

SHELLEY

Themes

Power of Nature
Human Power
Pride

Summary In this poem, the speaker meets a traveller who has seen a statue of Ozymandias, a king who had an inflated sense of his own importance & abused his power as a tyrant. He died and is now reduced to just a broken statue in the sand.

Context

- Ozymandias refers to Pharaoh Rameses II
- Shelley was an early socialist who was anti-monarchy and against governments which thought they were invincible.
- Shelley was a Romantic poet so believed in the sublime power of nature.

Form and Structure

- **Broken sonnet form** – used by Shelley to show that nothing created by humans lasts, it always changes over time.
- **Irregular Rhyme scheme** – shows Ozymandias' attempt to have control but his failure to do so
- **Second hand narrative** The poem is recounted by a speaker, recalling another speaker's tale, from a land we don't know and a time long ago = huge distance between us and Ozy = highlights how unimportant he now is

Language

- **Metaphor** – “**Shattered visage**” “**Trunkless legs**” = the broken statue is a symbol of how power fades. Ozy has been reduced to body parts & nothing is left of his power & status now.
- **Metaphor** – “**boundless and bare The lone and level sands stretch far away**” = the desert sands symbolise the power & enormity of Nature, in contrast to mankind & especially in contrast to the broken statue which is all that is left of Ozy
- Repetition used to show Ozymandias' arrogance “**King of kings**” – this is the name usually given to Christ, showing Ozymandias' hubris
- “**Sneer of cold command**” – harsh alliterative sound highlights Ozymandias' harsh nature
- “**Colossal wreck**” - oxymoron highlights Ozymandias' failure remain powerful despite the statue's size

Message:

However important a man may believe he is, time and nature will outlive him. Shelley wants us to feel a sense of disgust and hatred for Ozymandias and to agree with him that the ruling classes are not as great as they might think they are. He wants us to question societies that allow those of a higher status to abuse those beneath them.

Ozymandias

By Percy 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".



Exposure OWEN

Themes

Power of Nature
Conflict
Loss and absence

Summary In this poem, Owen writes from the perspective of a soldier in the trenches in WW1. The soldiers are under attack from brutal weather conditions, which currently seem more of an enemy than the German gunfire. The soldiers are suffering & dying of 'exposure' and it doesn't change anything at all.

Context

- Poet was a soldier in WW1 and died in battle. Owen said of his poetry, "My subject is war, and the pity of war."
- He was very critical of those in charge during war and felt war was pointless.

Form and Structure

- Repetition of hopeless statements ("**But nothing happens**") highlights the lack of change for soldiers and the futility of war
- Present tense makes us feel their hopelessness.
- Para-rhymes give an uncomfortable feel. "**faces**" and "**fusses**"
- Half rhymes (slant rhymes) create a sense of disharmony and discomfort, mirroring the harsh conditions of battle.

Language

- **Personification** of the weather as a crazy & brutal enemy attacking the soldiers – '**knife us**' '**mad gusts**' '**dawn...army**' highlights the relentless suffering of soldiers in the trenches & suggests that war has turned Nature itself into an enemy. The soldiers of lost all real sense of who and what they are fighting for.
- **Images of death** – soldiers are described as '**ghosts**' as if they are already dead.
- '**Love of God seems dying**' – soldiers are losing their faith in God because they think that He has forgotten them & doesn't care about their suffering.
- **Repetition of 'Is it that we are dying?'** The soldiers realise that they are dying but are powerless to prevent it. It is like they have given up the will to live, and see death as a release from suffering.

Message: war is futile – however much the soldiers fight and however long they wait & suffer, nothing really happens. Soldiers were **exposed** to dreadful conditions, but many of their letters home were censored so the people at home didn't always realise how bad things were. Owen is **exposing** (revealing) the terrible reality in his poem, as the soldiers die of **exposure to nature**.

Exposure

By Wilfred Owen

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife 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 gray,
But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause and renew,
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with lingering 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;
Now ever suns 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.

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



Storm on the Island

HEANEY

Themes

Power of Nature
Human Power
Fear

Summary Heaney describes a storm on the coast of Ireland. There is a history of big storms on the island & this affects the way the people on the island behave and feel. They continue to realise that, however much they prepare, the storms are always going to be stronger than they are

Context

- Poet grew up in rural Ireland, famous for its bad weather.
- Heaney is Irish – known for the “troubles” - the poem could be a metaphor for how people in Ireland have to accept conflict as part of their lives and not let it affect them

Form and Structure

- Takes us on a journey from islanders under-estimating storm & thinking they are prepared; through onslaught and into fear & uselessness/powerlessness
- Poem = **one tightly packed stanza**, a bit like the low houses, and also like islanders huddling.
- **Lines become increasingly narrow as poem progresses & become a funnel shape**, as if everything is shrinking down – like the islanders are shrinking down to protect themselves.
- **Free verse** reflects the uncontrollable power of nature

Language

- **War images/semantic field of battle** – the weather is portrayed as being like an army attacking the island from the air – “space is a salvo” “dives” “strafes” – these images portray the storm like an air battle, with the sky dropping bombs on the island
- **Simile** – “Like a tame cat turned savage” – the storm has made the sea wild & out of control, like a dangerous wild animal
- **Collective pronoun “We are prepared”** puts us in the position of the islanders and encourages us to empathise with their initial feelings of security “**We build our houses squat**”.
- He then **contrasts** this with their increasing feelings of insecurity & fear as the storm continues – “**We are bombarded**” “**It is a huge nothing that we fear**” which encourages us to continue to see ourselves alongside the islanders & to share their realisation that Nature is stronger than all of us

Message:

The message of the poem is that Nature is more powerful than humans, however much we like to convince ourselves that it isn't. Heaney wants us to understand that the islanders are being naïve and over-confident but then to feel empathy for their plight.

