



KAMIKAZE

By Beatrice Garland

Table of Contents

<i>FULL POEM</i>	2
<i>WHO IS BEATRICE GARLAND? (1938 -)</i>	3
<i>GARLAND'S PURPOSE</i>	3
<i>THE POEM'S 4 GENERATIONS</i>	3
<i>CONTEXT</i>	3
<i>THEMES</i>	3
<i>PERSPECTIVE – CHOICE AND DECISIONS DURING CONFLICT</i>	5
<i>PERSPECTIVE – THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF JUDGEMENT</i>	5
<i>FORM – DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE</i>	5
<i>DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE – FOCUS ON THE HUMAN MIND</i>	6
<i>DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE – EXPLORING 'TRUTH'</i>	7
<i>FORM – A 'PERCEIVED' RATHER THAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VIEWPOINT</i>	7
<i>DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE - DRAMA</i>	7
<i>LANGUAGE - AMBIGUITY</i>	8
<i>LANGUAGE - DEATH</i>	9
<i>STRUCTURE - CONTRAST</i>	9
<i>STRUCTURE: STANZA ARRANGEMENT</i>	10





FULL POEM

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
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.





WHO IS BEATRICE GARLAND? (1938 -)

Born 1938 in Oxford

- After completing a degree in English Literature, started working in the NHS
 - She still works there now as a clinician and teacher
 - Won the national poetry prize in 2001
-

GARLAND'S PURPOSE

Kamikaze comes from the collection of poems called *The Invention of Fireworks*, 2013

- The collection focuses on life and death in the natural world
 - Garland said she has a particular interest in what can motivate young men and women to give up their own lives in the service of a higher cause
 - In this way, we can link the poem to *Tissue* in that it explores the causes of extremism or terrorism
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THE POEM'S 4 GENERATIONS

The poem contains a mother talking to her children

- She is talking about her father, the Kamikaze pilot, and his father
 - The pilot's mission, with its elaborate ceremonial preparations, mirrors his father's dangerous fishing missions.
 - However, there are also differences, as his father always returned home safely.
 - The pilot recalls his brothers waiting for his father's return, which may have prompted him to consider his own children, who would not have seen him return from this mission if he had not aborted.
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CONTEXT

Kamikaze is translated as 'god wind' or 'divine wind' in Japanese

- It was not the original word used by the Japanese but a pronunciation error by American translators
 - However, the name became so well-known that after the war, the Japanese started using it
 - Kamikaze pilots went on suicide missions during WWII
 - They took an oath of loyalty and honour until death
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- o Then they would fly their planes and crash them into enemy warships to kill as many people onboard as possible
 - But it also meant sacrificing their own lives
 - This was seen as a sacrifice which brought great honour to the people of Japan and especially their families

THEMES

central concept

- honour

the consequences of obsession with honour

- 'Kamikaze,' like 'My Last Duchess,' investigates the extreme actions that people may take as a result of an obsession with honour.

true honour vs material honour

- Kamikaze' explores the conflict between two different impulses:
 - o to honour country or to honour nature/family/the human desire to do what is right

the conflict between heart and head

- The kamikaze pilot is torn between his nationalistic, militaristic mission and his desire to return home

'his choice was not futile; I think it was honourable, and I think he knew that in spite of how painful it was; Japanese society did not agree'

- a direct quote from Garland about the central idea of the poem

cultural expectations vs inner conscience

- The conflict lies between an honourable suicide and living with dishonour, ostracised by society

the development of the human mind

- Browning, often credited with creating the dramatic monologue, said, 'My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. Little else is worth study'
 - o Kamikaze can be considered a dramatic monologue and, therefore, we can see it as an exploration of the development of a human mind

glory

- Intertwined with the concept of honour was the concept of glory and the victory that the kamikaze pilots would bring to Japan, and its Emperor

the corrupting influence of propaganda

- Like 'Bayonet Charge', 'Exposure', 'Poppies' and 'Remains', in the background of this poem is World War II propaganda that drove people to give their lives for their countries

internal evaluation





- 'Kamikaze', 'Exposure' and 'Bayonet Charge', all feature active military men who question what they are doing

questioning propaganda

- the pilot questions what he is doing and, by extension, the official propaganda narrative

family

- the poem is told from the perspective of the pilot's father

the ambiguous nature of judgment

- The speaker is careful not to judge her father's decision nor to offer excuses

choices

- the poem can also be seen through the dilemma the pilot faces between an honourable suicide and living with dishonour, ostracized by society

cultural, military, and national expectations

- he was expected to go and sacrifice his life as a kamikaze pilot, and that would bring great honour to him, his family and his country

society vs the individual

- Returning to his family was seen as such a dishonourable action that his family disowned him, and that leads to his emotional death

the dehumanising effect of conflict

- like 'Bayonet Charge', 'Exposure', 'Poppies', 'Remains', 'My Last Duchess', 'War Photographer' and, perhaps, 'Charge of the Light Brigade', Kamikaze explores how conflict leads to the dehumanisation of people, in this case, the pilot and the community themselves

