

LITERATURE POETRY ANTHOLOGY

Power and Conflict

Percy Bysshe Shelley - Ozymandias

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

Context

- Shelley was one of the major English **Romantic** poets
- From a wealthy family and was in line to inherit both riches and his grandfather's role as an MP.
- He went to Eton College and then Oxford and was expelled from university for writing about
- This led to him to be disinherited by his father
- Shelley was well known as a '**radical**' during his lifetime
- Some think *Ozymandias* reflects this side of his character as it can be read as a criticism of people or systems that become huge and believe themselves to be invincible.



Meaning

- The **narrator** of Shelley's poem says he met a traveller from an ancient land and then tells us the story the traveller told him.

The man had seen the remains of a huge statue in the desert. At the foot of the statue were words which reflected the **arrogance** and **pride** of Ozymandias. Those words seem very hollow now as the magnificent statue is destroyed and none of the pharaoh's works have lasted.

- It is likely that Shelley told the tale of the fall of this once-great king to make a **general statement about politics in his day**. He was not a supporter of the royal family. *No matter how great a king might be, he isn't immortal - neither he nor his works will last forever.*

Form and Structure

- Ozymandias is a ***sonnet*** (a poem of 14 lines), although it doesn't have the same, simple rhyme scheme or punctuation that most sonnets have. Some lines are split by full stops and the rhyme is irregular at times.
- It is written in ***iambic pentameter***
- The first line and a half up to the colon are the narrator's words, the rest are those of the traveller he meets. There are no clear ***stanzas*** as such. Instead, it is one, 14-line block of text that is split up with lots of punctuation throughout.

Language

- The poem is **powerful when read aloud**. The end of lines 1 and 3 rhyme, as do the first and last words of line 3 which gives it extra power.
- Lines 12 and 14 also rhyme and words such as ("decay / away") mean that the poem ends with a feeling of mystery and emptiness. The use of **iambic pentameter** means that it has a regular sound.
- Shelley creates a memorable image of this "vast" and once great statue, now in ruins.
- He also places it in the middle of a huge desert with nothing else around it, which highlights its **fall from grace**. What was once so magnificent - a symbol of the king's great power - is now "sunk... shattered... lifeless".
- We have **no sympathy** whatsoever with the statue or the king though, due to some of Shelley's descriptions: "sneer of cold command... hand that mocked them" and the arrogance of the words displayed at the bottom.

Go compare...



William Blake - London

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

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

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

But most thro' midnight streets I
hear

How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the
Marriage hearse

Context

- William Blake (1757-1827) was a poet and artist who specialised in illuminated texts, often of a religious nature. He **rejected established religion** for various reasons. **Blake lived and worked in London**, and one of the main reasons he was dissatisfied with established religion was its failure to help children in London who were forced to work.
- London featured in Blake's collection 'Songs of Innocence and of Experience', poems aimed at showing the 'two contrary states of the human soul'.
- Some believe The French Revolution may have been inspirational to Blake, as London alludes to the revolt, arguably suggesting that **the experience of living there could encourage a revolution on the streets of the capital.**

Meaning

- The poem describes a journey around London, offering a glimpse of what the speaker sees as the **terrible conditions faced by the inhabitants of the city**. Child labour, restrictive laws of property and prostitution are all explored in the poem.
- The poem starts with a criticism of laws relating to ownership. The "chartered Thames" is a bitter reference to the way in which every aspect of life in London is owned, even the river, so often in other poems a symbol of life, freedom and the power of nature. Blake's poem also criticises religion and its failures. The speaker draws attention to the cry of the chimney sweeper and the blackening of church walls, implying that the church as an institution is inactive, unwilling to help those in need.
- **It ends with a vision of the terrible consequences to be faced** as a result of sexually transmitted disease.
- Blake's speaker has a very negative view of the city. For Blake, the conditions faced by people caused them to decay physically, morally and spiritually. The tone of the poem is at times biblical, reflecting Blake's strong interest in religion. It is as if the speaker is offering a prophesy of the terrible consequences unless changes are made in the city.
- **The poem is pessimistic. It is without hope for the future.**

Form and Structure

- As the **title** of the collection suggests, London is presented in a very **regular way, much like a song**. There is a strict **abab rhyme scheme** in each of the four stanzas, which each contain four lines. This alternating rhyme scheme contributes to the song form.
- The **four stanzas** offer a glimpse of different aspects of the city, almost like snapshots seen by the speaker during his "wander through" the streets.

Language

- **Repetition** of words: '**chartered**' = charters allocate ownership and rights. '**marks**' = physical marks / speaker recording evidence.
- Regular rhyme can sometimes appear rather upbeat, but the rhymed words here tend to have sad meanings. There are also a lot of heavy vowel sounds in the rhyme – the *oh* in "woe" and the long *i* sound in cry and sigh – emphasise sadness.
- In the first three lines of stanza two, the speaker makes it clear that "every" sound he hears is evidence of the "mind-forged manacles" - the city has robbed them of the ability to think.
- The poem is full of negative words: 'weakness', 'woe', 'cry', 'fear', 'appalls', 'blood', 'blights', 'plagues' and 'hearse'.
- The poem ends with a startling contrast in the language chosen: "marriage hearse". To Blake, marriage should be a celebration of love and the beginning of new life. Yet here it is combined with the word "hearse" - a vehicle associated with funerals. To the speaker of the poem, the future brings nothing but death and decay.

