

## Bayonet Charge by Ted Hughes

### Overview of the Poem and Context:

Although published in 1957, the poem concentrates on the battles of World War One. In the poem, Hughes centres on the feelings of one soldier as he goes 'over the top' to charge towards the enemy trenches. His initial feelings of patriotism are replaced, as he charges, with an overriding sense of fear.

### Potential Links:

Realities of war are examined here as in: 'Exposure' and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'.

### Key Language Features:

Hughes attempts to show the juxtaposition between the events and the surroundings as he mentions the pastoral 'green hedge' and the 'yellow hare'. The pain of the soldier and his youth and inexperience are indicated by words like 'raw' and 'bewilderment'. Similes are used to express the hare's flight and the irrationality of the soldier. 'Cold clockwork' indicates the soldier's lack of independent control. He is a small piece in the much bigger machinery of war.

### Themes:

Realities of war and fear.



### Key Structural Features:

The text is in third person giving a remoteness and reportage quality to the poem. Lines are uneven and there is much use of enjambment and caesura to create an irregular rhythm to reflect the soldier's panic. The soldier begins with feelings of pride and patriotism but these are quickly replaced with fear. The soldier is 'he'; he could be anyone on the battlefield.

### Key Quotations:

'Bullets smacking the belly out of the air', 'patriotic tear', 'cold clockwork of the stars and the nations', 'rolled like a flame', 'human dignity, etcetera/ Dropped like luxuries', 'terror's touchy dynamite.'

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