

### Structure

There are layers of narration: Shelley – the narrator – the traveller’s tale. This use of reported speech distances the reader from the subject giving the poem a dream-like and mysterious tone.

### Language

The central image of the poem is the ‘shattered’ statue. Note the imagery of decay and brokenness.

### Context

Deserts hold a fascination within our culture. They have swallowed up civilisations in the past: they are mysterious and powerful. They symbolise our lack of power in the face of nature.

### Language and Themes

This image explores the loss of power. ‘Colossal’ means vast and magnificent whereas ‘wreck’ points to the destruction of that power.

### Language, Meaning and Content

The poem is an ironic statement about power. Here we see the ‘king of kings’ left shattered and in the sands of the desert – a powerful comment on the temporary nature of power.

### Context

When the poem was written there was a fascination with Egypt and ‘ancient’ lands and their treasures.

# 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  
5 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:  
10 ‘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.

### Meaning and Content

Message of the poem: no one has power against time and nature.

### Language

There is a juxtaposition here, between the commanding and arrogant words that are surrounded by images of decay.

The irony in this line is that there are no more ‘works’ to consider. Time has removed them.

### Structure

Look at the distance between the legs and the head. This signals the ‘scattered’ statue and highlights the loss of power.

### Language

These expressions of contempt and threat have been replicated on this ‘lifeless thing’.

### Language

On the inscription he claims to be the best of the best! Magnificent. The ruler of all other kings.

### Structure and Form

Sonnet structure; this allows Shelley to deal with big ideas succinctly.

*Percy Bysshe Shelley*

### Language and Structure

Repeated words in the first two stanzas give a sense of the constant control of the ordinary people who live a dull and repetitious life.

### Language and Context

'chartered' means privately owned: in Blake's London even the river Thames is as good as privately owned.

### Form

Every stanza has the same ABAB rhyme scheme. Like Blake's city, the poem is regulated and controlled.

# London

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.

5 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.

10 How the chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning church appalls,  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls.

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

### Themes

Blake imagines the control of the people as 'manacles' but manacles of the mind: they are controlled mainly not through physical force, but through unhappiness, exhaustion, fear, and so on.

### Themes

The churches are blackened by the smoke from the factories, but also 'blackened' by the shame that Blake feels they should be feeling about the people's suffering.

### Themes

Palaces – like churches – represent the power and privilege that has no pity for the lives that are being ruined.

### Language

The repeated 's' sounds – sibilance – makes us hear the sighs of the people.

### Context

A harlot is another word for prostitute. Their 'curse' might be 'bad language', but it is also the sexually transmitted diseases ('plagues') they pass to their clients who infect their wives and then their children as they are born.

### Language

Blake uses the hard 'bl' alliteration to emphasise the violence being done to the men's families. We might think of the word 'bludgeon'.

### Language

This shocking oxymoron neatly sums up how marriages cause the death of children through the unconscious transmission of STDs.

*William Blake*

### Language

This is a memory, yet dates are not specific. This adds to the dreamlike quality of the experience and its timelessness.

### Meaning

An action or event that acts as an introduction to something more important

### Language

Nature is personified and at this point is nurturing. Notice the use of brackets (parenthesis) – the narrator is creating an aside, a whisper, that is confiding in tone.

### Language

The boat, again referred to as female later in the poem, is a means of taming nature – it enables the boy to travel over the water – yet later in the poem we are shown that it is fragile in the face of nature.

## Extract from, The Prelude

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  
 5 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,  
 10 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,  
 15 The horizon's utmost boundary; far above  
 Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.  
 She was an elfin pinnacle; lustily  
 I dipped my oars into the silent lake,  
 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
 20 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,  
 25 And growing still in stature the grim shape  
 Towered up between me and the stars, and still,

### Meaning

First indication of wrong-doing: the boy has stolen the boat.

### Language

Personification giving the mountains a voice through the echoes; building the ominous tone.

### Language

Visual image of light on water. The repeated 'l' sounds emphasise the delicacy of the water droplets. This is a peaceful scene.

### Language

Oxymoron showing guilt mixed with enjoyment of rowing and the night; building tension.

### Language

Suggests a light, delicate and magical boat

### Language

His pride in his skill matches his dynamic actions, he 'reaches' with an 'unswerving' line, 'fixed' his view. However, notice that he also feels like a thief.

### Structure

This is the turning point of the poem which introduces a dramatic change of tone.

### Language

The power is voluntary, conscious and therefore very frightening.