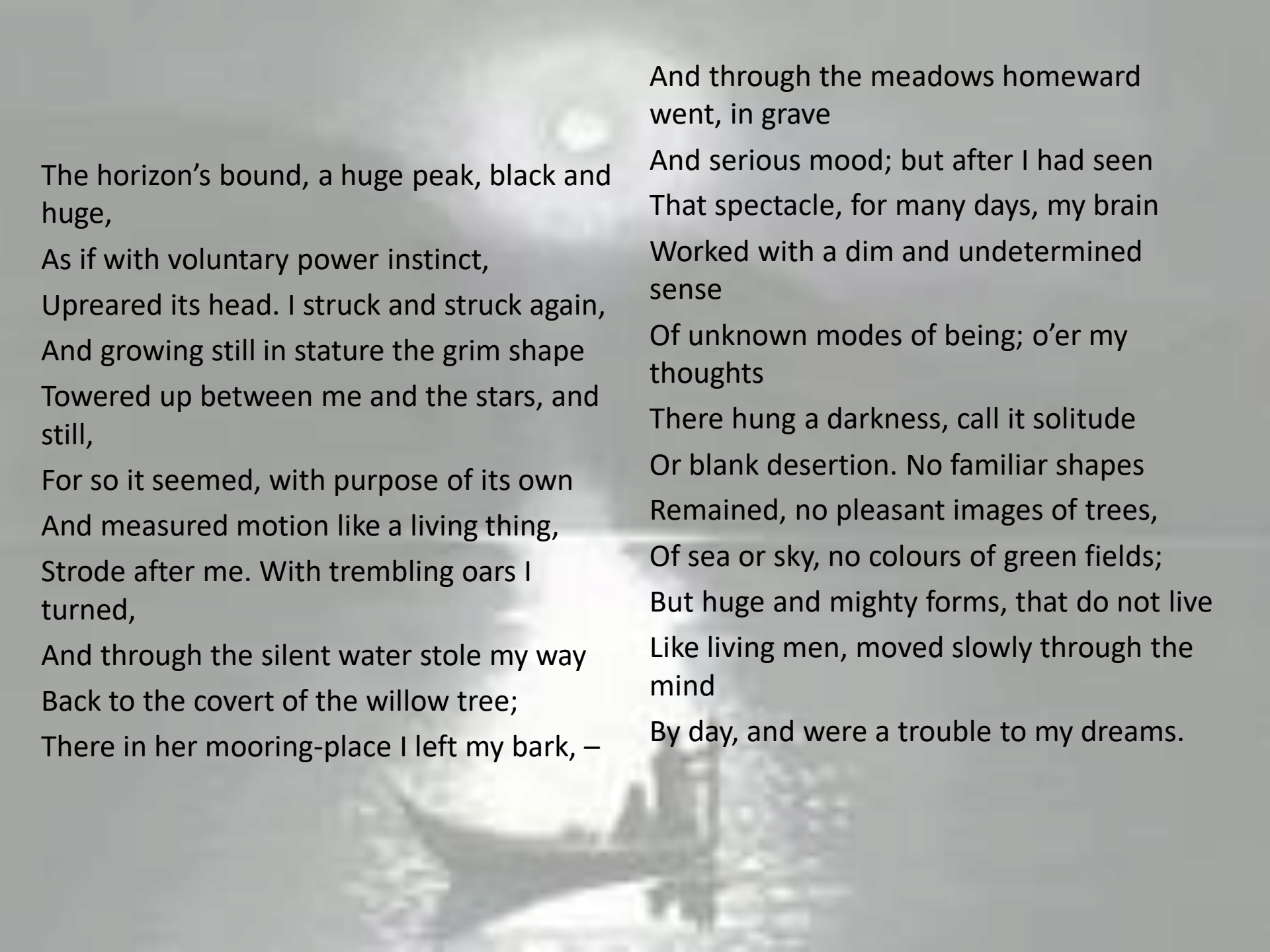
Go compare...



William Wordsworth – The Prelude: stealing the boat

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.

Context

- William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is one of the most famous poets in the history of English Literature. He was born in the Lake District, and his birthplace had a huge influence on his writing.
- Wordsworth was greatly **affected by personal loss** in his wife: orphaned at an early age; estranged from the mother of his first child, deeply saddened by the death of three of his other children.
- Just before finishing his studies at Cambridge University, he off on a walking tour of Europe, coming into contact with the **French Revolution, which informed his writing.**
- Wordsworth was made Poet Laureate (the Queen's poet) in 1843.
- William Wordsworth was a **Romantic poet**: he wrote poems about the world we live in which **challenged people and the way they thought at the time.**

Meaning

- *The Prelude* is one of the greatest works of literature ever written in English. It is a long autobiographical poem in 14 sections. The first version was written in 1798 but he continued to work on it throughout his lifetime.
- The poem shows the **spiritual growth of the poet**, how he comes to terms with who he is, and his place in nature and the world. Wordsworth was inspired by memories of events and visits to different places, explaining how they affected him. He described *The Prelude* as "a poem on the growth of my own mind" with "contrasting views of Man, Nature, and Society".
- This extract describes how Wordsworth went out in a boat on a lake at night. He was alone and a mountain peak loomed over him; its presence had a great effect and for days afterwards he was troubled by the experience.
- Wordsworth **does not view humanity as having authority over nature**.

Form and Structure

- *The Prelude* can definitely be viewed as an **epic poem**, in length at least. Although many of the events Wordsworth writes about are 'ordinary' they are given an epic quality, to fully describe the impact they had on his life.
- This is an extract of 44 lines written in **blank verse**. There are no stanzas: the writing is continuous though there is plenty of punctuation to help us read it. **This extract is a complete story in itself.**
- The work is in **iambic pentameter** to give it a consistent pace.
- During the poem the setting is of a journey in a boat. The journey represents a more spiritual journey and it becomes more rough and hostile along the way. At first, nature is shown at peace with the poet, later as it gets darker and he tries to reach the horizon it becomes harsh and predatory, putting man back in his place.

Language

The Prelude is **conversational**. The poet uses "and" throughout to give the verse a breathless quality.

The **night** is used to create effect: the gentle moonlight at the beginning becomes darkness as the poet-narrator's state of mind becomes troubled by the end of the extract.

This is imagery that could be associated with **gothic (sinister or grotesque) tales, nightmares or even horror**.

Personification is also used by Wordsworth: he refers to the boat as "her" and the mountain peak comes alive and chases him.

Nature: we can be made to feel very small and insignificant by the natural world.

Loneliness: Wordsworth can think more clearly and is more affected by events and places as a result.

The night: the poem seems to suggest that you can sometimes experience feelings and events more clearly at night, perhaps due to loneliness.

Go compare...