PERSPECTIVE – CHOICE AND DECISIONS DURING CONFLICT

Beatrice Garland said that the conflict is personal as well as national

- It's about how the national conflict of war causes inner conflict
 - It is about the conflict between two different impulses
 - to honour country or to honour nature
 - he is torn between his mission and his desire to return home
 - Garland said that 'his choice was not futile; I think it was honourable, and I think he knew that in spite of how painful it was; Japanese society did not agree'
 - The conflict lies between an honourable suicide and living with dishonour, ostracized by society
 - We could also say that the conflict is about the cultural expectations of the man and the man's own inner conscience





The cultural, military and national expectation was that he would go and sacrifice his life as a kamikaze pilot and that would bring great honour to him, his family and his country

- However, his inner conscience was telling him to return home
 - This is perhaps similar to *Exposure* and *Bayonet Charge*
 - In all three poems the active military men question what they are doing
 - In *Bayonet Charge*, the soldier questions what he is doing in the middle of the battle field
 - *Exposure* is about a military man thinking back to home and the comforts of family, just like *Kamikaze*.
 - However, in *Exposure*, we have 'kind fires... sun smiles' motivating the speaker to fight
 - The opposite happens in *Kamikaze*
 - Thoughts of the beauty of nature and memories of home compel him to turn his back on the mission and return home

PERSPECTIVE – THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF JUDGEMENT

The speaker is careful not to judge her father's decision, nor to offer excuses

- She speculates about his reasons for turning back and not completing his mission
 - But she leaves the reader to make up their own minds about his decisions
 - Only in the final two lines does the speaker suggest that her father might not have been happy with the choices he made
 - And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered which had been the better way to die.

FORM – DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

form of '*Kamikaze*'

- *Kamikaze* bears many characteristics of the dramatic monologue

general function of the dramatic monologue

- to dramatise a particular issue about the human condition

5 main characteristics of a dramatic monologue

1. an imagined, dramatic speaker
 - a. in *Kamikaze*, a mother recounting a story about her father and grandfather to her children
 - i. important qualities of the dramatic speaker in a dramatic monologue
 1. the speaker is not to be confused as the author;
 - a. the speaker is an imagined persona often teetering on the verge of madness or delusion
2. an imagined, defined listener





- a. in Kamikaze, the speaker's children:
 - i. 'but halfway there, she thought, / recounting it later to her children...'
 - b. The presence of an audience differentiates the dramatic monologue from interior monologues or, perhaps, soliloquies because the speaker cannot be completely open in their speech
 - i. They maintain a sense of reservation about who they really are and what they really mean
 - i. The audience and the readers must work hard to reveal the truth within the speaker's mind
 - 1. This effect helps to maintain tension as we go on a journey through the speaker's mind as we assess their version of reality and truth
 - a. This poem, therefore, can also be seen as a comment on language itself and the power of rhetoric to hide, expose and twist reality and truth
3. a developing action in the present
 - a. the speaker is coming to the realisation of why her father abandoned the kamikaze mission
4. the gradual ironical revelation of the character of the speaker
 - a. the mother's understanding that by disowning her father after he abandoned his kamikaze mission, they behaved completely dishonourably
5. the implication of another action in the past
 - o the mother begins to understand that despite her family regarding her father as dishonourable for abandoning his kamikaze mission, it was, in fact, her family that was dishonourable for abandoning him and, rather, he was the honourable one for returning to his family
 - 'we too learned / to be silent, to live as though / he had never returned'
- It represents the distillation of a crucial moment of human experience, focusing on a particular occasion that becomes a revelation of an almost religious nature as the speaker tries to transcend the finite

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE – FOCUS ON THE HUMAN MIND

Robert Browning, the author of 'My Last Duchess', is often credited, along with Alfred Lord Tennyson, as being the creators of the dramatic monologue form.

