Conflict Poetry: What Great Looks Like
Theme: War
War in Bayonet Charge

Within the Bayonet Charge, Hughes employs personification and violent imagery to present war as chaotic and futile. As he describes the “bullets smacking the belly out the of air” the force of the weapons are highlighted and the destruction caused by war is emphasised. This suggests that the war is brutal as it is not only the men that are physically assaulted by the artillery but the “air” itself. This in turn suggests that nature too is being destroyed by war because the war is dominating the environment and overpowering the natural world. This conveys the impression that the soldiers are directly heading further into pain and violence because the bullet fire appears to surround them incessantly as they “stumble” towards their inevitable death. Furthermore, the verb “smacking” provides connotations of youth and childhood and once again may suggest the naivety of the soldier as was referenced earlier in the poem when Hughes described him as “running raw” which led us as the reader, begin to acknowledge that the persona was unprepared, and in a sense, this can be seen as a wider metaphor to portray how all men joining the war are unaware of what is yet to come. This then works to convey an impression that the seemingly young soldier is facing a sense of bewilderment and highlights the fast-paced and chaotic nature of war. This violent imagery also highlights that the soldier is now being punished by the perilous battle because he is defenceless against the “bullets.” The presentation of war here may be reflective of Hughes’ own life as he appears incredibly critical of the impact of war not only on the soldier but on nature and given that he grew up in the countryside it may be presumed that he is incredibly protective over its’ wellbeing.
War in Charge of the Light Brigade

Within The Charge of The Light Brigade, Tennyson exposes a patriotic view of war. He uses alliteration and rhyme to emphasise that, unlike the protagonist in Bayonet Charge, the soldiers were honourable in battle. He describes how ‘horse and hero fell, they had fought so well.’ This suggests that the poet is glorifying the soldiers and perceives them as strong and courageous despite their “fall”. This also illustrates that that battle was dangerous and full of horror as many men were subject to death, yet that it was their refusal to try to escape the “cannons” that defined them as “heroes”. This also works to create the impression that Tennyson is not emphasising the position of the individual during war - in the way that Hughes does- but rather the collective heroism of the soldier’s sacrifice for their country. The use of such patriotic language, exaggerated through the use of rhyme, would make the reader feel immediate respect and pride towards the soldiers who gave their life during the battle of Balaclava because they are presented as gallant and courageous. In this sense, we as the reader, experience the same emotions as Tennyson himself did, as he read of the battle in a newspaper and immediately felt urged to pay his respects to the “noble six hundred.”
War in War Photographer

Within War Photographer, Dufy employs violent imagery to convey the horror of war. She illustrates how it is impossible to forget the “hundred agonies in black and white.” This suggests that, those that observe war first hand, will continue to be haunted by the brutal scenes of “running children in nightmare heat.” This also emphasises the scale of suffering and illustrates the vast number of innocent people that are left in “agony” as a result of wars all around the world, in “Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh.” The idea that the photograph “spools” are in “black and white” may convey the impression that the war photographer does not believe that they truly convey the brutality and chaos of war and will never serve as a true reflection of the scenes of “suffering” that they have seen first hand. Perhaps this is why, later in the poem, we see that war is ignored by those who are directly effected. The use of juxtaposition between “tears that prick between the bath and pre lunch beers” would make the reader feel a sense of shame that we are so self involved that we focus on our own “ordinary pain” rather than truly acknowledging, and being affected by, the “blood stained” in “foreign dust.” Within this, Duffy is exploring the conflicted nature of being a war photographer – between having a “job to do” and being unable to forget the horror of war or erase “the cries of this man’s wife.” Perhaps, through writing this poem, Duffy sought to understand why her close friend of many years would give their life to such an occupation, and put themselves in such danger when their “editor” will just “pick out five or six” and the world will continue to ignore war.
War in Exposure

Within Exposure, Owen employs rhetorical questions to expose the futility of war. He conveys a sense of hopelessness when he describes how the soldiers repeatedly asked “what are we doing here?” and “is it that we are dying?” This shows that the soldiers have lost all sense of purpose and no longer have any patriotic tendencies because they have seen the futile nature of war and realise that soon they will simply have to “turn back” to their “dying.” This also conveys the impression that the soldiers are desperate to understand why they are sacrificing their lives to “the merciless iced east winds” when “nothing happens.” They are aware that their lives are being given in vein and that, soon they will be forgotten as “half known faces.”