Robert Browning – My Last Duchess

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's
hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured
countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts
by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they
durst,

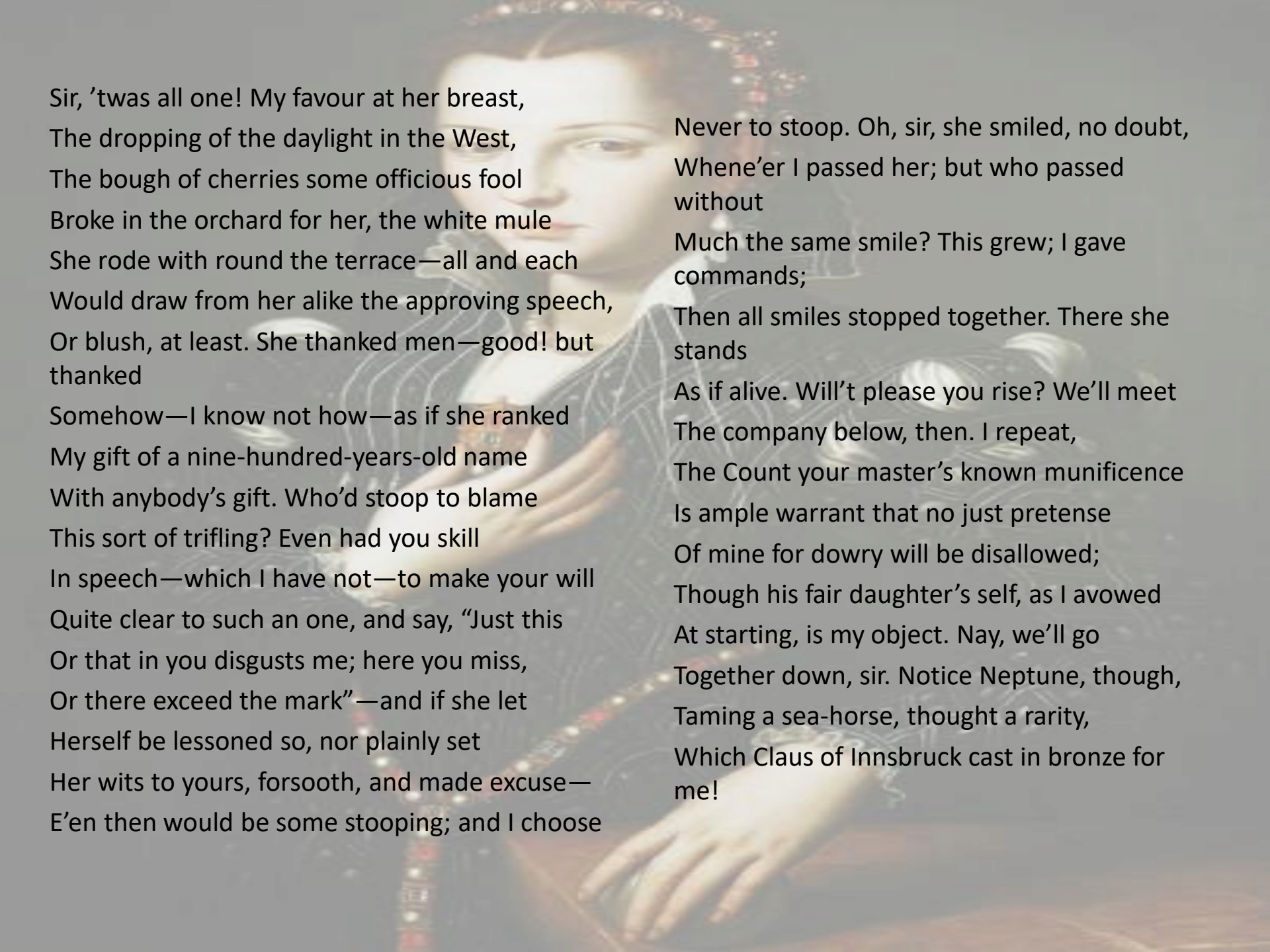
How such a glance came there; so, not the
first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such
stuff

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause
enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made
glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went
everywhere.



Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed
without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave
commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she
stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for
me!

Context

- **Robert Browning** (1812-1889) was known for his dark humour in his poems, as well as his social commentary and characterisation.
- Browning was interested in the **repression of the Victorian era**, and the **true, darker side of human behaviour**.
- Browning is best known for his use of the dramatic monologue. *My Last Duchess* is an example of this and it also reflects Browning's love of **history** and **European culture** as the story is based on the life of an Italian Duke from the sixteenth century.

Meaning

- The characters mentioned in this poem are based on real life, historical figures. The narrator is **Duke Alfonso II** who ruled a place in northern Italy called Ferrara between 1559 and 1597. The Duchess of whom he speaks was his first wife, **Lucrezia de' Medici** who died in 1561 aged 17, only two years after he married her. In real life, Lucrezia died in suspicious circumstances and might have been poisoned.
- The poem is set in 1564, three years after the death of the Duchess. An emissary from the Count of Tyrol has been sent to see the Duke about his marriage to the Count's daughter. During his speech to the visitor, he makes himself look arrogant, insensitive and selfish: showing the picture of his late wife and hinting that he might have killed her because of his jealousy and distrust of her.
- The Duke thinks the world revolves around him simply because he has "a nine-hundred-years-old name". In criticising the character of his late wife, he reveals the unpleasant side of his nature.
- Browning shows, in a clever way, that **commenting on a certain subject can reveal more about the person making the comments than the subject itself**. The Duke spends a lot of time criticising his late wife but the reader finishes the poem feeling sorry for her and disliking the Duke a great deal.

Form and Structure

- This is one of Browning's best known **dramatic monologues**.
- The poem is written in **iambic pentameter** and in **rhyming couplets**.
- This is **one long speech**, pretending to be a conversation. It is divided up into rhyming couplets but to mimic unrehearsed speech there are lots of twists and turns within the lines, shown by a variety of **punctuation** (colons and lots of dashes as well as the usual commas and full stops).

Language

- Although it is written in rhyming couplets, the sense of rhyme is partly lost because there is so much **enjambment**. There is lots of stopping and starting and it is hard to read it without sounding full of yourself.
- There are lots of **personal pronouns** in this poem, hinting at the narrator's **high opinion of himself** and his **selfishness**.
- Many of the words also relate to his **love of possessions** - including his former wife ("My last Duchess").
- This is not a poem full of wonderful imagery, reflecting the Duke's lack of sensitivity and capacity for emotional intelligence.
- **Pride is not an attractive quality**: the Duke's arrogance comes across quite clearly when talking about himself and his things.
- **Being upper class and having good morals don't necessarily go together**: people of great wealth and breeding often considered themselves to be morally superior to others - the Duke shows that isn't the case.
- **Money and possessions aren't everything**: he might have a wonderful house, terrace, orchard, paintings and statues but his paranoia about his late wife comes across and reflects his insecurity. In real life, Duke Alfonso II married three times and didn't produce an heir to his fortune - money can't buy you everything.