- Browning wished to make us feel the complex and unstable nature of an individual person
 - o In the preface to *Sordello*, he writes:
 - 'My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. Little else is worth study'
 - Accordingly, Browning pays the least possible attention to outward nature.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE – EXPLORING 'TRUTH'

In Browning's dramatic monologues, he often uses the form, tone, and language of the dramatic monologue to make the reader aware of the ambiguity of truth





- In Kamikaze, when the speaker was a child, she disowned her father in accordance with the customs of her nation.
 - The poem suggests that in their culture during the World War 2 era, a kamikaze pilot who abandons his mission should be ostracised as a result of the dishonour he brings his nation and family.
 - According to their culture, the correct course of action to take was to ostracise those who were deemed dishonourable.
 - Yet, it appears, as the mother is recounting this story to her children, she realises that, ironically, she and her family were, in fact, the dishonourable ones for ostracising him
 - And he was honourable for returning to them.
 - However, the tragedy is that by the time she realises this, it appears he is already dead
 - And now, all she can do is pass this moral on to her own children.
 - Another perspective is that she is actually making an appeal to her children, perhaps out of guilt and, therefore, asking for some kind of forgiveness.
 - Dramatic monologues often illustrate that beneath the surface, readers should be aware of the distortions in the version of life the poem presents.
 - This poetic form asks the reader to question religious, social, and cultural ‘truths’

FORM – A ‘PERCEIVED’ RATHER THAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL VIEWPOINT

- The form of a poem can highlight the kind of relationship the poet desires to create with the reader.
 - For example, the lyric is often based on autobiographical material and is written from a personal point of view, thus allowing the poet to forge a link between the reader and herself;
 - however, the dramatic monologue creates a different kind of relationship between the poet, subject matter and reader
 - It gives us an interior view of the workings of the speaker’s mind
 - The poet and ‘I’ are separate entities; imagination replaces experience, and the viewpoint is ‘perceived’ rather than personal
 - In the 1970s and 80s, poets used real, fictional, mythical, and historical personae as an alternative means of exploring what it meant to be a woman – or at times, a man.
 - They often used this technique to challenge gender, racial, social, and religious expectations through the characters they create
 - Dramatic monologues are also seen as a method for inviting sympathy for the speaker
 - We judge them but we are also sympathetic towards them, just as we are towards the mother and her father.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE - DRAMA





The dramatic monologue form allows the poet to dramatise the human condition

- It works as a piece of drama
 - The form makes it possible to combine rhyme, rhythm, and metre with narrative
 - Browning's monologues are concerned with situations, episodes of lives that are still in the process of developing
 - They focus on examples of self-occupied men and women as they attempt to overcome the limitations of their physical lives
 - In this case, it may be that the speaker is trying to overcome her sense of guilt that she acquired by being part of a community that uncritically ostracised her father.

LANGUAGE - AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity exists where more than one interpretation is possible

- Ambiguity is seen as a highly effective quality in cultivating the reader's interests
 - When used well, it can convey an intellectual pleasure of gratified curiosity; a unique kind of pleasure and satisfaction that we acquire via the exploration of curiosities and ideas (both those in our own minds as well as in the author's)
 - Ambiguity is particularly effective in piquing the reader's moral and emotional interests concerning the literal, philosophical, psychological, intellectual and metaphorical contents of stories and how these elements interact with each other in the fictional and real worlds
 - 'Her father embarked'
 - Embark can mean going on board a vehicle for transportation
 - It can also mean making a start or beginning something new
 - The question here is, what is the thing he is beginning?
 - Is it the beginning of his journey to death?
 - Is it the beginning of his realization of the value of life and nature?
 - Is it the beginning of his journey into history?
 - Is it the beginning of his journey to eternal honour?
 - The ambiguity of the verb 'embarked' also requires us to ask what has caused him to consider any of these things so important as to compel him to sacrifice his own life for it.
 - This links to Garland's quote that she is interested in what can motivate young men and women to give up their own lives in the service of a higher cause.

The concept of gratified curiosity may appear paradoxical given that we often assume that satisfaction is derived by solving the story's mystery; however, we must also accept that not all mysteries are designed to be solved; much of the pleasure of reading comes from simply being given the room as well as the tools to delve into the mysteries of the human mind, conscience, emotions and behaviours.

- Ambiguity also reflects the reality of the human condition precisely because life itself is so ambiguous





- o some questions in life, such as the origins of our species or the origins of evil (as William Golding questions in Lord of The Flies) may never truly be answered and yet the pursuit of knowledge about these subjects has driven man for as long as we have existed.
 - ‘in the cockpit, a shaven head full of powerful incantations’
 - Incantations are spells
 - o Is Garland pointing to the notion that he had his own powerful ideas, perhaps prayers to help carry out the kamikaze mission?
 - o Or is she saying someone had put a spell on him in the sense that he has perhaps been brainwashed by some propaganda?
 - This idea is similar to the one in Poppies, where the mother recounts her experience of losing her son to the ‘world overflowing like a treasure chest’
 - The simile perhaps suggests that the young soldier has been brainwashed by propaganda which paints a romantic vision of war that contradicts the brutality and tragic realities of war.

LANGUAGE - DEATH

‘And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered which had been the better way to die.’