The use of rhetorical questions conveys the soldiers melancholy acceptance of death and it is clear that they are too exhausted to even fight back against their inevitable demise. This makes the reader feel dejected and we start to question the purpose of war and perhaps even start to question our faith in the way that the soldiers do, when they realise that they are being left to suffer for no reason and are not being offered guidance or protection and so “love of God seems dying.” This futile presentation of war reflects Owen’s own life as he too was a soldier in WW1, and experiences first hand the brutality and violence of war – leaving him to be extremely critical of armchair patriots.
Theme: Loss
Loss in Poppies

Within Poppies, Wier uses a metaphor to illustrate the heart-breaking nature of loss as it slowly begins to destroy the mother of a departed soldier. Weir describes how, as the mother within the poem said goodbye to her son, all her “words flattened, rolled, turned into felt.” This highlights the devastating nature of loss as it is clear that she is so overwhelmed by emotion she cannot even speak as all words appear futile at this moment in time. Moreover, this works to suggest that the mother feels a sense of loyalty towards her son, and given her vast amount of pride, she will not allow herself to speak of her misery or taint her son’s adventure as “the world overflowed like a treasure chest”. She knows she has to be “brave” however it becomes clear that even before her son has left, the mother was desperate to hold him like she did when he was “little” and that she had to “resist” the “impulse” to “play at being eskimos” like they did when he was a child. We start to understand that the mother is yearning for her son to be young again so that she could protect him and keep him safe and we see why she is so desperate to “hear his playground voice catching on the wind.” The word “felt” perhaps may illustrate her weakness at this moment as we associate felt with fragility and instability and the reader is invited to sympathise with the persona’s yearning as she is clearly weakened by the experience of loss. The depiction of loss can be seen as reflective of the time in which the poem was written as many families has been torn apart by the devastating consequences of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, yet it has been commented that the poem has a timeless relevance and given the fact that Weir seemingly deliberately avoids contextualising the setting of the poem she may be alluding to the enduring suffering that takes place worldwide within war.
Loss in Remains

Within Remains, Armitage uses a metaphor to illustrate that loss is haunting and that it is impossible to forget the violent nature of war. The persona at first appears somewhat dismissive and almost arrogant about his involvement in war but it soon becomes clear that, upon returning home, he remains tortured by his experiences. He explains the suffering he experiences as he is tainted by guilt, commenting that “he’s he in my head.” This suggests that the persona feels a deep sense of remorse for killing a man who was “probably armed, possibly not” as he is unable to forget what he has done. This also arguably highlights that he feels a sense of resentment towards the victim and almost blames him for the suffering he is now experiencing now that his “bloody life” is in his “bloody hands.” We see that the persona is no longer evasive about death and realises that even after “toss”ing the “guts back into his body” he won’t be able to forget what he has done as even “the drink and the drugs won’t flush him out” and instead will haunt him forever. The use of a metaphor may make the reader feel a sense of sympathy for the mental distress experienced by the persona but arguably we may feel it is deserved – he is now repenting for his actions. The depiction of loss and war may be seen as reflective of the poet’s own life as it was written following an interview Armitage conducted with a war veteran. Reference to Shakespearean sentiments in the description of “bloody hands” may also allude to the timeless understanding that punishment for sin cannot be avoided and that those who kill will be tormented themselves.
Loss in The Emigree

Within The Emigree, Rumens employs a metaphor to show that memory is stronger than loss. She speaks of her home country and explains how her “memory of it is sunshine clear”. This highlights that although the persona is experiencing a sense of loss when reflecting on her home country she remains comforted by her positive memories. This also conveys the impression that even though she left “as a child”, her memories continue to be vivid and clear because she clearly has an enduring love for her place of origin. This also emphasises that, to her, her home country will remain a place of comfort and safety forever because she refuses to associate it with “the worst news she receives”. Indeed, she cannot bring herself to acknowledge that it is “sick with tyrants” as this will bring her greater loss. In this way, we can understand that she knows that she has lost her country, but she refuses to lose her positive view of it. The impression of “sunlight” suggests her memories are filled with admiration and this in turn works to create a sense of hope. Alternatively, this may make the reader experience a sense of misery as we acknowledge that she will now only experience her country through her memories as “there’s no way back at all” and she is now just left to yearn for her country as she has “no passport”. The depiction of loss can be seen as reflective of the poet’s own life as, given her experiences in multi-cultural South London, Rumens developed a sense of curiosity about the experiences of refugees and has been described as having “a fascination with elsewhere.”
Theme: Nature
Nature in Extract from The Prelude

