

GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE SUPPORT PACK

AQA Anthology of Poetry

**Power and
Conflict Cluster**

Support Pack Includes:

- Glossary of poetic devices
- Thesis statements and golden quotes for all poems
- Poem by poem analysis of language, form, structure and context
- Analysed golden quotes for each poem
- Grade 7-9 model essays for each poem*
- Grid of themes covered in each poem
- Essay advice
- Practice questions

- **Note:** The model essays are about one poem only as a tool to model how to write analytically about a poem.
- In your exam, you will always be asked to write about two poems

Poetic Device	Meaning
Alliteration	Where words that are close together start with the same consonant sound. E.g. "flowing flakes that flock"
Ambiguity	Where a word or phrase has two or more possible interpretations
Caesura	Punctuation in the middle of a line of poetry to create a pause
Dramatic Monologue	A form of poetry that uses the assumed voice of a single speaker who is not the poet, to address an implied audience, e.g. My Last Duchess
Emotive Language	Specific language choices used to make the audience feel a particular emotion
End-stopping	Finishing a line of poetry with the end of a phrase or sentence - and the associated full stop
Enjambment	When a sentence runs from one line or stanza into the next
Form	The type of poetry (e.g. sonnet or ballad) and its features (e.g. number of lines, rhyme scheme etc)
Half-Rhyme	Words that have a similar but not identical end sound, e.g. "crisp" and "grasp"
Imagery	Language which creates a picture in your mind – it includes metaphors, similes and personification
Juxtaposition	When a poet puts two ideas, events or descriptions close to each other to encourage the reader to contrast them. This usually makes one seem better or worse by comparison. E.g. Agard contrasts British and Caribbean history
Metaphor	Comparing one thing to another <u>without using like or as</u> . E.g. "the loose silver of whitebait"
Oxymoron	A phrase which appears to contradict itself, e.g. "marriage hearse"
Personification	Giving human attributes to something which is not human e.g. "My city hides behind me"
Rhyming Couplet	A pair of rhyming lines which are next to each other or form a stanza of only 2 lines, e.g. the final two lines of War Photographer
Simile	Comparing something to something else <u>using like or as</u> . E.g. "the world overflowing/ like a treasure chest"
Speaker	The narrator in a piece of poetry
Stanza	A paragraph in poetry

Golden Quotes

	Thesis	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3
Ozymandias	Shelley presents Ozymandias as a symbol of the futility of human ambition and the transience of power. The poem contrasts the ruler's desire for permanence with the inevitable decay brought by time, ultimately suggesting that all earthly glory is fragile and destined to fade.	Wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command	My name is Ozymandias, king of kings	The lone and level sands stretch far away
London	Blake presents London as a city corrupted by oppression and moral decay, revealing how institutional power and social inequality create widespread suffering. The poem critiques the failure of authority and exposes the deep connection between poverty, exploitation, and the loss of individual freedom.	I wander through each chartered street	Marks of weakness; marks of woe	Mind-forged manacles I hear
The Prelude	Wordsworth presents nature as a powerful and awe-inspiring force that shapes human identity and challenges human pride. The poem explores the tension between the speaker's initial confidence and his growing sense of vulnerability, revealing how encounters with the natural world inspire humility and spiritual reflection.	Small circles glittering idly in the moon	A huge peak, black and huge... upreared its head	A trouble to my dreams
My Last Duchess	Browning presents power and control as destructive forces within relationships, revealing how pride and possessiveness lead to objectification and moral corruption. The poem explores the Duke's obsession with dominance and status, exposing the dangers of unchecked authority and the fragility of human empathy.	That's my last Duchess on the wall	She had a heart... too soon made glad	I gave commands; then all smiles stopped together
Charge of the Light Brigade	Tennyson presents the Charge of the Light Brigade as a powerful reflection on courage and sacrifice, highlighting the tension between heroic duty and the futility of war. The poem explores how loyalty and obedience drive soldiers into inevitable destruction, revealing both the nobility and tragedy of their actions.	Theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do any die	Cannons to the left of them, cannons to the right of them	Into the jaws of Death, into the mouth of hell
Exposure	Owen presents war as a relentless struggle against nature and despair, revealing how soldiers endure physical suffering and psychological torment in a conflict that feels futile. The poem explores the erosion of hope and the sense of abandonment, exposing the harsh reality that death and waiting become the defining experiences of war.	Merciless iced east winds that knife us	But nothing happens	Slowly our ghosts drag home

	Thesis	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3
Storm on the Island	Heaney presents nature as an unpredictable and overwhelming force, showing how human attempts at control are fragile in the face of its power. The poem explores the tension between security and vulnerability, revealing that isolation and exposure heighten both fear and respect for the natural world.	Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale	Spray... spits like a tame cat turned savage	Strange... it is a huge nothing that we fear
Bayonet Charge	Hughes presents the experience of battle as chaotic and dehumanising, showing how instinct and fear overpower ideals of patriotism. The poem explores the soldier's transformation from purposeful action to raw survival, revealing the futility and psychological cost of war.	Suddenly he awoke and was running	Bullets smacking the belly out of the air	King, honour, human dignity, etcetera
Remains	Armitage presents the lasting psychological impact of war, showing how violence continues long after the battlefield through memory and guilt. The poem explores the fragility of soldiers' mental states and the struggle to reconcile personal responsibility with the chaos of conflict, revealing that trauma is an enduring consequence of war.	Probably armed, possibly not	I see every round as it rips through his life	His bloody life in my bloody hands
Poppies	Weir presents grief and remembrance as deeply personal yet universally resonant experiences, exploring the emotional complexity of a mother's response to her child leaving for war. The poem reflects on love, loss, and the struggle to maintain connection, revealing how conflict extends its impact far beyond the battlefield.	Spasms of red paper	The gelled blackthorns of your hair	Your playground voice catching on the wind
War Photographer	Duffy presents war photography as a stark reminder of society's indifference to suffering, exploring the tension between duty and detachment. The poem contrasts the photographer's personal burden with the public's fleeting concern, revealing a world where empathy is temporary and human pain is commodified.	Spools of suffering set out in ordered rows	Running children in a nightmare heat	Reader's eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers
Tissue	Dharker presents human life and structures as fragile and impermanent, suggesting that true strength lies in openness and adaptability rather than rigid control. The poem explores how paper becomes a metaphor for human existence, revealing that power and permanence are illusions compared to the enduring force of nature and human connection.	Paper that lets the light shine through	How easily they fall away on a sigh, a shift	Raise a structure never meant to last
The Emigree	Rumens presents memory and identity as deeply tied to place, exploring how nostalgia and idealisation shape the speaker's sense of belonging. The poem contrasts the warmth of remembered landscapes with the harsh realities of displacement, revealing the tension between personal attachment and political conflict.	I have no passport, there's no way back	I am branded by an impression of sunlight	My city takes me dancing through the city of walls

	Thesis	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3
Checking Out Me History	Agard presents identity as something shaped by the stories we are told, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric history and highlighting the erasure of Black and Caribbean voices. The poem explores the struggle for cultural self-awareness, revealing how reclaiming suppressed histories becomes an act of empowerment and resistance.	Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me	Bandage up me eye with me own history	I carving out me identity
Kamikaze	Garland presents Kamikaze as a powerful exploration of duty, identity, and the human instinct for survival. The poem contrasts cultural expectations of honour with personal values, revealing how rigid traditions can lead to isolation and loss when individual choices defy societal norms.	A shaven head full of powerful incantations	Little fishing boats strung out like bunting	He must have wondered which had been the better way to die

Ozymandias

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_Egz2bDQ0o



Overview

- The speaker meets a traveller who tells him about a statue standing in the middle of the desert.
- It's a broken statue of a king who ruled over a past civilisation. His face is proud and he arrogantly boasts about how powerful he is in the inscription on the statue's base.
- The statue has fallen down and crumbled away so only ruins remain
- **Ozymandias** can be seen as a political statement against any one person/group gaining great power and influence and shows that such power is fleeting and can be lost.
- The poem being framed as a story from a *traveller* again questions the power of Ozymandias' empire as the "King of kings" has been reduced to a story being passed around in chance encounters - where the meeting, who the speaker is and who the traveller are, are deliberately vague to emphasise this point.
- Alternative interpretation – it allows Shelley to distance himself from direct criticism of George III/The Church

Context – The Poet

- Shelley was a **Romantic poet**
- He frequently wrote radical and anti-establishment ideas
- Like all **Romantic poets**, he championed emotion over reason
- He was particularly interested in the overthrowing of monarchies and the ending of absolute power and oppression (inspired by the French Revolution).

Context – The real Ozymandias

- Ozymandias is the Ancient Greek name for the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II.
- He was a great and powerful ruler and wielded absolute power.
- The great riches and advanced civilisation of Ancient Egypt are well known still, yet the actual power associated with this culture has long since vanished.
- Shelley depicts the desert as a barren wasteland which may symbolically represent the pointlessness of great empires.

Ozymandias

It's clear the speaker hasn't even seen the statue himself – this emphasises how unimportant Ozymandias is now.

Semantic field of deterioration – suggests that all power is fleeting and will eventually rot away

Word choices highlight the cruelty of the pharaoh's command. These link to the idea of corrupt monarchs in position of power and Shelley's overall disdain for monarchs.

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

Regular rhyme scheme is interrupted by imperfect rhyme here which links to the overarching theme of decay and corruption.

Suggests the cruel reputation of the pharaoh and all tyrants – tyranny, arrogance etc – survive whilst the power does not. Their only lasting influence is a legacy of cruelty.

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;

Juxtaposition and irony to compare the *passions* to *lifeless things*. Also, juxtaposes *survive* and *lifeless* showing how art can outlast human power, but it can't immortalise that power.

Language choice: is Shelley criticising the kings who place themselves on pedestals/above others?

Deliberately ambiguous – is Ozymandias mocking his people or is the sculptor mocking Ozymandias?

And on the pedestal these words appear:
"my name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty and despair!"

Form of the sonnet is disrupted. The rhyme scheme should be completed this line but is not completed until the following line. This could symbolise the theme of decay by having even a well established poetic form like a sonnet decay and break down.

Irony – Ozymandias would despair to see the state of his empire and power now

Ozymandias' arrogance shines through here – he elevates himself above even other rulers

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away

The ruined statue emphasises how human accomplishments are insignificant compared to the passage of time.

Alliteration (*lone* and *level*) combined with language choices emphasises the feeling of empty space in the surrounding desert. The desert is vast and survives far longer than the statue. All this emphasises the insignificance of the statue and Ozymandias himself.

What

How

Why

Shelley begins by using the historical figure of Ozymandias as a means to explore his view that institutional power was rooted in disdain and domination, revealing a leader who ruled through fear rather than compassion. In this way, Ozymandias could be seen as an allegory for the institutional establishment of the time, who Shelley viewed as morally corrupt, as many of his Romantic contemporaries did.

use of “sneer” conveys contempt, emphasising the disregard the ruler (and those he symbolises) had for those they ruled.

“cold command” uses alliteration to emphasise harshness and emotional detachment.

“wrinkled” ironically hints at age and mortality, foreshadowing the decay that undermines his authority.

Shelley chooses to present this image early in the poem, framing Ozymandias’s character before revealing the ruin of his works, which heightens the irony of his ambition

Wrinkled lip and
sneer of cold
command

Shelley critiques tyrannical leadership and expose its fragility: even the most commanding presence cannot withstand time. This shows how pride and cruelty pervade Ozymandias’s legacy, yet these qualities are powerless against the inevitable erosion of power.



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What

Ozymandias sought eternal recognition, elevating himself above all others

biblical echo of “king of kings” suggests divine authority, amplifying his self-importance. The hyperbolic comparison to the language used to describe Jesus further amplifies the supreme arrogance felt by the character.

intertextual reference to religious language contrasts sharply with the surrounding desolation, creating dramatic irony: the grandeur of the claim is mocked by the ruin it adorns.

Structurally, this line sits at the heart of the poem, acting as a pivot between past glory and present decay

exposes the futility of human ambition—power that once seemed absolute now survives only as hollow words, challenging the illusion of permanence and showing that pride pervades human history, yet time erases all monuments to ego.

My name is
Ozymandias, king of
kings

Biblical reference could be a veiled way to link the corrupt and hubristic view of human power exhibited through Ozymandias and the institution of the Church. In this way, Shelley is able to use the biblical character of Ozymandias to criticise the institutions he opposed, whilst relying on the allegorical nature of the poem as a shield against reprisal



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What

How

Why

By the close of the poem, Shelley is exploring how nature and time outlast all human achievements, reducing empires to insignificance

earthly glory is fragile, and the forces of time and nature ultimately render all ambition meaningless

The words “lone” and “level” evoke emptiness and equality, suggesting that the desert has reclaimed dominance, erasing hierarchies and ambition.

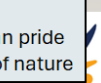
use of “stretch” conveys vastness, dwarfing the remnants of Ozymandias’s statue and reinforcing the theme of transience

Structurally, this closing line acts as a cyclical return to the traveller’s perspective, widening the lens from the shattered monument to the infinite desert, which pervades the poem as a symbol of time’s supremacy

The lone and level
sands stretch far
away

Romantic poets’ bias towards nature and opposition to the industrialising which they saw as the crystallisation of human power

Shelley likely does this to assert his Romantic agenda: to humble human pride and celebrate the enduring power of nature



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Shelley presents Ozymandias as a symbol of the futility of human ambition and the transience of power. The poem contrasts the ruler's desire for permanence with the inevitable decay brought by time, ultimately suggesting that all earthly glory is fragile and destined to fade.

Shelley begins by using the historical figure of Ozymandias as a means to explore his view that institutional power was rooted in disdain and domination, revealing a leader who ruled through fear rather than compassion. In this way, Ozymandias could be seen as an allegory for the institutional establishment of the time, who Shelley viewed as morally corrupt, as many of his Romantic contemporaries did. He captures the arrogance and cruelty of the ruler through the description, "*Wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command.*" The use of "sneer" conveys contempt, emphasising the disregard the ruler (and those he symbolises) had for those they ruled. The phrase "cold command" uses alliteration to emphasise harshness and emotional detachment. Despite this, the word "wrinkled" ironically hints at age and mortality, foreshadowing the decay that undermines his authority. Shelley chooses to present this image early in the poem, framing Ozymandias's character before revealing the ruin of his works, which heightens the irony of his ambition. This allows Shelley to critique tyrannical leadership and expose its fragility: even the most commanding presence cannot withstand time. This shows how pride and cruelty pervade Ozymandias's legacy, yet these qualities are powerless against the inevitable erosion of power.

The ruler's hubris is crystallised in the inscription, "*My name is Ozymandias, king of kings.*" What Shelley is saying is that Ozymandias sought eternal recognition, elevating himself above all others. The declarative "My name is" asserts identity as if carved into permanence, while the biblical echo of "king of kings" suggests divine authority, amplifying his self-importance. The hyperbolic comparison to the language used to describe Jesus further amplifies the supreme arrogance felt by the character. Alternatively, this Biblical reference could be a veiled way to link the corrupt and hubristic view of human power exhibited through Ozymandias and the institution of the Church – a frequent target of Romantic criticism. In this way, Shelley is able to use the biblical character of Ozymandias to criticise the institutions he opposed, whilst relying on the allegorical nature of the poem as a shield against reprisal. This intertextual reference to religious language contrasts sharply with the surrounding desolation, creating dramatic irony: the grandeur of the claim is mocked by the ruin it adorns. Structurally, this line sits at the heart of the poem, acting as a pivot between past glory and present decay. Shelley's agenda to expose the futility of human ambition is on full show here—power that once seemed absolute now survives only as hollow words, challenging the illusion of permanence and showing that pride pervades human history, yet time erases all monuments to ego.

By the close of the poem, Shelley is exploring how nature and time outlast all human achievements, reducing empires to insignificance. This is not surprising given the Romantic poets' bias towards nature and opposition to the industrialising which they saw as the crystallisation of human power. The final image, "*The lone and level sands stretch far away,*" delivers the poem's ultimate verdict on power. The words "lone" and "level" evoke emptiness and equality, suggesting that the desert has reclaimed dominance, erasing hierarchies and ambition. The use of "stretch" conveys vastness, dwarfing the remnants of Ozymandias's statue and reinforcing the theme of transience. Structurally, this closing line acts as a cyclical return to the traveller's perspective, widening the lens from the shattered monument to the infinite desert, which pervades the poem as a symbol of time's supremacy. Shelley likely does this to assert his Romantic agenda: to humble human pride and celebrate the enduring power of nature. This supports the thesis because it shows that earthly glory is fragile, and the forces of time and nature ultimately render all ambition meaningless.

Shelley presents Ozymandias as a cautionary emblem of power's impermanence. The poem interrogates the human desire for legacy, revealing how pride pervades ambition yet collapses under the weight of time. By contrasting the ruler's boast with the barren sands, Shelley fulfils his agenda: to dismantle illusions of permanence and remind readers that nature, not man, holds the final authority. *Ozymandias* therefore exposes the futility of human ambition and the inevitable decay that shadows all power.

London

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHp8eVi27Nw>



Overview

- The speaker describes a walk around the city of London.
- He observes that everywhere he goes, the people he meets are affected by misery and despair.
- The misery cannot be escaped, even by the young and innocent.
- People in power (like the church, the monarchy and wealthy land owners) seem to be behind the problems and do nothing to help the people in need.

Context – The Poet

- Blake was a **Romantic poet**
- He believed strongly in the idea of revolution, believing rebellion against oppressors was both inevitable and morally right
- Like all **Romantic poets**, he championed emotion over reason
- He was particularly interested in the overthrowing of monarchies and the ending of absolute power and oppression (inspired by the French Revolution).

Form and Structure

- The poem is a dramatic monologue
- The ABAB rhyme scheme is unbroken
- The first two stanzas focus on people. The 3rd stanza focuses on the institutions he holds responsible. The final stanza returns to focusing on people.

The first-person speaker personalises the suffering and forces the reader to connect more with the passionate presentation of the suffering.

The unbroken rhyme scheme could echo the relentless misery of the city.

