



# RS4 English - Power and Conflict Poetry



## Remains by Simon Armitage

**Themes:** Effect/Reality of Conflict, Suffering

### Overview

- Simon Armitage writes from the perspective of a soldier's experience in Iraq during the Gulf War.
- The speaker and his fellow soldiers shot a looter dead. The body was then removed as though just an object.
- The speaker suffers with PTSD and is haunted by the memory of the looter.

### Context

- Armitage interviewed soldiers for a Channel 4 film in 2007, with the challenge of writing poems based on their experiences. These were published in a collection called *The Not Dead*.
- Armitage's style is known for its colloquial, conversational nature, focusing on individual experiences.

### Language

- **'On another occasion, we get sent out'** – conversational, happened regularly 'get sent' suggests lack of autonomy.
- **'tosses his guts back into his body... carted off'** - graphic imagery, colloquial
- **'the drink and drugs won't flush him out'** – futile attempt to self-medicate, ruining his life further. 'flush' is colloquial.
- **'his bloody life in my bloody hands'** – repetition of bloody emphasises the violence and how he is still haunted.

### Structure

- First person narrative – natural.
- Dramatic monologue.
- Enjambment and lack of rhyme creates a conversational tone.
- The first four stanzas deal with the shooting, while the last four focus on the after effects. Final stanza is two lines long, adding emphasis.

## Exposure by Wilfred Owen

**Themes:** Effects/Reality of conflict, Patriotism, Power of Nature

### Overview

- Owen describes his experiences in the trenches of WWI in freezing conditions, waiting for something to happen.
- For the soldiers, nature takes on the role of the enemy – their biggest threat.

### Context

- Owen wrote the poem while in the trenches and killed in battle shortly after
- Owen's poems were often angry that the soldiers were in dangerous trenches while the generals were living in comfort.
- He tried to reveal the truth of the conditions to the people back home.

### Language

- **'In the merciless iced east winds that knife us'** – personifies nature to emphasise threat/power, sibilance creates sinister impression, 'us' first-person plural shows shared experience.
- **'But nothing happens'** – repetition of this phrase emphasises monotony
- **'sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence'** – sibilance mimics sound of bullets whistling
- **'Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces'** – Personification makes this seem intentional

### Structure

- First person narrative - real experience.
- Regular structure suggests monotony: eight stanzas of five lines, last line shorter for emphasis. Short lines are rhetorical questions or the repeated phrase 'But nothing happens': sense of pointlessness.
- Rhyme scheme of abba for first four lines, emphasises monotony.

## Bayonet Charge by Ted Hughes

**Themes:** Effects/reality of conflict, Patriotism

### Overview

- Nameless soldier going over the top in the trenches with his bayonet attached to his rifle to stab enemy soldiers.
- He reflects on his former patriotism but finds in battle he is consumed by terror and becomes animal-like.

### Context

- Published in 1957 but likely about WWI.
- Hughes' father was a veteran of WWI and Hughes might have wanted to draw attention to the hardships of trench, perhaps hearing first-hand accounts from his father.

### Language

- **'Suddenly he awoke and was running – raw in raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy'** – Poem opens *in media res*, repetition of 'raw' shows unpreparedness
- **'Cold clockwork of the stars and the nations'** – Harsh alliterated 'c', 'cold' suggests the 'nations' are uncaring, he is just a cog, 'stars' links to cruel fate.
- **'Threw up a hare that rolled like a yellow flame'** – unclear if real hare, fearful and desperate too, or a wounded soldier.
- **'King, honour, human dignity etcetera Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm'** – 'etcetera' suggests all these things are trivial when faced with real danger, so his patriotism 'dropped' from him.

### Structure

- Third person imagined narrative.
- Poem starts *in media res* to mirror his disorientation and urgency.
- Enjambement throughout maintains the momentum of the charge.

