



KAMIKAZE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – *Kamikaze* was written by Beatrice Garland, and was published in 2013.

Beatrice Garland – Beatrice Garland is an English poet that won the 2001 National Poetry Prize for her poem 'Undressing.' She wrote no poetry for some time after, instead focusing her attention on her other work, as a physician for the National Health Service and a teacher. She describes writing poetry as 'a marvelous part of one's interior private life' and cites John Donne and Seamus Heaney as influences. She enjoys writing poems about the experiences of others around the world.



Japan in World War II – Japan entered World War II with a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour (a US military base) on December 7th, 1941. The Japanese fought on the side of the Axis powers alongside Nazi Germany and Italy, taking a leading role in fighting across Asia. The Japanese military culture of never accepting defeat meant that they were the last of the Axis powers to surrender – only after the catastrophic losses suffered from two atomic bombs dropped by the USA on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Japanese Seafaring Culture – Throughout the poem, Garland makes specific references to 'fishing boats' and the 'green-blue translucent sea.' Largely owing to its geographical make-up as a series of islands, Japan's history is steeped in seafaring traditions. Many Japanese people in the past lived and worked near/on the sea, as fishing and inter-island trading were key features of life. Garland compares this peaceful life with the position that the kamikaze pilot finds himself.



Kamikaze Pilots – During the Second World War, the term 'kamikaze' was used to describe pilots who were sent on suicide missions. They were expected to crash their planes into enemy targets, e.g. ships, forcing heavy damage and casualties to the enemy, but also killing themselves. The word 'kamikaze' translates as 'divine wind.' The tradition of facing death rather than capture and defeat was deeply engrained in Japanese culture, meaning pilots would face this with loyalty.



Language/Structural Devices

Imagery – Garland creates imagery through a range of techniques – primarily the use of interesting and specific vocabulary – the 'huge' flag, 'little' board and 'translucent' sea being prime examples. Garland also utilises powerful colour imagery, noting the 'green-blue' of the ocean, the flashing 'silver', and the 'dark shoals.' Each of these details combine to create a vivid depiction of the life-filled scene that the pilot looks down upon. This helps the reader to empathise with the pilot and the decision that he takes.

Enjambment – Garland utilises enjambment to help the reader experience the pilot's altering mindset whilst on the kamikaze mission. Enjambment is first used in stanza one, to echo the incantations (chants) of loyalty that the pilot repeats to himself early in the flight – the lack of punctuation reflect that he is not stopping and dwelling on thoughts of death. Enjambment occurs at many other points, but particularly in stanza 4, as fond memories of his past flood into his mind and overtake the incantations, altering his mindset.

Quote: "at the little fishing boats/ strung out like bunting/ on a green-blue translucent sea"

Quote: "a shaven head/ full of powerful incantations/ and enough fuel for a one-way/ journey into history"

Double Meanings and Metaphors – Garland weaves double meanings and metaphors throughout the text to juxtapose ideas about war and death with the more peaceful backdrop of the Japanese fishing scene. For example, the 'dark shoals of fishes' could easily represent the flight of Japanese war planes heading towards destruction, whilst 'silver' presents ideas of honours and glory for those who die.

Alliteration and Sibilance – Garland uses alliteration to portray the peaceful, laidback life of the pilot before the war – for example the softy repeated 'l' sounds in 'later', 'looked', 'little', and 'like.' Garland also uses sibilance through the openings to the words 'safe', 'shore', 'salt-sodden' and 'awash.' These help to recreate the sounds of the sea and the storms that the pilot remembers from his youth.

Quote: "the dark shoals of fishes/ flashing silver as their bellies/ swivelled towards the sun"

Quote: "– yes, grandfather's boat – safe to the shore, salt-sodden, awash."

Form/Structure – The poem has a consistent, regular form throughout. There are 7 stanzas, each containing 6 lines. This regular structure could be seen to represent the regimented order of Empirical Japan. However, there is no apparent consistent rhyme scheme, meaning a lack of flow. This could represent the confusing influences in the pilot's mind.

Pronouns – Third person pronouns are used throughout the poem to describe the pilot, for example 'he,' and 'his.' 'He' is not named – representative of the fact that he no longer has a voice – in the eyes of his community he has been dishonoured. The italics towards the end of the poem indicates a shift towards the first person (we, my).

Further Thought: Line lengths vary more in stanzas 6&7. Does this represent the disorder in the pilot's later life?

Quote: "live as though/ he had never returned, that this/ was no longer the father that we loved."

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Personal Consequences of War – Rather than focusing upon bloody details or evoking violent imagery, this poem deals with the lasting effects that war can inflict on people, families, and communities. This poem not only deals with the kamikaze pilot's own story, but the implications for those around him.



Courage/ Honour – In the Empirical Japanese context, demonstrating courage and honour for one's country are deemed as a compulsory commitment. By seemingly neglecting this, and opting to live, the kamikaze pilot is described as being 'dead' to those around him anyway – the only difference is that he brings shame upon his family for generations. The reader is encouraged to consider: Is this what honour/ courage are? Is the pilot treated fairly?