Go compare...



Lord Alfred Tennyson – Charge of the Light Brigade

1.

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.

2.

"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.

3.

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.



4.

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.

5.

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.

6.

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

Context

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

Meaning

- The Crimean War was fought between Britain and Imperial Russia from 1853-1856. For the first time in history, newspapers carried eye-witness reports as well as detailing **not just the triumphs of war but the mistakes and horrors as well.**
- The most significant moment in the Crimea came during the **Battle of Balaclava**. An order given to the British army's cavalry division (known as the Light Brigade) was misunderstood and 600 cavalrymen ended charging down a narrow valley straight into the fire of Russian cannons. Over 150 British soldiers were killed, and more than 120 were wounded. At home the news of the disaster was a sensation and a nation that had until then embraced British military exploits abroad began to question the politicians and generals who led them.
- **The poem therefore seems to be more concerned with creating national heroes for a nation than mourning the dead soldiers or arguing against the war.**

Form and Structure

- **The poem has a strong rhythm.** For example "half a league, half a league" two light beats followed by a heavy beat expresses the sound of the horses galloping.
- There are six numbered stanzas, as if each stanza is a memorial stone to 100 of the 600 cavalrymen. The length of the stanzas reflect the structure of the story.
- **The first three stanzas** - the Light Brigade is approaching the guns. There is a strong structure. Three lines (of three six-to-seven syllables) are followed by a shorter line (five syllables: "rode the six hundred"). This pattern suggests the strong formation in which the cavalry charge.
- **Stanza two** – the Light Brigade has engaged the enemy so the longer stanzas describe the struggle. The structure starts to break down. The rhythm of stanza four, for example, is broken by four shorter lines, while stanza five has only two short lines (lines 42 and 48). The desperate attempt to retreat is expressed in the run of six longer lines (43-48).
- **Stanza six** is a short, sharp conclusion written as if they are the lines we should remember the Light Brigade by.

Language

- The language of the poem is understandably military: guns, soldiers, cannon, sabres and gunners set the scene. The power of the poem, however, comes from the careful use of imagery and sound effects.
- The strong central image of the "valley of Death" (lines 3,7 and 16) refers to a well-known poem in the bible - Psalm 23 - about the 'valley of the shadow of death'. By using this Biblical allusion, Tennyson shows how important the event is.
- Tennyson uses a wide variety of techniques to provide the poem with highly effective sound effects. Alliteration, for example, is used to express the sounds of battle. Note the sound of bullets in line 22 ("shot and shell").
- **The poem has a strong rhythm.** For example "half a league, half a league" two light beats followed by a heavy beat expresses the sound of the horses galloping.

Go compare...



Wilfred Owen – Exposure

I

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...
Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
 But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire.
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
 What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray,
 But nothing happens.

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

II

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

Is it that we are dying?

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

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

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

Context

- Wilfred Owen was a soldier and officer in World War 1 and, during this time, he witnessed the full horror of conditions on the front line. He wrote a number of poems about this, published after the war.
- The **war itself was often criticised** because of a huge loss of life for very little gain. During the Somme, over 60,000 British soldiers died in one day, and in all they only gained 6 miles by the end of the war.
- Owen's **poems were often angry** that the soldiers were in muddy dangerous trenches while the generals behind the lines were living in comfort. Owen's poems tried to show the truth of conditions to people back home.

Meaning

- The poem itself is about the **weather** and **conditions of living** in the trenches rather than any fighting. It is more a poem about the **conflict between man and nature**.
- This is extremely relevant because man has created machines that can launch explosive shells for miles and destroy the landscape, and yet, nature can still do more harm than any of it.

Form and Structure

- The poem uses a large amount of **ellipses**, **caesura** and **repetition** to create an on-going sense of waiting and boredom.
- The poem is made of **eight stanzas** with a consistent use of a half line to end. This reinforces the sense of stasis or sameness throughout the poem that nothing is happening.
- There is use of **para-rhyme** showing words which appear to rhyme yet sound wrong when read – creating a sense of unease in the poem that the soldiers are feeling.
- The poem ends with the fear of tonight and the people who will lose lives and how none of this will change anything.

Language

- Owen also uses a huge amount of **onomatopoeia** and **alliteration** in the poem to emphasise the atmosphere and the sound of weather.
- Written about soldiers in a trench we expect to see a large amount of **military language**, however most of this is used to describe and personify the weather as if it were an army attacking them.
- **Contrasting language** used to describe the movement of the weather: “merciless”, “silent”, “mad”, to the movement of the soldiers: “wearied”, “worried”, “watching”.
- **Pathetic fallacy** creates a sense of mood.
- **Personification** emphasises the strength of the elements: “mad gusts tugging”, “Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army”.

Go compare...



Seamus Heaney – Storm on the Island

We are prepared: we build our houses squat,
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.
The wizened earth has never troubled us
With hay, so as you can see, there are no stacks
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees
Which might prove company when it blows full
Blast: you know what i mean - leaves and branches
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale
So that you can listen to the thing you fear
Forgetting that it pummels your house too.
But there are no trees, no natural shelter.
You might think that the sea is company,
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs
But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits
The very windows, spits like a tame cat
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives
And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo.
We are bombarded by the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

Context

- Seamus Heaney was a poet in Ireland, he grew up in a farming community and many of his poems were about very normal and homely subjects. He uses a large number of **agricultural and natural images** in his work as **metaphors for human nature**.
- The poem is set around a story of a small isolated cottage near the sea in a storm and the exposure to the elements.

Meaning

- The poem looks at the **conflict between nature and man** and people's irrational fear of the weather.
- There is also a hint of **conflict** in the way the weather is described with "bombardment" and "salvo" - despite our fears and attempts to prepare, perhaps we fear the wrong thing? Perhaps our preparations are pointless?
- **Power** is also explored. As an Irish Catholic, religion is a big element in Heaney's life. In many ways he is also humbling the idea of God, reducing his power into a 'huge nothing'. It suggests fear only has power if you allow it.

Form and Structure

- The poem is in blank verse with 19 lines. There are 5 feet (10 syllables) in each line.
- The verses are **unrhymed** and it gives it a very conversational tone. This is added to by the use of **asides** ‘you know what I mean’. The poem also uses a great deal of **enjambment**, aiding the sense of conversation.
- The poem is in **present tense** to suggest the storm is occurring at the time.
- Fear: The poem ends with “it is a huge nothing that we fear”, suggesting it is not just about the weather but also potentially many things.