## Charge of the Light Brigade by Tennyson

**Themes:** Reality of conflict, Patriotism

### Overview

- Tennyson describes a cavalry charge of 600 soldiers against the Russians in the (unpopular) Crimean War. Lightly-armed soldiers were shot at with canons.

### Context

- Tennyson was the poet laureate – his role was to celebrate the soldiers' bravery and might of the British Empire.
- Published six weeks after the battle. Over half were killed, injured or taken prisoner.
- The soldiers had no chance as they were only armed with swords against cannons on three sides. The order was a mistake.

### Language

- **'someone had blunder'd'** – He does not dwell on this, but 'blunder'd' sounds casual, suggesting a lack of care.
- **'into the jaws of death, into the mouth of hell'** – Metaphor and personification emphasises the awfulness of the battle, as if death was an inescapable monster.
- **'Flash'd...sabring...charging...plunged... shatter'd and sunder'd.'** – Use of verbs at the start of lines emphasises fast pace of the action and how bravely they fought.
- **Honour the charge they made! Honour the Light Brigade'** – Imperatives tell us we must honour them, glorifying the sacrifice even if the order to charge was wrong.

### Structure

- Third person narrative.
- Features of a ballad.
- Six stanzas, each representing 100 men.
- First stanza is tightly structured to mirror cavalry formation but becomes awkward to reflect the chaos of battle.
- Dactylic dimeter (DUM-de-de) mirrors sounds of horses galloping/fast pace.

## Poppies by Jane Weir

**Themes:** Effects of conflict, Loss

### Overview

- Focuses on the effects of conflict through the perspective of a mother whose son is a soldier gone to war.
- The poem details saying goodbye to her son, visiting a war memorial and memories of his childhood.

### Context

- Around the time of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, but the conflict is left vague to be timeless/relatable to any war.
- Hints of criticism of the way young soldiers can be absorbed by the glorifying of war and devastation war causes.

### Language

- **I pinned one to your lapel, crimped petals, spasms of paper red'** – pronouns emphasise closeness and intimacy, 'spasms... red' suggest injury/death.
- **'The gelled blackthorns of your hair'** – harshness of military haircut making him look older and more aggressive, also like crown of thorns Jesus wore, symbol of sacrifice.
- **'my stomach busy making tucks, darts, pleats'** – sewing imagery emphasises the domestic, trying to sew herself together.
- **'I listened, hoping to hear your playground voice catching on the wind'** – she still recalls him as if he is a child, links going to school and going into the army.

### Structure

- First person imagined narrative.
- Dramatic monologue in style of an elegy (poem of mourning)
- Free verse with enjambement and caesura reflecting the unstructured and chaotic nature of her grief.



# RS4 English - Power and Conflict Poetry



## Storm on the Island by Seamus Heaney

Themes: Power of Nature, Fear

### Overview

- The narrator describes the experience of a community on an unnamed island battling the onslaught of the weather (which is presented as a military enemy)

### Context

- This poem was published in 1966 at the start of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland: a period of deep unrest and violence.
- The first eight letters of the title spell 'Stormont': this is the name of Northern Ireland's parliament. The poem might be a metaphor for the political storm that was building in the country at the time.

### Language

- 'We are prepared: we build our houses squat'** - 'We' creates a sense of community. Opening conveys safety and confidence.
- 'blows full blast...it pummels'** - Use of the plosive 'b' and 'p' highlight the storm is fierce and unpredictable which means it could never have been properly prepared for.
- 'You might think that the sea is company, Exploding comfortably'** - The oxymoron could suggest the residents of the island have become accustomed to the noises.
- 'spits like a tame cat turned savage'** - Simile compares the nature to an animal that has turned on its owner.

### Structure

- First person narrative.
- Dramatic monologue.
- The poem can split into three sections: Confidence: 'We are prepared' (ironic); The violence of the storm: 'It pummels your house'; Fear: 'It is a huge nothing that we fear.'
- There is a turning point (a volta) in Line 14: 'But no.' Reflects the final calm before the storm.

