

AQA English GCSE

Poetry: Power and Conflict

Kamikaze - Beatrice Garland

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KAMIKAZE

Beatrice Garland

Brief Summary

The poem Kamikaze explores a daughter's **reflection** on her connection and relationship to her father who was a Kamikaze pilot in WWII and decided not to complete his suicide mission. It follows her train of thought as she thinks about the journey her father would have made to go on the mission and she relates her father's experience to the natural beauty of the world. It also delves into the situation which occurred when her father returned home and was shunned by his family due to the **cultural expectations** placed upon them in Japan.

Synopsis

- Daughter is recounting the journey of her father as he flew on a kamikaze mission
- Remembering the father setting off and the things he took
- She is telling the story to her children
- Father looks at the sea and the village – boats and fish act as symbols
- Father remembers his childhood on the beach with his brothers (waiting for their father)
- Switch to daughter's perspective / narrative – interject that that is the children's grandfather
- Memories of the grandfather bringing home fish
- Switch to daughter's perspective
- Remembers her father returning and being rejected by the community
- Remembers being forced to reject him herself
- Leave with the question of whether he should have died

Summary

Context – wanted to explore motivations as to why people decide to die for their country // Kamikaze pilots flew manned suicide missions into military targets // from the collections "The Invention of Fireworks" which explores life and death in the natural world.

Structure - consistent and ordered // 6 lines/stanza // undermined by free verse and enjambment // changing narrative perspectives

Language – sibilance // allusion // themes of patriotism, nature and memory

Key Points – internal conflict between the roles of father and soldier // Inspired to live by the beauty of nature // Nature is shown to be powerful, but its beauty is apparent and its power is not feared but appreciated // Conflict between society's expectations and the individual.

Context

Beatrice Garland (1938 -)

Garland includes John Donne, John Clare and Seamus Heaney as some of her writing inspirations, and has won prizes for her poetry. When writing the poem Kamikaze, she was inspired into looking into the motivations as to why people wanted to die for their country.

Kamikaze Pilots

During WWII, Japanese kamikaze pilots flew manned suicide missions into military targets (e.g. ships), using planes filled with explosives. Soldiers and pilots were taught it was the only way to change the direction of the war (Japan losing), and they had to take part in this last resort. Very well trained pilots would volunteer to die, but towards the end of the war the military would have to recruit people and shun those who refuse.



Kamikaze pilots were named after a typhoon that wiped out enemy ships in the 13th century, which has a link to nature being the true source of power. Japanese culture was very patriotic, and the military would focus on fighting and dying for your country, with the sentiment that it was better to be killed than be named a coward

Japanese culture during the war was very honour based, with people being taught that one person's dishonour will stain their whole family, and emphasizing the importance of being brave and honourable comes before everything else.

From the collection “The Invention of Fireworks” (2014)

The collection was shortlisted for the 2014 Forward Prizes for the Best First Collection, which shows it had a very good reception in the literary world. Overarching, the poems explore life and death within the natural world. They also investigate how in the twentieth century, mankind becomes a threat not just to nature but to itself as well. It looks at human turbulence and how we should seek solace in the power of nature, as a reminder that an otherwise bleak life still possesses beauty.

Kamikaze

Whilst the poem was written in the 21st century, it is set against the **backdrop of WWII** and the extreme conflict which was taking place at the time. The war creates an ideal backdrop to explore other forms of conflict:

- The conflict **between individuals in Japan and the societal expectations placed upon them**. These expectations were immensely strict as the Japanese regard honour to be incredibly important.
- The conflict **within families** due to the pressure put on them by society and in the case of Kamikaze pilots, the military.
- The conflict **between nature and man**

The poem also explores the futility of avoiding a fate set out for you by an authority or government. In this case the kamikaze pilots' fate was formed in the military when they were instructed to go on suicide missions in the name of their country.



The poem has a very intimate tone as the Garland works to contrast both the speaker and the daughter's voices, which sometimes merge into one. This ensures the readership are aware that it is a very personal story and narrative being imparted in the poem.



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

*Painful irony to his search for remembrance
Sought death to be remembered and immortalised by respect.*

celebrating the honour he will bring to his community

Figure of eight the symbol for infinity. This may be used to imply the eternal nature of nature – continue indefinitely - nature is infinite in comparison to the transience of humanity, and life is brief, transient and precious. War and honour will be forgotten – nature will remain. Nature is more powerful than mankind.

Stacks of pebbles that mark graves, shows the father is starting to

Japan is known as the land of the rising sun. Embark means to get on but also to begin something – he is beginning a new chapter of his life – both choices lead to a type of death

He is under the spell of patriotism and propaganda Not making his own decisions – his decision would be to keep living

Connotations of peace and tranquillity in the colour imagery. Doesn't want to deny himself – nor those he will kill – the beauty of nature and the beauty of life. Associating nature with precious possessions

Sibilance implies a sense of grace and peacefulness, as well as suggesting an elegant and graceful tone, also works to increase the pace to make the poem sound more emotional.