### Language

Note the repetition of 'huge' reflecting his disjointed and terrified thoughts.

### Language

Nature, now a terrifying force, changes from a woman to the dehumanised 'it' making it forbidding and menacing.

For so **it** seemed, with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,  
30 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  
35 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  
40 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.

### Language

Contrast with threatening images

### Themes

Nature's power

### Themes

This change reflects the duality of nature: gentle and nurturing or terrifying and overwhelming.

The narrator continually reflects on the power of nature and it troubles him. He understands that mankind is frail in the face of nature.

*William Wordsworth*

### Form and Themes

The whole poem is written in rhyming couplets, perhaps reflecting the control the duke exercises over everything.

# 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.  
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
'Frà 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  
10 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  
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps  
Frà 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  
20 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.  
25 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

### Language

The duke is courteous but this contrasts with his brutal actions.

### Language and Themes

In 'asides' the duke lets us know the personal power and control he exercises in all things.

### Language

Sometimes the duke interrupts his own words as though he is not quite clear about his thoughts, or is not confident about himself. Again, we know that this is a pretence.

### Language

He mentions Fra Pandolf's words as though he can't remember them clearly or they weren't very important, but we know he remembers everything exactly – and takes offence easily!

### Language

Simple words, but they carry a threat: he was angered by her insistence on looking (and probably going) wherever she liked.



### Language

She showed her gratitude and appreciation to everyone who deserved it.

### Language

The duke accuses his wife of being frivolous: only he - the head of an ancient family - is a fitting subject for her attention.

### Meaning

It's almost as though the duke prefers his wife to 'live' in the portrait where she will be perfect (i.e. under his control) forever, never disobedient.

### Meaning

For appearance's sake, the duke says he most values the count's daughter for her own qualities as a person, not for the riches she may bring.

30 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  
35 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  
40 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;  
45 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  
50 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,  
55 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

### Language and Meaning

Typical euphemisms from the duke. He means he will never accept even the slightest disobedience. He is not explicit about the commands he gave or what happened as a result.

### Meaning

The duke predicts that he will receive a large dowry. However, really he is giving an order: the dowry *will be granted*.

**Robert Browning**

### Context

The poem commemorates a British cavalry charge in the Crimean War in 1854.

### Form

The poem is written in dactylic rhythm, thus suggesting the sound of galloping horses ('Half a league, half a league.')

### Context

This line recalls a famous part of the Bible: 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.' Setting off this association in readers' minds gives the line extra authority and power.

### Language

The 'd' alliteration makes the action of 'doing and dying' sound easy – a duty that does not require thought.

# The 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.

5 'Forward, the Light Brigade!  
Charge for the guns!' he said.

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

2

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'

10 Was there a man dismay'd?

Not tho' the soldier knew

Some one had blunder'd.

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why,

15 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,

20 Cannon in front of them

Volleyed and thunder'd;

Storm'd at with shot and shell,

Boldly they rode and well,

Into the jaws of Death,

25 Into the mouth of Hell

Rode the six hundred.

### Structure

Each stanza is organised around this 'undred'/'under'd' rhyme, which ends the fourth line of every stanza.

### Context

'he' is the Light Brigade commander, Lord Cardigan.

### Meaning and Themes

The order to charge the Russian artillery was a mistake – a blunder.

### Meaning and Content

This line has become a common saying: 'ours not to reason why': in other words duty sometimes means carrying out wrong orders without questioning them.

### Language and Structure

Repetitions of lines and words throughout the poem add to the sense of forward momentum – an unstoppable charge.

### Language

The 'valley of death', with its positive associations with the Bible, has now become the 'jaws of death' and the 'mouth of hell', emphasising inevitable death and agony.

4

Flash'd all their sabres bare,  
 Flash'd as they turn'd in air  
 Sabring the gunners there,  
 30 Charging an army, while  
All the world wonder'd:  
 Plunged in the battery-smoke  
 Right thro' the line they broke;  
 Cossack and Russian  
 35 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke  
 Shattered and sunder'd.  
 Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.

**Themes**

Here Tennyson suggests that the cavalymen's heroism is admired not just in Britain, but across the world. Of course he is only asserting this: he can't know if it is really true.

**Themes**

The repetition of 'not' creates a stumble in the poem's rhythm. This makes a pause and draws attention to the waste of life that the mistaken order to charge has caused.

5

Cannon to right of them,  
 40 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,  
 45 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.

**Language, Structure and Form**

In this stanza, the poem's galloping rhythm returns, and the use of alliteration (here and elsewhere in the poem) gives more emphasis to the galloping rhythm.

