

KAMIKAZE

- **Context:** this poem is about the experience of a Kamikaze pilot who, instead of completing his suicide mission, turns back the plane due to his nostalgic memories and the beauty of nature. This would have brought massive shame on his family, as being a Japanese pilot was seen as a way of honouring your country (an act of patriotism).
- **“... a shaven head/full of powerful incantations”** - a bald head is symbolic in Japanese culture for men who were samurai warriors, which may suggest that the pilot is physically strong and can cope with the mental anguish caused by his mission. However, **“powerful incantations”** hints at the life-changing propaganda that was ingrained in the pilot’s mind at the beginning of the poem, which influenced many men to undergo these missions, as it was seen as a great honour to die for their country. These have completely changed his mindset and put him under a kind of spell.
- **“At the little fishing boats/strung out like bunting”** - this simile is ironic, as bunting is often a symbol of celebration. This may show how men who were kamikaze pilots were often held up by their families and society as heroes who should be honoured. However, we know that there is no victorious return or welcome for this pilot. The homely and almost domestic image of boats is a far cry from the massive enemy ships that the pilot almost flies into. The beauty of this image of tiny boats appears to also remind the pilot of his childhood, as him and his brothers would bring **“their father’s boat safe”**.
- **“A tuna, the dark prince, muscular, dangerous”** - this metaphor would appear to suggest the incredibly costly tunas which were often sold in Japanese markets for millions of pounds, due to their rarity. The image of a **“prince”** suggests that these fish were treated and seen as almost royalty, whilst **“dark”** could suggest their sinister appearance and fleeting movements. This reminds the reader of the dangerous power of nature. The word **“muscular”** also hints at the magnificence of these giant beasts.
- **“And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered/which had been the better way to die”** - this tragic and blunt final line emphasises how a family was torn apart due to the destructiveness of propaganda. The taboo surrounding the pilot’s return forces his family to treat him as if he is dead. The pilot’s daughter’s words are tinged with a regret and sadness about this fact.



KEY THEMES, STRUCTURE AND FORM