

Commentary on thistle by ted hughes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ted Hughes was born in 1930 and since then throughout his life many wars have occurred during this time. Ted Hughes's poem Thistle portrays the events of war and what it truly represents. Simply the title itself 'Thistle' is an exceptional word, which adequately suits the poem's image for the reason being that the first icon the reader captures is a sharp pain afflicting object. A thistle is a sharp pointed plant, a harsh plant, cold and pointy only there to damage its surroundings in exposure. This idea and image of war being like the formidable injuring spikes of a thistle that Hughes presents is supported throughout the poem by a selection of dextrous language.

The first two stanzas use a powerful and fierce form of language such as 'spike', 'crackle', 'splintered', and 'Icelandic frost'. All these words are strong fierce words that are inharmonious. This may be perhaps to show the description of war itself the actual event or field. Whereas stanzas three and four use a less forceful quality of words such as 'pale hair', 'grow grey', 'sons appear'. This divergent form of language is softer and calmer, which diverts the poem towards the events after the war and what happens to the soldiers after the country has used them up in their battle for freedom. This point of the split stanzas can be supported by the layout of the poem.

The layout of the poem is set in four stanzas each containing four lines. The first two stanzas only contain a full stop in the last line as the form of punctuation, whereas stanzas three and four have full stops at the end of each line. I am not particular sure why Hughes has done this but perhaps one idea is that it breaks down the poem's speed and rhythm. The first two sets of stanzas have a more of a fluid pace and rhythm, which is perhaps to show the intensity of war and its acceleration and rapidity. Whereas the third

and fourth stanza punctuation at the end of each line breaks up the rhythm to slow it down, which, subsequently corresponds to the slow style of the old, 'grey like men' Hughes describes in line ten.

Due to this layout technique Hughes has found it unnecessary to use a form of rhyming scheme. This I feel is a good idea because the language is so powerful the and strong the poem is read at fairly slow pace and concentration and emphasis is put on the language rather than the rhyming scheme. The poem tone is cold and dispirited to show the depression of war and the sinister atmosphere. While reading the poem the tone brings out a revengeful feeling as well as a hurt setback Image. Hughes does this by his choice of language.

In the first line, 'Against the rubber tongues of cows and the hoeing hands of men' The tongues of the cows are rough and thick which leads back to the title of thistles being harsh. Although this could be contradicted in the sense that a cows tongue is soft but not smooth. The word Thistles is used again in line two, 'Thistles spike the summer air' The thistle sharp pointed arrows pierce the calm and beautiful calm summer air. Hughes here gives the reader an ill-favoured image to undergo by showing how the strength of the war destroys the beauty. In line four, 'Everyone a revengeful burst', Hughes here describes how each side to the battle has moments in which they gain victories or achievements.

Although the next line, 'Of resurrection, a grasped fistful', Shows how when there is this burst of revenge there is a consequence that occurs. Hughes uses the term fistful this could either mean the destruction of a fist or hand

full of people or perhaps it could be the image of a mighty fist sweeping across the battlefield with only destruction in its path. The last line of the second stanza, 'Of splintered weapons and Icelandic frost thrust up' sets a fantastic scene of the end of the war and all that is left are used battered guns lost out among the battle field poking up out of the ground and the cold perhaps morning air freezes the mud into a hard iceberg of spikes. This image appears like a thistle, the guns sticking out like the spikes out of the ball of the thistle plant. Line seven is the description of the war veteran and the ex-soldier is described as a 'decayed Viking', the Viking has a stereotype of a built war machine rough and tough as though that is all he is made for. Well the soldier is like the Viking.

He has been made to fight and now that that job no longer exists for him he has nothing left to do but to grow old and die. As the next line describes the war machine is left only to his pale hair and he is no longer worried or cared about, and although he has survived the torment of the war the brutal memories still remain with him. Line eleven and twelve shows how not only were these war veterans lives ravaged by war but now they have to watch their sons be taken in by the training they had ready for battle. Then step to the venturesome battleground close to death. Impaled perhaps by the thistles that remain to expire their lives. 'Mown down, it is a feud.

Their sons appear, Stiff with weapons, fighting back over the same ground'

Hughes raps up the poem nicely by showing how although thousands of lives are lost in these wars we are yet too stubborn to learn from our mistakes and put others to their death bead. Hughes has written this poem with a huge

degree of thought and deep meaning and he has especially set the mood and meaning behind it appropriately.