**Themes**

Again Tennyson emphasises the waste of life.

**Language and Themes**

Now – in the final stanza – the poem takes on the tone of public rhetoric through a rhetorical question and then imperative verbs, telling the reader what they should think and do. The poem's final message is one of celebration for the heroism of the noble cavalry.

6

50 When can their glory fade?  
 O the wild charge they made!  
 All the world wonder'd.  
Honour the charge they made!  
Honour the Light Brigade,  
 55 Noble six hundred!

*Alfred Lord Tennyson*



### Language and Meaning

Multi-layered title: could mean exposure to the weather; exposure to enemy troops; exposure to the reality of war; exposure to loss of faith.

### Language

The winds are personified as a further enemy in this war.

### Language

In the poem, Owen speaks for all soldiers. Notice the numerous inclusive references to 'our', 'we' and 'us' throughout the poem

### Themes

The ellipsis suggests that time is dragging.

## Exposure

### Language

Silence is to be feared, dreaded. Everything is strange – the men are threatened despite the monotony of just waiting.

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,  
5 **But nothing happens.**

### Language

Everything is waiting.

### Language

Alongside the weather that stabs them, the brambles take on elements of war – brambles linked to barbed wire.

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.  
10 **What are we doing here?**

### Language

Usually a symbol of hope and new beginnings, dawn also takes on characteristics of war.

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,  
15 **But nothing happens.**

### Language

Sibilance reflects the speed and sound of the bullets. This is the first sign of action, but it returns to the monotony: '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,  
20 **But nothing happens.**

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

### Structure

A structural shift here from the present to memories of home

### Structure and Context

A structural shift to consider the role of faith and God's place in war. This speculation often featured in Owen's poetry.

30 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.

35 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.

40 **Tonight**, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,  
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.  
The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,  
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,

**But nothing happens**

### Structure

A structural shift back to the men. Introduction of a new perspective to the scene: the 'burying-party' who view the scene with detachment.

### Language and Structure

Even with all of this death, there is nothing that changes: this is the futility of war. Links back to the opening of the poem.

### Language and Meaning

An ambiguous line. Whose eyes does this refer to? The burying-party who as so used to death that they no longer become emotional about it or the men whose eyes are 'iced' through death?

### Context

Owen was a First World War poet. He fought and died in this war.

**Wilfred Owen**

### Language

The pronouns make the experience on the island shared: the islanders stick together.

### Language

Word choices are straightforward and 'no nonsense' – just like life for the islanders.

### Language

These words personify the earth of the island, but as a tough being. The inhabitants are similarly tough.

## Storm on the Island

We are prepared: we build our houses squat,  
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.

This wizened earth has never troubled us  
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks

5 Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees  
Which might prove company when it blows full  
Blast: you know what I mean – leaves and branches

Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale  
So that you listen to the thing you fear

10 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

15 The very windows, spits like a tame cat  
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives

And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo,  
We are bombarded with the empty air.  
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

### Language

Simple, ugly words. The hard 'st' alliteration emphasises the harshness of island life.

### Language

This conversational aside addresses the reader directly. These words' colloquial style emphasise the simple outlook of the islanders. The reader is expected to understand and agree.

### Themes

Suggests the wail of the storm wind and confirms the sense of drama that it threatens. 'Tragic' suggests acceptance though: the islanders accept the threat of the storms, and are 'prepared'.

### Language

This oxymoron sums up both the familiar island sounds and the threat those sounds carry: a prediction of the storm's attack is suggested by 'exploding'. The sea is 'explosive' but the islanders know that the force is contained ('comfortable') – for now.

### Themes

Irony: the storm that is so destructive is intangible: wind is nothing but 'empty air'.

### Language

When the storm breaks it is expressed in an extended metaphor of a military attack.

### Language

The 's' and 't' sounds in these lines directly convey the spitting, hissing sound of the rough sea.

*Seamus Heaney*

### Structure

The reader is thrown straight into the action as if we have woken suddenly too.

### Context

The soldier would use the bayonet to stab the enemy. A close and violent form of fighting on the battlefield.

### Language

This is not a glorious view of being at war.

### Language

Two meanings: beauty and causing blindness

### Language

Simile to show that he is moving blindly, following orders, like running in the dark.

### Language

In the natural world, the hare is fast and agile, but it cannot survive in mankind's war. It is a multi-layered symbol of the loss of innocence through war.

