

# AQA English GCSE

## Poetry: Power and Conflict

Tissue - *Imtiaz Dharker*

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# TISSUE

Imtiaz Dharker

## Brief Summary

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

## Synopsis

- Tissue paper is described to be fragile and easily affected by aging and handling
- Paper is then attributed to the significance of the Koran
- Maps and buildings are then included in the extended metaphor
- Dharker claims that an architect could use tissue to build with and never need to use brick again
- Tissue is then finally likened to skin

### Summary

**Context** – Dharker sees increasing materialism in society.

**Structure** - Most stanzas mark a change in tissue paper reference (Koran to buildings to money etc.)

**Language** – Metaphors // Religion // Society // Human power.

**Key Points** – Dharker is criticising how people care more about possessions and money than humanity.

## Context

### Imtiaz Dharker (1954-)

Dharker was born in Pakistan but grew up in Glasgow and describes herself as “Scottish, Pakistani, Muslim, Calvinist”. Most of her poetry concentrates on identity and home which is significant given her ability to reconcile her conflicting identities as well as dividing her time between Wales, India and London.

### Tissue

The poem comes from the 2006 collection “The terrorist at my table” which is focused on global politics, terrorism, extremism, religion and fundamentalism. Tissue is the first poem in the collection so acts as a preface to explore the source of fundamentalism (the abuse of power). She presents the idea that humans do not have the right attitude to life, we see it as permanent and an opportunity to gain power. This critical view may be reflective of her having to see her husband suffer with cancer for 11 years before dying of it which may have demonstrated to her the temporary nature of life.



## 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.

*Asyndetic listing is used here to emphasise the significance of the Koran on humanity.*

*Alliteration of a harsh consonant highlights Dharker's disdain towards these man-made structures.*

*This metaphor demonstrates the overwhelming power of daylight- something people can't control.*

*The final line is left separate to make it clear to the listener that they are meant to consider the meaning of the poem in relation to their life.*

*This short, simple, declarative sentence creates a blunt tone to the poem.*

*This metaphor criticises the significance humanity places on money.*

*There is a turning point here when it is revealed that the poem is in fact about living flesh.*



## The opening

The title could be referring to thin paper which is easy to destroy or a human tissue which ages and eventually dies. Society can be viewed as a tissue as it is made from a collection of cells and is intrinsically fragile but it could also become more like tissue by becoming more flexible.

The line ***“Paper that lets the light shine through”*** is ironic as despite it being translucent, it is able to exert great influence. Religious books are an example of paper with power which have a large influence on the way people act.

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

## Form

The poem takes the form of an **allegory** which has the hidden meaning of revealing the transience of life. This could cause the reader to let go of a materialistic life and instead focus on the people around them and God. It ends with the direct address ***“your skin”*** to cement this message in the readers’ minds that they should consider their own actions.

## Structure

### Stanza lengths

The whole poem is written in **quatrains** which provides a consistent structure to show how restrictive human power and control can be.

The final line is only a single line to emphasise and isolate its meaning. This shows it breaking free from the controlling structure and implies that there is a need to break free from the control of human power.



### Free verse and enjambment

The regularity of a fixed stanza length is undermined by the use of **free verse** and **enjambment**. These loose structural forms show that freedom can be found even within a restrictive institution.



The structure also implies that even the most powerful presentations of power (buildings and governments) are underpinned by chaos and insignificance. Dharker's use of **enjambment unifies lines** showing her view that humans should become united. The combined effect of these devices is to show that humanity is not in control as much as it would like to imagine and the poem may be mocking those who believe they have a lot of power.

## Language

### Extended metaphor

Tissue paper is used to liken surrounding objects to human life. **"Maps too"** shows how a person can be like a map with many different countries and cultures contained within them and no borders.

Whilst the Koran is paper it is also a collection of lives, the power it contains does not come from it being made of physical paper but from the influence it has on people's lives. The power of paper is also seen in **"might fly our lives like paper kites"** which shows that if money is given too much power, it will be able to govern our lives (**"fly them"**).



### Religion

The **symbol of light** is a recurring theme throughout the poem which begins with **"Paper that lets the light shine through"**. Light is used as a **symbol of truth and enlightenment** to show how the world should be viewed. This has religious ties as God is described in terms of light in both the Muslim and Christian holy books (this links to Dharker's upbringing).

The poem could be interpreted to also be a source of enlightenment to the listener of a new way of living in which God is able to permeate through life and materialism. There is no reference to a specific God in this poem which reflects Dharker's exploration and criticism of fundamentalism in the collection.

### Society

Within the poem, Dharker sets out what she believes would make an ideal society. The **metaphor of buildings** being able to **"fall away on a sigh"** implies that buildings should be able to change and adapt easily. Here, buildings are a **symbol of permanence that should be abolished**. Dharker explicitly states that society should become more transparent and this is emphasised by the **harsh alliterative consonants** in **"turned transparent"**.

### Human power

Dharker explores what humans deem to be truly important by what they put on paper. Religious truths, buildings (compared to paper), borders, money are all referenced, leading the reader to question whether or not these are the right things to be vesting interest in. Her use of **symbolism** in **"Koran"**, **"borderlines"**, **"mountain folds"**, **"fine slips"**, **"what was**



*paid by the credit card*” and *“capitals and monoliths”* demonstrates all the symbols of human power are also causes of division between people.

### Comparisons

#### London

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human power is presented to be a source of oppression and suffering in London. Here the citizens are shown to suffer in <i>“mind forged manacles”</i> whilst in Tissue <i>“borderlines”</i> act as a symbol of division and limitation</li> <li>• Both poets are critical of material wealth and inequality which is shown by the focus on <i>“chartered”</i> land in London whilst in Tissue, Dharker shows how money is able to <i>“fly our lives like paper kites”</i>.</li> </ul>
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Blake’s poem, the narrator seems to accept the cyclical nature of corruption, which is seen in the structure of the poem. In the final stanza, the <i>“Marks of weakness”</i> referred to in the first stanza are alluded to in the final line <i>“blights with plagues”</i>. Dharker however, offers a solution to the problem of power to not let money <i>“fly our lives like paper kites”</i>.</li> </ul>