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.
This wizened earth has never troubled us
With hay, so, as you 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 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 with the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.



Bayonet Charge HUGHES

Themes

Conflict

Fear

Personal conflict

Summary In this poem, Hughes describes a soldier in WW1 going 'over the top' to charge an enemy trench. He focuses on the chaos and terror of battle, and on how all of the soldier's previous patriotism can't really hold up in the horror of battle.

Context

- Poet briefly served in the RAF before going to Cambridge University.
- In 1914, many men joined the army out of sense of patriotism, believing that the war would be over quickly. Nobody realised at that time just how long & horrific the war would be, and how many people would die.

Form and Structure

- Begins 'in media res' ("**suddenly he awoke**") with soldier following orders.
- **Line lengths vary** to make the poem begin quickly and then slow down.
- **irregular free verse** creates a sense of things being out of control & echoes the chaos & disorder of battle.
- Hughes uses a lot of **enjambment** to create a rushed & disjointed effect & highlight the sense of pace as the soldier runs.

Language

- Natural imagery contrasts war "**green hedge that dazzled with rifle fire**"
- Hare as a **symbol** of the terror & vulnerability of the soldier. "**its mouth wide open silent**"
- Listing gives patriotism less meaning "**king, honour, human dignity, etc**"
- **Metaphor** – '**Terror's touchy dynamite**' – the soldier's fear is compared to a bomb, ready to explode.
- **Metaphor** of the universe being '**Cold clockwork**' - the universe keeps turning; time keeps ticking on like a clock and the universe/world doesn't seem to really care about the war or about the soldier's suffering.

Message: the horror of war has reduced the once proud & patriotic soldier to a creature driven by fear. The soldier is seen as a tiny part of an uncaring universe, suggesting that his suffering is futile. Hughes' message is that the soldier, like the hare, is powerless and a victim of something much bigger than he is, with nobody really caring.

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.



Checking Out Me History

AGARD

Themes

Human Power

Anger

Personal conflict

In this poem, Agard suggests that children's education is Eurocentric, biased in favour of white culture & white history & that education is poorer as a result.

Context

- Poet born in the Caribbean and moved to the UK in the 1970s. He was a touring lecturer for the Commonwealth Institute, travelling to schools throughout the UK to promote a better understanding of Caribbean culture.
- The poem references many black historical figures such as Mary Seacole with the point being that most of us are unlikely to have heard of them all – or have only heard the 'white version' of the story

Form and Structure

- *Italics identify 'hero sections' as they are being emphasised and praised*
- The rhythmic, songlike nature of the poem reflects the oral tradition of passing stories down in song or to a beat. He uses this structure as it is common in Caribbean culture. By turning it into a serious poem it shows he values this tradition.

Language

- Nursery rhyme references show what English history means to him “**Old King Cole**”
- **Metaphor** - ‘**I carving out me own identity**’ – he’s crafting/creating his cultural identity
- **Images of light and vision** – “**beacon**” “**star**” are used to describe the black heroes so they shine out against the idea of a ‘blind’ education system
- ‘**dem tell me**’ - suggests conflict between ‘them and us’ - those in power and those not. By the final line Agard has placed himself in the position of power, using the word ‘**I**’ suggesting he has taken control of his identity & we **admire & respect** this attitude.
- **Patois and phonetic spellings** are used as a statement of Caribbean culture and show a rejection of Standard English.

Message: black culture has value & should be recognised and shared, otherwise we deny much of the population their own cultural heritage. Agard wants us to **condemn** an education system that favours white history. We should feel **angry** that the education system is biased, and **respect** for people who are trying to change this. We might feel complicit in, or affected by, the bias in the education system, as we learn about significant black figures that we might not have heard of before.

Checking Out Me History

By John Agard

Dem tell me

Dem tell me

Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history

Blind me to my own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat

dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat

But Touissant L'Ouverture

no dem never tell me bout dat

Toussaint

a slave

with vision

lick back

Napoleon

battalion

and first Black

Republic born

Toussaint de thorn

to de French

Toussaint de beacon

of de Haitian Revolution

Dem tell me bout de man who discover de balloon

and de cow who jump over de moon

Dem tell me bout de dish run away with de spoon

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 volunteer to go

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



Tissue DHARKER

Themes

Power of Nature
Human Power
Pride
Identity

In this poem, Dharker plays with ideas about human life being like 'tissue' in order to examine the ephemeral nature of human lives, and the idea that humans need to accept wisdom into their lives, understanding that they are ephemeral, which will change things for the better by building community

Context

- Poet has Pakistani origins but born in Glasgow.
- She is interested in global issues, terrorism, religion and identity.

Form and Structure

- The poem is written in **irregular free verse. Irregular stanzas and line lengths** make it feel as if, like human power, the poem can't be controlled and will not last.

Language

- **Extended Metaphor** “Paper that lets the light shine through” “Turned into your skin” = human skin/lives are like tissue paper – delicate & fragile = human life is fleeting and ephemeral
- **Light = symbol of wisdom** humans should accept the wisdom that is the knowledge of the ephemerality of human power. That way, they will be happier
- **“fly our lives like paper kites”** – paper (representing money, finance, government) is shown to control human life. Dharker wants us to break free from this
- **“the shapes that pride can make”** – suggests humans need to stop trying to create permanent structures and should instead create community “a living tissue”

Message: Dharker wants readers to understand the frailty of human existence. She wants us to reflect on the fleeting nature of human life. By accepting that human power is ephemeral, Dharker suggests that humans will be happier and communities will develop that are not divided by borderlines or controlled by power institutions.

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, mountainfolds,
Fine slips from grocery shops
that say how much was sold
and what was paid by credit card
might fly our 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.