### Language

All of his moral reasons for joining up have no significance in this fight for survival.

### Language

He is driven by terror not patriotism and has become a weapon of war. He is dehumanised by war.

### Language

The inclusion of 'etcetera' into the list of reasons to join the war suggests that these reasons are no longer relevant – just to be dismissed.

### Language

Contrast of the natural world with the violence of the battlefield. This green hedge also 'dazzles' with rifle fire suggesting the enemy is behind it. He is running into the gunfire.

### Structure

Khaki is the colour of uniforms. First hint that this is a battlefield

### Language and Meaning

'hand' has two meanings: he has a 'hand' in the country and the reasons they are fighting – he is part of the country; as the 'hand' of the clock he is at the centre of time, the most significant element of this moment.

# 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  
 5 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 –  
 10 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  
 15 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,  
 20 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.

Ted Hughes

### Language

The soldier is relating an incident in the past, but speaks in the present tense, giving dramatic immediacy.

# Remains

### Structure

'Another' shows that this poem is part of a longer account of a soldier's life: we begin in the middle of his story.

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**.

### Language

An ordinary soldier is speaking in his own language style, so much of the poem is written in slang or informal language.

### Language

The casual style brings the reader close to the speaker and suggests the soldier didn't really care whether the looter was armed or not.

5 **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

### Language

The verb choice, 'rips', is deliberately violent. (Compare it with another possible choice, 'passes'.)

10 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**,

### Language

'Life', not 'body'. This word choice economically conveys the information that the gunfire was fatal.

### Language

The shot looter's prone body is a symbol of pain: it looks like a representation of absolute pain.

15 **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.

### Language

Good examples of the soldier's callousness. Clothing is what we normally think of as 'inside out'. The phrase seems to equate the shot looter with an item of clothing – a thing, not a person.

### Themes

The looter's death is having a disturbing impact on the soldier. He can 'see' the looter's blood on the street.

20 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

### Themes

The soldier repeats his earlier words but with new significance: previously he showed indifference; now he is feeling guilty.

### Language

The hyphenated words with their alliterations are hard and brutal – like the soldier's experience.

25 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 –

30 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,

### Themes

The soldier tries to hide his feelings in clichéd phrases.

but **near to the knuckle**, here and now, **his bloody life in my bloody hands**.

*Simon Armitage*



### Structure

The poem is written in blank verse (it doesn't rhyme).

# Poppies

### Language and Themes

The poem is addressed to one person – the son. The poem expresses the feelings of all mothers, but is also very personal.

### Themes

Throughout this stanza, the mother tries to control and displace her deep emotions. Here she smooths her son's collar to 'smooth' her feelings.

### Language

This simile simply and effectively sums up what the world is like for the son: it offers something enticing and precious, hard to resist. His enthralled reaction is further developed through the metaphor 'intoxicated'.

### Language and Themes

The chaos of the mother's emotional release is suggested by her 'busy' stomach and her exit from the house unprepared for the cold.

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.

### Context

The military imagery ('blockade') reminds us of the death-in-conflict backdrop to the poem.

### Themes

At the end of the poem the woman again yearns for her son's childhood, when he was safe.

### Language

His hair is gelled into spikes, presumably to be fashionable. It is doubtful that he would have that hair style in the army.

### Themes

A dove is a traditional symbol of peace, hope and love. This appears to be a literal statement: the son kept a song bird in his room. However, it is more likely to be a metaphor: the mother released her own pent up emotions when her son left.

**Meaning**

Perhaps she is fearing or expecting to find her son's name on the war memorial.

30 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  
35 your playground voice catching on the wind.

**Meaning**

A wishbone is a token of luck; presumably the mother is wishing for her son's safe return.

**Language**

Metaphors of clothes and clothes making run through the poem. Here the dove repairs any danger that might have befallen her son, but the repair is only 'ornamental', reminding us of the ornamental stitching around the son's blazer that was disrupted by the blood-red poppy.

**Language**

The mother 'hopes' (not 'expects') to hear his voice, and it is his childhood voice she wishes to hear. She yearns for the safety of his childhood.

*Jane Weir*

### Language

Religious images – perhaps relating to the sanctity of life versus the destruction of life during war. Also the processing of the film links to religious rituals.

### Context

Photographic film is sensitive to white light so to develop photographs, chemicals would be used in a darkroom. The room would be lit by a red light as this would not cause the film to react.

### Language

Metaphor relating to the horrors and suffering shown on the rolled up photographic film

# War Photographer

In his **darkroom** 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  
5 a priest preparing to **intone** a **Mass**.