Language

- **Forceful sounds** – illustrate the power of nature.
- **Assonance / sibilance** – create the sound of the wind – adds atmosphere and power to the elements.
- The use of **oxymoron / contrast** highlight the ambiguous nature of the storm, and the conflicting thoughts of humans
- **Direct mode of address:** “you” / “your” – involves the reader, encouraging them to question their own fears.
- **War style language** “bomarded” illustrates the strength of the storm and highlights the fear of the inhabitants.

Go compare...



Ted Hughes – Bayonet Charge

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

In bewilderment then he almost stopped –
In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations
Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running
Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs
Listening between his footfalls for the reason
Of his still running, and his foot hung like
Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows

Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame
And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide
Open silent, its eyes standing out.
He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,
King, honour, human dignity, etcetera
Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm
To get out of that blue crackling air
His terror's touchy dynamite.

Context

- Ted Hughes (1930-1998) was born in Yorkshire, in the North of England, and grew up in the countryside. After serving in the RAF for two years, he won a scholarship to Cambridge University where he studied Archaeology and Anthropology.
- **The themes of the countryside, human history and mythology** therefore already deeply influenced his imagination by the time he started writing poetry as a student.
- He made his name as a poet in the late 1950s and 1960s and was poet laureate from 1984 until his death from cancer in 1998.

Meaning

- *Bayonet Charge* is perhaps unusual for a Ted Hughes poem in that it focuses on a nameless soldier in the First World War (1914-18).
- This poem tries to step inside the body and mind of a soldier carrying out one of the most terrifying acts of this or any war: charging straight into rifle fire with the aim of killing enemy soldiers face-to-face. In doing so, Hughes dramatises the struggle between a man's thoughts and actions.
- It describes the experience of '**going over-the-top**'. This was when soldiers hiding in trenches were ordered to 'fix bayonets' (attach the long knives to the end of their rifles) and climb out of the trenches to charge an enemy position twenty or thirty metres away.
- The aim was to capture the enemy trench. The poem describes how this **process transforms a soldier from a living thinking person into a dangerous weapon of war.**

Form and Structure

- The **length of the lines** varies. Hughes uses long and short lines to suggest the quick and slow progress of the soldier.
- **The first stanza** is all about action and running. The soldier is awake and running within six words of the opening line. The flow, however, is broken by the use of dashes "-". This breaks up the flow of the poem and shows **how the soldier is waking up to what is happening and slowly starting to think**.
- **The second stanza** therefore happens in a **kind of slow-motion** (note the three lines that are broken in the middle by punctuation – lines 11, 14 and 15).
- The second half of line 15 breaks this spell and he knows he has to rush, without thinking, towards his death in **the final stanza**.
- At the start of the poem the soldier is instinctively obeying orders. In stanza two he has moments of clarity when he thinks about what he is doing and time seems to stop still.
- In the end all high moral justifications, such as king and country, have become meaningless. He himself becomes a form of human bomb, not a person but a weapon of war.

Language

- There is the frantic action of battle and the thick difficulty of the mud. In the middle of all this, there is the sudden fear and clear thoughts of the soldier. **These feelings are presented in images you can see as well as images you can hear.**

Sound

- Hughes uses a dense repetition of words and sounds right from the beginning. For example, in stanza one he uses the repeated 'h' sound that expresses the soldier's heavy breathing.

Imagery

- The rich descriptions contrast with where the soldier is heading - a simple, almost childish description – line 3.
- Another form of contrast is between the imagery of war and the imagery of nature. Throughout the poem we have a background of farming and the natural world: line 3 and 16. The hare, however, becomes an image of death.
- Similes like those found in line 8 and bring a sense of hell to the battlefield.

Go compare...



Simon Armitage – Remains

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

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

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



Pain itself, the image of agony.
One of my mates goes by
And tosses his guts back in to his body.
Then he's carted off in the back of a lorry.

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

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

He's here in my head when I close my eyes,
Dug in behind enemy lines,
Not left for dead in some distant, star-stunned, sand-smothered land
Or six-feet-under in desert sand,

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

Context

- The poem is written **from the perspective of a soldier** stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan (or any warzone really). They are on patrol and fire on some bank robbers. One of the looters appeared to possibly have a gun so they open fire. The rest of the poem is looking at the fact the soldier, even long after this event, cannot leave the memory behind and carries this dead man with him in his mind.
- **Post traumatic stress** and mental illness is very common in soldiers who struggle to come to terms with some part of their duty, normally a horrific memory of killing or being in danger. These memories often leave the sufferer with nightmares, panic attacks, depression and suicidal tendencies.
- Simon Armitage is a famous UK poet who is known for being very direct in his work. His recent poems have looked at the experiences of war and soldiers.

Meaning

- The poem is originally set in a warzone and naturally looks at conflict in a **direct** way.
- However it also focuses heavily on the **after effects of conflict** and the **long-term effects** it has on the people involved.
- Power is partly shown in this as well, firstly the **soldiers' power over life and death**, but later the power over their own memory and experiences. Mental health and morality are also key in this.

Form and Structure

- The poem is written in **8 stanzas**, the last of which is a couplet, which leaves the poem on a **dramatic end**.
- It does not rhyme and the poem is a monologue, using very **conversational asides** and syntax to structure the sentences into a very conversational tone “end of story, not really”.
- There is also a lot of **enjambment** and **caesura** used to emphasise the natural speech patterns of the speaker. Another key factor in this poem is the use of **colloquialism** (slang) and **personal pronouns** to give it a sense of realism, “One of my mates,”.
- There is a loose set of **rhymes** in the poem, often **internal** and used to give an almost childish aspect to the horror of the warzone. It perhaps suggests how numb this soldier is to what is happening.

Language

- The speaker in the poem (the soldier) appears to be numb to the horror of the experience of war; most of the *horrific images of death and killing* are **juxtaposed** to the *casual nature of the way the soldier speaks*, using slang and clichés.
- In part, this reflects a conflict in himself: the way he sees these events and how they affect him, but also his way of trying to maintain control, by trivialising the whole experience.
- Anecdotal style: “on another occasion”, involves the reader in the soldier’s story.
- Use of **prosaic**, everyday language creates a bond between the speaker and reader; they feel a sense of familiarity with the speaker’s words.
- Language associated with being **exposed**: “rips”, “open”, “torn”.