Within Extract from the Prelude, Wordsworth uses a range of juxtaposing imagery to present nature as powerful and deceptively malevolent. The use of repetitive dark and dull language in “huge peak, black and huge” conveys the notion that nature appears almost monstrous as it asserts its authority over mankind. Here, it can be seen that Wordsworth is no longer appreciative of or admiring the picturesque “glittering” qualities of nature he once romanticized but is now highlighting it’s sinister power; the environment now seems alarming to the reader due to its size and apparent strength. The scenery now appears horrifying and dark because the scale of nature is emphasised and we are given the impression that the persona now has acknowledged their powerlessness in comparison to the strength of nature. This in turn suggests that mankind is almost insignificant in comparison to the strength and power of nature and we are unsurprised that the persona began to retreat from his experience with “trembling oars.” At this point, the reader may begin to question their own position against nature and begin to experience a sense of fear and overwhelming feeling of insignificance much like Wordsworth did when he wrote the poem to explain his troubled relationship with nature after he had a momentary existential crisis upon realising the might of nature in comparison to his own apparent irrelevance.
Nature in Storm on the Island

Within Storm on the Island, Heaney employs a simile to describe the threatening characteristics of the storm and present nature as dangerous and violent. He conveys the vicious nature of the wind by describing how it “spits like a tame cat turned savage.” This works to highlight the destructively animalistic qualities of nature because it suggests that the weather has become wild, in turn suggesting that nature and man are in conflict with one another because it shows that the islanders can no longer control their surroundings. In juxtaposing the notion of a “tame cat” who is now “savage,” Heaney also created the impression that perhaps the weather on the island was once docile and manageable—another nod to earlier in the poem where the persona acknowledged that nature had never “troubled” the island—but that it has now become chaotic and inhumane. This also works to describe the overwhelming force and unpredictability of nature; the wind appears fierce and it becomes clear that nature has become an enemy to the inhabitants as it enforces its power mercilessly as it continuously is “bombarding” the islanders who are left to suffer with “no shelter.” The use of personification and violent verb “spits” creates an impression that nature resents the islanders and wants them to suffer its violent wrath because it alludes to the notion that it is deliberately inflicting harm. This in turn evokes a sense of insecurity in the reader as we begin to experience a sense of fear as we acknowledged the destructive power of nature. We begin to see that the islanders are almost as war with their environment and this is exaggerated by the constant use of violent language and references to war such as “dives” and “salvo.” Arguably, therefore, it could be suggested that the conflict within the poem reflects Heaney’s own experiences in Northern Island during The Troubles when war continued to “pummel” the houses of many.
Nature in Kamikaze

Within Kamikaze, Garland uses a simile to presents nature as an attractive temptation that is stronger than honour and glory. It appears to lure the persona away from his “Kamikaze” mission when - on the way to death - he sees “little fishing boats strung up like bunting.” This suggests that the persona is almost being welcomed home by nature as we associate “bunting” with celebration and happiness. The beauty of the world appears to creates a sense of freedom that juxtaposes the fear evoked by his “one way journey into freedom”. Therefore, this highlights the idea that the picturesque qualities of nature are enough to counteract the “powerful incantations” in the persona’s “shaven head” and invite him to question his suicide mission. It becomes clear that nature is encouraging nostalgia and we see that the persona starts to have memories of his “brothers on the shore” and his “grandfathers boat”. This therefore suggests that nature is more powerful than the desire for honour as it allows him to reflect on what is most important in life; his family. The use of imagery in referring to the boats as “bunting” illustrates that the persona is trying to return to a place of safety and comfort as bunting has connotations of childhood and joy. This would make the reader feel relieved that the persona has refused to go through with his mission and is returning to the beauty of the world because it is clear that his death would be futile. This depiction of nature can be seen as reflective of Garland’s own life as she wrote this poem after interviewing the daughter of a Kamikaze pilot as she is inspired by the stories of others. She has even said of herself “I spend a lot of the day listening to other people's worlds” and this is clear when reading this poem.
Theme: Power
Power in Ozymandias