The initial focus on people is likely to gain the reader's sympathy so they are more inclined to blame the institutions which are then highlighted. Ending with the people, and some of the most vulnerable like new-born babies, makes it clear that the readers should focus on the people around them and try to help their suffering. This also emphasises the cyclical nature of the suffering, further suggesting this misery is never ending.

Key Quotation:

The **mind-forged manacles** I hear:

Connotations of slavery.

The manacles are a creation of the mind. **Whose** mind is deliberately vague. Are they of their own creation, or have they been forged by other people and forced on the oppressed?

Forged seems to refer to blacksmithing, the production of the manacles of the mind, but could also make the reader think of *forgery* playing in to the idea that the manacles are fake or untrue – they are the creation of the mind and not real.



The overall effect of the quotation suggests the people of London are enslaved by chains which are not physically real, but are the products of the imagination.

London

Language choice implies a degree of purposeless. Could reflect how he feels powerless to effect what is happening

Repetition could reflect the speaker's frustration at everything in the city (even a great natural feature like the river) is now owned.

Repetition but playing on the dual meaning of mark to mean *notice* and *stain*. Emphasises the effect on the reader and the speaker

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.

Clearly shows everyone in the city is affected and stained by the misery

Repetition of **every** throughout highlights the universal effects of the oppression. Also creates a sense of bleakness as there is no escape from the despair.

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:

Hellish imagery used to emphasise to the reader how horrific this is.

Use of the definite article creates an **archetype** rather than an individual character to emphasise the universal nature of the oppression and despair.

How **the** chimney-sweepers cry
Every **black'ning** church appals,
And **the** hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in **blood** down palace walls.

Contrasting image of black and red refer to the French Revolution. When combined with the imagery of decaying religion and blood spilt against the walls of the monarch, this could also imply a revolt like the French Revolution could happen in London. Blackening could also refer to the stone churches being stained by the industrial revolution's pollution. Is the city being stained/blackening? Just the institution of the church?

Juxtaposition of a prostitute's curse against a baby's cry suggests the immediate corruption of the innocent.

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the **youthful harlot's** curse
Blasts the **new-born infant's** tear,
And blights with plague the **marriage** hearse.

Oxymoron of marriage (happy, joy, children) with hearse (death, mourning) further suggests the inevitable corruption, decay and destruction of anything good and innocent.

What

power in London is oppressive and unnatural.

How

seems to challenge the reader's complacency and provoke anger at the moral decay caused by such control.

Why

"wander" suggests vulnerability and lack of purpose, contrasting with the rigid control implied by "chartered."

I wander through
each chartered
street

repetition of "chartered" later in "chartered Thames" is striking because it applies to a natural river, symbolising how even nature is dominated by human systems of ownership.

By highlighting the unnatural control over the Thames, Blake condemns a society obsessed with profit and authority and the associated power that gives privileged society over the oppressed

oxymoron between freedom and restriction reflects Blake's critique of institutional power:



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What

emphasises the physical and psychological impact of the power inequity in his society.

convey the physical and emotional scars of oppression

institutional power manifests in everyday life, leaving no one untouched

How

These marks are not self-inflicted but imposed by systemic forces—poverty, exploitation, and neglect

Why

Because of his agenda to expose the hypocrisy of institutions like the Church and the monarchy, which claimed moral authority while allowing widespread suffering

repetition of "marks" suggests permanence, as if suffering is etched into the faces of London's inhabitants

Marks of
weakness;
marks of woe

By making these marks visible, Blake forces readers to confront the consequences of a society that prioritises power and wealth over compassion, fulfilling his revolutionary aim to awaken social conscience.

alliteration of "weakness" and "woe" reinforces the sense of fragility and despair

evoke empathy and outrage, urging readers to recognise the moral failure of a society that allows such degradation.

semantic field of pain highlights the human cost of social inequality

What

authority: it does not merely restrict bodies but colonises minds, perpetuating cycles of obedience and despair through the power disparity.

reveals how power operates invisibly, shaping consciousness and eroding freedom.

How

Why

The word "manacles" suggests chains and imprisonment, but by describing them as "mind-forged," Blake implies that oppression is not only physical but psychological

Mind-forged
manacles I hear

This supports Blake's agenda to challenge the ideological control of the ruling classes. He believed that true freedom required breaking these mental chains and rejecting the false morality imposed by corrupt institutions.

implicit links between 'forged' and 'forgery' could anchor the idea that the 'manacles' are themselves not real, simply something created by the corruption of society.

"I hear" makes this oppression almost tangible, as if the speaker is surrounded by the echo of mental bondage.

"forged" carries connotations of hard and laborious work, further highlighting how these manacles have been manufactured rather than being a naturally occurring state of society.



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How does *London* explore ideas about power?

Blake presents London as a city corrupted by oppression and moral decay, revealing how institutional power and social inequality create widespread suffering. The poem critiques the failure of authority and exposes the deep connection between poverty, exploitation, and the loss of individual freedom.

Blake begins the poem by foregrounding the tension and corruption of authority and its intrusion into every aspect of life, supporting the thesis that power in London is oppressive and unnatural. “I wander through each chartered street”, immediately establishing a tone of aimless observation. The choice of “wander” suggests vulnerability and lack of purpose, contrasting with the rigid control implied by “chartered.” The repetition of “chartered” later in “chartered Thames” is striking because it applies to a natural river, symbolising how even nature is dominated by human systems of ownership. This oxymoron between freedom and restriction reflects Blake’s critique of institutional power: laws and property rights have commodified the city, stripping away liberty. This supports Blake’s agenda as a radical poet who opposed the industrial and political systems of his time, believing they enslaved both people and nature. By highlighting the unnatural control over the Thames, Blake condemns a society obsessed with profit and authority and the associated power that gives privileged society over the oppressed, aligning with his vision of spiritual and social liberation. His choice of language seems to challenge the reader’s complacency and provoke anger at the moral decay caused by such control.

Because of his agenda to expose the hypocrisy of institutions like the Church and the monarchy, which claimed moral authority while allowing widespread suffering, as the poem progresses, Blake emphasises the physical and psychological impact of the power inequity in his society. Blake uses the phrase “marks of weakness; marks of woe” to convey the physical and emotional scars of oppression. The repetition of “marks” suggests permanence, as if suffering is etched into the faces of London’s inhabitants. The alliteration of “weakness” and “woe” reinforces the sense of fragility and despair, while the semantic field of pain highlights the human cost of social inequality. These marks are not self-inflicted but imposed by systemic forces—poverty, exploitation, and neglect. By making these marks visible, Blake forces readers to confront the consequences of a society that prioritises power and wealth over compassion, fulfilling his revolutionary aim to awaken social conscience. Blake’s choice to present suffering as visible and universal supports the thesis by showing how institutional power manifests in everyday life, leaving no one untouched. His purpose is to evoke empathy and outrage, urging readers to recognise the moral failure of a society that allows such degradation.

Towards the end of the poem, Blake reveals how power operates invisibly, shaping consciousness and eroding freedom. The metaphor “mind-forged manacles” is one of Blake’s most powerful critiques of authority. The word “manacles” suggests chains and imprisonment, but by describing them as “mind-forged,” Blake implies that oppression is not only physical but psychological. People have internalised the constraints imposed by institutions—church, monarchy, and government—so that their own thoughts become instruments of control. Additionally, the implicit links between ‘forged’ and ‘forgery’ could anchor the idea that the ‘manacles’ are themselves not real, simply something created by the corruption of society. This is further anchored through the fact that ‘forged’ carries connotations of hard and laborious work, further highlighting how these manacles have been manufactured rather than being a naturally occurring state of society. The use of “I hear” makes this oppression almost tangible,

as if the speaker is surrounded by the echo of mental bondage. This supports Blake's agenda to challenge the ideological control of the ruling classes. He believed that true freedom required breaking these mental chains and rejecting the false morality imposed by corrupt institutions. By exposing this invisible power, Blake urges readers to recognise and resist the systems that enslave both body and mind thus exposing the insidious nature of authority: it does not merely restrict bodies but colonises minds, perpetuating cycles of obedience and despair through the power disparity.

Blake's *London* presents power as corrupt, pervasive, and destructive. Through images of chartered streets, visible marks of suffering, and psychological chains, the poem critiques the institutions that exploit and dehumanise the poor, challenging the moral hypocrisy of a society that claimed progress while perpetuating oppression. Ultimately, the poem suggests that true power lies not in authority but in the ability to resist and imagine freedom beyond the "manacles" of the mind.

Extract from The Prelude

Overview

- The poet is remembering an incident from his childhood when he took a boat that did not belong to him and rowed out into the lake at dusk, only to be overcome by a growing sense of dread (perhaps mixed with guilty conscience for stealing a boat) as he neared the lakeside cliffs.
- One cliff in particular seemed to tower threateningly over him. Although he returned safely to shore, for many days afterwards he could not shake off the sensation of a 'force' having chased him home.
- Of course Extract from The Prelude: Stealing a Boat isn't just about a boy taking a dinghy out for a quick spin around a lake. Wordsworth is exploring a key event in his life that developed him both mentally and spiritually. This experience teaches him that nature holds authority over humanity and that, although we are part of nature, sometimes we can be made to feel very small and insignificant by the natural world.
- Wordsworth also realises that once an event has happened, it doesn't mean it's over. The experience stayed with him for days afterwards just as a traumatic event can affect an individual for their whole lives.
- Another theme evident in the poem is solitude. Wordsworth is alone throughout the boat stealing experience and this loneliness is repeated throughout The Prelude. It suggests that he feels things more deeply when alone. Isolation allows him the time and space to ponder more deeply upon events and understand how he has been affected by them.
- The other key feature of the poem is the night time setting. Wordsworth seems to suggest that you can sometimes experience feelings and events more vividly at night. This is connected to the theme of loneliness as night is often a time when we are alone with our thoughts.

Context – The Poet

- This poem is an epic narrative poem written in blank verse (no rhyme, no rhythm)
- Wordsworth was part of the 18th Century Romantic Movement
- He opposed the increasing industrialisation of the countryside
- Epic poetry was used at a time before printing presses and industrialisation so poets could remember their poems. Wordsworth's use of it could represent a desire to return to a pre industrialisation world

Form and Structure

- There are no Stanzas – makes it seem like a continuous story
- Caesura and Enjambment are used to help with reading
- The extract is a complete story in itself
- These all contribute to it being an epic poem – an older form of poetry – which represents the poet's desire to return to a pre-industrial time

Extract from the Prelude

Link to context: The Child's building panic at the 'monstrous cliff' could represent Wordsworth's panic about the destruction of nature from industrialisation.

Repetition of "And" gives a breathless quality and suggests this is being told verbally as a story. Could also represent the fear and nervousness of the speaker.

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

Repetition shows the panic is building in the child.

Personification contributes to child's growing panic and build up a picture of a monster in his mind.

What

How

Why

Wordsworth illustrates the tension between confidence and humility that runs through the poem.

create a sense of calm and innocence



combination of the words “small” and “glittering” suggest beauty and delicacy, while “idly” conveys a carefree, almost playful tone.

“Small circles
glittering idly in
the moon”

Wordsworth uses this gentle imagery to contrast with the later, darker descriptions, emphasising the shift from security to vulnerability.

idyllic description reflects the speaker's initial confidence and harmony with nature

to show how human pride—represented by the speaker's sense of control—can be unsettled by nature's hidden power.

moonlight adds a spiritual dimension, hinting at nature's purity and transcendence



What

How

Why

As the poem develops, Wordsworth emphasises the unparalleled power of nature, contrasting it against the fragility of human endeavour as many of his Romantic contemporaries did.

how encounters with nature provoke humility and reshape identity.



The tone changes dramatically emphasising how erroneous the earlier perception was

A huge peak, black
and huge...
upreared its head

uses this moment to challenge human arrogance: the speaker realises that his confidence in mastering nature was an illusion.

repetition of “huge” and the stark adjective “black” create an image of overwhelming, almost menacing power.

this reflects Wordsworth's Romantic agenda: to present nature as sublime—a force that inspires awe and spiritual reflection, reminding humanity of its smallness.

“upreared” personifies the mountain as a living force, suggesting that nature is active and dominant rather than passive further highlighting its power



What

How

Why

nature is not only vast and physical but also spiritually profound, capable of altering perception and identity.

that contrasting the relative fragility of human power against the eternal power of nature leads to humility and introspection.



“trouble” conveys lingering unease, suggesting that the encounter was not just physical but deeply psychological.

A trouble to
my dreams

Wordsworth uses this to show that true encounters with the sublime leave a permanent mark, humbling human pride and prompting reflection on our place in the universe

“dreams” implies that nature's power extends beyond the external world into the inner self,



How does *Extract from The Prelude* explore ideas about power?

Wordsworth presents nature as a powerful and awe-inspiring force that shapes human identity and challenges human pride. The poem explores the tension between the speaker's initial confidence and his growing sense of vulnerability, revealing how encounters with the natural world inspire humility and spiritual reflection.

At the start of the extract, Wordsworth illustrates the tension between confidence and humility that runs through the poem. This can be seen when he uses the image of “small circles glittering idly in the moon” to create a sense of calm and innocence. The combination of the words “small” and “glittering” suggest beauty and delicacy, while “idly” conveys a carefree, almost playful tone. This idyllic description reflects the speaker's initial confidence and harmony with nature, as if the world exists for his enjoyment. The moonlight adds a spiritual dimension, hinting at nature's purity and transcendence. Wordsworth uses this gentle imagery to contrast with the later, darker descriptions, emphasising the shift from security to vulnerability. His purpose is to show how human pride—represented by the speaker's sense of control—can be unsettled by nature's hidden power.

As the poem develops, Wordsworth emphasises the unparalleled power of nature, contrasting it against the fragility of human endeavour as many of his Romantic contemporaries did. The tone changes dramatically with the appearance of the “huge peak.” The repetition of “huge” and the stark adjective “black” create an image of overwhelming, almost menacing power. The word “upreared” personifies the mountain as a living force, suggesting that nature is active and dominant rather than passive further highlighting how its power is developing within the narrative of the poem. This sudden shift from gentle moonlit circles to towering darkness mirrors the speaker's psychological transformation—from control to fear. Wordsworth uses this moment to challenge human arrogance: the speaker realises that his confidence in mastering nature was an illusion. Contextually, this reflects Wordsworth's Romantic agenda: to present nature as sublime—a force that inspires awe and spiritual reflection, reminding humanity of its smallness. This desire to glorify the pre industrialised society is even explored on a macro level by Wordsworth's choice to write in the form of epic poetry, itself a style harkening back to a pre-industrialised era of communication. This supports the thesis by showing how encounters with nature provoke humility and reshape identity.

In the aftermath of the experience, the speaker confesses that the memory of the mountain became “a trouble to my dreams.” The word “trouble” conveys lingering unease, suggesting that the encounter was not just physical but deeply psychological. The intrusion into “dreams” implies that nature's power extends beyond the external world into the inner self, haunting the speaker's imagination. This reinforces the idea that nature is not only vast and physical but also spiritually profound, capable of altering perception and identity. Wordsworth uses this to show that true encounters with the sublime leave a permanent mark, humbling human pride and prompting reflection on our place in the universe thus emphasising how vulnerability leads to growth and spiritual awareness and anchoring the idea that contrasting the relative fragility of human power against the eternal power of nature leads to humility and introspection.

Wordsworth's *Extract from The Prelude* explores power as something that belongs to nature rather than humanity. Through contrasting imagery—from gentle moonlit circles to the towering, “black and huge” peak—and through the psychological aftermath of the experience, Wordsworth reveals that human pride is fragile when confronted with the sublime. Contextually, this reflects the Romantic belief that nature is a source of spiritual truth and moral education, capable of inspiring humility and shaping identity. Ultimately, the poem suggests that power lies not in domination but in recognition of forces greater than ourselves.

My Last Duchess

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9h_csKEwxg



Overview

- The speaker, a duke, points out a painting of his former wife, inviting the listener to admire its lifelike quality
- The speaker implies the wife may have flirted with the painter, and been too flirtacious with people besides her husband.
- The duke believes the wife should have been more grateful for the gift of the power he bestowed upon her by marrying her and making her a duchess.
- The duke hints that he may have had the wife killed, and then discusses meeting the listener's master – a count – who's daughter the duke now plans to marry.

Context – The Poet

- Many of Browning's monologues express criticisms of social norms.
- He was fascinated with Italy and travelled there. He may have been inspired by the real life of Countess Lucrezia who died under suspicious circumstances (the rumour is she was poisoned)
- He was inspired by Romantic Poetry

Form and Structure

- The poem is a **dramatic monologue** written in iambic pentameter
- There are rhyming couplets
- There is frequent enjambment and caesura

This reinforces the impression that the duke is in conversation with his visitor. It also links to the theme of power as we are only told events from his point of view, as he was a wealthy man and therefore had the power to make his version of events the only 'truth' that was accepted.

These suggest a desire for control

Which undoes the control of the couplets to suggest the duke gets carried away with his anger and passions – building up a picture of an unstable character, obsessed with power and an unreliable narrator.

My Last Duchess

Suggests he *owned* the duchess, not just the painting. The use of 'last' also implies that she is one in a line of women and easily replaced. Speaks to the power he has over her.

Language creates the impression of a question from the visitor, but we only hear it through the duke. He is in complete control of the conversation

Reference to death is out of place and hints at the violence of her death

The duke thinks it's obvious that his affection and wealth should be worth more than the beauty of nature.

He clearly thinks his title and aristocracy are a gift she should have valued.

The Duke's arrogance shows through again – he considers himself so important he wouldn't even lower himself to teaching his wife how to be a better duchess (in his eyes)

Sudden topic shift back to the quality of the painting shows how unfeeling he is about her death. He has shown more feeling (anger) at her perceived infidelity than at her passing.

He's talking about the object of the conversation here, but language choice hints at his continued perception of women as objects to be bought (with a "dowry") – furthering the interpretation that the poem is a criticism of Victorian marriage practices.

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 your 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 were asking 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 what'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 this mark' – and if she let Herself to be lessened 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' 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!**

Speaker asks the listener a question, but immediately begins to talk again – they are given no chance to respond as he has all the power in the conversation.

The Duke is controlling even who has access to the painting/image of the duchess.