Go compare...



Jane Weir - Poppies

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

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's
upturned collar, steeled the softening
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
across the tip of your nose, play at
being Eskimos like we did when
you were little. I resisted the impulse
to run my fingers through the gelled
blackthorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated.
After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.
Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
and this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach
busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf,
gloves.

On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.
The dove pulled freely against the sky,
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to
hear
your playground voice catching on the wind.

Context

- Jane Weir, born in 1963, grew up in Italy and Northern England, with an English mother and an Italian father. She has continued to absorb different cultural experiences throughout her life, also living in Northern Ireland during the troubled 1980s.
- Her poetry has won several prizes and drawn praise from many other leading poets. She has also written many other kinds of books. The influences of her broad cultural experiences as well as her knowledge of and interest in other art forms can be seen throughout her work.

Meaning

- **The poem is set in the present day but reaches right back to the beginning of the Poppy Day tradition.** Armistice Sunday began as a way of marking the end of the First World War in 1918 so people could remember the thousands of ordinary men who had been killed in the First World War. Today, the event is used to remember soldiers of all wars who have died since then.
- When *Poppies* was written, British soldiers were still dying in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a way of trying to understand the suffering that deaths caused, the poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy asked a number of writers to compose poems, including Jane Weir.
- **The poem is about the nature of grief.** The mother is speaking directly to her son, **but a son who shifts in time.**
- 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.

Form and Structure

- The poem appears to have a strong, regular sense of form. There are four clear stanzas, the first and last with six lines, the second with 11 and the third 12.
- On closer inspection, however, we can see a great deal of movement within this outwardly regular form. 19 lines out of 35 have **caesuras** in the middle of the lines - marked by commas or more strongly by full-stops. This could reflect the inner emotion of the **narrator**.
- **The biggest movement in the poem, however, is in the narrative structure – how the story is told.** The time sequence keeps changing along with her emotions. It goes from "Three days before" (line 1) to "Before you left" (line 3) to "After you'd gone" (line 23) to "later" (line 25) and the present in "this is where it has led me" on line 26. It ends with her suspended, on the hill, between the present and the past.

Language

- Poppies is a **richly textured** poem because the images of touch and feel (texture) run throughout the poem.
- The detailed description of the blazer is emphasised through **alliteration** on "bias binding... blazer", emphasising the closeness between mother and son.
- In words such as "spasms", "disrupting" and "blockade" however, she may be also recalling the **violence** of his death.
- This sense of her blocking out the memory of his violent death with a sweeter, purer memory is sustained in the second stanza: "Sellotape bandaged around my hand", this everyday affectionate gesture is tainted by the word "bandaged", with its **connotations** of injury.
- In the third stanza, the language becomes **metaphorical** and **symbolic**. The door to the house is the door to the world. The song-bird is a 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.

Go compare...



Carol Ann Duffy – War Photographer

In his dark room he is finally alone
with spools of suffering set out in
ordered rows.

The only light is red and softly glows,
as though this were a church and
he a priest preparing to intone a Mass.
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is
grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays
beneath his hands, which did not
tremble then
though seem to now. Rural England.
Home again
to ordinary pain which simple weather
can dispel,
to fields which don't explode beneath
the feet
of running children in a nightmare heat.

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

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

Context

- The poem is written about a war photographer who has **returned home and is developing his photos**. The process of developing old style film photos is rather unusual for many to understand today. Old style film is very sensitive to light, so it must be done in a dark room lit with red light. The photo itself is developed using chemicals, which slowly bring out the photo, it is then hung to dry. All of this can create quite a sinister atmosphere, red light, surrounding by hanging photos and chemical smells.
- The poem is also looking at the **contrast** between the war zones and safety of being back home and the way people just do not understand the truth, after all a single photo cannot show everything.
- War photographers do a very dangerous job, many are killed and injured, as they must get in harms way to get the photos they are after.

Meaning

- The poem looks at **conflict** in the sense that he has taken photos of war and fighting.
- However there is also **conflict between the warzone and 'Rural England'**. The poet is trying to emphasise how out of touch people are about the truth of war, as well as how it is more a business or bit of gossip rather than life changing and destructive.

Form and Structure

- Written in 4 **stanzas**, the poem features **rhyming couplets** interspaced with non-rhyming lines.
- The **regular** structure can represent the order he is giving to the chaos in his photos, perhaps also the almost mechanical process he is going through and putting that **distance** between himself and the context.
- The poem is written as a **narrative**, leading us through the act of the photographer processing his photos, this again helps create a sense of **detachment** or even **cynicism** about what this action reflects, that people suffer and lose lives and the end result to us is a few pictures chosen for the newspapers.

Language

- **Emotive** language used to convey the photographer's troubled memories: "a hundred agonies"
- **Imagery**: "a half-formed ghost" – evidence that the photographer continues to be 'haunted' by the memory of what he photographed.
- **Plosive** sounds "Belfast. Beirut. Phnom. Penh". Could reflect click of camera / could reflect explosions
- **Monosyllabic** in places – emotionless?
- **Irony** "which did not tremble then". Does he suggest the memory is worse than the moment in time?

Go compare...



Imtiaz Dharker - Tissue

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

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

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

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

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

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

An architect could use all this,
place layer over layer, luminous
script over numbers over line,
and never wish to build again with brick

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

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

turned into your skin.

Context

- Imtiaz Dharker is a poet and filmmaker, she has Pakistani origins and was raised in Glasgow. A great number of her poems look at issues such as **religion, terrorism and global politics/identity**.
- The poem is written from the point of view of someone today looking out at the conflict and troubles of the modern world; destruction, war and politics, money and wealth as well as issues like terrorism and identity. The poem remarks how nothing is meant to last, that it would be better not to hold too tightly to that and instead we should be willing to let go and pass things on in their time to be remade.
- In short, that the world would be better if it shared more qualities with 'tissue'.

Meaning

- The poem looks at conflict in terms of **destruction** and **politics**. It hints that **we make our own conflict** by holding on too tight to power and control. We create division and conflict between ourselves by insisting on following the instructions handed down to us.
- The poem remarks how nothing is meant to last, and calls in to **question things** (structures, rules, borders) **that the human race attribute meaning to**.
- The final image is a reminder of our own **mortality**.