Within Ozymandias, Shelley uses imperative verbs to highlight the oppressive nature of the deceased pharaoh whilst simultaneously illustrating that power is fleeting. The reader is informed that upon Ozymandias’ pedestal read the words “Look on my works, ye mighty and despair” and this suggests that when, dictating this placard, Ozymandias surely intended to proclaim his might and strength to anyone drawing near the statue. It becomes clear that, due to his narcissistic tendencies, he wanted everyone to fear him because he was a tyrant who ruled through fear. This also shows that Ozymandias was inviting the people within his country to look upon him and admire his strength and control because he wanted them to be intimidated by him. The repetition within “king of kings” later within the stanza demonstrates that he not only was very powerful, but that he thought he was the most superior of all those that ruled because it suggests that he believed he was the greatest of all kings. Furthermore, the exclamatory command “despair!” illustrates how Ozymandias implored his subjects and enemies to dread his power; conveying the notion that Ozymandias believed that power is upheld through enforcing fear. Ozymandias’ evident self belief in the greatness of his power is clearly ironic as, rather than remaining “the king of kings” through history, he was in fact forgotten as his statue was destroyed, leaving behind no more than “two vast and trunk less legs” This would make the reader feel relieved that Ozymandias’ power and control was fleeting because it is clear that he was a malevolent and arrogant leader who demands fear from his subjects rather than respect. The depiction of power can be seen as reflective as Shelley’s own views as he was critical of those in authority and regularly questioned the power of the establishment.
Within this poem by Browning, power is presented as misogynistic and oppressive through the use of enjambment and sibilance. This can be seen when the persona boasts about his oppressive control over his wife, stating that he “gave commands; then all the smiles stopped together.” This exaggerates the Duke’s patriarchal control over the Duchess because it suggests that her entire personality changed following his enforcement of power. Arguably, the suggestion that “the smiles stopped altogether” is somewhat ambiguous and eludes to the suggestion that perhaps, following her “trifling”, the Duke used his power and control to kill her. This is supported by the suggestion given earlier in the poem that he is left with a painting in which the Duchess “looks as though she were alive” which could be seen for a euphemism for her in fact being dead. The idea that the Duchess is no longer smiling also suggests that the Duke was intimidating because it conveys the impression that the Duchess was afraid of him and that all happiness has been taken away from her. This also suggests that the Duke exploited his position as a man and used his gender as a way to control his partner because it appears clear that he thought it acceptable to instruct her about how to behave. The term “altogether” conveys a sense of finality and suggests that his power has overtaken her entirely because she will never smile again. This is exaggerated through the use of sibilance which works to create a harsh tone to the poem; reflecting the Duke’s cruel nature. The depiction of power can be seen as reflective of Browning’s own life as, given that he lived for several years in Italy, it is believed that he was inspired to write this poem following hearing about a Duke who killed his wife after she disobeyed his power and control.
Power in London

Within London, Blake uses repetition to present power as harmful to those in poverty as he exposes a conflict between the establishment and civilian society as a whole. He describes how on the faces of the poorest people he sees nothing but “marks of weakness, marks of woe,” which suggests that the poor are blighted by feelings of melancholy as they have become feeble and vulnerable. This also conveys the impression that those that live in poverty have lost all sense of hope and now are just left to “cry” because they cannot envision life improving. This also works to highlight that Blake is being critical of the establishment and the “black’ning Church” because he alludes to the notion that those in power are ignoring the suffering within the city and are not helping or supporting those “infants” who are left to suffer without any sense of sympathy or help offered towards them. A sense of blame is placed on the establishment as he uses metaphor to show his disgust towards those in power that turn away from supporting those in “woe” and simply allow “blood” to run “down palace walls” The depiction of their “woe” illustrates that the civilians within the city have been left in extreme sadness and the idea that they are “marked” suggests they have been branded by the lowly position in society and will never be able to escape their suffering because they are not going to be supported or helped out of poverty and will remain there forever imprisoned by their “mind forged manacled”. The use of repetition exaggerates the large wide spread scale of suffering and makes the reader feel immense sympathy for the position of the people. The negative depiction of power can be seen as reflective of the poet’s own life as he rejected established religions, seeing them as corrupt and unhelpful to those most in need.
Theme: Identity
Identity in Checking Out Me History