Means *if they dare*. Suggests people were aware/scared of his temper. Also shows the duke's own sense of self importance

The duke saw her wife as too free with her affections towards other men. He is building up the implication that as a member of the upper class, his affections are more valuable than those of 'lesser' men and she should have been more grateful.

Caesuras are getting longer and more jarring as he becomes more angry and loses control

Language choice emphasises how he viewed her as an object or his property.

Hints at her murder. 'I gave commands' sounds cold and cynical – he felt no emotion at ordering her assassination

Ending on a personal pronoun emphasises his self-centred nature.

What

Browning immediately establishes the Duke's power through his objectification of the Duchess, presenting her as a possession rather than a person.

How

The demonstrative pronoun "that" and the possessive "my" reduce the Duchess to an object, while the phrase "on the wall" suggests she is now part of his curated collection, stripped of agency and voice.

*"That's my last
Duchess on the wall"*

use of **dramatic monologue** is crucial here: the Duke controls the narrative entirely, and the reader only hears his perspective, mirroring the way he controls how the Duchess is remembered

The Duke's desire to dominate not just people, but the perception itself is further reinforced through Browning's choice of **rhymed couplets** which create a polished, almost rehearsed tone, suggesting the Duke has told this story many times.

Browning invites the reader to question the morality of a man who values control over compassion. The objectification here is not just personal but symbolic of wider patriarchal attitudes, making the reader reflect on how women have historically been silenced and displayed.

English
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What

The Duke's hubris is revealed in his criticism of the Duchess's joyful nature, which he interprets as a failure to worship him exclusively.

How

The ellipsis conveys a moment of hesitation or suppressed emotion, suggesting that even recalling her joy unsettles him.

*line "She had a
heart... too soon
made glad"*

"too soon" implies that her happiness was indiscriminate and therefore unacceptable, revealing his arrogant belief that her affections should be reserved solely for him.

Browning uses this to explore how power, when rooted in ego, becomes tyrannical.

enjambment here reflects the Duke's emotional instability—his thoughts spill over the lines, undermining the control he tries to project.

Duke's obsession with control reflects the dangers of aristocratic pride. For Browning's Victorian audience, this serves as a warning against the moral decay that can result from unchecked male authority. The reader is positioned to see the Duke not as noble, but as deeply flawed—his pride isolates him and ultimately leads to cruelty.

English
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What

implies the Duke ordered the Duchess's death.

How

The Duke's ability to erase the Duchess's presence and replace it with a painting reflects the ultimate abuse of power: rewriting history to suit one's ego.

Why

bluntness of "I gave commands" contrasts sharply with the poem's otherwise ornate language, making the moment feel stark and brutal.

caesura after "commands" creates a pause that mimics the finality of his decision, while the euphemistic phrasing forces the reader to infer the horror, making the Duke's calm tone even more disturbing.

*"I gave commands;
then all smiles
stopped,"*

This moment encapsulates Browning's critique of patriarchal and authoritarian power—when combined with objectification and hubris, it leads to irreversible and tragic outcomes.

use of **ambiguity** here is deliberate: by not stating outright what happened, he invites the reader to engage critically with the Duke's morality.

Browning ensures the reader is left questioning not only the Duke's actions, but the societal structures that allow such figures to thrive.

"all smiles stopped" reduces the Duchess's life to a single consequence of his authority, showing how absolute his control has become.

English
SHARE MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

In *My Last Duchess*, Browning explores the corrupting nature of power through the Duke's objectification of his wife, his hubris, and his chilling control over her life and legacy, using dramatic monologue, structural choices, and subtle language to critique patriarchal authority and aristocratic pride.

Browning immediately establishes the Duke's power through his objectification of the Duchess, presenting her as a possession rather than a person. The line "*That's my last Duchess on the wall*" is deceptively simple, yet loaded with implications. The demonstrative pronoun "that" and the possessive "my" reduce the Duchess to an object, while the phrase "on the wall" suggests she is now part of his curated collection, stripped of agency and voice. Browning's use of **dramatic monologue** is crucial here: the Duke controls the narrative entirely, and the reader only hears his perspective, mirroring the way he controls how the Duchess is remembered. The Duke's desire to dominate not just people, but the perception itself is further reinforced through Browning's choice of **rhymed couplets** which create a polished, almost rehearsed tone, suggesting the Duke has told this story many times. A reader may feel disturbed by the Duke's casual tone and the way he speaks about his wife as if she were a trophy. This discomfort is intentional—Browning invites the reader to question the morality of a man who values control over compassion. The objectification here is not just personal but symbolic of wider patriarchal attitudes, making the reader reflect on how women have historically been silenced and displayed.

The Duke's hubris is revealed in his criticism of the Duchess's joyful nature, which he interprets as a failure to worship him exclusively. The line "*She had a heart... too soon made glad*" shows his discomfort with her warmth and openness. The ellipsis conveys a moment of hesitation or suppressed emotion, suggesting that even recalling her joy unsettles him. The phrase "too soon" implies that her happiness was indiscriminate and therefore unacceptable, revealing his arrogant belief that her affections should be reserved solely for him. Browning's use of **enjambment** here reflects the Duke's emotional instability—his thoughts spill over the lines, undermining the control he tries to project. The Duke's hubris—his excessive pride and self-importance—blinds him to the Duchess's innocence and generosity. A reader might feel sympathy for the Duchess, who is punished for simply being kind and expressive, and anger toward the Duke for his possessiveness. Browning uses this to explore how power, when rooted in ego, becomes tyrannical. In the context of Renaissance Italy, where status and reputation were paramount, the Duke's obsession with control reflects the dangers of aristocratic pride. For Browning's Victorian audience, this serves as a warning against the moral decay that can result from unchecked male authority. The reader is positioned to see the Duke not as noble, but as deeply flawed—his pride isolates him and ultimately leads to cruelty.

Browning's most chilling portrayal of power comes in the line "*I gave commands; then all smiles stopped,*" which implies the Duke ordered the Duchess's death. The bluntness of "I gave commands" contrasts sharply with the poem's otherwise ornate language, making the moment feel stark and brutal. The **caesura** after "commands" creates a pause that mimics the finality of his decision, while the euphemistic phrasing forces the reader to infer the horror, making the Duke's calm tone even more disturbing. Browning's use of **ambiguity** here is deliberate: by not stating outright what happened, he invites the reader to engage critically with the Duke's morality. The phrase "all smiles stopped" reduces the Duchess's life to a single consequence of his authority, showing how absolute his control has become. A reader is likely to feel shocked and appalled by the Duke's coldness, especially as he moves on to discuss his next marriage without remorse. This moment encapsulates Browning's critique of patriarchal and authoritarian power—when combined with objectification and hubris, it leads to irreversible and tragic outcomes. The Duke's ability to erase the Duchess's presence and replace it with a painting reflects the ultimate abuse of power: rewriting history to suit one's ego. Browning ensures the reader is left questioning not only the Duke's actions, but the societal structures that allow such figures to thrive.

Through the Duke's voice, Browning exposes the dangers of power rooted in pride and control. By using dramatic monologue, structural precision, and subtle language, he critiques the objectification of women and the destructive consequences of hubris, ensuring the reader is both emotionally unsettled and intellectually engaged with the poem's moral questions.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

The charge of the Light Brigade



Overview

- The poem is a narrative retelling of the disastrous charge of a light cavalry brigade into a wall of enemy cannon, resulting in horrendous losses
- The poem looks at themes of:
 - Glory of War
 - Courage
 - Heroism
 - Duty
- People have said that the poem is more interested in creating national heroes than protesting war.

Context – The Poet

- Tennyson was the Poet Laureate when he wrote the poem
- He was asked to preserve the memory of the battle in a poem
- The poem was published in 1854, just 6 weeks after the battle took place

Context – The Crimean War

- The Crimean War (1854-1856) was a conflict between Russia and Britain
- It was the first 'modern war'
- It was the first time newspapers carried eye witness reports of war, making the information accessible to the public.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?

[No Title]

Form and Structure

- 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' is written with the same rhythm throughout. The terminology for this rhythm is dactylic dimeter. The underlined words are stressed, this means that you put more emphasis on them.
- This meter is called a 'falling' rhythm. This is used by the poet to represent the soldiers falling to their deaths. Additionally, the rhythm and meter sound like drumbeats/ horse hooves/ cannon fire – all things connected to war
- Stanzas 1-3 have a strong, regular structure – representing the tight formation of the cavalry as they charge, but the structure breaks down in Stanza 4 as the cavalry reach the guns and the battle plan falls apart

The Charge of the Light Brigade

Metaphor for the battleground. Suggests that death surrounds the soldiers like the walls of a valley. They cannot escape it.

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.

Repetition creates a sense of doom.

Rhetorical question – shows the soldiers understand the danger, but follow their orders. The poet admires the bravery of the men.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Someone had blunder'd:
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.

Repetition and rhyme shows soldiers' sense of duty. They follow orders without question.

Repetition to show the relentlessness of the charge. Links to Valley of Death metaphor – they are surrounded by danger.

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.

Shows they made their retreat but the use of 'not' stresses that there are no longer 600 living soldiers.

Rhetorical question – the poet does not think their sacrifice should be forgotten. Their sacrifice is symbolic of everyone who gives their lives for their country.

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.

The poet shows the soldiers as heroes.

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

Repetition from Stanza 4. Context link. Whole world was able to see the horror of war for the first time due to newspapers.

What

explores the theme of conflict by presenting the soldiers' unquestioning obedience and the fatal consequences of duty.

How

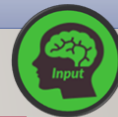
Tennyson highlights the soldiers' lack of agency in war: they cannot question orders or debate their purpose; their role is simply to act, even if it leads to death

Why

Repetition of "**Theirs not to...**" creates a chant-like quality, reinforcing the idea of drilled obedience and inevitability. This highlights their heroism as they did not question their orders despite the suicidal nature of them

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:

uses this to glorify the soldiers' courage. For Victorian readers, this would evoke admiration for noble sacrifice and patriotic duty.



English
SHARAH MUHAMMAD ACADEMY TRUST

What

By placing the soldiers in a crossfire, Tennyson highlights the **heroism** of the Light Brigade, who charge forward despite knowing the odds.

How

Why

Links to Valley of Death metaphor – they are surrounded by danger.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,

As Poet Laureate, had a duty to uphold national pride. This line contributes to a picture of **British resilience**, turning a military disaster into a story of **valour and unity**

Imagery: creates a vivid image of the soldiers being surrounded. This stirs emotional sympathy for the soldiers, who are caught in a deadly situation with no escape. The line mirrors the chaos and violence of war, showing conflict as overwhelming and inescapable.

uses a **falling rhythm**, mimicking the galloping of horses and the relentless advance into battle. This rhythmic intensity reflects the **mechanical nature of war**, where soldiers follow orders despite the danger.

By focusing on the soldiers' advance despite being surrounded by cannons, he highlights their **loyalty and discipline**, not the error of command. This line reinforces the idea that **honour lies in following orders**, even when the outcome is fatal.



English
SHARAH MUHAMMAD ACADEMY TRUST

What

It presents war as both terrifying and glorified, emphasizing the fatal consequences of obedience and duty.

How

Why

Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell

For Victorian readers, this would evoke admiration for the soldiers' unquestioning loyalty and courage, even in the face of certain death.

Metaphor: "**jaws of Death**" and "**mouth of hell**" personify death and hell as monstrous things waiting to consume the soldiers. This imagery evokes a sense of horror, suggesting that the soldiers are being swallowed by forces beyond their control.

"**hell**" carries associations of eternal suffering and punishment, amplifying the sense of doom. This emphasises their bravery for continuing with the charge



English
SHARAH MUHAMMAD ACADEMY TRUST

Tennyson presents the *Charge of the Light Brigade* as a powerful reflection on courage and sacrifice, highlighting the tension between heroic duty and the futility of war. The poem explores how loyalty and obedience drive soldiers into inevitable destruction, revealing both the nobility and tragedy of their actions.

From the outset, Tennyson foregrounds the soldiers' unquestioning obedience through the lines, "*Theirs not to make reply, / Theirs not to reason why, / Theirs but to do and die.*" This triplet crystallises the suppression of individual agency: the soldiers are denied voice and thought, reduced to action and consequence. The repeated possessive pronoun "Theirs" emphasises that these imperatives belong to their role, not their personal will, while the anaphora creates a drumbeat of duty, echoing the rhythm of military orders. The stark monosyllables in "do and die" compress life into a blunt rhythm, conveying the immediacy and inevitability of death. Positioned early in the poem, these lines establish a moral frame for the narrative: obedience precedes the charge and shapes everything that follows. This supports the thesis because it shows how loyalty and obedience—qualities that seem noble—become forces that drive soldiers into inevitable destruction, creating the tension between heroic duty and futility.

As the charge unfolds, Tennyson intensifies the sense of entrapment through the refrain, "*Cannon to right of them, / Cannon to left of them.*" The parallel syntax and phrasing create a spatial map of danger, enclosing the brigade within symmetrical threat. The repeated "Cannon" acts as a percussive beat, mimicking artillery fire and reinforcing the mechanical nature of slaughter. Structurally, this refrain recurs and expands later to include "Cannon in front of them," tightening the vice and escalating tension. This patterning transforms the battlefield into a closing trap, underscoring the inevitability of destruction. This analysis supports the thesis because it demonstrates how the soldiers' courage is heightened by the hopelessness of their situation: they advance despite overwhelming odds, revealing both the nobility of their bravery and the tragic futility of the charge.

At the height of the charge, Tennyson shifts from tactical detail to mythic imagery in the lines, "*Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of Hell.*" Here, the battlefield becomes a monstrous entity, personified as a predator consuming the soldiers. The visceral metaphor of "jaws" and "mouth" suggests not just risk but annihilation, while the religious diction of "Hell" elevates the action to epic scale, aligning the soldiers with classical heroes yet hinting at moral disorder. The repetition of "Into" propels the reader forward, imitating the relentless momentum of the charge and making retreat linguistically impossible. Positioned at the poem's climax, these lines suspend narrative detail in favour of symbolic weight, universalising the tragedy of war. This supports the thesis because it shows how Tennyson frames the soldiers' sacrifice as heroic yet doomed, reinforcing the idea that courage and loyalty lead them into inevitable destruction, which is both admirable and tragic.

Across voice-silencing imperatives, encircling refrains, and mythic predation, Tennyson crafts a poem that honours the Light Brigade's bravery while exposing the catastrophic consequences of unquestioning obedience. The soldiers' loyalty—"not to reason why"—is embedded through anaphora and refrain, driving them into a corridor of fire and ultimately into the symbolic jaws of annihilation. This dual design—human admiration set against mechanised destruction—creates the poem's lasting tension: heroism shines most brightly where survival is least possible. In achieving this, Tennyson asks the reader to remember the soldiers and "honour the charge they made," while recognising the moral and strategic failure that made such honour necessary. The poem does not simply depict conflict; it interrogates it, concluding that the nobility of courage is real, but in the machinery of war, its cost is immeasurable and, all too often, inevitable.

Ultimately, Tennyson's portrayal of the Light Brigade captures the paradox at the heart of conflict: courage and loyalty shine most brightly in circumstances where survival is least possible. By combining imperatives that silence reason, refrains that enclose the soldiers, and metaphors that mythologise their fate, the poem honours their bravery while questioning the cost of blind obedience. In doing so, Tennyson powerfully reflects on the tension between heroic duty and the futility of war, showing that the nobility of sacrifice is real—but its price is immeasurable and, all too often, inevitable.

Exposure

Overview

- The speaker is a soldier serving in the trenches during WWI
- They highlight the dangers faced by the cold, but also the environment itself, and how the cold weather is just as, if not more dangerous than the German soldiers
- Exposure focuses on the theme of passive suffering of the soldiers. One of the central ideas of the poem is the psychological damage done by waiting for something terrible to happen. The suffering caused by anticipation.

Context – The Poet

- Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) is today recognised as one of the leading poetic voices of criticism on World War I, but during his lifetime he only had 4 poems published.
- In 1915 Owen enlisted in the army but by 1917 he had returned to Britain from abroad because he was suffering from shell-shock. Shell shock is a psychological illness caused by exposure to war.
- Owen returned to active duty and won the Military Cross for his efforts, but was killed on the 4th November 1918 in battle.
- He represented the voices of the soldiers in his command and exposed the 'pity of war' through the bleak realism in his poetry.

Context – Trench Warfare

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvYIIuxh2kY>



Form and Structure

- The rhyme scheme is not consistent across the stanza to represent that war is unpredictable.
- Owen's use of half-rhyme creates an unsettling effect, adding to the mood.

Exposure

One interpretation is that the men fighting are being **exposed** to brutal conditions. As well as the obvious dangers of war, these men also have to deal with the extremely cold weather that could kill them (dying from exposure).

On the other hand, some people believe Owen is writing to **expose** the poor conditions that soldiers have suffered during the war.

Exposure

Personification of the weather reflects that the weather is the threat.

"Nothing happens" links to idea of passive nature of their suffering.

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 memories of the salient...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

Last line of each stanza indented to draw attention to it.

Use of pronoun 'We' to show this affects a lot of people, not just the speaker

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?

Alliteration of 'S' sound (sibilance) represents the sound of gunfire.

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.

Repetition suggests how terrified the soldiers are, awaiting their deaths.

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.

Caesura breaks the structure to show that war is unpredictable. Part of their suffering is that unpredictability. They know something terrible is coming...but when?

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 sun 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

Contrasting positive images highlights how negative war is and the soldier's loss of faith

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn:
Nor 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.

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

Weather as threat – tonight some of them will die to the weather.

Metaphor to show they have died. A reversal of personification as here, humans are given the qualities of nature. Could represent that the weather has won.

What

shows war as a relentless struggle against nature, where soldiers experience physical suffering that feels futile, and despair is seeded from the first breath of the poem

How

casts nature as an active, hostile combatant

Why

"merciless" denies any comfort or relief

the soldiers are attacked not only by the enemy but by the environment itself; the weather becomes a weapon

alliteration in "iced east" chills the ear,

the violent word "knife" personifies the wind as a blade—an agent of harm rather than background

"us" collapses the distance between poem and reader, making the pain communal and ongoing

Merciless iced east winds
that knife us

opening with this line establishes a structural agenda where nature dominates the battlefield; it frames the stanza (and indeed the poem) around a conflict with the elements, preparing for the anticlimax of the refrain that follows.

to reposition heroism: survival here is not defined by charging but by enduring.