## Kamikaze by Beatrice Garland

Themes: Conflict, Patriotism, Childhood

### Overview

- This poem explores a kamikaze pilot's journey towards battle, his decision to return, and how he is shunned when he returns home.

### Context

- Cowardice or surrender was a great shame in wartime Japan. To surrender meant shame for you and your family, and rejection by society.
- The Japanese word 'kamikaze' means 'divine wind' or 'heavenly wind.'

### Language

- 'Powerful incantations...a one-way journey into history'** - He is under the spell of patriotism and propaganda.
- 'the little fishing boats strung out like bunting'** - The simile, adjective "tiny" and naturalistic imagery of the "green-blue translucent sea" create an image of beauty. Faced with death, the pilot considers what it means to live.
- 'arcing in swathes like a huge flag'** - Simile. A flag implies patriotism but perhaps it could also be alluding to surrender which is something the pilot is considering.
- 'he must have wondered which has been the better way to die.'** - The final two lines explore and criticise the destructive results of patriotism: on civilians as well as soldiers.

### Structure

- Third person narrative - written from the daughter's perspective. The detachment is reflective of how she feels.
- The first five stanzas are ordered (whilst he is flying on his set mission). The final two are in italics and have longer lines to represent the fallout of his decision: his life has shifted and will no longer be the same.
- Direct speech gives the poem a personal tone.

## War Photographer by Carol Ann Duffy

Themes: Conflict, Suffering, Reality of War

### Overview

- Tells the story of a war photographer developing photos at home in England. As a photo develops, he begins to remember the horrors of war - painting a contrast to the safety of his dark room.

### Context

- Duffy was inspired to write this poem by her friendship with a war photographer. She was intrigued by the challenge faced by these people whose job requires them to record terrible, horrific events without being able to directly help their subjects.
- The location is ambiguous and therefore universal: ("Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh.")

### Language

- 'spools of suffering set out in order rows.'** - Sibilance suggests the suffering is so widespread that it is almost audible.
- 'to fields which don't explode beneath the feet of running children in a nightmare heat'** - Present participle 'running' - still happening in the photographer's mind. He is haunted by what he has seen.
- 'a half-formed ghost'** - The metaphor highlights the haunting nature of the image.
- 'the reader's eyeballs prick with tears'** - 'Prick' suggests pain but only a small amount for a short time. Growing acceptance that despite his best efforts his photos will make no difference.

### Structure

- Third person narrative.
- Enjambment - reinforces the sense that the world is out of order and confused.
- Rhyme reinforces the idea that he is trying to bring order to a chaotic world - to create an understanding.
- Contrasts: imagery of rural England and nightmare war zones.

## The Prelude by William Wordsworth

Themes: Power of Nature, Fear, Childhood

### Overview

- The poem recalls a boy's night-time adventure in a rowing boat that instils a deeper and fearful respect for the power of nature.
- At first, the boy is calm and confident, but the sight of a huge mountain that comes into view scares the boy and he flees back to the shore.

### Context

- Wordsworth was a Romantic poet. His poetry explores themes of nature, human emotion and how humans are shaped by their interaction with nature.
- Published shortly after his death, The Prelude was a very long poem (14 books) that told the story of William Wordsworth's life.

### Language

- 'It was an act of stealth / And troubled pleasure'** - The oxymoron suggests he knows it's wrong; forebodes the troubling events that follow.
- 'a huge peak, black and huge.'** Repetition highlights nature's intimidation and the impact it has on the speaker's state of mind.
- 'And measured motion like a living thing, Strode after me'** - The mountain is personified as a powerful beast with intent.
- 'hung a darkness...a trouble to my dreams'** - The dreamlike imagery of the opening is replaced with a nightmarish view of nature. The speaker has been humbled.

