

Kamikaze

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In WWII, Japan formed special units in its air force known as 'Kamikaze' pilots. The pilot's job was to destroy the enemy by deliberately crashing their planes into American warships and, in doing so, losing their own lives.



Kamikaze pilots were on suicide missions, prepared to sacrifice their lives for the defence of Japan. Their sacrifice was seen as both a religious and patriotic obligation. It was considered an honour to die for the good of the country. The planes they flew were specially adapted and packed with explosives in order to maximise the damage done to enemy ships.



Kamikaze pilots who failed to complete their mission - for whatever reason - were alienated from society after the war and were condemned for their failure to kill themselves for the sake of their country.

The poem is about a failed Kamikaze pilot and his family's reaction to him.

The pilot sets off on his mission but changes his mind and returns home, thus failing to complete this mission. On his return, his family refuse to speak to him and he is shunned by society.

The narrator of the poem is his daughter.

'Embarked' could have 2 meanings here. Literally, he is setting out his mission. Metaphorically, it is the start of his realisation that life is worth living.

Combination of these words suggests the idea of adventure and discovery - it is a positive view of what he is about to do.

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

Symbols of rituals and culture in the plane with him. Reflects the Kamikaze pilot's love of his country and his readiness to die defending it.

Not expected to return - expected to die for his country and be remembered honourably for it.

She attempts to justify and understand his decision - she doesn't know for sure why he changed his mind.

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**

Images he sees from his plane - calm and idyllic.
This powerful image of nature gives him an idea
of what he is truly sacrificing.

Pilot's daughter - she is the speaker in the poem. She is guessing what happened because she was never told.

Simile - links to physical appearance but also 'bunting' is usually associated with celebration - perhaps he realises life is to be celebrated and not sacrificed in warfare.

Nature - life in abundance - reminds him of what he is giving up.

Alliteration and metaphor here. Silver suggests the precious nature of life - this helps to change his mind.

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

Simile - natural world is thriving and full of life - signalling to him - reminds him that life is worth living.

Suggests the fulfilment of life - vibrant and energetic.

Memory is simplistic (he and his brother building with stones on the beach) - suggests appreciation of the small things in life which may have seemed insignificant - now they are everything to him.

'Turbulent' reflects his current state of mind - he knows he no longer wants to carry out this mission.

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

Pilot begins to reminisce - suggests a realisation of the importance and value of life.

Another image of a precious gem - emphasises his growing understanding of the beauty of life.

Repetition of 'silver' to emphasise the value of life.

References to nature - life is vibrant and energetic.

- *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*

Sense of taste and touch are evoked here - 'salt-sodden', 'feathery'. Creates a vivid image of a vivid memory. Pilot is reminded that life is exciting and he can still be part of it if he chooses.

Metaphor - suggests nature is impressive and should be respected/revered, not sacrificed or treated lightly.

Chooses to live - life is too important to sacrifice.

Impact of his actions - she feels shame that he did not make the ultimate sacrifice for his country.

*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***

Shunned by the wider community - shame.

Innocence of the children here - they do not understand and so carry on as normal. The choice of verbs reflects the contrast of their life and that of the pilot.

Tone changes in this final stanza - contrasts the vivid and exciting vibrancy of life to the pilot's alienation - like a living death.

Contrast to 'chatter' and 'laughter' - they are taught to shun the pilot and to respect cultural rules - the last of the positive images in the poem are 'silenced'.

Children condemn him - put cultural beliefs above the love of their father.

*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.

Wonders if he questions his decision - was life really worth living when he was treated so poorly and isolated from everyone?