What

reveals conflict as stasis and psychological attrition rather than dramatic movement

How

the deepest wound of war can be the waiting—a numbing limbo in which fear, cold, and time corrode hope.

Why

By utilising repetition to make this phrase a structural refrain, closing multiple stanzas, Owen uses it as a tool to function as an anti-climax, repeatedly undercutting the suspense built by descriptions of flares, whispers, and "nervous" sentries.

But nothing happens

links to Owen's agenda of criticising the conflict by encouraging the reader inhabit the soldiers' psychological torment: dread without resolution, fear without release.

exposes the futility at the heart of this conflict—nothing changes, yet suffering persists—making waiting and despair the defining experiences of war.

repeated end-line creates cyclical stasis: each stanza's momentum collapses into the same void, mirroring the soldiers' daily monotony and the erosion of hope.



What

the men feel already dead—their identities hollowed out by exposure and abandonment

How

combines to construct an image of the imagined return becomes a haunting rather than a welcome.

shows psychological torment and the erosion of hope, proving that in Owen's war, the men endure not only pain but the loss of self—another face of conflict's futility.

Why

"slowly" imposes a trudging pace;

slowly our ghosts drag
home

The poem's cyclical refrain still looms, so even the fantasy collapses back into "nothing happens."

semantic field of death ("dying," "ghosts," "bury") threads through the stanza to make spiritual death precede physical death.

advances Owen's anti-war agenda by exposing the sense of abandonment: the soldiers are alienated from both the front and the home front, so hope erodes from both directions



Owen presents war as a relentless struggle against nature and despair, revealing how soldiers endure physical suffering and psychological torment in a conflict that feels futile. The poem explores the erosion of hope and the sense of abandonment, exposing the harsh reality that death and waiting become the defining experiences of war.

From the outset, Owen casts nature as an active, hostile combatant in *“Merciless iced east winds that knife us.”* What he is saying is that the soldiers are attacked not only by the enemy but by the environment itself; the weather becomes a weapon. The adjective “merciless” denies any comfort or relief, the polyphonic alliteration in “iced east” chills the ear, and the violent word “knife” personifies the wind as a blade—an agent of harm rather than background. The inclusive pronoun “us” collapses the distance between poem and reader, making the pain communal and ongoing. How he does this is crucial: opening with this line establishes a structural agenda where nature dominates the battlefield; it frames the stanza (and indeed the poem) around a conflict with the elements, preparing for the anticlimax of the refrain that follows. The line’s heavy stresses and harsh consonants grind the pace, mirroring endurance rather than action. Why he does it is to reposition heroism: survival here is not defined by charging but by enduring. This supports the thesis because it shows war as a relentless struggle against nature, where soldiers experience physical suffering that feels futile, and despair is seeded from the first breath of the poem.

As the poem progresses, the refrain *“But nothing happens”* reveals conflict as stasis and psychological attrition rather than dramatic movement. What Owen is saying is that the deepest wound of war can be the waiting—a numbing limbo in which fear, cold, and time corrode hope. The line’s blunt monosyllables and simplicity carry the dead weight of inaction. By utilising repetition to make this phrase a structural refrain, closing multiple stanzas, Owen uses it as a tool to function as an anti-climax, repeatedly undercutting the suspense built by descriptions of flares, whispers, and “nervous” sentries. That repeated end-line creates cyclical stasis: each stanza’s momentum collapses into the same void, mirroring the soldiers’ daily monotony and the erosion of hope. The refrain’s placement after rhetorical questions (“What are we doing here?”) intensifies its nihilism; par rhyme elsewhere (e.g., *silent/salient; us/nervous*) leaves the ear unsettled and dissatisfied, reinforcing the poem’s tonal bleakness. This links to Owen’s agenda of criticising the conflict by encouraging the reader inhabit the soldiers’ psychological torment: dread without resolution, fear without release. This supports the thesis because it exposes the futility at the heart of this conflict—nothing changes, yet suffering persists—making waiting and despair the defining experiences of war.

Later, Owen turns from external assault to spiritual erasure in *“slowly our ghosts drag home.”* What he is saying is that the men feel already dead—their identities hollowed out by exposure and abandonment. The use of “slowly” imposes a trudging pace; “ghosts” metaphorically strips the soldiers of warmth, substance, and belonging; “drag” is a verb of weight and weariness, suggesting that even the idea of home offers no lift. The noun “home” typically promises safety, yet here it is ironised by adjacent lines in the poem where “shutters and doors all closed” imply rejection; all this combines to construct an image of the imagined return becomes a haunting rather than a welcome. How he does it structurally is significant: this line sits within a vision-sequence that reads like a volta from the external trench to the inner mind, as if cold has induced hallucination. The poem’s cyclical refrain still looms, so even the fantasy collapses back into “nothing happens.” Owen’s use of the semantic field of death (“dying,” “ghosts,” “bury”) threads through the stanza to make spiritual death precede physical death. In doing so, he is again able to advance his anti-war agenda by exposing the sense of abandonment: the soldiers are alienated from both the front and the home front, so hope erodes from both directions. This supports the thesis because it shows psychological torment and the erosion of hope, proving that in Owen’s war, the men endure not only pain but the loss of self—another face of conflict’s futility.

Across hostile personification of weather, a refrain of stasis, and ghostly metaphor, Owen redefines conflict as endurance against nature and against the mind's collapse. His choices force the reader into the same trapped temporality the soldiers inhabit. In doing so, he dismantles romanticised notions of combat and insists that war's central experiences are death and waiting, not glory. *Exposure* therefore presents war as a relentless struggle where physical suffering and psychological despair grind hope down, and where the very structure of the poem enacts the futility it condemns.

Storm on the Island

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sgsu_WgO9GY



Overview

- The narrator describes how a community believes it is well prepared for a coming storm
- As the poem goes on, their confidence starts to disappear as the storm develops. The power and the sounds of the storm are described.
- The ending describes the fear as the storm hits the island.

Context – The Poet

- Heaney is one of Northern Ireland's best known poets.
- His poetry is known for its rich, sensory quality.
- He often focussed on topics many could relate to such as family or landscapes

Context – The Troubles

- ★ 'The Troubles' refers to almost 30 years of violence between the nationalists who wanted Independence from the UK and the unionists who believed in strengthening the political ties between Northern Ireland and Britain.
- ★ Armed paramilitary groups, including the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), made Belfast a terrifying place to live.
- ★ The British government claimed that its forces were in Northern Ireland to keep law and order, but Irish republicans objected strongly to the presence of the British soldiers.
- ★ The first eight letters of the title spell out Stormont – the name of the NI parliament building. This hints that the storm could be about the brewing violence and political issues of The Troubles.

Form and Structure

- The poem is written in blank verse
- The first person "we" is used
- The poem is all one stanza

This mirrors the patterns of everyday speech and makes the poem seem like a conversation

This suggests this is a collective, communal experience.

[No Title]

The poem is compact and sturdy, mirroring the houses in the poem.

Storm on the Island

Shows this is the viewpoint of the whole community

Language choice – lots of words about safety and security which is reinforced by the end stopping. This feeling of security is undermined by the caesura in the rest of the poem

The island is barren, but the ironic tone here suggests that even if something did grow, it would just end up being a problem/trouble for them later

Nature is **personified** here as potentially friendly.

The fact that there are *no trees* to provide the company could stress the loneliness of the setting.

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.

Personification emphasises a sense of danger posed by the weather here. Literary context: in Greek drama, the *Chorus* comments on and explains events. Having no trees to act as this chorus suggests the islanders are left on their own to face the storm.

Oxymoron juxtaposes the feelings of fear and safety that the islanders feel

Repetition of key words from earlier reinforces key idea of nature *seeming* safe.

Simile suggests how things which are familiar and trusted can become unpredictable, violent or terrifying during a storm

But there are no trees, no natural shelter. You **might think that the sea is company**, **Exploding comfortably** down on the cliffs But not: 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**.

Military **semantic field** suggests the full force of the storm. Also serves to suggest the storm is like a fighter plane attacking the island maliciously.

Wind, which does a lot of harm is not an actual thing. Could this be a symbolic link to the artificial (or mind-forged) conflict between Christian denominations in NI?

[No Title]

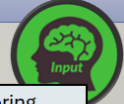
What

How

Why

human security is fragile; despite building solid houses, the islanders cannot silence the storm's voice

remind readers of the futility of human control and to evoke awe at nature's grandeur.



"tragic chorus" to evoke the idea of Greek tragedy, suggesting that the storm is not just a physical event but something with dramatic, almost theatrical significance.

"Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale"

agenda often involved exploring humanity's relationship with nature, showing how it shapes identity and humbles human ambition

Heaney likely does this to remind readers of the futility of human control and to evoke awe at nature's grandeur.

"tragic" conveys inevitability and suffering, hinting that human beings are powerless against this elemental drama.

"chorus" implies a collective voice, reinforcing the overwhelming and communal nature of the storm's power—it is not a single gust but a force that dominates the entire landscape.

By personifying the wind as capable of raising a "chorus," Heaney elevates nature to an almost divine status, reminding readers of its enduring dominance



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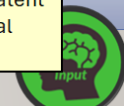
What

How

Why

As the poem progresses, Heaney seeks to unsettle the reader, making them question humanity's dominance and recognise the latent ferocity in the natural world.

the limits of human control and the latent violence in natural forces



isolation exposes the islanders to nature's raw force, stripping away any sense of safety.

"Spray... spits like a tame cat turned savage"

transformation from domestic to wild mirrors the unpredictability of nature: something familiar and seemingly harmless becomes violent and threatening.

Heaney often used natural imagery as a metaphor for instability and conflict, suggesting that both nature and society can turn unexpectedly hostile

juxtaposition of "tame" and "savage" highlights the illusion of control

"spits" carries connotations of aggression and contempt, suggesting that the storm actively resents human presence.



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What

How

Why

At the end of poem, Heaney explores how isolation magnifies fear, revealing that power can exist in absence as much as in presence.

examines how isolation magnifies fear, echoing the existential uncertainty of rural life and, metaphorically, the political tensions of his time

"Strange... it is a huge nothing that we fear"

This line deepens the theme of vulnerability, as it suggests that fear itself amplifies the storm's power—our inability to comprehend or control it makes it more intimidating.

word "strange" signals the unsettling realisation that the storm's power lies not in physical destruction but in its invisible, uncontrollable presence.

emphasises that human fragility is psychological as well as physical

oxymoron "huge nothing" captures the abstract nature of this threat: the wind cannot be seen, yet its effects are immense



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How does *Storm on the Island* explore ideas about power?

Heaney presents nature as an unpredictable and overwhelming force, showing how human attempts at control are fragile in the face of its power. The poem explores the tension between security and vulnerability, revealing that isolation and exposure heighten both fear and respect for the natural world.

Heaney uses the phrase “tragic chorus” to evoke the idea of Greek tragedy, suggesting that the storm is not just a physical event but something with dramatic, almost theatrical significance. The word “chorus” implies a collective voice, reinforcing the overwhelming and communal nature of the storm’s power—it is not a single gust but a force that dominates the entire landscape. The use of “tragic” conveys inevitability and suffering, hinting that human beings are powerless against this elemental drama. This supports the thesis by illustrating that human security is fragile; despite building solid houses, the islanders cannot silence the storm’s voice. Contextually, Heaney grew up in rural Northern Ireland, where communities were deeply connected to the land and vulnerable to harsh weather. His agenda often involved exploring humanity’s relationship with nature, showing how it shapes identity and humbles human ambition. By personifying the wind as capable of raising a “chorus,” Heaney elevates nature to an almost divine status, reminding readers of its enduring dominance. Heaney likely does this to remind readers of the futility of human control and to evoke awe at nature’s grandeur.

As the poem progresses, Heaney seeks to unsettle the reader, making them question humanity’s dominance and recognise the latent ferocity in the natural world. Here, Heaney uses a vivid simile to compare the sea spray to a “tame cat turned savage.” This transformation from domestic to wild mirrors the unpredictability of nature: something familiar and seemingly harmless becomes violent and threatening. The use of “spits” carries connotations of aggression and contempt, suggesting that the storm actively resents human presence. The juxtaposition of “tame” and “savage” highlights the illusion of control—humans may believe they have mastered nature, but its power can erupt without warning. Heaney’s agenda here reflects his fascination with the limits of human control and the latent violence in natural forces. Living through political unrest in Northern Ireland, Heaney often used natural imagery as a metaphor for instability and conflict, suggesting that both nature and society can turn unexpectedly hostile. This image reinforces the thesis by showing that isolation exposes the islanders to nature’s raw force, stripping away any sense of safety.

At the end of poem, Heaney explores how isolation magnifies fear, revealing that power can exist in absence as much as in presence. In the poem’s closing line, Heaney reflects on the paradox of fearing “a huge nothing.” The word “strange” signals the unsettling realisation that the storm’s power lies not in physical destruction but in its invisible, uncontrollable presence. The oxymoron “huge nothing” captures the abstract nature of this threat: the wind cannot be seen, yet its effects are immense. This line deepens the theme of vulnerability, as it suggests that fear itself amplifies the storm’s power—our inability to comprehend or control it makes it more intimidating. Heaney’s agenda was to explore psychological landscapes as much as physical ones; here, he examines how isolation magnifies fear, echoing the existential uncertainty of rural life and, metaphorically, the political tensions of his time. By ending on this thought, Heaney emphasises that human fragility is psychological as well as physical.

Heaney’s *Storm on the Island* portrays nature as a force that dwarfs human strength, exposing the fragility of our attempts at control. The storm dominates through fear as much as force. By interrogating humanity’s relationship with uncontrollable forces—whether natural or political—Heaney reveals how isolation and vulnerability heighten our awareness of power beyond our control. Ultimately, Heaney invites readers to respect the natural world’s unpredictability, reminding us that security is always provisional.

Bayonet Charge

Overview

- Hughes presents the moment where a soldier, charging in to No-Man's Land is suddenly overcome by a sense of profound weakness.
- Ideas like patriotism, honour and bravery seem worthless when confronted by the fear and threat of danger.
- A hare, injured by stray bullets is recognisably terrified and the creature's fear is a universally applicable to response to any animal facing imminent death.

Context – The Poet

- Ted Hughes was affected by war indirectly through the psychological effect it had on his father. His father was one of a small percentage of his regiment that survived WW1.
- He was inspired by poets like **Wilfred Owen**
- He often wrote about the countryside, having grown up in Yorkshire

Context – The Bayonet Charge

- The bayonet charge was a popular method of attack in the early stages of the war but rarely successful. Enemy trenches were heavily defended by machine guns and whole battalions could be wiped out in one fell swoop. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme there were nearly 60,000 British casualties. Of those, nearly 20,000 perished.



Form and Structure

- 3 stanzas split the scene like 3 acts, however there are uneven rhythm and line lengths...
- ... which could reflect the soldier's haphazard progress



Bayonet Charge

Third person used to show the poem presents the soldier's experiences from the outside

Dual meaning – discomfort but also inexperience

Unusual verb choice could reflect the soldier's difficulty seeing due to gunfire

Sensory imagery creates a sense of the soldier's physical experience

Simile suggests his patriotism has been turned to fear and pain. Have heroic ideals been replaced with a painful reality?

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,

Simile implies the rifle disables him or impairs his movements. Emphasises the violence of war. Does it foreshadow his rifle will be useless and he'll be injured in this charge?

Third person used to show the poem presents the soldier's experiences from the outside

Simile creates a sense of distance. Is he seeing himself from the outside? Disconnected?

Also creates an image of someone blind and irrational – could reflect the idea there is no rhyme or reason to war

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 out 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

Metaphor suggests soldier is part of the machinery of the universe – he is not in control

Simile suggests violent or frantic movement.

Could the hare be a metaphor for the soldiers trapped by war?

Simile suggests the soldier is almost turned to stone by the stillness.
Also builds the idea that someone else (sculptor) is in control

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.

Repetition from Stanza 1 suggests the soldier is now back on course

Language choice at the end of a list of 'typical' reasons people fight in war devalues the other items and emphasises the soldier's new priorities - survival

What

Hughes thrusts the reader into a moment of disorientation and panic.

How

use of “Suddenly” conveys abruptness, stripping away preparation or choice, while the word “awoke” suggests a dreamlike state, implying that the soldier has been wrenched from thought into instinct.

the soldier’s experience begins not with heroic resolve but with a jolt into chaos, as if consciousness itself is fractured

Suddenly he awoke and was running

emphasise the dehumanising effect of battle—the soldier is reduced to reflex, his individuality erased by the sheer force of survival.

“and” effectively accelerates the syntax, creating a breathless immediacy that mirrors the soldier’s physical urgency brought on by the conflict he finds himself in.

This shows the transformation from purposeful action to raw instinct, revealing how chaos in conflict overwhelms ideals of honour which are easy to espouse from the comfort of peace time.

Structurally, this opening destabilises expectations: there is no prelude of patriotism or purpose, only a plunge into action, which sets the tone for a poem dominated by confusion and fear

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What

Later, Hughes intensifies the violence of the scene with the visceral image

How

conflict is not only deadly but grotesquely physical, as even the air seems to suffer assault

Why

“smacking” carries a brutal, percussive sound, evoking both speed and aggression, while the phrase “belly out of the air” personifies the atmosphere as a living body being ruptured.

Bullets smacking the belly out of the air

This could immerse the reader in the soldier’s perspective, where violence saturates perception and the natural world becomes complicit in destruction.

“belly,” suggests softness and vulnerability. It mirrors the soldier’s own fragility, reinforcing the idea that everything around him feels exposed and under attack.

exposes the psychological cost of war: the soldier’s reality is distorted into a nightmare of tearing and smacking, erasing any trace of noble purpose.

Structurally, this line occurs mid-charge, amplifying the sensory overload and reinforcing the poem’s chaotic rhythm through harsh consonants and enjambment.