How leaving the family in order to provide for them was something required by



consider the consequences of death and reminds readers that all the beauty of nature is undermined by the role he's about to play— will lose his ability to enjoy nature

*Nature's beauty is precious and valuable
Life is valuable and sacred – shouldn't be ended prematurely
Nature presented as powerful*

Wouldn't "meet his eyes" – eyes are the windows to the soul. Doesn't want to see the person he has become – ashamed of her own husband.

Doesn't want to communicate with him – distance herself from him as her daughter will. Thus the impact of conflict is ongoing – passed down from generation to generation. OR doesn't want to face what she is doing – feels guilty – painful to give up her husband but has no choice because her culture demands it.

Both options offer a kind of death and this line implies that soldiers are controlled by indoctrination and propaganda, and used as tools of the government. Written in a detached third-person viewpoint which might suggest the speaker doesn't agree with this cultural view.

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.

every generation, just in different capacities. The father feels a responsibility to return to them. This is a selfless reason to return, rather than just a fear of death.

Repetition of safe – it is safety and life he is focusing on

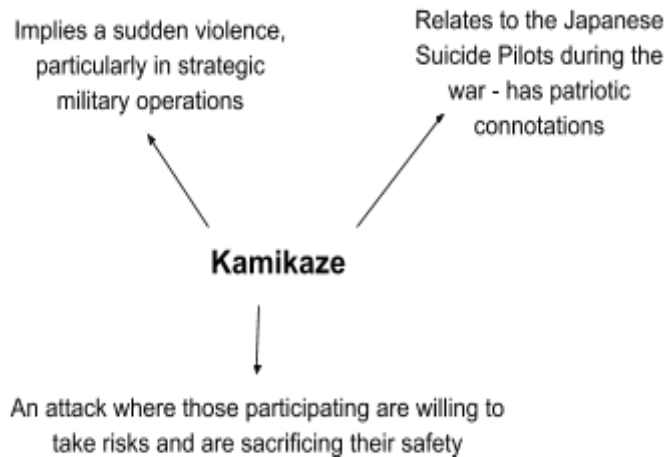
*Imbalance of power between humanity and nature. Even a kamikaze pilot – the epitome of bravery – sense the danger of it. Pilot (symbol of military power and determination) is not the most dangerous thing in the poem – a fish is!
Metaphor – it is a prince – important and significant – deserving of respect and honour (like a soldier)
Emphasise its significance by using first punctuation in poem (first full stop)
Signal it is deserving of notice.*

Learning about cultural values

By living he traded this for being forgotten and ignored. Story is not told by historians but by a daughter who never knew him – the whole poem is speculative. Suggests the father physically survives but dead to the community and society he returned to



The title “Kamikaze”



Perspective

Kamikaze shows the impact that war has on those left behind. The reader is viewing conflict through the eyes of someone left behind, someone trying to understand the motivations of their father, to understand what made him go to war and what made him come back from it.

The poem is written from a **daughter's perspective** in the **third person**. This narration creates a **sense of detachment** which reflects the distance the speaker feels from her father's life as she grew up not knowing him.

Shifts in narrative perspective

The **shift in narration** from **third** person to **first** person when the speaker discusses her father's return acts as the volta.

was no longer the father **we** loved.
 And sometimes, **she** said, he must have wondered
 which had been the better way to die.

This signifies a **dramatic shift from external to internal** and shows the impact that war has had on her. This is a personal moment and memory, so deserves a personal and subjective perspective.



The final line returns to the **third person**: **“he must have wondered which had been the better way to die”**. The **detached tone** from the beginning of the poem returns but this time to signify that she is detached from the culture which gave him the option of dying as a Kamikaze pilot. Alternatively, it could be a desire to detach herself from her father.

Structure



The structure reflects the theme of conflict within the poem:

- The poem is structured into **tightly controlled stanza lengths of 6 lines**, which perhaps reflects the **order and obedience** expected of a soldier.
- This structure is juxtaposed and undermined by the **free verse** and **enjambment**.

ENJAMBMENT | Sentence which runs over multiple lines.

The attempts of freedom within the confines of the strict stanza structure suggests her father had his own desires, roles and individuality within the constrictions put in place by the Japanese government.

The **free verse** and **enjambment** could also show that he is starting to doubt his obedience and realised he wants to pursue the freedom and beauty of life unrestrained. This reminds the reader, and perhaps society, that the soldiers depicted in the poem are still individuals. This **structural juxtaposition** also could reflect the conflict between military commitment and cultural pride, and desire for life and freedom.

Last word

Garland selects the word **“die”** as the last word of the poem, which creates a sense of **futility** and **inevitable fate**: the soldier was destined to die one way or another. The reader is also forced to reflect on their own mortality and life which will end the same way as the soldiers. In a more overarching societal application, the writer may be suggesting that conflict and patriotism denies humanity the enjoyment of life and nature.



