GCSE

English Literature

‘Kamikaze’ (Beatrice Garland)

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The poet (contextual information about the poet relevant to the poem) (AO3)

- Beatrice Garland is an English poet born in Surrey in 1938.
- She won the National Poetry Prize in 2001.
- The poem was written in 2013 and is part of the poetry collection ‘The Invention of Fireworks’.
- In her poetry, Garland often explores the themes of life and death in the natural world.
- Beatrice Garland has said: “I spend a lot of the day listening to other people’s worlds”. In this poem she tells a story, told by someone else about an event and culture that is outside her own experience as a teacher and clinician.

Structure and form (AO2)

- ‘Kamikaze’ is a narrative poem mostly told in the third person through the reported speech of the pilot’s daughter.
- Stanzas 1 to 5 are narrative stanzas about the father’s journey and are written in the third person.
- Stanza 6, where sentence 2 begins, shifts in time and focus and is told directly from the point of view of the pilot’s daughter – speaking in her own words.
- The final two stanzas are about the aftermath of the pilot’s decision to return home. It reverts back to the third person.
- There is no set rhythm or rhyme.
- There are only three sentences in the poem with each one marking a significant moment in the action and time.

The poem (content and context)

What is the poem about? (AO1)

The poem is about a kamikaze pilot failing to complete a suicide bombing mission during WW2.

When flying, the pilot looks out of his plane and remembers the beauty and power of nature. This sight helps him make the decision to return home.

On his return, he is shunned and rejected by his family and society. They believe his actions are cowardly and shameful because he has broken the Japanese code of honour, bravery and patriotism.

At the end, the pilot wonders if it would have been better to commit suicide by carrying out his kamikaze mission.

Deeper meaning (AO1)

The poem explores the power of honour, shame and family relationships. It deals with the ideas of external and internal conflict. External conflict focuses on the physical conflict of WW2 wheras the internal conflict deals with the thought process of the pilot as he debates whether or not to abort the mission and return home.

Context of the poem (AO3)

Kamikazes were Japanese fighter pilots who were expected to complete suicide bombing missions in WW2 (1939–1945).

It was considered to be an honourable and patriotic way to die and over 3,000 kamikaze pilots died doing this in WW2.

Kamikaze pilots were responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 where the USA suffered one of its heaviest losses.

Section 3 (connections and contrasts) (AO3)

- **‘Sonnet 29’ by Elizabeth Barratt Browning:** Both poems are about love, relationships, resilience and strength.
- **‘Cousin Kate’ by Christina Rossetti:** Both poems deal with love and family relationships. They both focus on ideas of shame and honour because of the breaking of society’s expectations. Characters in both poems face isolation.
- **‘Catrin’ by Gillian Clarke:** Both poems explore themes of love and family relationships. Both deal with different types of conflict and identity. Both poems focus on memories.
- **‘Dusting the Phone’ by Jackie Kay:** Both poems deal with different types of relationships.
- **‘The Schoolboy’ by William Blake:** Both poems look at the effects of nature.
- **‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’ by William Wordsworth:** Both poems focus on the presentation of nature and the power of memories.
- **‘Drummer Hodge’ by Thomas Hardy:** Both poems look at the themes of war and death.
- **‘Disabled’ by Wilfred Owen:** Both poems consider ideas about war and death. They both consider the notion of sacrifice and patriotism whilst exploring the issues of isolation and identity. Both poems deal with the power and effect of memories.
- **‘Decomposition’ by Zlfikar Ghose:** Both poems consider the themes of identity and isolation.
- **‘War Photographer’ by Carol Ann Duffy:** Both poems consider ideas about war, death and trauma. Both deal with themes of identity and the attitudes of society.

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Section 2c: Key quotations (AO1)

1. ‘Her father embarked at sunrise’
2. ‘a shaven head/full of powerful incantations’
3. ‘a one-way/journey into history’
4. ‘little fishing boats/strung out like bunting’
5. ‘the dark shoals of fishes/flashing silver’
6. ‘a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous’
7. ‘my mother never spoke again/in his presence’
8. ‘they treated him/as though he no longer existed’
9. ‘til gradually we too learned/to be silent’
10. ‘he must have wondered/which had been the better way to die’

Section 2a: Language and imagery (AO2)

- The reference to ‘sunrise’ is directly linking the events to the pilot’s culture as Japan is referred to as Land of the Rising Sun.
- The metaphor ‘journey into history’ implies the pilot is part of an important historical event but he is also literally going to be history himself by dying.
- The simile ‘little fishing boats/strung out like bunting’ implies how lively and tempting the life he has left behind seems in contrast with his deathly mission.
- The peaceful image of the ‘dark shoals of fishes’ in the sea contrasts with the violence and danger of the war in the skies.
- The ‘fishes/flashing silver’ could refer to the planes and be a metaphor for glory and honour.
- The parenthesis and aside in ‘– yes, grandfather’s boat – ‘ suggests how the daughter is speaking to her children which makes the event seem more personal.
- The alliteration and sibilance of ‘safe/to the shore, salt-sodden, awash’ could be reflecting the movement and sound of the waves.
- The metaphor, ‘once/a tuna, the dark prince, muscular dangerous’ suggests the power of nature and perhaps its ability to transform.
- The adjectives ‘dark’ and ‘dangerous’ also have connotations of something mysterious and sinister. The word ‘prince’ suggests the natural superiority of the tuna and the system of hierarchy within the sea.
- The onomatopoeic ‘chattered and laughed’ contrasts with the silence that the kamikaze pilot must now endure.

Section 1–10: Key questions to ask about the poem

1. There is more than one speaker in the poem. Who are the different speakers and what is the effect of this? (AO1)
2. Why does Garland use ‘Kamikaze’ as the title? (AO1)
3. What is the significance of the ‘samurai sword’ and ‘powerful incantations’ in the poem? (AO2)
4. What is the significance of the ‘cairns of pearl grey pebbles’? How do you think the ‘cairns’ affect the pilot? (AO1)
5. What is the effect of the listing in stanza 5 of the poem? (AO2)
6. Why do you think the poet has included the infinity symbol, the ‘figure of eight’ in stanza 3? (AO2)
7. Do you think the reaction of the pilot’s wife is fair? Justify your answer. (AO1/AO2)
8. The pilot is referred to as ‘Her father’ or ‘he’ but never by name. Why do you think this is and what is the effect? (AO2)
9. What is the effect of the last two lines? (AO2)
10. How might the poem reflect attitudes of Japanese society at the time? (AO3)

Section 2 links for further research

- A newspaper article about kamikaze pilots
- Mr Bruff meets Beatrice Garland to talk about ‘Kamikaze’
- The story of a kamikaze pilot – BBC news