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What

Hughes uses the line as a vehicle to expose that the lofty principles that once justified war now feel hollow and absurd.

How

Why

list begins with grand abstractions—“King,” “honour”—but collapses into “etcetera,” a dismissive term that trivialises what should be sacred. This tonal shift signals the soldier’s mental disintegration: ideals that once inspired him are now meaningless in the face of terror.

King, honour, human dignity, etcetera

critiques the romanticisation of war, exposing how propaganda evaporates under the pressure of lived experience

shows how fear and instinct overpower patriotism, revealing the futility of conflict and the erosion of human dignity

Structurally, this line functions as a turning point, marking the moment where ideology gives way to instinct. Its placement after intense physical imagery underscores the futility of such concepts when survival is at stake.



English
SHARE MULTIMEDIA TRUST

Hughes presents the experience of battle as chaotic and dehumanising, showing how instinct and fear overpower ideals of patriotism. The poem explores the soldier's transformation from purposeful action to raw survival, revealing the futility and psychological cost of war.

From the opening line, "*Suddenly he awoke and was running*," Hughes thrusts the reader into a moment of disorientation and panic. What Hughes is saying is that the soldier's experience begins not with heroic resolve but with a jolt into chaos, as if consciousness itself is fractured. The use of "Suddenly" conveys abruptness, stripping away preparation or choice, while the word "awoke" suggests a dreamlike state, implying that the soldier has been wrenched from thought into instinct. By choosing "and" Hughes effectively accelerates the syntax, creating a breathless immediacy that mirrors the soldier's physical urgency brought on by the conflict he finds himself in. Structurally, this opening destabilises expectations: there is no prelude of patriotism or purpose, only a plunge into action, which sets the tone for a poem dominated by confusion and fear. This could serve to emphasise the dehumanising effect of battle—the soldier is reduced to reflex, his individuality erased by the sheer force of survival. This shows the transformation from purposeful action to raw instinct, revealing how chaos in conflict overwhelms ideals of honour which are easy to espouse from the comfort of peace time.

Later, Hughes intensifies the violence of the scene with the visceral image, "*Bullets smacking the belly out of the air*." What Hughes is saying here is that conflict is not only deadly but grotesquely physical, as even the air seems to suffer assault. The choice of "smacking" carries a brutal, percussive sound, evoking both speed and aggression, while the phrase "belly out of the air" personifies the atmosphere as a living body being ruptured. Furthermore, "belly," suggests softness and vulnerability. It mirrors the soldier's own fragility, reinforcing the idea that everything around him feels exposed and under attack. This grotesque metaphor collapses boundaries between environment and flesh, suggesting that war contaminates everything – even the environment. Structurally, this line occurs mid-charge, amplifying the sensory overload and reinforcing the poem's chaotic rhythm through harsh consonants and enjambment. This could immerse the reader in the soldier's perspective, where violence saturates perception and the natural world becomes complicit in destruction. This supports the thesis because it exposes the psychological cost of war: the soldier's reality is distorted into a nightmare of tearing and smacking, erasing any trace of noble purpose.

Finally, Hughes dismantles patriotic ideals with the bitterly ironic phrase, "*King, honour, human dignity, etcetera*." Hughes uses the line as a vehicle to expose that the lofty principles that once justified war now feel hollow and absurd. The list begins with grand abstractions—"King," "honour"—but collapses into "etcetera," a dismissive term that trivialises what should be sacred. This tonal shift signals the soldier's mental disintegration: ideals that once inspired him are now meaningless in the face of terror. Structurally, this line functions as a turning point, marking the moment where ideology gives way to instinct. Its placement after intense physical imagery underscores the futility of such concepts when survival is at stake. This critiques the romanticisation of war, exposing how propaganda evaporates under the pressure of lived experience. This supports the thesis because it shows how fear and instinct overpower patriotism, revealing the futility of conflict and the erosion of human dignity.

Through abrupt openings, violent personification, and ironic dismissal of ideals, Hughes presents conflict as a force that strips soldiers of humanity and purpose. His use of chaotic syntax, grotesque imagery, and structural shifts mirrors the soldier's psychological collapse, transforming patriotic resolve into primal terror. In doing so, Hughes interrogates the cost of war—not only in lives lost but in identities shattered—concluding that in the crucible of battle, survival eclipses honour, and the ideals that once justified violence dissolve into etcetera. The poem therefore fulfils the thesis: it portrays conflict as chaotic, dehumanising, and ultimately futile.

Remains

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DHWqppktFo>



Overview

- The speaker describes being sent to deal with looters in a Middle Eastern Warzone
- One of the looters flees and is shot down by the speaker and two other soldiers
- The speaker describes being haunted by the images of the looter long afterwards, implying a metaphorical shadow left by the man in the speaker's life, which turning to drink and drugs cannot erase.
- This poem comes from a collection of war poetry called *The Not Dead*. He interviewed many soldiers about real experiences to inspire this poetry.
- The poem is based on the account of Guardsman Tromans.

Context – The Poet

- Simon Armitage's poetry often reflects concern about how people are affected by the violence around them.

Remains

One interpretation is that the title reflects the physical left overs of the conflict – the human remains – emphasising the physical consequences of war

On the other hand, the title could reflect the psychological left overs of the war – the PTSD the speaker is suffering because the traumatic experiences of conflict remains with him even to this day

Remains

Colloquial language shows the soldier's English voice in a foreign land to emphasise his displacement.

The doubt in the final line of the stanza contrasts with the definite action that follows.

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.

This comes as a surprise – the sudden violence doesn't fit with the chatty tone

Repetition suggests he's keen for the reader to know it wasn't just him – does he feel guilt?

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

Poetic voice shifts to "I" – this is now more personal

Violent metaphor contrasts with the colloquial tone of the opening to emphasise the horrific nature of the violence

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**,

An almost child-like use of language. Is the speaker struggling to process it in an adult way?
Is the euphemism a way of reflecting the speaker's inability to face up to the reality of events?

A grotesque use of imagery to stress the horror of the scene. Hyperbole?

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.

Choice of verbs suggests a lack of respect for human life

Metaphor foreshadows the lasting effects the incident will have on the speaker.
Shadows have connotations of dark and death – a shadow hanging over the speaker.

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**

Enjambment reflects the blinking. The horror is still there at the start of the next stanza. This reflects the memory constantly echoing through the speaker's mind – there is no break from it.

Repetition from Line 4 implies he is reliving the events in his head.

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 –

Metaphor compares the memory to a soldier in a trench. What are the connotations of trench warfare? What does this say about the poet's thoughts on the memory?

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,

Violent connotations, suggesting that he cannot escape the memory of the violence – it even affects his choice of words

Is there a dual meaning to "Bloody?" Is he swearing in anger? Or referencing the image of blood on the hands a symbol of guilt?

But near to the knuckle, here and now,
His **bloody life in my bloody hands**.

Use of "my" suggests he is no longer trying to include others in the blame, but feels solely responsible.

What

From the outset, Armitage introduces moral uncertainty by exploring how the soldier's decision to kill is based on guesswork, not certainty, which immediately undermines any sense of moral clarity

This ambiguity suggests that guilt is inevitable because the soldier cannot be sure his action was justified.

How

shows how conflict erodes mental stability and plants the seeds of guilt that will haunt the soldier long after the event.

Why

"probably" and "possibly" create a semantic field of doubt, contrasting sharply with the absolute finality of death that follows.

Probably armed,
possibly not

Through the conversational tone and fragmented syntax, which mimic the soldier's hesitant thought process, Armitage effectively constructs a sense of doubt underscoring the actions

This phrase appears early in the poem, framing the narrative with uncertainty and foreshadowing the psychological torment that dominates later stanzas.

This critiques the simplistic narratives of heroism and patriotism often presented in jingoistic media: in reality, soldiers act under pressure, often without moral assurance.

What

Armitage uses the line as a vehicle to espouse that the act of killing is not abstract but vividly personal;

This reveals the enduring psychological impact of war: the soldier cannot escape the image of destruction, which corrodes his sense of self and deepens his guilt.

How

Why

"rips" is brutal and visceral, connoting savage destruction rather than clean efficiency, while the phrase "every round" slows the moment into agonising detail, forcing the reader to experience the killing frame by frame.

I see every round as
it rips through his
life

This focus on the slowed perception of time and specific details of the violent conflict help to construct a picture of a speaker who is suffering from PTSD and constantly reliving the traumatic psychological event brought about by their part in the conflict

"I" foregrounds the soldier's perspective, intensifying the sense of responsibility and isolation

Structurally, this line marks a shift from collective action ("we") to individual guilt, signalling the beginning of psychological fragmentation.

Armitage effectively immerses the reader in the soldier's trauma, showing how memory fixates on the most violent fragments.



English
SHARE HULL ACADEMY TRUST

What

The poem closes with Armitage exploring the futility of trying to escape guilt.

How

This demonstrates the futility of war: even survival does not bring peace, only enduring torment

Why

The repetition of "bloody" operates on two levels: literally, as a reminder of physical gore, and colloquially, as an expression of frustration and despair. This duality mirrors the soldier's conflicted state—anger at circumstance and horror at consequence.

His bloody life in my
bloody hands

Armitage may have done this to show that war's damage is not confined to the battlefield; it infiltrates the psyche, leaving soldiers permanently scarred.

the metaphor of "hands" evokes the biblical allusion to guilt and responsibility, recalling Macbeth's futile attempts to wash away blood

Structurally, this line functions as a cyclical return to the central trauma, closing the poem without resolution and reinforcing the idea that conflict persists internally long after the external battle ends.



English
SHARE HULL ACADEMY TRUST

Armitage presents the lasting psychological impact of war, showing how violence continues long after the battlefield through memory and guilt. The poem explores the fragility of soldiers' mental states and the struggle to reconcile personal responsibility with the chaos of conflict, revealing that trauma is an enduring consequence of war.

From the outset, Armitage introduces moral uncertainty by exploring how the soldier's decision to kill is based on guesswork, not certainty, which immediately undermines any sense of moral clarity in the line, "*Probably armed, possibly not.*" The words "probably" and "possibly" create a semantic field of doubt, contrasting sharply with the absolute finality of death that follows. This ambiguity suggests that guilt is inevitable because the soldier cannot be sure his action was justified. Through the conversational tone and fragmented syntax, which mimic the soldier's hesitant thought process, Armitage effectively constructs a sense of doubt underscoring the actions. This phrase appears early in the poem, framing the narrative with uncertainty and foreshadowing the psychological torment that dominates later stanzas. This critiques the simplistic narratives of heroism and patriotism often presented in jingoistic media: in reality, soldiers act under pressure, often without moral assurance. This supports the thesis because it shows how conflict erodes mental stability and plants the seeds of guilt that will haunt the soldier long after the event.

The violence becomes disturbingly intimate in the line, "*I see every round as it rips through his life.*" Armitage uses the line as a vehicle to espouse that the act of killing is not abstract but vividly personal; the speaker witnesses life being torn apart in real time. The choice of "rips" is brutal and visceral, connoting savage destruction rather than clean efficiency, while the phrase "every round" slows the moment into agonising detail, forcing the reader to experience the killing frame by frame. The pronoun "I" foregrounds the soldier's perspective, intensifying the sense of responsibility and isolation. Structurally, this line marks a shift from collective action ("we") to individual guilt, signalling the beginning of psychological fragmentation. This focus on the slowed perception of time and specific details of the violent conflict help to construct a picture of a speaker who is suffering from PTSD and constantly reliving the traumatic psychological event brought about by their part in the conflict. Armitage effectively immerses the reader in the soldier's trauma, showing how memory fixates on the most violent fragments. This reveals the enduring psychological impact of war: the soldier cannot escape the image of destruction, which corrodes his sense of self and deepens his guilt.

The poem closes with Armitage exploring the futility of trying to escape guilt. The haunting confession, "*His bloody life in my bloody hands.*" emphasises that guilt is inescapable; the soldier feels morally contaminated by the killing. The repetition of "bloody" operates on two levels: literally, as a reminder of physical gore, and colloquially, as an expression of frustration and despair. This duality mirrors the soldier's conflicted state—anger at circumstance and horror at consequence. The possessive pronoun "my" intensifies ownership of the act, while the metaphor of "hands" evokes the biblical allusion to guilt and responsibility, recalling Macbeth's futile attempts to wash away blood. Armitage may have done this to show that war's damage is not confined to the battlefield; it infiltrates the psyche, leaving soldiers permanently scarred. Structurally, this line functions as a cyclical return to the central trauma, closing the poem without resolution and reinforcing the idea that conflict persists internally long after the external battle ends. This demonstrates the futility of war: even survival does not bring peace, only enduring torment.

Armitage presents conflict as an experience that destroys not only bodies but minds. The poem dismantles romanticised notions of war, replacing them with a portrait of guilt, ambiguity, and psychological decay. By ending with unresolved trauma, Armitage insists that the true cost of war lies beyond the battlefield—in the relentless replay of memory and the erosion of moral certainty. *Remains* therefore portrays conflict as futile and dehumanising, leaving soldiers trapped in a war that never truly ends.

Poppies

Poppies Analysis



Overview

- The poem is about the nature of grief.
- The mother is speaking directly to her son but a son who shifts in time. There is:
 - The son leaving home for school on his own for the first time.
 - The son who has just been killed.
 - Beneath the surface the son dying violently in a field hospital in Afghanistan.
- It is as if all these different versions of her son fixed exist together inside her. When the poem reaches a moment in the present (line 26) she is vulnerable, without protection. The final lines then go back to the past tense "I traced..."
- It is as if the present holds too much pain and her memories can only be expressed if distanced in imagery held safely in the past.
- The poem is set in present day but reaches right back to the beginning of the Armistice Day tradition
- Armistice Day (November 11th) pays tribute to the fallen from all wars.
- Written in response to a request from Poet Laureate Carol-Ann Duffy, who asked several leading poets to write a piece on the suffering and death of war while British soldiers were stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Context – The Poet

- Jane Weir, born in 1963, lived in many places including Northern Ireland during the troubled 1980s.

Form and Structure

- The poem appears to have a strong, regular sense of form. There are four clear *stanzas*
- On closer inspection, there is a great deal of movement within this regular form. Lots of lines have breaks in the middle of the lines - marked by commas or more strongly by full-stops- *caesuras*.
- This variation in form suggests the inner emotion of a *speaker* who is trying to remain calm but is breaking with sadness inside. – like the form, she appears strong from a distance but inside she is breaking apart.
- Rhyme- there is no rhyme as it would add a lively tone to the poem- which wouldn't be appropriate for the content

Poppies

Words such as "spasms", "disrupting" and "blockade" suggest she may be also recalling the violence of his death. The pain of the violent memory has become so fixed in her mind that she cannot help but use violent language to describe mundane things.

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.

Through the detailed description of the blazer is emphasised through **alliteration**. We feel the closeness between mother and child

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,

IMAGERY: The contrast between the death in battle and the domestic happiness (the boy has been cuddling his cat) is powerful.

Metaphor for the mother setting the child free. This then changes into the dove, the symbol of peace – but here the peace the son has found is only the peace of death.

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.

Wishbones connote fragility – suggesting the fragile nature of the speaker's emotions. They are also extracted from a carcass following death, further recalling the violent nature of the son's death

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 end of the poem moves back to the past tense- to reflect that she can only exist if she keeps the memories in the past.

2 possible interpretations. Could mean she can only exist/get by if she buries the memories in the past and tries not to think about them. **However**, it could represent her only being able to survive if she keeps thinking about the happier times in the past.

It could be both and the **oxymoron** would represent the conflicting emotions felt by someone who is grieving.

What

Weir begins by suggesting that even a simple domestic act—pinning poppies—becomes charged with pain and memory, foreshadowing violence

How

This demonstrates how conflict reaches beyond the battlefield, shaping intimate moments with echoes of violence and loss.

Why

“spasms” connotes involuntary movement and suffering, evoking the physical agony of war wounds, while “red” symbolises both the poppy of remembrance and the blood of sacrifice. This duality permeates the poem, merging tenderness with trauma.

Spasms of red paper

Through metaphor and colour imagery, Weir transforms an ordinary object into a visceral reminder of death.

Weir may be exploring how grief infiltrates everyday life, making remembrance unavoidable.

It may be significant that this image appears early, setting a tone of tension between beauty and brutality that frames the mother's emotional journey.



English
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What

As the poem progresses, Weir intensifies the sense of vulnerability by using the son's appearance as a vehicle to evoke danger and fragility simultaneously.

How

love and loss coexist, revealing the psychological cost of separation and the way conflict permeates even tender gestures.

Why

metaphor “blackthorns” suggests sharpness and potential harm, while “gelled” implies deliberate styling—a poignant reminder of youth and normality. This contrast between innocence and menace reflects the mother's conflicted emotions: pride in her son's maturity and fear of his exposure to violence.

The gelled blackthorns of your hair

This could convey the complexity of maternal love under the shadow of war: affection becomes laced with anxiety

Through tactile imagery and natural symbolism, Weir aligns the son with thorny plants that wound when touched.

Structurally, this line occurs as the mother prepares him to leave, marking a turning point where physical closeness gives way to emotional distance and drawing a parallel between the bittersweet emotion of the son leaving, and the physical and psychological pain he and the mother would experience as a result through the reference to the thorns.

What

memory becomes the mother's only connection to her son, yet even this is fragile and fleeting.

How

Why

The phrase “playground voice” recalls childhood innocence, contrasting sharply with the adult reality of war, while “catching on the wind” suggests transience and elusiveness—her son's presence reduced to an echo.

Your playground voice catching on the wind

auditory imagery and personification, gives the wind agency as it carries and disperses the voice, further emphasising the agonising idea of the son being forever just out of reach.

explores how grief is not a single moment but an enduring state, where memory both comforts and wounds, revealing how conflict transforms relationships into recollections, leaving the mother suspended between love and loss.

By placing this line at the close of the poem, Weir is creating a cyclical movement from physical preparation to intangible remembrance, emphasising the permanence of absence.