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

### Language

Quotation from the Bible, used here to suggest that all human life is temporary.

### Language

Instead of the expected words from the mass 'Father, son and holy ghost', we have a trinity of war zones.

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

### Meaning

When he was taking photographs he was able to think solely about his job – but once at home he considers the human cost of these horrors

### Language and Meaning

Literally: the photograph is beginning to develop in the chemicals.

Metaphorically: the photograph of someone's suffering and likely death appears.

Something is happening. A stranger's features **faintly** start to twist before his eyes,  
15 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.

### Themes

The human cost of the horrors of war. In rural England children would not have to face this – but could play happily and safely.

### Meaning

Asking permission to capture the image

A hundred agonies in black-and-white  
20 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.

### Meaning

This shows the contrast between the comfortable lives of people who consume the photographs and the lives of the people in the photographs.

*Carol Ann Duffy*

### Meaning

Multi-layered meaning:  
tissue paper, skin, pages of old books, pages  
of religious books, tissue to mop up tears

### Language and Themes

Light images occur throughout  
the poem. Light relates to  
knowledge and truth.

## Tissue

### Language and Themes

The extended metaphor  
of tissue is used to  
explore the power and  
fragility of humankind.

Paper that lets the light  
shine through, this  
is what could alter things.

Paper thinned by age or touching,

### Language and Themes

The power of recording  
family history; the  
impermanence of  
life contrasts with  
permanent accounts of  
those family records.

5 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

10 died where and how, on which sepia date,  
pages smoothed and stroked and turned  
transparent with attention.

### Language and Structure

The internal rhyme  
drifts across the page  
(away from the ends  
of the lines where  
we might expect to  
find them) like paper  
blowing in the wind.

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

### Language

Maps might represent  
the journeys that  
we take throughout  
life. Borders are  
temporary but the sun  
– the light and truth – is  
permanent.

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

### Context

Yellowed with age

### Meaning

The receipts that we are given when we buy goods in shops can tell a story of our lives. Money (made of paper) controls our lives – ‘Fly our lives’.

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.

### Language

A symbol of freedom

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

### Meaning

The great buildings that we erect in our cities will be outlasted by the knowledge contained on paper.

30 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

### Meaning

Reference to God’s design for life and humankind in the Christian religion.

### Language and Structure

The final stanza contains just one single line, separating it from the rest of the poem. It speaks directly to the reader, focusing them on the fragile and precious nature of life.

with living tissue, raise a structure  
never meant to last,

35 of paper smoothed and stroked  
and thinned to be transparent,

### Language

Repeated ‘and’ shows this as a continuous action

turned into your skin.

*Imtiaz Dharker*



### Language and Meaning

Begins like a story – almost like a children’s story. The ellipsis signals a shift – perhaps a pause to think through memories.

### Language

A heavenly image – idealised memory of the childhood city.

### Language

This is a complex image. It links to the ‘child’s vocabulary’. This vocabulary – the first language, now ‘banned by the state’ ‘spills’ out. It is a ‘doll’, a child’s toy but the word ‘hollow’ suggests that she used it to smuggle her identity out of the country. The doll’s contents allow her to regain her connection to her idealised past. She can’t forget this language – ‘Can’t get it off my tongue’.

### Language

The repeated ‘they’ suggests menace and threat. These forces are hostile and the city needs protection. Things are different there now.

### Themes

An emigrée is someone who has moved to a different country to live – often for social or political reasons.

## The Emigrée

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.  
5 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.  
10 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.  
15 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;  
20 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,  
25 and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight.

### Language

A part of the year. Contrasts with the light and bright impressions in the line above.

### Language and Structure

Each stanza ends with ‘sunlight’ – a positive image.

### Meaning

She has no means of returning to the city.

### Language

Personification of the city. The power of memory. Even though she cannot return, she continues to hold the city precious in her memories. She pets it and like a lover the city ‘takes me dancing’.

### Meaning

A shadow is evidence of sunlight, so they coexist. She can offer her old, oppressed city the sunlight of hope.

*Carol Rumens*

### Language

'Dem tell me' is repeated throughout the poem with an increasingly strong tone of resentment and accusation.

### Structure

The poem is written not in standard English but in Agard's own voice and dialect, thus defiantly asserting his own identity.

### Themes

The Battle of Hastings (1066) is traditionally a central part of the history of the English. 'All dat' is off-hand in tone: it dismisses the relevance of this version of history.