Form and Structure

- The poem is written as an on-going **monologue**.
- There is some **internal rhyme** through the poem (though with no real pattern to it).
- It uses **enjambment** to create a very human and calm tone.
- The poem begins by questioning the **fragility** of paper: using this to symbolize the fragile structures we create. The final line “turned into your skin” is a reminder of our own **fragility**, like the structures we leave behind.

Language

- The use of **extended metaphor** of the paper is used to symbolise the fragility of human beings.
- The reference to relatable objects: Koran, Building Maps and Grocery slips are used to symbolise wider issues/
- These objects are symbols of wider issues in the world: religion, structures of power, major cities and landmarks of various nations, borders of countries and the divides in politics and culture. Grocery slips could represent the influence of money and wealth on society.
- **Natural imagery** of light and sun – shown to overpower, outlast the things we create.

Go compare...



Carol Rumens – The émigrée

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

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

I have no passport, there's no way back at all
but my city comes to me in its own white
plane.

It lies down in front of me, docile as paper;
I comb its hair and love its shining eyes.
My city takes me dancing through the city
of walls. They accuse me of absence, they
circle me.

They accuse me of being dark in their free city.
My city hides behind me. They mutter death,
and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight.

Context

- The poem explores the **memory** of the speaker and their experiences in a faraway city they spent time in as a child. The poet reminisces about the place through her childhood eyes, although we see conflict between this and her adult perception of her homeland.
- An **emigrée** is usually the term for someone who has to leave a country for political or social reasons.
- The poet bases many of the ideas on modern examples of emigration from countries like Russia or the Middle East where people are fleeing corruption and tyranny, or those countries change in their absence to some form of dictatorship.

Meaning

- The poem has a deep sense of **conflict** in terms of emotions and memory; the poet is torn between her childhood memory and her adult understanding.
- This also reflects in the form of the city itself today, which has become a hostile totalitarian place. The concept of a city can be a metaphor for **memories** and **growth** in general, progression from childhood to maturity.

Form and Structure

- The poem follows a **three stanza** structure with repetitive elements such as the idea of 'sunlight'.
- The opening of the poem seems to encompass the speaker trying to capture the memory, the second stanza builds on the details of this, fleshing out the city in her mind, finally the poem seems to veer towards an idea of facing up to the modern, dark place her city of memory has become.
- The poem **does not have a particularly consistent structure** or any use of **rhyme**, this perhaps encapsulate the still uncertain understanding of the speaker about her city.
- The poem uses **enjambment** to create a flowing pace to the narrator's thought process, as though she is thinking out loud and yet to find a conclusion.

Language

- A large amount of **imagery** is used within the poem to try and capture the concept of the city, including personification, though much of this is deliberately vague.
- The feeling of uncertainty is further enhanced by some of the **unusual** and **unnatural links** between ideas and choice of **metaphors**.
- Vocabulary associated with **war**, **invasion** and **tyranny** contrast her **idealistic** image of the city.
-
- **Anecdotal**: “There once was a country...”, as though she is engaging us with a story.
-
- **Personification** of the city: highlights the importance of her home to her.
-
- **Contrast** positive/negative language – illustrates the difference between her perception of her home, and the reality.

Go compare...



John Agard – Checking out me History

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 and all
dat

Dem tell me about 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 de thorn

To de French

Toussaint de beacon

Of de Haitian Revolution



Dem tell me bout de man who discover de
balloon
And de cow who jump over de moon
Dem tell me bout de dish ran away with de
spoon
But dem never tell me bout Nanny de
maroon

*Nanny
See-far woman
Of mountain dream
Fire-woman struggle
Hopeful stream
To freedom river*

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and
Waterloo
But dem never tell me bout Shaka de great
Zulu
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492
But what happens 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

Context

- **John Agard** was born in British Guiana (now called Guyana) in the Caribbean, in 1949. He moved to the UK in the late 1970s and is well known for **powerful and fun performances** of his work.
- He uses non-standard phonetic spelling (written as a word sounds) to represent his own accent, and writes about what it is like being black to challenge racist attitudes, especially those which are unthinking.

Meaning

- This poem draws on Agard's experience to make us look at the way history is taught, and at how we conceive our identity as we learn about cultural traditions and narratives. It becomes clear that Agard had to follow a history curriculum biased towards whites, especially British whites, so that he learned about mythical, nursery rhyme characters instead of living black people from the past.
- He **challenges this view of history** and cites some major black figures to balance the bias and create a basis for his own identity.
- It is a poem that challenges us to consider the **meaning of history**, how we come to know about the past and accept versions of history. The poet might be provoking us to "check out" our own histories, particularly if they include periods or important figures not taught in schools.

Form and Structure

- *Checking Out Me History* alternates between **two structures**, marked by two different fonts.
- The first uses the repeated phrase "Dem tell me" to indicate the white version of history, mostly written in rhyming **couplets, triplets** or **quatrains**.
- Interspersed are the stories of three black historical figures: Toussaint L'Overture, Nanny de Maroon and Mary Seacole, told using **abbreviated syntax** with words missed out, shorter lines and an irregular rhyme scheme.

Language

- Agard uses **variations in spelling** to suggest Caribbean dialect, stressing the importance of carving out his "own identity".
- There is repetition - particularly of "Dem tell me" - throughout the poem, creating a sense of **rhythm**.
- In the "Dem tell me" sections the poet refers to nursery rhyme characters and other non-historical people. There's a suggestion that the version of history taught to the poet is not exactly accurate even before you consider that black people have been completely left out.
- The sections on individual black historical figures contain stronger **imagery**, with use of **nature metaphors** to powerful effect. Toussaint L'Overture is a "thorn" and a "beacon". Nanny de Maroon is linked with a mountain, fire and rivers. Mary Seacole is described in dramatic imagery as a "healing star" and a "yellow sunrise" to the patients she treats.
- All three are associated with **light** - "beacon", "fire-woman" and "star" - suggesting that they play metaphorical roles, illuminating the poet's true historical identity.
- The poem changes in tone: "Dem tell me" sections have an accusatory, **rebellious** tone to them, created by repetition and short lines at the beginning. Whereas the sections on Toussaint L'Overture, Nanny de Maroon and Mary Seacole are **celebratory** in tone, emphasised by images of nature and using epic (out of the ordinary) vocabulary - words like "vision", "see-far" and "star".

Go compare...