English
SHARE MULTICULTURAL TRUST

Armitage presents the lasting psychological impact of war, showing how violence continues long after the battlefield through memory and guilt. The poem explores the fragility of soldiers' mental states and the struggle to reconcile personal responsibility with the chaos of conflict, revealing that trauma is an enduring consequence of war.

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The violence becomes disturbingly intimate in the line, *"I see every round as it rips through his life."* Armitage uses the line as a vehicle to espouse that the act of killing is not abstract but vividly personal; the speaker witnesses life being torn apart in real time. The choice of "rips" is brutal and visceral, connoting savage destruction rather than clean efficiency, while the phrase "every round" slows the moment into agonising detail, forcing the reader to experience the killing frame by frame. The pronoun "I" foregrounds the soldier's perspective, intensifying the sense of responsibility and isolation. Structurally, this line marks a shift from collective action ("we") to individual guilt, signalling the beginning of psychological fragmentation. This focus on the slowed perception of time and specific details of the violent conflict help to construct a picture of a speaker who is suffering from PTSD and constantly reliving the traumatic psychological event brought about by their part in the conflict. Armitage effectively immerses the reader in the soldier's trauma, showing how memory fixates on the most violent fragments. This reveals the enduring psychological impact of war: the soldier cannot escape the image of destruction, which corrodes his sense of self and deepens his guilt.

The poem closes with Armitage exploring the futility of trying to escape guilt. The haunting confession, *"His bloody life in my bloody hands."* emphasises that guilt is inescapable; the soldier feels morally contaminated by the killing. The repetition of "bloody" operates on two levels: literally, as a reminder of physical gore, and colloquially, as an expression of frustration and despair. This duality mirrors the soldier's conflicted state—anger at circumstance and horror at consequence. The possessive pronoun "my" intensifies ownership of the act, while the metaphor of "hands" evokes the biblical allusion to guilt and responsibility, recalling Macbeth's futile attempts to wash away blood. Armitage may have done this to show that war's damage is not confined to the battlefield; it infiltrates the psyche, leaving soldiers permanently scarred. Structurally, this line functions as a cyclical return to the central trauma, closing the poem without resolution and reinforcing the idea that conflict persists internally long after the external battle ends. This demonstrates the futility of war: even survival does not bring peace, only enduring torment.

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War Photographer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeZCQlUMQxl>



Overview

- Stanza 1: The photographer is in his darkroom preparing himself mentally and emotionally (like a priest) to develop his photographs. He is reminded of all the pictures he has taken from the many wars he has covered.
- Stanza 2: In his home setting of rural England, the photographer is using chemicals to develop the pictures. He feels far removed from the normalcy of ordinary life after witnessing the horrors of war. Here Duffy contrasts the quiet life of peaceful England with the horrific experience of foreign battlefields.
- Stanza 3: Slowly the image comes to life. It is the face of a man who was killed in front of the photographer. The sorrow of his wife and the blood on the earth are both physical and metaphorical.
- Stanza 4: The photographer has taken hundreds of shots but only a couple will be chosen for the newspaper. These photographs of pain and suffering are presented within the pages of a glossy Sunday supplement. At the end of the poem, the photographer is flying out to another war. A war which people at home choose to ignore.
- The photographer feels deeply upset and has to prepare himself to view the horrific developing images. He feels people in England cannot and do not want to understand the suffering that he has seen. He reflects upon the fact that many people in the West live self-absorbed and insular lives. He is angry at how his job is more about selling newspapers than telling the truth or raising awareness of the issues.
- The end of the poem shows the photographer's contempt for people back home who merely glance at his photos before returning to their lives unaffected. He hates that he is powerless to change things; however he is impelled to continue covering such stories and photographing the horrors of war.

Context – The Poet

- Carol Ann Duffy was the poet Laureate. She is the first Scottish, First female and first openly gay poet laureate.
- Her work often focuses on giving voices to those not usually heard and is often critical of violence
- Duffy's Catholic upbringing means Biblical imagery and language often appears in her work

Form and Structure

- The poem is told in the third person from the point of view of the war photographer. The effect of the third person shows how this man represents all war photographers who have similar experiences.
- Therefore the poet is reporting on someone else's experiences not their own.
- This leaves the reader removed from the man. We are "they", referred to in the final lines? – the ones who look at pictures in newspapers and Sunday supplements?

War Photographer

Regular rhyming couplets reflects the photographer's control when in public

Describes where the photographer is, but the connotations of dark could also hint at the subject matter of the photos

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**.

Metaphor for the spools of film could convey the emotions locked in the images. This also evokes war as the spools of film are described in terms of the soldiers, or possibly like war graves

Semantic field of religion could show the photographer's respectful attitude. **Context link:** reflects Duffy's Catholic upbringing

This is a line from the Bible which means human life is brief and temporary.

Photographer is professional and has a sense of duty. Does he need to put his emotions aside like a soldier does?

Contrast between the photographer's work in combat and at home make the mundane complaints of everyday life seem less severe to him.

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.

He keeps his emotions in check when he is in a warzone but is unable to suppress them once back home. Irony?

Context link to the 'Napalm Girl' photo. Could reflect the importance of the photographer's work as that photo is often credited with ending the Vietnam War



- The metaphor of the photograph developing in a distorted way could convey the haunting nature of the image.
- The focus on the photo and family makes this personal and emphasises the real suffering of war.
- The use of "half-formed" could hint at the subject's body being mutilated

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**.

Emphasises that all this is happening "somewhere else."

Word choice suggests the lasting impact of war

Juxtaposition between "hundred" and "five or six" questions the material and emotional cost of the work

Word choice highlights the small size of the emotional reaction from the reader, especially when contrasted with the more severe imagery of violence and suffering earlier in the poem

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**.

Rhyme of "tears" and "beers" seems to trivialise the tears

Irony: He has become desensitised by his work and has lost faith in people

What

Duffy opens with the haunting image of the photographer's workspace becoming a silent archive of agony, as a vehicle for interrogating the notion that human pain is reduced to objects by the commodification of society

How

the commodification of pain pervades the poem, framing conflict as something organised for consumption rather than felt as raw human tragedy.

Why

"Spools of suffering" fuses the mechanical with the emotional, suggesting that trauma has been captured and contained within film.

Spools of suffering set out in ordered rows

juxtaposition of "suffering" with "ordered rows" creates a chilling contrast: chaos and pain are systematised, hinting at the clinical detachment required for the photographer's role: organizing horror into something presentable, perhaps even consumable.

the "ordered rows" could be representative of the ordered rank and file of military personnel, or even the regimented presentation of war graves, leaving the reader with a chilling sense of foreboding pervading the line and foreshadowing the violence to follow in the text

Duffy is likely seeking to critique how war's horrors are mediated through technology, stripping them of immediacy and intimacy.

the sibilance in "spools of suffering" creates a soft, sinister tone, echoing the quiet horror of the images



English
SHARK HULL ACADEMY TRUST

What

As the poem progresses, Duffy uses the concept of the photographer's images capturing moments of unbearable suffering, evoking iconic scenes of war where innocence is destroyed as a vehicle to intensify the sense of horror

How

the photographer's burden born of his inner conflict: he cannot escape these memories, even as society glances and moves on.

Why

use of "running" conveys urgency and terror, while "nightmare heat" blends sensory detail with psychological torment, suggesting that war transforms reality into something surreal and hellish

Running children in a nightmare heat

This phrase pervades the stanza with a haunting tone, reminding readers that these are not abstract tragedies but lived experiences.

confronting readers with the visceral reality behind the images, challenging the detachment that often accompanies consumption of news.

intertextual reference to famous war photographs such as the 'Napalm Girl' Vietnam Era photograph, which universalises the horror while grounding it in specific suffering.

Because this line appears as the poem shifts from the controlled setting of the darkroom to the chaotic scenes the photographs depict, it reinforces the contrast between order and devastation.

What

By the end of the poem, Duffy is highlighting the contrast between the horror of war and the comfort of domestic life, exposing a moral and emotional disconnect

How

contrast pervades the final stanza, exposing the gulf between the photographer's moral weight and the reader's casual detachment.

Why

empathy is fleeting and superficial; readers indulge in momentary sorrow before returning to comfort and routine

reader's eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers

"prick" suggests a brief, almost painless sensation, undermining the depth of their response

empathy evaporates quickly, leaving the photographer isolated with the burden of truth

juxtaposition of "tears" with "bath and pre-lunch beers" trivialises suffering by placing it alongside domestic luxury.

critiques a society that commodifies pain, consuming it as spectacle without consequence, questioning the ethical implications of viewing suffering, and exposing the emotional laziness of those who feel momentary pity but quickly return to comfort.

Duffy presents war photography as a stark reminder of society's indifference to suffering, exploring the tension between duty and detachment. The poem contrasts the photographer's personal burden with the public's fleeting concern, revealing a world where empathy is temporary and human pain is commodified.

Duffy opens with the haunting image of the photographer's workspace becoming a silent archive of agony, as a vehicle for interrogating the notion that human pain is reduced to objects by the commodification of society. She uses the metaphorical image of "*Spools of suffering set out in ordered rows*." "Spools of suffering" fuses the mechanical with the emotional, suggesting that trauma has been captured and contained within film. The juxtaposition of "suffering" with "ordered rows" creates a chilling contrast: chaos and pain are systematised, hinting at the clinical detachment required for the photographer's role: organizing horror into something presentable, perhaps even consumable. Additionally, the sibilance in "spools of suffering" creates a soft, sinister tone, echoing the quiet horror of the images. Alternatively, the "ordered rows" could be representative of the ordered rank and file of military personnel, or even the regimented presentation of war graves, leaving the reader with a chilling sense of foreboding pervading the line and foreshadowing the violence to follow in the text. By beginning with this image, Duffy establishes the central tension between the photographer's duty to document and the moral discomfort of turning suffering into art. Duffy is likely seeking to critique how war's horrors are mediated through technology, stripping them of immediacy and intimacy. This shows how the commodification of pain pervades the poem, framing conflict as something organised for consumption rather than felt as raw human tragedy.

As the poem progresses, Duffy uses the concept of the photographer's images capturing moments of unbearable suffering, evoking iconic scenes of war where innocence is destroyed as a vehicle to intensify the sense of horror with the phrase, "*Running children in a nightmare heat*." The use of "running" conveys urgency and terror, while "nightmare heat" blends sensory detail with psychological torment, suggesting that war transforms reality into something surreal and hellish. This phrase pervades the stanza with a haunting tone, reminding readers that these are not abstract tragedies but lived experiences. Duffy does this through the vivid imagery and intertextual reference to famous war photographs such as the 'Napalm Girl' Vietnam Era photograph, which universalise the horror while grounding it in specific suffering. Because this line appears as the poem shifts from the controlled setting of the darkroom to the chaotic scenes the photographs depict, it reinforces the contrast between order and devastation. Duffy is confronting readers with the visceral reality behind the images, challenging the detachment that often accompanies consumption of news. This supports the thesis because it highlights the photographer's burden born of his inner conflict: he cannot escape these memories, even as society glances and moves on.

By the end of the poem, Duffy is highlighting the contrast between the horror of war and the comfort of domestic life, exposing a moral and emotional disconnect. The poem closes with biting irony in the line, *“reader’s eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.”* What Duffy is saying is that empathy is fleeting and superficial; readers indulge in momentary sorrow before returning to comfort and routine. The verb “prick” suggests a brief, almost painless sensation, undermining the depth of their response, while the juxtaposition of “tears” with “bath and pre-lunch beers” trivialises suffering by placing it alongside domestic luxury. This contrast pervades the final stanza, exposing the gulf between the photographer’s moral weight and the reader’s casual detachment. By closing with this image, Duffy effectively critiques a society that commodifies pain, consuming it as spectacle without consequence, questioning the ethical implications of viewing suffering, and exposing the emotional laziness of those who feel momentary pity but quickly return to comfort. This shows how empathy evaporates quickly, leaving the photographer isolated with the burden of truth.

Duffy presents war photography as a lens through which conflict is both revealed and sanitised. The poem interrogates the ethics of representation, showing how suffering permeates the photographer’s conscience even as it barely touches the reader’s. By exposing the conflict between the permanence of trauma with the ephemerality of empathy, Duffy critiques a society that consumes pain as spectacle and moves on unchanged. *War Photographer* therefore explores duty and detachment with unsettling clarity, revealing how conflict’s true horror lies not only in violence but in the indifference that follows.

Tissue

(13) Imtiaz Dharker: 'Tissue' Mr Bruff Analysis - YouTube



Overview

- The poem resists a straightforward interpretation, but there are some key themes/ideas explored:
- Stanzas 1-3 explore the importance of paper as a method of recording our history. Stanzas 4-6 focus on the paradox that paper is fragile, yet is so powerful it controls our lives.
- The end of the poem explores the creation of various things, particularly human life. Life is the most complex and precious thing we create, but, like paper, it is temporary, yet it still forms part of a bigger, ongoing story.
- Overall, the poem explores **control** – Different things control human life (money, religion, nature, pride, government etc).
- Overall, the poem explores **freedom** – The speaker imagines a world that breaks free of some of these restrictions where human constructions are less permanent or important.

Context – The Poet

- Dharker was born in Pakistan, raised in Glasgow and now lives in Britain and India.
- *Tissue* is from a 2006 collection of poems called *The Terrorist at my Table* which questions how well we know the people around us.
- Whilst writing *Tissue*, the poet's partner was slowly dying of cancer, which may reflect the ideas of human fragility which pervade the poem.

Form and Structure

- The poetic voice is deliberately elusive.
- There is a lack of rhyme, regular meter and use of enjambment.

Suggesting the focus is on humanity itself, rather than a specific group or individual.

This creates a sense of freedom or openness – mirroring the speaker's desire for freedom and clarity. The rejection of traditional poetic form (no rhyme, meter etc) could also reflect the idea of breaking away from more oppressive forces/institutions which control our lives.

Tissue

Creates an image of something fragile – like paper but even more easily disposed of.

Human bodies are made of tissue. But we also draw our plans, devise our lives with paper, which may be thin and fragile or powerful.

Tissue

Repetition and early placement draws the audience's attention – suggests paper is important. Is it what can drive the change alluded to in line 3?

Paper – and the writing on it – has the power to bring change

Powerful image: could suggest that paper can be worn out by age, just like humans. but, just as an old person might become physically weak but wiser and spiritually stronger as he or she approaches death, a worn page can still have great power.

Language choice suggests an affectionate act – like caring for a child or pet. Does this reflect the importance of these 'marks on a page'?

Metaphor suggests that if buildings were paper, people would more easily see how fragile and temporary they are – buildings could symbolise society or institutions

Alliteration and language choice of means of travel creates a sense of freedom from the artificial confines of society

Repetition of the imagery from stanza 5 – light is enduring and will continue to shine even when man-made structures break

Like paper, and the power it holds, human life is only temporary, but the repetition from line 11 reminds us we are part of something larger (family history) and our impact can outlast our physical form – just like paper

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,

Paper is used to record family history or religious beliefs. Whole lives or belief structures can be summed up by marks on paper

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.

Could show how easily influenced things are, not just how destructible. Not only is human life fragile, but we are so easily moulded and changed by those around us, by nature and even 'wind'. In the same way, we write on paper, changing its meaning, tearing it, folding it, using it how we please.

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.

Religious connotations. Christianity and Islam links light to the divine. Light, therefore, symbolizes God and purity — light is both a metaphor for God and, later in the poem, a metaphor for nature.

Ancient religious books are often written on flimsy parchment or vellum. It also evokes the imagery of the stained glass window in a church, where the light of God shines through. It can also suggest the fragility of life. We record thoughts and feelings on paper that is easily destroyed and the writing becomes faint over time. However, there is a greater 'light' — that of the spirit — that shines and sanctifies frail human endeavour.

Alternative interpretation: light is an extended metaphor for a human soul. By showing how light (our souls) shines through paper it shows how we attempt to be remembered by putting little bits of us into these fragile documents. This, however, is shown not to work, as paper 'thins with age' and was 'never meant to last'.

The sun is a powerful, permanent force, whereas, like so much of human power, borders are just temporary marks on paper (maps)

"fine slips" of shopping receipts record our daily lives and can tell a story of our existence. Combined with simile at the end of the stanza suggesting our lives are controlled by money (another worthless piece of paper invested with value by human society.)

Is this a criticism of human pride? We build huge monuments to ourselves and buildings which are, ultimately, unimportant

The final single line breaks the quatrains, reflecting life as whole; unpredictable and disorganised no matter how we try to impose order. It also suggests how sudden and unpredictable death is. Is the poet showing the sanctity of human life, however brief, because of the lasting impact we can have on the world around us?

What

power is not about control but about flexibility and honesty.

How

Why

uses paper as a metaphor for transparency and vulnerability

“lets” suggests permission and openness, contrasting with the rigidity of human systems like maps and buildings. This theme of change is further anchored through the choice of enjambment

Paper that lets the light shine through

“light” carries connotations of truth, hope, and spirituality, implying that real strength comes from allowing illumination rather than blocking it, emphasising the positive tone of the opening of the text.

impact of her partner’s cancer related death colouring the text and undercutting the positivity

may be challenging the human obsession with permanence and authority, suggesting that fragility can reveal deeper truths about life and identity.

reference to paper conveys a sense of fragility, tainting this hopeful image

What

life is dynamic and that clinging to fixed structures is futile in the face of time and nature

How

Why

even the most rigid systems are vulnerable to change, echoing the poem’s critique of human attempts to impose permanence.

How easily they fall away on a sigh, a shift

adaptability, not rigidity, is the key to resilience

“easily” conveys how effortlessly these structures—whether physical or ideological—can collapse.

soft sounds of “sigh” and “shift” create a tone of delicacy, reinforcing the idea that power is fleeting

What

encourages humility and acceptance, suggesting that true power lies in embracing impermanence rather than resisting it.

How

Why

explores the idea that human life has value only because it is temporary

“raise” evokes human ambition and creativity, but the phrase “never meant to last” undercuts this drive with a stark truth: all human achievements are temporary.

Raise a structure never meant to last

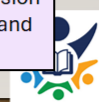
may reflect the personal circumstances she was experiencing during the writing of the poem

ambiguous use of “structure” could refer to the physical structures raised as monuments to human power, or potentially to something more metaphorical like the structure of a family unit, or a happy life

juxtaposition of construction and impermanence reflects the tension between our desire for control and the inevitability of decay.