### Structure

- First person narrative.
- The extract can be split into three sections, each with a different tone to reflect his shifting mood: Lines 1-20: (rowing) carefree and confident Lines 21-31: (the mountain appears) dark and fearful Lines 32-44: (following days) reflective and troubled.

## The Emigree by Carol Rumens

Themes: Conflict, Identity, Protest,

### Overview

- The speaker describes her memories of a home city that she was forced to flee. Despite the cities problems, her positive memories of the place cannot be extinguished.

### Context

- The home country of the speaker is not revealed - this ambiguity gives the poem a timeless relevance.
- Increasingly relevant to many people in current world climate.

### Language

- 'the bright, filled paperweight'** - Metaphor highlights the narrator's memories of her country are bright and positive, solid and fixed.
- 'branded by an impression of sunlight'** - The repetition of the word 'sunlight' suggests the speaker has an almost dream-like picture of the past. 'Branded' - she has been forever marked by the memory of her city.
- 'time rolls its tanks and the frontiers rise'** - The tanks represent the physical conflict. The negative reports of her country make her cherish her positive memories more.
- 'My city takes me dancing.'** - Her city is comforting to her. It is not only personified, but is a metaphorical lover who can take her dancing and magically penetrate walls, as in a fairy story.

### Structure

- First person imagined narrative.
- The first two stanzas have lots of enjambment - conveys freedom.
- The final stanza has lots of full-stops - conveys that fact that she is now trapped.
- The last line of each stanza is the same (epitrophe): "sunlight": reinforces the overriding positivity of the city and of the poem.



# RS4 English - Power and Conflict Poetry



## Ozymandias by Percy Shelley

Themes: Power of Nature, Decay, Pride

### Overview

- The poem describes the ruins of an ancient's king's statue in a foreign dust.
- The poem is a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of power.

### Context

- Shelley was a Romantic poet.
- Shelley disliked the concept of a monarchy and the oppression of ordinary people.

### Language

- 'two vast and trunkless legs of stone' – 'Vast' emphasises the large proportions of the statue but this is undermined by the fact that it is 'trunkless.'
- 'sneer of cold command' - Highlights the king's cruelty and heartless nature. The 'sneer' could represent the ugliness that power can reveal in people.
- 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!' - Imperative command demonstrates his arrogance and perceived superiority. Ironic – his power is only temporary.
- 'boundless and bare,/The lone and level sands stretch far away.' – The alliterative phrases highlight his isolated state. He is insignificant in comparison to nature.

### Structure

- First person narrative (though the story is told through a second-hand account).
- A sonnet (14 lines) – Mirrors Ozymandias' egotistical love of himself.
- Sonnet structure is unconventional – Shelley's refusal to conform to one style of sonnet could be reflective of his desire to break from traditions and defy establishments.

## London by William Blake

Themes: Power of the state, Inequality, Loss

### Overview

- The narrator walks through London and is saddened by the sights and sounds of poverty. He is critical of the authorities which have allowed the city to become this way.

### Context

- Blake was a Romantic poet.
- Published in 1794 - a time of great poverty in many parts of London.
- Much of Blake's work was influenced by his radical political views - he believed in social and racial equality.

### Language

- 'Marks of weakness, marks of woe' – 'Weakness' and 'woe' highlight the unhappy state of society. A mark signals permanence – the impact of suffering.
- 'mind-forged manacles' – The people of London are imprisoned by their own lack of belief that they can live differently.
- 'Every black'ning church...blood down palace walls' – 'black'ning' highlights the failure of the church. The palace is a metaphor for the hierarchy in society.
- 'the marriage hearse' - Oxymoron links the happy image of marriage with death. Cycle of misery.

### Structure

- First person narrative.
- Dramatic monologue - narrator speaks passionately about what he sees.
- Simple ABAB rhyme scheme: reflects the unrelenting misery of the city.
- First two stanzas focus on people; third stanza focuses on the institutions he holds responsible; fourth stanza returns to the people – they are the central focus.

