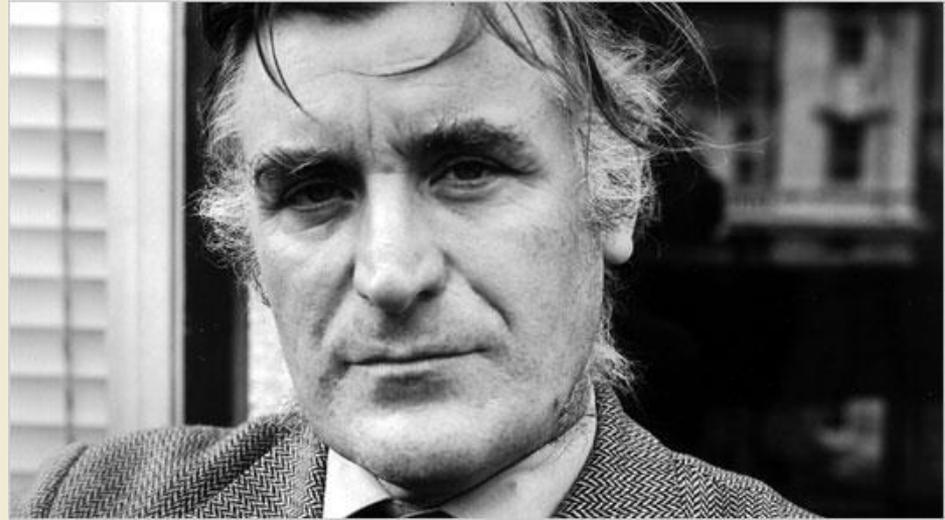


# Bayonet Charge

Ted Hughes



*Bayonet Charge* focuses on a nameless soldier in the First World War (1914-18).

It describes the experience of 'going over-the-top'. This was when soldiers hiding in trenches were ordered to 'fix bayonets' (attach the long knives to the end of their rifles) and climb out of the trenches to charge an enemy position twenty or thirty metres away. The aim was to capture the enemy trench.

This poem tries to step inside the body and mind of a soldier carrying out one of the most terrifying acts of this or any war: charging straight into rifle fire with the aim of killing enemy soldiers face-to-face.

At the start of the poem the soldier is instinctively obeying orders. In stanza two he has moments of clarity when he thinks about what he is doing and time seems to stop still. In the end, all high moral justifications such as king and country, have become meaningless. He himself becomes a form of human bomb, not a person but a weapon of war.

# Bayonet Charge

Military form of attack - soldiers charge over the top of trenches with bayonets attached to their rifles.



Metaphorical - he has 'woken' up to the reality of the situation. Reflects his fear and panic.

Reality here - fear of being shot causes him to run - avoiding bullets.

Repetition of 'raw' emphasises fear. Suggests he is exposed and vulnerable - could also suggest he is naïve/unused to battle.

Verb - clumsy whilst trying to escape.

Suddenly he awoke and was running - raw  
In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,  
Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge  
That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing  
Bullets smacking the belly out of the air -  
He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm;  
The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye  
Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest, -

Confusion - also image of sparks from ricocheting bullets

Violent image - sound and impact of the shots - personification of the air.

'Patriotic' tears have been replaced by those of confusion and fear.  
Simile - bravery and patriotism he did have ('iron') have melted away in the face of actual battle.

Simile - rifle is useless to him - also emphasises horror and physical pain of war.

Reality of war  
leaves him feeling  
like this.

Pause is created here -  
contrasts the quick  
pace of the first  
stanza.

Metaphor - realising  
that he is simply a  
cog in the war  
machine - 'stars and  
nations' could refer  
to an uncaring  
government - just  
send them off to die.

Questions  
how he  
fits in.

In **bewilderment** then he almost stopped (⊖)  
In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations  
Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running  
Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs  
Listening between his footfalls for the reason  
Of his still running, and his foot hung like  
Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows

Simile - soldier is questioning  
his presence/role there - it is  
not the patriotic experience he  
expected. 'Listening' suggests  
he's trying to understand the  
reason for the war - the reality  
no longer seems enough for him  
to die for.

Simile - seems like a statue/made  
of stone. Reflects the soldier's  
stopping to realise the full reality  
of war.

'Crawled' suggests  
fear/weakness/vulnerability  
- hiding in the field.

Could be literal - animal scared by gunshots?  
As a metaphor - the hare is the soldier - he  
has realised that he is being a coward  
(yellow) he will need to fight as he has been  
trained if he wants to survive.

Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame  
And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide  
Open silent, its eyes standing out.

Makes the decision  
to fight - fight or  
flight as in the  
natural world.

He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,

King, honour, human dignity, etcetera

Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm

To get out of that blue crackling air

His terror's touchy dynamite.

These are the patriotic  
reasons men were given  
for fighting. 'Etcetera'  
suggests they are not  
even worth listing -  
none of these things  
matter when you are  
actually in battle.

Fear and desperation are  
about to take over - he  
will lose control of his  
emotions - Not the  
trained, emotionless killer  
he should be - reality.

Has been reduced to  
primitive/basic existence -  
not killing out of honour or  
duty, but out of fear and  
desperation. Kill or be  
killed.

Gunfire

# Question: How does the poet present the experience of conflict in Bayonet Charge?

A It describes the experience of 'going over-the-top

S STANZA LENGTH, ENJAMBMENT, USE OF DASHES, Caesura

T war, why we fight, terror

I simile, metaphor, personification

L alliteration, repetition, verbs, onomatopoeia

E terror, fear, confusion