English
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English
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How does *Tissue* explore ideas about power?

Dharker presents human life and structures as fragile and impermanent, suggesting that true power lies in openness and adaptability rather than rigid control. The poem explores how paper becomes a metaphor for human existence, revealing that power and permanence are illusions compared to the enduring force of nature and human connection.

Dharker begins by suggesting that power is not about control but about flexibility and honesty. By suggesting that “Paper that lets the light shine through”, she uses paper as a metaphor for transparency and vulnerability. The word “lets” suggests permission and openness, contrasting with the rigidity of human systems like maps and buildings. This theme of change is further anchored through the choice of enjambment in the lines. The image of “light” carries connotations of truth, hope, and spirituality, implying that real strength comes from allowing illumination rather than blocking it, emphasising the positive tone of the opening of the text. However, the reference to paper in the metaphor conveys a sense of fragility, tainting this hopeful image, possibly as a result of the personal tragedy Dharker was living through whilst she wrote the poem. It’s hard not to see the impact of her partner’s cancer related death colouring the text and undercutting the positivity here. Dharker’s may be challenging the human obsession with permanence and authority, suggesting that fragility can reveal deeper truths about life and identity.

As the poem progresses, Dharker’s reminds readers that life is dynamic and that clinging to fixed structures is futile in the face of time and nature. The phrase “fall away on a sigh, a shift” emphasises the transience of human constructs. The word “easily” conveys how effortlessly these structures—whether physical or ideological—can collapse. The soft sounds of “sigh” and “shift” create a tone of delicacy, reinforcing the idea that power is fleeting. This image suggests that even the most rigid systems are vulnerable to change, echoing the poem’s critique of human attempts to impose permanence. This links back to the title of the poem, ‘Tissue’ where the dual meaning helps to develop this idea. The choice of Tissue could easily refer to the biological tissue which makes up human beings, making it a metaphor for human life, and therefore human power, but if we consider the dual meaning of tissues as delicate and disposable we are again presented with the idea that this power of humanity connected to life is impermanent. This supports the thesis by illustrating that adaptability, not rigidity, is the key to resilience.

Towards the end of the poem, Dharker explores the idea that human life, and the power it has over others, has value only because it is temporary, through the implications of “Raise a structure never meant to last”. Here, Dharker uses “raise” to evoke human ambition and creativity, but the phrase “never meant to last” undercuts this drive with a stark truth: all human achievements are temporary. Once again, this may reflect the personal circumstances she was experiencing during the writing of the poem. The ambiguous use of “structure” could refer to the physical structures raised as monuments to human power, or potentially to something more metaphorical like the structure of a family unit, or a happy life – both of which she was feeling being torn from her. The juxtaposition of construction and impermanence reflects the tension between our desire for control and the inevitability of decay. This line acts as a philosophical statement, reinforcing the poem’s central metaphor that paper—and by extension, life—is fragile yet meaningful showing that Dharker values openness and human connection over rigid permanence. Here, she encourages humility and acceptance, suggesting that true power lies in embracing impermanence rather than resisting it.

Dharker’s *Tissue* explores power as something illusory when tied to permanence and control. Through metaphors of paper, delicate imagery, and tonal shifts, the poem argues that strength comes from transparency, adaptability, and human connection. Ultimately, the poem suggests that while human constructs crumble, the light of truth and the bonds between people endure, revealing where real power lies.

The Emigreee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfIJ8iXLfLc>



Overview

- The speaker describes having left her country behind when she was a child but never losing her child-like image of it.
- Whatever bad news she hears of it, she remembers the sunlight and its beauty.
- As an adult she is becoming aware that this is a false image, but she cannot dismiss her nostalgic view.
- She cannot return to her city but is preoccupied with the memory of it.

Context – The Poet

- The poem is not written from Rumens' personal experience.

Form and Structure

- The first two stanzas contain lots of **enjambment** but the final stanza features more **end-stopping**.

This could reflect the speaker's feelings of confinement in the new "city walls"

What is the significance of the title?

The Emigreee

To **migrate** means to move and implies a directionless, aimless movement. To **immigrate** is to move into a country whilst to **emigrate** is to leave and move out of a country.

Emigreee is also a French word. The use of a foreign language word could serve to emphasise the speaker's feeling of displacement or highlight that they are no longer in the home they enjoyed.

[No Title]

Does the link to **emigration** serve to emphasise the fact that the speaker has left a home they remember fondly? Possibly against their wishes?

The Emigree

Language creates a story-like atmosphere, but also hints at loss.

Positive connotations suggests the memory is positive and clear. Also **repetition** – first instance of a repeated word which evokes clarity, brightness and joy.

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**.

Metaphor of beauty and colour suggests the value of the memory to the speaker. Also implies these are *fixed* memories.

Juxtaposition of negative "branded" with positive image could suggest the memory is positive, but perhaps shouldn't be. Has she been forced to flee? Also further suggests the permanence of the memory as it has branded her.

The description connotes purity suggesting the city is almost heavenly

Simile links to paperweight imagery from previous stanza and suggests fragility.

The **white streets of that city**, the gentle slopes
Glow ever 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 up and spills 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.

Time is **personified** as an enemy, but can't affect the speaker's memory. Also connects to the semantic field of war connoting some conflict forcing her to flee her home.

Could this hint at what had happened to cause her to flee her home?

Personification recalls the earlier doll image but now the speaker interacts with it, showing her relationship to her memory

I have no passport, there's no ~~way back at all~~
But my city comes to me in its **[No Title]** line.
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.

Imagery suggests she feels her new home closes her in, or is restrictive.

What Rumens presents political power as a dominating force that controls identity and movement, using the speaker's exile as a vehicle to expose the brutality of authoritarian regimes

How

Why demonstrates how political conflict intrudes upon and destabilises the speaker's idealised identity

reveals how political power can erase a person's sense of belonging.

embedding the symbolic noun "passport" into a stark declarative highlights how the state controls not just physical borders but personal identity itself

"no way back at all" intensifies the finality of her exile, suggesting a regime powerful enough to sever people completely from their homeland.

I have no passport, there's no way back at all

critiques oppressive systems that weaponise borders and restrict belonging, suggesting that external political power exerts a harsh and dehumanising influence on displaced individuals

Structurally, this line appears after the speaker has constructed a warm, romanticised memoryscape; its position disrupts the nostalgic tone and forces the political reality into the foreground.

English
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What Rumens explores the psychological power of memory, using the speaker's idealised recollections as a vehicle to show how emotion can shape—and even distort—identity.

How

Why Demonstrates how the mind can cling to an idealised past, even when political conflict has made that past unreachable.

"branded", with its connotations of permanent marking or ownership, implies both pain and inevitability

"impression of sunlight" reveals that what marks her is not the city as it really is, but an idealised, nostalgic image of it.

I am branded by an impression of sunlight

Explores how identity is shaped by both emotional memory and the trauma of displacement.

Rumens' recurring structural motif of "sunlight" reflects the poem's tension between emotional warmth and political darkness: the speaker's memories overpower the reality of oppression hinted at elsewhere

The passive construction "I am branded" reinforces her lack of control, showing that internal forces—nostalgia, longing, identity—can dominate her as powerfully as any external authority.

English
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What Rumens contrasts imaginative freedom with political restriction, using personification as a vehicle to explore competing forms of power.

How merges joy and restriction to reveal the complexity of memory

Why the speaker's sense of identity is shaped by an idealised version of place that exists in opposition to the political reality.

The personification of the city "taking" her "dancing" evokes liberation, fluidity and emotional intimacy, suggesting that her imagined homeland still holds a nurturing power over her.

My city takes me dancing through the city of walls

shows that imagination holds a resistant kind of power—one that cannot be controlled by regimes, even when physical landscapes become restricted or hostile.

contradictory images side by side to expose the clash between imaginative freedom and political constraint

Structurally, the repeated possessive "my city" throughout the poem becomes most powerful here, showing the speaker asserting ownership in defiance of the political forces that once expelled her.

Juxtaposition of the fluidity and freedom suggesting by "dancing" and the movement taking place "through the city of walls," emphasises the lack of agency and control she feels over herself, where the noun "walls" symbolises barriers, oppression, and the authoritarian control hinted at earlier in the poem.

English
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How does *The Émigrée* explore ideas about power?

Rumens presents memory and identity as deeply tied to place, exploring how nostalgia and idealisation shape the speaker's sense of belonging. The poem contrasts the warmth of remembered landscapes with the harsh realities of displacement, revealing the tension between personal attachment and political conflict.

At the beginning of the poem, Rumens presents political power as a dominating force that controls identity and movement, using the speaker's exile as a vehicle to expose the brutality of authoritarian regimes. When the speaker states that "I have no passport, there's no way back at all," Rumens reveals how political power can erase a person's sense of belonging. By embedding the symbolic noun "passport" into a stark declarative, Rumens highlights how the state controls not just physical borders but personal identity itself—the speaker literally lacks the documentation that proves who she is. The absolute phrase "no way back at all" intensifies the finality of her exile, suggesting a regime powerful enough to sever people completely from their homeland. Structurally, this line appears after the speaker has constructed a warm, romanticised memoryscape; its position disrupts the nostalgic tone and forces the political reality into the foreground. This shift supports the thesis by demonstrating how political conflict intrudes upon and destabilises the speaker's idealised identity. Rumens' agenda here is clear: she critiques oppressive systems that weaponise borders and restrict belonging, suggesting that external political power exerts a harsh and dehumanising influence on displaced individuals.

As the poem develops, Rumens explores the psychological power of memory, using the speaker's idealised recollections as a vehicle to show how emotion can shape—and even distort—identity. The speaker's assertion that she is "branded by an impression of sunlight" suggests that memory holds a deep and almost possessive power over her. The choice of "branded", with its connotations of permanent marking or ownership, implies both pain and inevitability, as though her memories have acted upon her in a way she cannot resist. However, the embedded phrase "impression of sunlight" reveals that what marks her is not the city as it really is, but an idealised, nostalgic image of it. Rumens' recurring structural motif of "sunlight" reflects the poem's tension between emotional warmth and political darkness: the speaker's memories overpower the reality of oppression hinted at elsewhere. The passive construction "I am branded" reinforces her lack of control, showing that internal forces—nostalgia, longing, identity—can dominate her as powerfully as any external authority. This line advances Rumens' agenda by demonstrating how the mind can cling to an idealised past, even when political conflict has made that past unreachable. Through this, the poem supports the thesis by illustrating how identity is shaped by both emotional memory and the trauma of displacement.

Towards the end of the poem, Rumens contrasts imaginative freedom with political restriction, using personification as a vehicle to explore competing forms of power. When the speaker claims that "my city takes me dancing through the city of walls," Rumens merges joy and restriction to reveal the complexity of memory. The personification of the city "taking" her "dancing" evokes liberation, fluidity and emotional intimacy, suggesting that her imagined homeland still holds a nurturing power over her. Yet this movement takes place "through the city of walls," where the noun "walls" symbolises barriers, oppression, and the authoritarian control hinted at earlier in the poem. Rumens places these contradictory images side by side to expose the clash between imaginative freedom and political constraint. Structurally, the repeated possessive "my city" throughout the poem becomes most powerful here, showing the speaker asserting ownership in defiance of the political forces that once expelled her. This tension reinforces the thesis: the speaker's sense of identity is shaped by an idealised version of place that exists in opposition to the political reality. Rumens' agenda is to show that imagination holds a resistant kind of power—one that cannot be controlled by regimes, even when physical landscapes become restricted or hostile.

In *The Émigrée*, Rumens weaves together memory, identity and political oppression to examine competing forms of power. Through symbolic language, structural contrast and idealised imagery, she demonstrates how authoritarian regimes attempt to control identity by manipulating borders, restricting movement, and instilling fear. Yet Rumens also shows that personal memory has its own power—emotional, imaginative, and enduring. The poem ultimately suggests that although political power can enforce exile and erasure, it cannot destroy the internal landscapes the speaker carries with her. Rumens presents memory as both a refuge and a burden, revealing that the most enduring form of power may lie not in political systems, but in the human capacity to remember, imagine and belong.

Kamikaze

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zwoe5twfd4>



Overview

- The poem tells the story of a Kamikaze pilot who, en route to his suicide mission, is reminded of the beauty of nature, and the importance of family, so decides to return home rather than completing his mission.
- Because of the culture of Honour and shame in imperial Japan, he is ostracized by his family and community and shunned by all of them – living a form of ‘waking death’ where he may as well be dead as no one will acknowledge him.
- The poem explores ideas of duty, blind patriotism, family and memory, as a daughter and the pilot both are shown to be recalling images from the past
- The first 5 stanzas form one sentence which covers an account of the pilot's flight as the pilot's daughter imagines it. The end of the sentence could represent the plane landing. The final 2 stanzas deal with the consequences of the pilot's actions.

Context – Kamikaze Strategy

- Kamikaze was the term given to a form of attack developed during WWII
- Japanese pilots would intentionally fly their planes into allied ships in the hopes of sinking them – this was considered more accurate than the ballistic missile technology of the time
- Japanese society was very rigid socially. The concept of honour, and its opposite – shame, was crucial as a motivating factor in decisions and social interactions
- Many pilots were shamed into becoming Kamikazes as a result of the strict code of honour – it was better to die a hero in battle than to bring shame and dishonour upon your family



Kamikaze

3rd person viewpoint suggests the speaker is not connected to the events

Link to context – being selected to be a Kamikaze was a great honour and the pilot's family would be well respected afterwards.

Distance is created in the poem through the use of different voices since the pilot cannot tell anyone his thoughts

Simile evokes celebration and joy – suggesting the daughter's pride in her father's honourable role. Irony is created as these connotations are at odds with the idea of war. Does this suggest there will be no victorious return for the pilot?

Flags are a symbol of national pride and identity, but here the simile may be suggesting they are used to direct something – is he being forced into his actions by national pride?

The enjambment emphasises how there is a change of each new stanza. Does this suggest the power of memory?

The enjambment and lack of punctuation throughout this stanza could hint that the pilot has gotten caught up with his childhood memories – do these influence his actions?

The daughter shows empathy for her father here – but her emotions seem complex.

Final sentence could be a comment on the destructiveness of patriotism – he may have wished that he achieved his mission. Either way – his story ends in a kind of death

Language is deliberately ambiguous. The incantations could be propaganda, prayers or his own thoughts. Incantations directly suggests the pilot is under some kind of spell – perhaps being taken in by the propaganda?

Viewpoint – the speaker reveals the daughter's thoughts here which reflects a change from the opening stanza

Reference to children could suggest this single event has had long term effects – having consequences for future generations

The fish can be seen as a metaphor for the planes responding to Japan's (the sun's) orders – Japan is known as the land of the rising sun.

The waves could be seen as a metaphor for the war and – possibly – the pilot's decision.

Italics suggest this is now the daughter's voice directly.

The dangerous connotations in this description remind the reader of the danger of nature. Could they also hint at the dangerous repercussions of the pilot landing his plane and not completing his mission – as symbolised by the following full stop?

The effects of the culture of shame and honour

Verbs suggest the daughter is imagining what he thought but the past tense shows she cannot ask

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.

What cultural expectations of honour dominate the pilot's thoughts, setting up the conflict between duty and survival which pervades the poem

How Garland presents the pilot as both soldier and sacrificial figure.

Why the pilot is prepared for his suicide mission through symbolic and spiritual conditioning, suggesting that his identity is subsumed by cultural expectations of honour.

Garland begins by framing the pilot's mission as a ritualistic act

A shaven head full of powerful incantations

"shaven" evokes purity and readiness, while "incantations" implies almost magical or religious influence, reinforcing the idea that duty is sanctified.

Alternatively, the reference to incantations could be a critique of the pervasive power that propaganda or jingoism has over those in conflict.

By presenting the pilot in this fashion, Garland transforms them into a vehicle to critique the power of tradition in shaping identity, showing how societal ideals can override personal instinct

 English
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What the natural world and domestic life exert a powerful pull on the pilot, contrasting sharply with the destructive purpose of his mission.

How the instinct for survival and longing for belonging can overpower abstract ideals of honour.

Why

"little" conveys fragility and innocence, while the simile "like bunting" evokes celebration and community, symbols of life rather than death.

Little fishing boats strung out like bunting

personal identity reasserts itself against cultural conditioning, highlighting the human cost of traditions that demand self-sacrifice.

idyllic imagery permeates the stanza, creating a tonal shift from militaristic rigidity to nostalgic warmth

Structurally, this moment acts as a turning point: the pilot's gaze moves from the sky to the sea, signalling his reconnection with human values and foreshadowing his decision to return

 English
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What Garland interrogates the notion that the pilot's choice to live physically results in a kind of social death, as he is ostracised by his family and community.

How

Why ambiguity underscores the futility of rigid codes of honour: whether he dies in battle or lives in shame, the result is loss.

"must" suggests speculation, emphasising the distance created between the father and daughter by the societal pressures of imperial Japan

He must have wondered which had been the better way to die

This forces the reader to confront the destructive power of cultural expectations, which punish individuality and fracture relationships, thus it shows how societal norms can ostracise those who defy them, leaving the pilot alienated and questioning the value of both duty and survival

"better way" implies that neither outcome offers dignity or peace.

This line functions as a cyclical return to the theme of death, closing the poem without resolution and reinforcing its tragic irony.

 English
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Garland presents *Kamikaze* as a powerful exploration of duty, identity, and the human instinct for survival. The poem contrasts cultural expectations of honour with personal values, revealing how rigid traditions can lead to isolation and loss when individual choices defy societal norms.