### Context

When he reads the poem, Agard often sings the parts of the poem between the italicised parts. The rhymes help to create a sarcastic, nursery rhyme tone as Agard dismisses conventional, European versions of history.

# Checking Out Me History

Dem tell me

Dem tell me

Wha dem want to tell me

Bandage up me eye with me own history

5 Blind me to me own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat

dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat

But Toussaint L'Ouverture

no dem never tell me bout dat

10 *Toussaint  
a slave  
with vision*

lick back

Napoleon

15 battalion  
*And first Black  
Republic born*

*Toussaint de thorn*

*to de French*

20 *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

25 but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

### Themes

A bandage is normally used to heal. Ironically, here it is used to blind – to stop Agard developing his own identity.

### Context

A hero of black self-liberation

### Language

'lick back' – the slang of the phrase boasts that victory was easy.

### Form

Even in very short lines, Agard often uses rhyme. Here he uses near rhyme. These sound effects contribute to the poem's defiant playfulness.

*Nanny*  
see-far woman  
*of mountain dream*  
*fire-woman struggle*  
*hopeful stream*  
*to freedom river*

### Language

Agard suggests Nanny had vision – ‘far-seeing’ in a metaphoric way.

### Themes and Context

Conventional history overlooks history *before* the arrival of Europeans. Agard’s rhetorical question challenges this ‘Euro-centric’ version of history which blots out the history and identity of the original peoples.

30

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

35

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

40

*From Jamaica*  
*she travel far*  
*to the Crimean War*  
*she volunteer to go*  
*and even when de British said no*

45

*she still brave the Russian snow*

a healing star  
*among the wounded*  
a yellow sunrise  
*to the dying*

### Language

These metaphors give Mary Seacole a respect and admiration that ‘traditional’ history denies her.

### Themes

These lines repeat the poem’s opening but now we better appreciate their power, their significance. Agard (and Afro Caribbeans generally) are no longer going to rely on traditional white history.

50

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

### Language

They will ‘carve out’ their own history. This metaphor suggests the force they will use if necessary.

**John Agard**

### Structure

These pronouns show us that the speaker is a grandchild of the kamikaze pilot.

### Language

This stanza contains a number of very different sorts of details. By jumbling them up together, Garland creates a slightly disrespectful tone, perhaps conveying the contempt for the father that he deserved for abandoning his mission.

## 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 **hen** 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

### Language

'Incantations' has religious connotations, suggesting the sacred nature of the kamikaze mission.

### Language

A simple, effective simile. 'Bunting' suggests a festival which contrasts with his mission, shocking him out of his commitment to it.

### Language

'Bellies swivelled' is almost an oxymoron: 'belly' is a childish word choice that emphasises the fish as living creatures. By contrast, 'swivelled' is technical and mechanical. The effect is to hint that the narrator is more detached from the sights than the pilot is, perhaps implying criticism of the pilot.

### Context

Kamikaze pilots were encouraged to believe that their mission would change history by saving Japan.

### Language

The descriptive details in these stanzas are deft and precise. Garland is keen for us to see the details vividly and accurately just as the pilot did, in order that we can understand how the quantity of colourful detail – both seen and remembered – overwhelmed the pilot and changed his mind.

### Structure

We are reminded that it is not the pilot's daughter who is the narrator. Instead one of her children is reporting her mother's story about the grandfather's failed kamikaze mission. When the mother is being quoted by the narrator, the poem is written in italics.

### Language

All the sibilance in this line suggests the swishing of the sea.

### Language

'Awash with' introduces another very visually clear list of simple details.

25 – *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  
30 *a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous.*

### Language

The description of the tuna contrasts with the simple, quick descriptions up to that point. The tuna is metaphorically a 'dark prince', suggesting its special power and significance, and that it is something to be treated with awe. 'Muscular' and 'dangerous' support the metaphor.

### Structure

Now the story shifts into the narrator's mother's words, shown by the italics.

*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  
35 as though he no longer existed,  
only we children still chattered and laughed*

### Themes

The shamed kamikaze pilot is rejected by his family and community. If he had finished his mission he would no longer exist *physically*. Now he no longer exists *socially*.

*till gradually we too learned  
to be silent, to live as though  
he had never returned, that this  
40 was no longer the father we loved.*  
And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered  
*which had been the better way to die.*

### Themes

The pilot's children react to his return in a natural way, but they *learn* to reject him.

### Themes

Dying can be social as well as physical. To be ostracised – to be ignored forever – is possibly worse than real death.

Beatrice Garland