Language and Themes

Conflict vs Identity

Conflict between identities (such as father and soldier) is established in the first two lines of the poem. There is immediately a **contrast** between title **“kamikaze”** and **“her father”**.

- **“kamikaze”** establishes his role as a soldier and Japanese suicide pilot.
 - This portrayal is reinforced by choice of possessions: a flask of water and samurai sword, showing him to be practical and nationalistic.
- The reference to **“her father”** humanises him and shows that he has a life outside of his mission and matters to people.
 - The contrast between being a kamikazee and father shows the reader the conflicting roles of the man; he can either live with his family or die for his country. The sad irony that in choosing his family he is ultimately rejected by them (they **“live as though he never returned”**)



Patriotism

The patriotism of kamikaze pilots is enforced by the **patriotic imagery** which is littered throughout the poem. The speaker states **“her father embarked at sunrise”**, here the reader is reminded that Japan is known as the land of the rising sun. Except instead of this being a new day full of



hope he is potentially heading towards his death. Moreover, **“embark”** means to get on but also to begin something, the father is beginning a new chapter of his life through rejecting his role as a kamikaze pilot.

The speaker sees **patriotism within nature**, such as the fish which are **“like a huge flag”**. This simile shows that the father and his family are indoctrinated by Japanese culture and societal norms which is why he believes dying is the right thing to do. This illustrates to the reader

how patriotism is so powerful it can control how a person acts and how they choose to die.

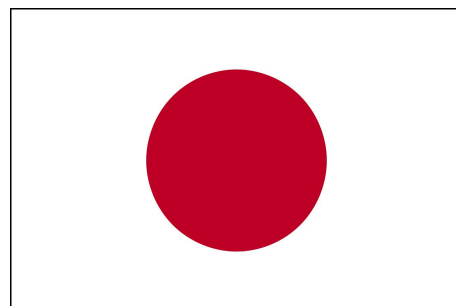
This identity as a patriotic soldier shifts to that of a father as he appreciates the beauty of nature and the beauty of life and decides to reject death. He provided **“feathery prawns”** and **“cloud marked mackerel”**, and these adjectives link grandfather’s provision of food to family.

Alternatively, it can be argued that the **adjectives “cloud-marked”** and **“feathery”** have **angelic and heavenly connotations** which suggest that whilst the father has rejected death, the concept of it is now present forever in the family’s life.

The speaker’s father also feels a need to provide for his family by returning to them. However, his duty according to society is to provide his family with honour not sustenance, and unfortunately this can only be achieved through death

Roles of Soldier vs Father

These are established at the start, as the **transition** from soldier to father is shown. There is a danger of patriotism in a soldier and the poem shows how this leads to his death not literally but **metaphorically**. His death would have given him eternal glory in the eyes of society, however through choosing life his honour has metaphorically died.



Theme of “Those Left Behind”

There is a **shift in narrative perspective (Volta)**, when the narrative changes to her personal experience of war and its effects. Here, the poem is written from a **first person perspective** – it is personal to her and her experiences, as one of those left behind by soldiers going to war.

The speaker is experiencing loss when remembering her father, as though he died, which displays the far reaching effect on multiple generations. Even in the poem the speaker chooses to feature



four generations (children, speaker, father, grandfather) to show that conflict will keep on impacting each generation by the impact it has on those before.

Comparisons

Kamikaze	The Prelude
Celebrated the beauty of nature	Feared the power of nature
Patriotism vs Nature	Man vs Nature
Both speakers are forced to reconsider their perspective and consider the power and influence of nature	

Kamikaze & Poppies

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both poems convey the grave impact on civilians that war and conflict can have, including the psychological impact. In Poppies, the mother is grieving and suffering from loss and this emotional breaking is displayed through the structural use of caesura and enjambment. Similarly, in Kamikaze, the daughter suffering from a life where she cannot know her father and this is a struggle against culture (third person). They both also display characters trying to process memories, and how memory interacts with impact of conflict. In Kamikaze, this is the speaker going over memory of father whilst trying to rationalise why he came back and why he left, and in Poppies this is the main character going back over memories of her son whilst trying to rationalise why he left - "I was brave" The poets both offer non-conventional perspectives of war, Kamikaze from the perspective of a daughter (loss of father) and Poppies from the perspective of a mother (loss of son).
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst both are suffering from loss, one is loss of father not because of a physical death but because of her culture's rejection of him, whereas in Poppies it is the physical loss of a son to war, but also loss of her memories of him as they are corrupted by connections to war. These contrasting perspectives display the multitudes of way war and conflict can cause loss for those left behind.

Kamikaze & Checking Out Me History

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both poems express the Importance of a person's history and origins (as well as their culture) in forming their identity. In Kamikaze, it is shown that without her father, she cannot understand herself and is therefore distanced from him
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst Kamikaze presents conflict with her culture, COMH shows conflict with those restricting his culture, fighting for it not against it