Garland begins by framing the pilot's mission as a ritualistic act in the line, "*A shaven head full of powerful incantations.*" What Garland is saying is that the pilot is prepared for his suicide mission through symbolic and spiritual conditioning, suggesting that his identity is subsumed by cultural expectations of honour. The adjective "shaven" evokes purity and readiness, while "incantations" implies almost magical or religious influence, reinforcing the idea that duty is sanctified. Alternatively, the reference to incantations could be a critique of the pervasive power that propaganda or jingoism has over those in conflict. Through metaphor and connotation, Garland presents the pilot as both soldier and sacrificial figure. It may be significant that Garland chooses to anchor this image early in the poem, establishing the tension between indoctrination and individuality that drives the narrative. By presenting the pilot in this fashion, Garland transforms them into a vehicle to critique the power of tradition in shaping identity, showing how societal ideals can override personal instinct. This demonstrates how cultural expectations of honour dominate the pilot's thoughts, setting up the conflict between duty and survival which pervades the poem.

This tension deepens as the poem progresses when Garland explores how the natural world and domestic life exert a powerful pull on the pilot, contrasting sharply with the destructive purpose of his mission. She constructs the image, "*Little fishing boats strung out like bunting.*" The choice of "little" conveys fragility and innocence, while the simile "like bunting" evokes celebration and community, symbols of life rather than death. This idyllic imagery permeates the stanza, creating a tonal shift from militaristic rigidity to nostalgic warmth. Structurally, this moment acts as a turning point: the pilot's gaze moves from the sky to the sea, signalling his reconnection with human values and foreshadowing his decision to return. Through this dynamic, Garland presents how the instinct for survival and longing for belonging can overpower abstract ideals of honour. This supports the thesis because it reveals how personal identity reasserts itself against cultural conditioning, highlighting the human cost of traditions that demand self-sacrifice.

The poem closes with the devastating reflection, "*He must have wondered which had been the better way to die.*" Here Garland interrogates the notion that the pilot's choice to live physically results in a kind of social death, as he is ostracised by his family and community. The word "must" suggests speculation, emphasising the distance created between the father and daughter by the societal pressures of imperial Japan. The comparative phrase "better way" implies that neither outcome offers dignity or peace. This ambiguity underscores the futility of rigid codes of honour: whether he dies in battle or lives in shame, the result is loss. This line functions as a cyclical return to the theme of death, closing the poem without resolution and reinforcing its tragic irony. This forces the reader to confront the destructive power of cultural expectations, which punish individuality and fracture relationships, thus it shows how societal norms can ostracise those who defy them, leaving the pilot alienated and questioning the value of both duty and survival, further establishing the duality of the conflict in the poem where the pilot wrestles with the internal conflict of duty and survival and the external conflict of societal ostracization and the desire of a sense of belonging.

Garland presents *Kamikaze* as a critique of traditions that prioritise honour over humanity. The poem's structure mirrors the pilot's journey—from indoctrination to instinct, from belonging to isolation—revealing how conflict extends beyond the battlefield into the realm of identity and relationships. By showing that survival leads not to freedom but to ostracism, Garland interrogates the cost of cultural rigidity and the fragility of human connection. *Kamikaze* therefore explores duty and identity with poignant complexity, exposing how societal expectations can transform life into a living death.

Checking Out Me History

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mj1bMk_E7GQ



Overview

- The speaker talks about his identity and how it links to his knowledge of history. He claims he is ignorant of his own identity because it has not been taught to him.
- He was taught about British history but was taught about his Caribbean roots. He lists famous figures from history and asks why he doesn't know about people from other cultures who did great things.
- He mentions a diverse range of people who should be celebrated.
- At the end he resolves to create his own identity based on his heritage.

Context – The Poet

- John Agard is of Afro-Guyanese descent.
- Agard is an actor and playwright as well as a poet, and his poetry is generally meant to be performed.
- He frequently expresses pride in his Caribbean identity through the use of phonetic spellings and Caribbean dialect words

Context – The Caribbean Historical Figures

- Toussaint L'Ouverture: Haitian revolutionary who abolished slavery and freed Haiti from French rule
- Nanny The Maroon – A Jamaican national Heroine who fought against slavery
- Mary Seacole – A Jamaican Nurse in the Crimean War

Form and Structure

- The poem uses a mixture of Stanza forms
- The Caribbean history stanzas have shorter lines and more broken syntax than the British history stanzas
- The British stanzas have lots of simple rhymes.
- The poem alternates between figures from British and Caribbean culture.
- The British figures are skipped over briefly whilst the Caribbean figures are covered in more detail.

Suggesting the poet is breaking the confining language rules he's been taught and actively rebelling against the Education he has received (which he judges to be insufficient).

This emphasises the Caribbean sections and makes them seem more significant to the reader.

This gives them a childish quality, again furthering the poet's agenda of complaining about the biased Euro-centric education system.

[No Title]

This helps to emphasise the differences between them.

This combines with the shorter line length to further emphasise their importance to the speaker and the reader.

Checking Out Me History

Phonetic spelling showing Caribbean identity.
Juxtaposition of Dem and Me emphasises the separateness of the British education system and creates an *us and them* mentality.

Metaphors connected to vision being impaired suggest the decision to keep his history from him is deliberate. Bandage and blind also suggest the lack of connection to his history and identity is disabling.

Repetition emphasises the dull, repetitive nature of history curriculum

Plain, factual language for British history contrasted with imagery rich, lyrical style of Caribbean sections makes the British history seem all the more dull by comparison

Light and vision imagery returned to contrast with British history's blindness

Positive and aspirational semantic field suggests Nanny's great influence on the speaker

Metaphors of hope rooted in nature and the imagery of light once again

Metaphor suggests careful creation and sculpting of identity over time

Dem tell me
Dem tell me
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 all dat
Dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat
But **Toussaint L'Ouverture**
no **dem never tell me bout dat**

Toussaint
a slave
with *vision*
lick back
Napoleon
battalion
and first Black
Republic born
Toussaint the thorn
to de French
Toussaint de beacon
of the 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 ran way 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

Key theme of the poem – history is a construction put together by those in power.

Well known historical date emphasises the British centric nature of their education

Haitian revolutionary who abolished slavery in Haiti and freed it from French rule

Power is maintained by telling certain stories and keeping people ignorant of other parts of history

Images of light and vision contrast with the blindness of his former education. The references to light throughout the Caribbean sections could signify hope or truth

Simple rhyme scheme emphasises the silliness of the British history he's been taught. Rhyme builds up to the last line of the Stanza to draw attention to what he was not taught.

European coloniser compared to Native American cultures that resisted slavery – restriction contrasted with freedom. Also links to overarching theme that there's always more than one version of history – but he's only been taught one.

Repetition of **I** emphasises the speaker's freedom – he will now speak freely and self-educate

What

Agard exposes how institutional power controls identity by manipulating education, using the speaker's voice as a vehicle to challenge the authority of Eurocentric narratives.

shows that identity begins to be shaped—or misshaped—by the stories one is permitted to hear

How

Why

repetition of “dem” creates a clear divide between the oppressor and the oppressed, establishing a collective force that dictates knowledge.

Agard foregrounds the idea that identity can be deliberately restricted by those in power.

“wha dem want” emphasises selective storytelling: the curriculum is presented not as truth, but as a constructed version of history designed to uphold white cultural dominance.

**Dem tell me wha
dem want to tell me**

use of the non-standard English could reflect an act of rebellion against the oppressive systems of a Eurocentric education by defying the standards expected of formal language.

Agard's agenda is to expose the oppressive nature of a Eurocentric education system, revealing how it restricts cultural self-understanding and silences alternative voices.

Structurally, the poem opens with this accusatory line, placing the theme of imposed narratives at the forefront of the reader's experience.



English
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What

How

Why

presents the distortion of identity as an act of violence, using metaphor to show how historical erasure blinds individuals to their cultural roots.

While a bandage should heal or protect, here it is used to obscure, suggesting that the speaker's true cultural heritage has been deliberately hidden from him.

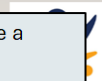
“bandage” carries connotations of harm and restriction, implying that the erasure of Black history is itself a form of inflicted damage.

**Bandage up me eye
with me own
history**

when stories are suppressed, identity becomes distorted

By embedding “me own history” in the line, Agard stresses the injustice of having one's personal cultural inheritance taken away and repurposed as a tool of control.

highlights the violence of cultural silencing and to criticise a system that blinds individuals to their heritage in order to maintain power structures.



English
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What

How

Why

presents identity as something actively reclaimed, using imagery of creation and resistance to show how recovering suppressed histories becomes a powerful act of self-definition

identity becomes stronger and more authentic when marginalised histories are rediscovered

“carving” suggests effort, artistry, and force; identity here is not inherited but deliberately shaped through reclaiming lost histories.

**I carving out me
identity**

“me identity” reinforces ownership, contrasting with earlier lines where identity was imposed by others.

Agard's agenda is to empower readers, encouraging them to resist the limitations imposed by dominant narratives and to construct their own identities through cultural awareness and historical truth.

Structurally, this moment appears after the celebratory stanzas honouring figures like Toussaint and Nanny, whose stories disrupt the poem's earlier oppression. Their presence energises the speaker, making the act of “carving” a symbolic reclaiming of cultural pride.



English
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How does *Checking Out Me History* explore ideas about identity?

Agard presents identity as something shaped by the stories we are told, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric history and highlighting the erasure of Black and Caribbean voices. The poem explores the struggle for cultural self-awareness, revealing how reclaiming suppressed histories becomes an act of empowerment and resistance.

At the beginning of the poem, Agard exposes how institutional power controls identity by manipulating education, using the speaker's voice as a vehicle to challenge the authority of Eurocentric narratives. When the speaker declares that "Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me," Agard foregrounds the idea that identity can be deliberately restricted by those in power. The repetition of "dem" creates a clear divide between the oppressor and the oppressed, establishing a collective force that dictates knowledge. The embedded phrase "wha dem want" emphasises selective storytelling: the curriculum is presented not as truth, but as a constructed version of history designed to uphold white cultural dominance. Furthermore, the use of the non-standard English could reflect an act of rebellion against the oppressive systems of a Eurocentric education by defying the standards expected of formal language. Structurally, the poem opens with this accusatory line, placing the theme of imposed narratives at the forefront of the reader's experience. This supports the thesis by showing that identity begins to be shaped—or misshaped—by the stories one is permitted to hear. Agard's agenda is to expose the oppressive nature of a Eurocentric education system, revealing how it restricts cultural self-understanding and silences alternative voices.

As the poem develops, Agard presents the distortion of identity as an act of violence, using metaphor to show how historical erasure blinds individuals to their cultural roots. The speaker's accusation that the authorities "bandage up me eye with me own history" uses the metaphor of a "bandage" to powerful effect. While a bandage should heal or protect, here it is used to obscure, suggesting that the speaker's true cultural heritage has been deliberately hidden from him. The verb "bandage" carries connotations of harm and restriction, implying that the erasure of Black history is itself a form of inflicted damage. This is anchored by the fact that bandaging an eye would inflict blindness, implying that the deliberate obscuring of the speaker's culture has a disabling effect on him. By embedding "me own history" in the line, Agard stresses the injustice of having one's personal cultural inheritance taken away and repurposed as a tool of control. Structurally, this line appears early in the poem, reinforcing how deeply the speaker's understanding of identity has been damaged by systemic misinformation. This directly supports the thesis: when stories are suppressed, identity becomes distorted. Agard's agenda here is to highlight the violence of cultural silencing and to criticise a system that blinds individuals to their heritage in order to maintain power structures.

Towards the end of the poem, Agard presents identity as something actively reclaimed, using imagery of creation and resistance to show how recovering suppressed histories becomes a powerful act of self-definition. When the speaker asserts that “I carving out me identity,” Agard shifts from passive victimhood to active empowerment. The verb “carving” suggests effort, artistry, and force; identity here is not inherited but deliberately shaped through reclaiming lost histories. The embedded phrase “me identity” reinforces ownership, contrasting with earlier lines where identity was imposed by others. Structurally, this moment appears after the celebratory stanzas honouring figures like Toussaint and Nanny, whose stories disrupt the poem’s earlier oppression. Their presence energises the speaker, making the act of “carving” a symbolic reclaiming of cultural pride. This directly supports the thesis by revealing that identity becomes stronger and more authentic when marginalised histories are rediscovered. Agard’s agenda is to empower readers, encouraging them to resist the limitations imposed by dominant narratives and to construct their own identities through cultural awareness and historical truth.

In *Checking Out Me History*, Agard uses voice, metaphor and structural contrast to show how identity is shaped—and often restricted—by the stories society chooses to tell. By challenging the dominance of Eurocentric history and celebrating overlooked Black and Caribbean figures, he exposes the power imbalance embedded in education. Yet the poem moves towards empowerment, suggesting that reclaiming suppressed histories allows individuals to take control of their identity with strength and pride. Ultimately, Agard argues that identity is not a passive inheritance but an active, liberating process of rediscovery—one that resists oppression and asserts cultural truth.

Themes

	Power of Humans	Power of Nature	Effects of Conflict	Reality of Conflict	Loss and Absence	Memory	Negative Emotions - Anger	Negative Emotions - Guilt	Negative Emotions - Fear	Negative Emotions - Pride/Arrogance	Identity	Individual Experiences
Ozymandias	✗	✗								✗		
London	✗				✗		✗					✗
Extract from the Prelude		✗				✗			✗	✗		✗
My Last Duchess	✗					✗				✗	✗	
The Charge of the Light Brigade			✗	✗							✗	
Exposure		✗	✗	✗	✗							
Storm on the Island	✗	✗							✗			
Bayonet Charge			✗	✗					✗			✗
Remains			✗	✗		✗		✗				✗
Poppies			✗	✗	✗	✗			✗		✗	✗
War Photographer			✗	✗		✗	✗	✗				✗
Tissue	✗	✗									✗	
The Emigree					✗	✗					✗	✗
Kamikaze		✗	✗		✗	✗					✗	✗
Checking Out Me History	✗						✗				✗	

You should spend 45 minutes on this section.

What the examiner wants to see:

‘A candidate’s response is likely to be a critical, exploratory, well-structured argument. It takes a conceptualised approach to the full task supported by a range of judicious references. There will be a fine-grained and insightful analysis of language and form and structure supported by judicious use of subject terminology. Convincing exploration of one or more ideas/perspectives/contextual factors/interpretations.’

- A focused, detailed, cohesive evaluation of the interrelationship of language, form and structure and their effect on the reader.
- Relevant subject terminology is integrated and precise.
- An assured personal response
- High level of engagement with the text
- Critical style with perceptive understanding and interpretation
- Well-chosen reference integrated into the response
- Excellent understanding of context, and convincing understanding of the relationship between text and context is integrated into the response.

Subject terminology to use for AO2:

- **Metaphor** – describe one thing as something different, allowing you to make a comparison in your mind’s eye.
- **Simile** – a comparison by using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’ to help you see it.
- **Imagery** – helps to paint a vivid picture in your mind to help you understand what a character is thinking about or feeling.
- **Oxymoron** – two words which seem to have opposite meanings or contradict each other are placed together to create particular effects.
- **Foreshadowing** – warning, hinting at events to come later in the play
- **Imperative verbs** – commanding or bossy verbs
- **Hyperbole** – exaggeration
- **Contrasts** – ideas that differ from each other
- **Antithesis** – a person or thing that is the direct opposite of someone or something else.
- **Personification** – giving human characteristics to something non-human.
- **Rhetorical question** – asking a question designed to encourage thinking.

1. Comparative introduction which directly answers the statement and establishes a line of argument.

Keep to 'What' and 'Why' here. Avoid how.

E.g. Agard explores the idea of identity by presenting it as a personal and unique thing to be celebrated, ultimately in response to the Eurocentric cultural identity he was exposed to. Rumens also explores the links between cultural heritage and identity by exploring how the loss of a culture impacts on someone's sense of self.

2. What, How, Why paragraphs exploring how poem A proves your thesis
3. What, How, Why paragraphs exploring how poem B proves your thesis
4. Brief conclusion that summarises how everything you have just written proves what was said in your thesis

- **What?** Firstly, 'insert poet's name' presents.....as.....
- **How?** The writer describes the.....as....
- **What?** This suggests that....
- **How?** The word, '.....' highlights that.....
- **How?** Furthermore, the use of the word, '.....' reinforces the idea that.....
- **Why?** The writer describes it in this way because they wanted to.....the reader.....

• **HELPFUL SENTENCE STEMS**

- Because of ... a poet may explore the idea that...
- [poet's name] explores/reveals/portrays...
- In the moment where...
- The phrase “_____”
- The word “_____” is interesting because...
- suggests/implies/evokes/ indicates...
- There is a sense of...
- Furthermore...
- Arguably...
- Perhaps...
- [poet's name] might be...

Practice Questions

In your exam, you will be given one named poem from this collection, and provided with an unannotated copy of that poem. You need to compare it to another poem from the collection from memory.

You can create your own practice questions by using some variation of the wording below:

Explore how [named poem] and one other poem you have studied explore the theme of [theme]

Some more examples have been provided below:

1. Compare the way in which the theme of pride is presented in *My Last Duchess* and one other poem you have studied
2. Explore the ways in which the effects of conflict are portrayed in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and one other poem you have studied
3. Compare the poets' feelings towards a place in *The Emigree* and one other poem you have studied
4. Compare the ways the reality of conflict is explored in *Exposure* and one other poem you have studied
5. Explore the ways that ideas about power are presented in *Ozymandias* and one other poem you have studied
6. Explore how ideas of power and conflict are presented in *London* and one other poem you have studied
7. Compare how the theme of anger is explored in *Checking Out Me History* and one other poem you have studied
8. Compare how *Extract from the Prelude* and one other poem you have studied explore the power of nature
9. Explore the ways in which nature is portrayed as the enemy of man in *Exposure* and one other poem you have studied
10. Compare the way in which the reality of war is presented in *Bayonet Charge* and one other poem you have studied
11. Compare the way that poets present loss in *Poppies* and one other poem you've studied
12. Compare the way that negative feelings are presented in *London* and one other poem you have studied
13. Explore how the theme of identity is presented in *Kamikaze* and one other poem you have studied
14. Explore the ways in which individual experiences are portrayed in *War Photographer* and one other poem you have studied
15. Compare the lasting effects of conflict presented in *Remains* and one other poem you've studied
16. Compare the ways that poets present memories in *Remains* and one other poem you have studied
17. Compare the way that the power of nature is presented in *Storm on the Island* and in one other poem you have studied
18. Compare the presentation of human power in *Ozymandias* and one other poem you have studied