## My Last Duchess by Robert Browning

Themes: Power, Pride, Control, Jealousy

### Overview

- The Duke speaks about his former wife's perceived inadequacies to a representative of the family of his bride-to-be, revealing his obsession with controlling others in the process.

### Context

- Browning may have been inspired by the story of an Italian Duke (Duke of Ferrara)
- Browning uses his poem to critique the objectification of women and abuses of power.

### Language

- 'That's my Last Duchess painted on the wall/Looking as if she was alive' - Possessive pronoun 'my' illustrates his desire for control.
- 'Spot of joy' – He believes she was made happy by others. Highlights his paranoia.
- 'I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together' - Euphemism for his wife's murder. The tone becomes chilling.
- 'Notice Neptune, though / Taming a sea-horse' – Parallels drawn between Neptune and the Duke. The metaphor suggests the Duke views himself as God-like.

### Structure

- First person imagined narrative.
- Dramatic Monologue.
- Written in iambic pentameter – rigid meter which is reflective of the Duke's views.
- One single stanza – structure mirrors the Duke's power.
- Heavy use of enjambment - rambling tone
- Heavy use of caesura - stuttering effect shows his frustration and anger

## Tissue by Imtiaz Dharker

Themes: Power of Nature, Control, Identity

### Overview

- In the poem, tissue paper is used as an extended metaphor for life to show that although fragile, humans have a large amount of power to change things.

### Context

- 'Tissue' is taken from a 2006 collection of poems entitled 'The Terrorist at My Table': the collection questions how well we know people around us.

### Language

- 'Paper that lets light shine through' - Emphasises that light is central to life, a positive and powerful force that can break through 'tissue' and even monoliths (stone statues).
- 'Maps too. The sun shines through their borderlines' – Humans impose their own borderlines in society. Dharker again highlights humanity's insignificance as nature does not care for these borders.
- 'fly our lives like paper kites' - This simile suggests that we allow ourselves to be controlled by paper.
- 'living tissue...never meant to last' - Dharker uses the adverb 'never' to embrace our impermanence.

### Structure

- First person narrative.
- The short stanzas create many layers, which is a key theme of the poem
- All stanzas have four lines, except the final stanza which has one line – reflects the need to break free from the control of human power.
- The lack of rhythm or rhyme creates an effect of freedom and openness.

## Checking Out Me History by John Agard

Themes: Protest, Identity, Childhood

### Overview

- The speaker recounts all of the historical figures he was taught as a child before listing the figures from black history who were not mentioned. He resolves to know more about his own heritage.

### Context

- Agard was born in British Guyana and received a Eurocentric education due to the country being colonised up until 1966.
- His poetry challenges racism and prejudice.

### Language

- 'Dem tell me' – Sense of bitterness. Uses non-standard phonetic spelling to represent his own powerful accent.
- 'Bandage up me eye with me own history' – Metaphor. Bandages are usually used to heal and fix yet in this sense, it is used to blind. Racial divisions are kept in place.
- 'a healing star...a yellow sunrise to the dying' – Agard is symbolically shining light on his own heroes of different ethnicities.
- 'I carving out me identity' - 'Carving' is in the present tense, indicating the speaker is in the process of re-educating himself.

### Structure

- First person narrative.
- Dramatic monologue.
- Stanzas concerning Eurocentric history (normal font) are interspersed with stanzas on black history (in italics to represent separateness).
- The lack of punctuation, the stanzas in free verse, the irregular rhyme scheme and the use of Creole could represent the narrator's rejection of the rules.