Line-by-Line Analysis

| STANZA | LINE | POEM | ANALYSIS |
|--------|------|---|--|
| 1 | 1 | Her father embarked at sunrise | The kamikaze fighter prepares for their suicide mission. The use of the word 'sunrise' immediately gives connotations of Japan (the land of the rising sun). The enjambment suggests he is trying to prepare without stopping to think about the magnitude of his task. The shaven head and the incantations suggest the authority of the Japanese military, it has been drummed into him that this is the honourable thing to do. The 'journey into history' suggests that he will always be remembered positively for his brave and noble act. |
| | 2 | with a flask of water, a samurai sword | |
| | 3 | in the cockpit, a shaven head | |
| | 4 | full of powerful incantations | |
| | 5 | and enough fuel for a one-way | |
| | 6 | journey into history | |
| 2 | 7 | but half way there, she thought, | This is a testimony of the pilot's daughter, making the reader question its authenticity. She is telling her children about these events – suggesting that they are important for conveying a lesson to the children. The poet uses colour imagery (green-blue), adjectives (translucent) and a simile (strung out like bunting) to suggest the serenity and beauty of life for the seafaring peoples of Japan. The beauty of these fishing boats is ironic as the pilot is supposed to be looking for warships. |
| | 8 | recounting it later to her children, | |
| | 9 | he must have looked far down | |
| | 10 | at the little fishing boats | |
| | 11 | strung out like bunting | |
| | 12 | on a green-blue translucent sea | |
| 3 | 13 | and beneath them, arcing in swathes | Military and patriotic symbols run throughout the description of the tranquil image of seafaring Japan, for example 'arc-ing in swathes' and 'like a huge flag.' The 'figure of eight' creates an image of an infinity symbol, suggesting the pilot is trapped – perhaps war seems like an endless cycle? It is possible that the 'fishes' are metaphors for aircraft, whilst the imagery used in 'silver' and 'swivelled' is indicative of the honours/glories bestowed on those who die for their country. |
| | 14 | like a huge flag waved first one way | |
| | 15 | then the other in a figure of eight, | |
| | 16 | the dark shoals of fishes | |
| | 17 | flashing silver as their bellies | |
| | 18 | swivelled towards the sun | |
| 4 | 19 | and remembered how he | The fond memories of times gone by sow further seeds of doubt as to whether he should go through with the kamikaze mission. Nostalgia with 'brothers.' Once more there is enjambment, as though these thoughts are rushing into his mind, perhaps overtaking the incantations of the opening stanza. The imagery created by erecting the pebble 'caims' in the face of the wave 'breakers' awakens the idea that people (like the defences) will eventually succumb to nature. |
| | 20 | and his brothers waiting on the shore | |
| | 21 | built cairns of pearl-grey pebbles | |
| | 22 | to see whose withstood longest | |
| | 23 | the turbulent inrush of breakers | |
| | 24 | bringing their father's boat safe | |
| 5 | 25 | – yes, grandfather's boat – safe | The word 'safe' is repeated – used at the end of the first line in the 5 th stanza and the last line of the stanza before – surely demonstrating the pilot's thought process, moving away from completing the mission and towards safety. There is sibilance in 'safe', 'shore', 'salt-sodden' and 'awash', replicating the sounds of the sea and the storms. The detail the vast array of fish demonstrates the clarity of the memory in the pilot's mind. |
| | 26 | to the shore, salt-sodden, awash | |
| | 27 | with cloud-marked mackerel, | |
| | 28 | black crabs, feathery prawns, | |
| | 29 | the loose silver of whitebait and once | |
| | 30 | a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous. | |
| 6 | 31 | <i>And though he came back</i> | The use of italics indicates a return to the first person perspective. It is ambiguous as to whether the pilot returned out of fear or lack of loyalty, or for some other reason, e.g. inability to find targets etc. In any case, these men and their families were often shamed. The pilot's wife and community thus turned their back on him, treating him as if he were dead. The children still chattering and laughing suggests their innocence. |
| | 32 | <i>my mother never spoke again</i> | |
| | 33 | <i>in his presence, nor did she meet his eyes</i> | |
| | 34 | <i>and the neighbours too, they treated him</i> | |
| | 35 | <i>as though he no longer existed,</i> | |
| | 36 | <i>only we children still chattered and laughed</i> | |
| 7 | 37 | <i>till gradually we too learned</i> | The children too eventually become culturally conditioned to see the shame in their father's actions – they are taught that he no longer deserves respect. It is clear now that this is a lesson to the children. The pilot may well have spent the rest of his life thinking that it would have been better for him to have gone through with the kamikaze. We note that the pilot is never given a voice, reflective of his now invisible position in society. |
| | 38 | <i>to be silent, to live as though</i> | |
| | 39 | <i>he had never returned, that this</i> | |
| | 40 | <i>was no longer the father we loved.</i> | |
| | 41 | And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered | |
| | 42 | which had been the better way to die. | |

Poems for Comparison

Poppies/ War Photographer

War Photographer can be compared and contrasted with these poems through the theme of personal consequences of war.

Bayonet Charge/ Charge of the Light Brigade

War Photographer can be compared and contrasted with these poems through the themes of courage and honour.

Words from the Poet

I have always read – poetry from the sixteenth century right up to the 2011s, as a result of a first degree in Eng. Lit. – and partly because no job can satisfy every need, perhaps particularly not the need for something personal and self-examining. I spend a lot of the day listening to other people's worlds. Writing poems offsets that: poetry is a way of talking about how each of us sees, is touched by, grasps, and responds to our own different worlds and the people in them. www.beatricegarland.co.uk