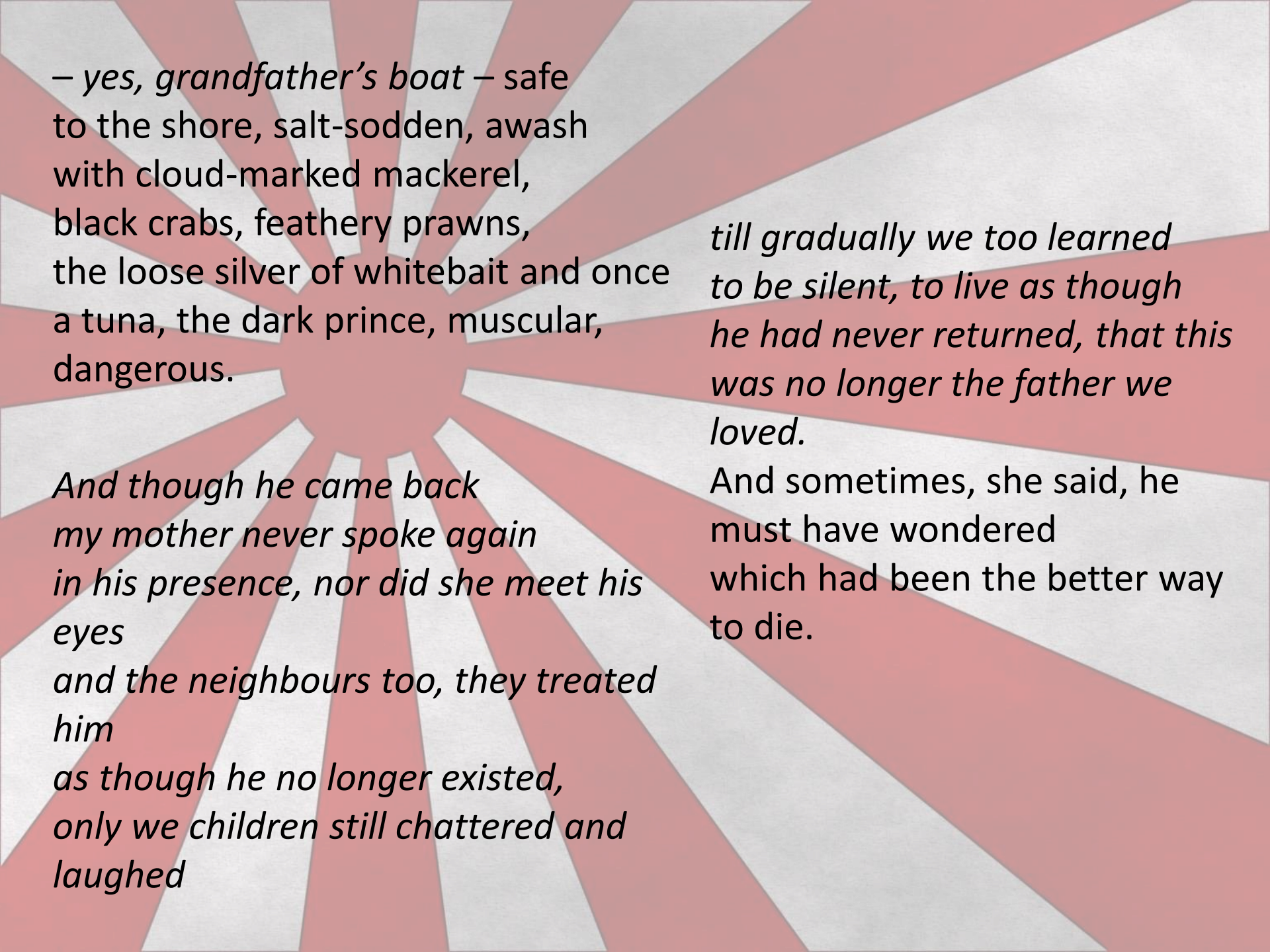
Beatrice Garland - Kamikaze

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.

Context

- Beatrice Garland was born in Oxford in 1938 and won the National Poetry Prize in 2001
- Towards the end of WWII, Japan was losing the war against American forces who were advancing towards the Japanese home islands. To defend, a special unit of the Japanese air force was formed, known as kamikaze pilots (literally meaning: Divine Wind). Their official name was the Special Attack Unit, their sole purpose to deliberately crash their planes in to American warships. Kamikaze pilots were on suicide missions, and their sacrifice was seen as both a religious and patriotic obligation.

Kamikaze Soldier's Oath

- 1. A soldier must make loyalty his obligation.
- 2. A soldier must make propriety his way of life.
- 3. A soldier must highly esteem military valour.
- 4. A soldier must have a high regard for righteousness.
- 5. A soldier must live a simple life.

Meaning

- The poem is set around the events of a **kamikaze pilot** flying to war and then **turning back** before it was too late. The pilot in this poem returns home and is **rejected** by his family forever after, his own wife refusing to speak to him.
- The poem is written from **two perspectives**: the narrator and the daughter of the pilot. The narrator explains the events, almost translating the story, while the speaker gives a first person account of how they excluded her father.
- The poet questions at the end which death would have been better, to die as a kamikaze pilot young or to grow old with a family who shut you out.

Form and Structure

- The poem changes to italic/font during the penultimate stanzas to indicate the change of speaker, from the narrator/translator to the daughter it appears as if the daughter is passing on the story to her own children and the narrator is explaining this process.
- The final **couplet** hits home the themes of the poem quite **dramatically** in a very somber tone but does not offer opinion, challenging the reader to come to their own decision.
- The consistent structure uses quite **regular syllable patterns** drifting up and down in length; this gives the poem a tone of nostalgia, but also the rhythm of the waves which can represent a helplessness.
- The use of asides and calm rural language **juxtaposes** the setting of war, giving the poem a much more personal scope on a major event.

Language

- Soft 's' and 'f' sounds (**sibilance**) when discussing nature could suggest the narrator's recognition that such natural beauty may have discouraged the pilot from completing his mission.
- The use of **listing** at the beginning highlight the pilot's emotional detachment in order to follow through with orders.
- **Contrasting** language choices symbolise the contrasting and conflicting emotions of the pilot.
- **Lack of punctuation** – child's voice / unconscious thought
- **Imperatives / modal verb** 'must', reveal the urgency and importance of decisions being made.
- **Symbolic** language: "figure of 8" is the infinity symbol. Representative of the endless cycle the pilot is trapped in?

Go compare...