- The past perfect tense of ‘which had been the better way to die’ suggests that as soon as he had taken the oath to complete his Kamikaze mission, that was the point at which he had died
 - o Even though he returns to his family after having decided not to complete the mission, he was dead because national expectations about honour and valour had killed him emotionally
 - Returning to his family was seen as such a dishonourable action that his family disowned him, and that leads to emotional death
 - This sets up the conflict between society and the individual
 - o We also get that the author is pointing out that without emotion, there is no humanity
 - Society dehumanized themselves by disregarding sympathy and empathy for him

STRUCTURE - CONTRAST

‘with a flask of water, a samurai sword’

- Notice the contrast between the ‘flask of water’ and ‘samurai sword’
 - o ‘flask of water’ possibly symbolises life
 - o ‘samurai sword’ possibly symbolises death
 - Some kamikaze pilots took their swords with them if they were officers – this possibly indicates a higher rank than others; more responsibility





- It can also be seen as a contrast between the imagery of nature and the imagery of a man-made object
 - The juxtaposition possibly serves to highlight the poem's exploration of the pilot's decision to return to his family rather than complete the kamikaze mission and the inner conflicts surrounding that decision
 - His decision can be seen as an entirely natural one
 - But in doing so, he has to overcome the conflict between national, man-made expectations created through war and the natural instinct to return to the comfort of his family, which is seen as dishonourable in the public eye

'with a flask of water, a samurai sword'

- Another interesting aspect of this quote is how it seems to summarise the poem's underlying contrast between natural imagery, which appears to represent the feminine, and the powerful, concrete masculine imagery in the first stanza, in particular
 - Examples of feminine imagery:
 - 'sunrise'
 - 'flask of water,'
 - 'her children,'
 - 'green-blue translucent sea'
 - 'figure of eight,'
 - 'shoals of fishes
flashing silver as their bellies
swivelled towards the sun'
 - 'pearl-grey pebbles'
 - 'feathery prawns,'
 - Examples of masculine imagery:
 - 'Her father'
 - 'a samurai sword'
in the cockpit, a shaven head'
 - 'enough fuel for a one-way
journey into history'
 - 'fishing boats'
 - 'a huge flag'
 - 'a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous.'
- The contrast between the feminine and the masculine is also portrayed in the style of the poem
 - It is a woman recounting the story to her children about her father's decision to abandon the kamikaze mission
 - She resists the masculine cultural expectation to pass judgment on him, by recounting the story from a neutral perspective, even though her own mother, it seems, taught her and her siblings ignore him when they were children





STRUCTURE: STANZA ARRANGEMENT

We could see Garland's arrangement of the 7 stanzas as representing 7 distinct stages in the kamikaze pilot's journey from the moment he 'embarked'

- Stanza 1
 - The focus is on the kamikaze pilot's conviction to sacrifice his life for a 'higher cause'
- Stanza 2
 - Signs of a changing mindset; a clash between ideals of national expectation of the kamikaze pilot and an appreciation of the beauty of nature
- Stanza 3
 - A building appreciation of nature
- Stanza 4
 - Appreciation of nature links to memories of childhood;
 - the memories of his brothers and the loyalty of his father to return after dangerous fishing missions clash with thoughts of death - 'cairns';
 - this stanza has 3 main aspects:
 - memories
 - natural imagery
 - and symbols of death;
 - this middle stanza represents the initial turning point in his mind
- Stanza 5
 - An epiphany, as indicated by the use of dashes for parenthesis
 - This begins with repetition of '- yes, grandfather's boat – safe'
 - The narrator imagines how he must have realized that by returning 'with cloud-marked mackerel, black crabs, feathery prawns, the loose silver of whitebait and once a tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous' his father symbolized the true model of loyalty and honour because he returned to his family safely and provided for them
 - She imagines that these ideas reinforced his belief that returning back home was a difficult choice but an honourable thing to do
- Stanza 6
 - This stanza focuses on the reaction of the mother
 - The author's use of italics indicates that she was in disagreement with the mother's refusal to 'meet his eyes'
- Stanza 7
 - This stanza is about how society influenced the speaker and her siblings to ignore their father, even though it was not something that came naturally to them
 - The result is her wondering if he had made a mistake by coming back because emotionally, he was now dying because of being ostracized by society and his family

On one hand, the poem can be seen as being very tight

- All 7 stanzas are made up of 6 lines
 - This tight structure possibly reflects the tight control of the military and the cultural expectations of exactly what the pilot should do





- These 7 stages were meant to perhaps be 2 stages:
 - the journey
 - and the completion of the emission
- Yet, within this tight structure, the speaker imagines that the pilot must have contemplated the imagery of nature he saw, which triggered memories of his father and childhood – the result being a clash with his thoughts about his journey toward death

However, the poem is written in **free verse** and contains numerous examples of enjambment

- The verse is not controlled by any kind of rhyming structure or contain any regular rhythm, which could indicate the pilot's desire to break free of the shackles of national expectation, the military and of war