Within this poem by John Agard, the persona looks at how identity is influenced by a biased understanding of history as he exposes the power of the establishment. Argard utilises Jamaican dialect and complains that “dem tell me want dem want to tell me” suggesting that the establishment has the power to alter the public’s understanding of history and in turn impact on the development of personal identity. This also suggests that history has a euro-centric focus and often ignored the history of ethnic figures and minorities as “dem never tell me about Shaka de great Zulu” This suggests a sense of anger as the persona is realising the biased nature of the British education system and he starts to question the validity of the history taught to him. The phrase “dem tell me” suggests that that he no longer trusts the repetitive names and dates he was taught at school and acknowledges that these facts have very little to do with his own identity and are simply a version of history that the establishment wants to show off. This would make the reader feel disappointed that history taught in schools is so often dismissive of other cultures and we would be proud that the persona is “checking out” his “own history” and “carving out” his own “identity” The depiction of identity can be seen as almost autobiographical as Agard came to the UK in the late 1970s and at this point he began educating people about Caribbean culture after seeing that it was largely ignored by school curriculums. He unfortunately experienced racism encouraged by a widespread ignorance about non-white history and took it upon himself to educate others about his cultural heritage.
Identity in Tissue

The poem Tissue focuses on how our identities are easily influenced by the power of paper. Dharker uses a metaphor and considers how a paper can ‘alter things’ and she refers to the soft thin paper of religious texts - particularly the Qur’an. This suggests that paper has the power to construct our understanding of the world and formulate our identity. This also conveys the impression that the creation of identity is not a natural process but is influenced by the “well used books” that “lets the light shine through” suggesting that we establishing meaning from books and use this to interpret our position within the world. This highlights the symbolic strength of paper in comparison to its physical fragility because it suggests that it has the power to offer a sense of truth. We begin to understand that people rely on “paper thinned by age or touching” to feel a sense of spiritual fulfilment and the idea that pages have become “transparent with attention” suggests that they have been read many times in order to understand the world and establish a true identity. The term “well used” highlights that these texts have been past through generations and that identities have been influenced by the power of paper for a long time even if it was “never meant to last”. The depiction of identity can be seen as reflective of Dharker’s own life as her dual-heritage encouraged her to be interested in the origins of identity and her multi-cultural experiences encourages her to try and understand how identity is created.
Theme: Effects on conflict on people
Effects of conflict on people in Poppies