# RS4 English - Power and Conflict Poetry



## Sophisticated Vocabulary

<b>Annihilation (n.)</b>	Complete destruction or obliteration
<b>Colloquial (adj.)</b>	Describing language that is ordinary, casual and familiar (not formal)
<b>Dehumanising (adj.)</b>	Taking away human qualities, treating as inhuman
<b>Disaffected (adj.)</b>	Dissatisfied with the people in authority and no longer wanting to support them
<b>Disembodied (adj.)</b>	Being without a body, feeling separated from one's body
<b>Disparity (n.)</b>	A difference in level or treatment that is unfair
<b>Macabre (adj.)</b>	Disturbing and horrifying because of involvement with death or injury
<b>Morality (n.)</b>	The distinction between right and wrong
<b>Nauseating (adj.)</b>	To cause feeling of nausea (sickness) or disgust
<b>Transitory (adj.)</b>	Not permanent, not lasting a long time

## Poetic Devices and Techniques

<b>Caesura</b>	A pause within a line of poetry. Can be marked by a full stop, comma, dash or ellipsis (...)
<b>End-stopped line</b>	A line of poetry that has a pause (comma, dash, full stop or ellipsis) at the end
<b>Enjambement</b>	The continuation of a sentence without pause across lines
<b>Extended Metaphor</b>	A metaphor that is continued throughout a text, recurring.
<b>Dramatic Monologue</b>	A poem in the form of a speech or narrative by an imagined person
<b>Meter</b>	The rhythmic structure of a poem, referring to the number of syllables and arrangement of stresses in a line (most common: iambic pentameter)
<b>Sonnet</b>	A poem of fourteen lines, typically associated with love poetry

## Killer Openings

- Provide a summary of your argument. Choose three adjectives that relate to that theme/topic.
- Add a sentence about the poets' purposes, linking to the question and context (where relevant).
- Ensure you are addressing the task of comparing/contrasting by highlighting similarities and/or differences that you will discuss in your answer.

### WAGOU - The Effects of War

'War Photographer' and 'Remains' both focus on the negative impact war has on the mind for those involved, such as the soldiers in 'Remains' and those that are directly involved like the photographer and even the newspaper readers mentioned in 'War Photographer'. The poets explore how the destructive nature and horrors of war can consequentially cause guilt, pain, desensitisation and even more severe mental health issues like PTSD. The poets intend to highlight that physical wounds are not the only cause of pain. They both explore that war has wide-ranging consequences, such as confusion over patriotic identity and duty, and the realisation that war turns soldiers into killing machines.

### Level 6

*Convincing, critical analysis and exploration* 26-30 marks

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical, exploratory, conceptualised response to task and whole text</li> <li>• Judicious use of precise references to support interpretation(s)</li> </ul>
<b>AO2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of writer's methods with subject terminology used judiciously</li> <li>• Exploration of effects of writer's methods on reader</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task</li> </ul>

## Writing structure - What/How/Why

### What – What impression does the poet(s) create?

- address the question by making a clear, concise point about what the poet(s) is doing

### How 1 – How do you know this? (quotation)

- make sure that you select a quotation that you can analyse in detail and embed it into your sentence fully. Crop the quotation as needed.

### How 2 – How can you explore this quotation?

- explain what the quotation means/implies
- zoom in on a particular word/phrase/technique – say a lot about a little

### Why – Why do the poets give us this impression?

- focus on the poet(s) intention when crafting the poem and relate this to the context and/or comment on the effect on the reader

### WAGOU - Power

Both poets express the tyrant's boasting, highlighting their annoyance and pride. Shelley describes the inscription in which Ozymandias describes himself as "King of Kings", perhaps alluding to himself as being a God, ruler of all, maybe even immortal, as he believed his power would last forever. There's a sense of irony here as Shelley describes that a "colossal wreck" is all there's left of his power. The oxymoron in "colossal wreck" maybe even mocks Ozymandias as it points out how his arrogant boast about his authority is in the middle of the ruins of his broken statue. Browning also expresses the duke's arrogance through boasting, as he mentions the "gift of a nine hundred years name". The word "gift" has connotations of charity, and implies the duchess should be thankful of everything the duke gives her, should worship him like a God as she's beneath him and should be glad he even gives her his time.