Within Poppies, Wier uses a metaphor to illustrate that conflict leads to loss which slowly begins to destroy the mother of a departed soldier. Weir describes how, as the mother within the poem said goodbye to her son, all her “words flattened, rolled, turned into felt.” This highlights the devastating nature of loss as it is clear that she is so overwhelmed by emotion she cannot even speak as all words appear futile at this moment in time. Moreover, this works to suggest that the mother feels an internal conflict as a result of the war and she feels both pride and loss. Indeed it is clear that she feels a sense of loyalty towards her son, and given her vast amount of pride, she will not allow herself to speak of her misery or taint her son’s adventure as “the world overflowed like a treasure chest.” She knows she has to be “brave” however it becomes clear that even before her son has left, the mother was desperate to hold him like she did when he was “little” and that she had to “resist” the “impulse” to “play at being eskimos” like they did when he was a child. We start to understand that the mother is yearning for her son to be young again so that she could protect him and keep him safe and we see why she is so desperate to “hear his playground voice catching on the wind.” The word “felt” perhaps may illustrate her weakness at this moment as we associate felt with fragility and instability and the reader is invited to sympathise with the persona’s yearning as she is clearly weakened by the experience of loss. The depiction of loss can be seen as reflective of the time in which the poem was written as many families has been torn apart by the devastating consequences of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, yet it has been commented that the poem has a timeless relevance and given the fact that Weir seemingly deliberately avoids contextualising the setting of the poem she may be alluding to the enduring suffering that takes place worldwide within war.
Within Remains, Armitage uses a metaphor to illustrate that conflict leads to internal suffering as death is haunting and that it is impossible to forget the violent nature of war. The persona at first appears somewhat dismissive and almost arrogant about his involvement in war but it soon becomes clear that, upon returning home, he remains tortured by his experiences. He explains the suffering he experiences as he is tainted by guilt, commenting that “he’s he in my head.” This suggests that the persona feels a deep sense of remorse for killing a man who was “probably armed, possibly not” as he is unable to forget what he has done. This also arguably highlights that he feels a sense of resentment towards the victim and almost blames him for the suffering he is now experiencing now that his “bloody life” is in his “bloody hands.” We see that the persona is no longer evasive about death and realises that even after “toss”ing the “guts back into his body” he won’t be able to forget what he has done as even “the drink and the drugs won’t flush him out” and instead will haunt him forever. The use of a metaphor may make the reader feel a sense of sympathy for the mental distress experienced by the persona but arguably we may feel it is deserved – he is now repenting for his actions. The depiction of loss and war may be seen as reflective of the poet’s own life as it was written following an interview Armitage conducted with a war veteran. Reference to Shakespearean sentiments in the description of “bloody hands” may also allude to the timeless understanding that punishment for sin cannot be avoided and that those who kill will be tormented themselves.
Example comparison introductions
War introduction – TCOLB and Bayonet Charge

Both poems present war as dangerous and violent. However, Tennyson presents war as valiant and heroic within the Charge of the Light Brigade, as he calls on his reader to “honour” the “noble six hundred” whereas Hughes conveys the futility of war and shows that there is no need for “king honour, human dignity etc” when faced with “bullets smacking the belly out of the air.”

Loss introduction – Poppies and Emigree

Both poems present loss as painful to the persona. However, Within Poppies, Wier presents loss as heart-breaking to a mother who has lost her son to war and is now left in anguish “hoping” to hear their “playground voice catching on the wind.” In contrast, With The Emigree, Rumens exposes the idea that loss is less powerful than memory and that, despite having “no way back” to her home country she is still “branded by an impression of sunlight.”

Nature introduction – Storm on The Island and Prelude

Both Storm on the Island and Extract from the Prelude expose a battle between man and nature; presenting nature as a dominant force that overpowers human strength. Within Storm on the Island, Heaney presents nature as a chaotic and unpredictable force that dominates the island and its inhabitants even though they are “prepared” whereas within Extract from the Prelude, Wordsworth focuses on man’s relationship with nature. At first it appears that the persona is appreciating the picturesque peaceful nature of the natural landscape but it soon the “black and huge” sinister power of nature soon becomes clear as they begin to feel insignificant.
Power introduction – Ozymandias and My Last Duchess

Both Ozymandias and My Last Duchess convey the destructive nature of power; illustrating power as a violent and controlling force. Both poems portray powerful, narcissistic figures that are to be feared by the reader and highlight the oppressive nature of total power however within Ozymandias, Shelley focuses on the fleeting nature of power as we realise that the cruel leader is no longer the “king of kings” whereas within My Last Duchess Browning focuses on patriarchal and misogynistic abuse of power as we see that he believes women are his “object”.

Identity introduction – Checking Out Me History and Tissue

Both Checking Out Me History and Tissue convey the manufactured nature of identity; illustrating that identity is a social construct. However within Checking Out Me History, Agard conveys the impression that identity is developed by a euro-centric view of history enforced by the establishment who “blind” Agard to his own “identity” whereas within Tissue, Dharker questions the symbolic power of paper in constructing human identity and suggests that it can “alter things”.

Effects of conflict on people— Poppies and Remains

Both Poppies and Remains allude to the internal conflict that people suffer with as an effect of war. However, in Poppies we see that conflict leads to extreme loss which is heart breaking for the mother of a departed solider who is left to hope to hear “[her son’s] playground voice catching on the wind” whereas within Remains we see that conflict results in internal torment as the persona is left to face his haunting memories and accept that “his bloody life is in [his] bloody hands”.