**Power and Conflict Poetry Practice Exam Questions**

Compare how poets present authority figures in My Last Duchess and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**My Last Duchess**

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,

– E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive. Will’t please you rise? We’ll meet

The company below, then. I repeat,

The Count your master’s known muniﬁcence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;

Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed

At starting, is my object. Nay, we’ll go

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf’s hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said

‘Frà Pandolf’ by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the ﬁ rst

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ‘twas not

Her husband’s presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek: perhaps

Frà Pandolf chanced to say ‘Her mantle laps

Over my lady’s wrist too much,’ or ‘Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Half-ﬂush that dies along her throat’: such stuff

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

Sir, ‘twas all one! My favour at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some ofﬁcious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace – all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked

Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody’s gift. Who’d stoop to blame

This sort of triﬂing? Even had you skill

In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, ‘Just this

Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,

Or there exceed the mark’ – and if she let

Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set

Compare how poets present ideas about identity in Checking Out Me History and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**Checking Out Me History**

Dem tell me  
Dem tell me  
Wha dem want to tell me

*From Jamaica  
she travel far  
to the Crimean War  
she volunteer to go  
and even when de British said no  
she still brave the Russian snow  
a healing star  
among the wounded  
a yellow sunrise  
to the dying*

Dem tell me  
Dem tell me wha dem want to tell me  
But now I checking out me own history  
I carving out me identity

**John Agard**

Bandage up me eye with me own history  
Blind me to my own identity

Dem tell me bout 1066 and all dat  
dem tell me bout Dick Whittington and he cat  
But Touissant L'Ouverture  
no dem never tell me bout dat

*Toussaint  
a slave  
with vision  
lick back  
Napoleon  
battalion  
and first Black  
Republic born  
Toussaint de thorn  
to de French  
Toussaint de beacon  
of de Haitian Revolution*

Dem tell me bout de man who discover de balloon  
and de cow who jump over de moon  
Dem tell me bout de dish run away with de spoon  
but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

*Nanny  
See-far woman  
of mountain dream  
fire-woman struggle  
hopeful stream  
to freedom river*

Dem tell me bout Lord Nelson and Waterloo  
but dem never tell me bout Shaka de great Zulu  
Dem tell me bout Columbus and 1492  
but what happen to de Caribs and de Arawaks too

Dem tell me bout Florence Nightingale and she lamp  
and how Robin Hood used to camp  
Dem tell me bout ole King Cole was a merry ole soul  
but dem never tell me bout Mary Seacole

Compare how poets present ideas about place in The Prelude: Stealing the Boat and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**The Prelude: Stealing the Boat**

One summer evening (led by her) I found  
A little boat tied to a willow tree  
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.  
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in  
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth  
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice  
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;  
Leaving behind her still, on either side,  
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,  
Until they melted all into one track  
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,  
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point  
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view  
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,  
The horizon’s utmost boundary; far above  
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.

She was an elfin pinnace; lustily  
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,  
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
Went heaving through the water like a swan;

When, from behind that craggy steep till then  
The horizon’s bound, a huge peak, black and huge,  
As if with voluntary power instinct,  
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,  
And growing still in stature the grim shape  
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
And measured motion like a living thing,  
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,  
And through the silent water stole my way  
Back to the covert of the willow tree;

There in her mooring-place I left my bark,  
-And through the meadows homeward went, in grave  
And serious mood; but after I had seen  
That spectacle, for many days, my brain  
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being; o’er my thoughts  
There hung a darkness, call it solitude  
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes  
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,  
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;  
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live  
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind  
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. **William Wordsworth**

Compare how poets present people’s response to conflict in War Photographer and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**War Photographer**

[In his darkroom he is finally alone](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736274)  
with [spools of suffering](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736277) set out in [ordered rows](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736276).  
[The only light is red and softly glows,  
as though this were a church and he  
a priest preparing to intone a Mass.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736278)  
[Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736281). [All flesh is grass](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736305).

[He has a job to do](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-2487967)[.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-12753422) [Solutions slop in trays](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736312)  
[beneath his hands which did not tremble then  
though seem to now](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-2528793). [Rural England](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736313). [Home again  
to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736318)  
[to fields which don't explode beneath the feet  
of running children in a nightmare heat.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-6503085)  
  
[Something is happening](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-2528801). [A stranger's features  
faintly start to twist before his eyes,](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1736335)  
[a half-formed ghost](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1750108). [He remembers the cries  
of this man's wife, how he sought approval  
without words to do what someone must](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1750123)  
[and how the blood stained into foreign dust.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-6502944)

[A hundred agonies in black-and-white](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1750130)  
[from which his editor will pick out five or six  
for Sunday's supplement.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1750140) [The reader's eyeballs prick  
with tears between bath and pre-lunch beers.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1750154)  
[From aeroplane he stares impassively at where  
he earns a living and they do not care.](https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-war-photographer-annotated#note-1750175)

**Carol Ann Duffy**

Compare how poets present suffering in Exposure and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**Exposure**

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knive us ...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent ...

Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient ...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,

Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.

Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow ...

We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army

Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray.

But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.

Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,

With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,

But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces -

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,

Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.

Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed

With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;

For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;

Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed –

We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;

Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.

For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;

Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,

For love of God seems dying.

To-night, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,

Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.

The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,

Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,

But nothing happens. **Wilfred Owen**

Compare how poets present loss in The Emigree and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**The Emigree**

There once was a country… I left it as a child

but my memory of it is sunlight-clear

for it seems I never saw it in that November

which, I am told, comes to the mildest city.

The worst news I receive of it cannot break

my original view, the bright, filled paperweight.

It may be at war, it may be sick with tyrants,

but I am branded by an impression of sunlight.

The white streets of that city, the graceful slopes

glow even clearer as time rolls its tanks

and the frontiers rise between us, close like waves.

That child’s vocabulary I carried here

like a hollow doll, opens and spills a grammar.

Soon I shall have every coloured molecule of it.

It may by now be a lie, banned by the state

but I can’t get it off my tongue. It tastes of sunlight.

I have no passport, there’s no way back at all

but my city comes to me in its own white plane.

It lies down in front of me, docile as paper;

I comb its hair and love its shining eyes.

My city takes me dancing through the city

of walls. They accuse me of absence, they circle me.

They accuse me of being dark in their free city.

My city hides behind me. They mutter death,

and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight.

**Carol Rumens**

Compare how poets present change in Kamikaze and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**Kamikaze**

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

*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.

**Beatrice Garland**

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

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

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

– *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.

*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*

Compare how poets present pride and glory in Charge of the Light Brigade and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’**

Cannon to right of them,

Cannon to left of them,

Cannon behind them

Volley’d and thunder’d;

Storm’d at with shot and shell,

While horse and hero fell,

They that had fought so well

Came thro’ the jaws of Death

Back from the mouth of Hell,

All that was left of them,

Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?

O the wild charge they made!

All the world wondered.

Honour the charge they made,

Honour the Light Brigade,

Noble six hundred.

**Alfred Lord Tennyson**

Half a league, half a league

Half a league onward,

All in the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

‘Forward the Light Brigade!

‘Charge for the guns!’ he said

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

‘Forward the Light Brigade!’

Was there a man dismay’d?

Not tho’ the soldier knew

Someone had blundered:

Their’s not to make reply,

Their’s not to reason why,

Their’s but to do and die:

Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them

Cannon to left of them

Cannon in front of them

Volley’d and thunder’d;

Storm’d at with shot and shell,

Boldly they rode and well,

Into the jaws of Death,

Into the mouth of Hell

Rode the six hundred.

Flash’d all their sabres bare,

Flash’d as they turn’d in air,

Sabring the gunners there,

Charging an army, while

All the world wonder’d.

Plunged in the battery smoke

Right thro’ the line they broke;

Cossack and Russian

Reel’d from the sabre stroke

Shatter’d and sunder’d.

Then they rode back, but not

Not the six hundred.

Compare how poets present memory in Remains and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**Remains**

On another occasion, we got sent out

to tackle looters raiding a bank.

And one of them legs it up the road,

probably armed, possibly not.

Well myself and somebody else and somebody else

are all of the same mind,

so all three of us open fire.

Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear

I see every round as it rips through his life –

I see broad daylight on the other side.

So we’ve hit this looter a dozen times

and he’s there on the ground, sort of inside out,

pain itself, the image of agony.

One of my mates goes by

and tosses his guts back into his body.

Then he’s carted off in the back of a lorry.

End of story, except not really.

His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol

I walk right over it week after week.

Then I’m home on leave. But I blink

and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.

Sleep, and he’s probably armed, and possibly not.

Dream, and he’s torn apart by a dozen rounds.

And the drink and the drugs won’t flush him out –

he’s here in my head when I close my eyes,

dug in behind enemy lines,

not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land

or six-feet-under in desert sand,

but near to the knuckle, here and now,

his bloody life in my bloody hands.

**Simon Armitage**

Compare how poets present emotional pain in Poppies and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**Poppies**

Three days before Armistice Sunday

and poppies had already been placed

on individual war graves. Before you left,

I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,

spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade

of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,

I rounded up as many white cat hairs

as I could, smoothed down your shirt's

upturned collar, steeled the softening

of my face. I wanted to graze my nose

across the tip of your nose, play at

being Eskimos like we did when

you were little. I resisted the impulse

to run my fingers through the gelled

blackthorns of your hair. All my words

flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked

with you, to the front door, threw

it open, the world overflowing

like a treasure chest. A split second

and you were away, intoxicated.

After you'd gone I went into your bedroom,

released a song bird from its cage.

Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,

and this is where it has led me,

skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy

making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without

a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.

On reaching the top of the hill I traced

the inscriptions on the war memorial,

leaned against it like a wishbone.

The dove pulled freely against the sky,

an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear

your playground voice catching on the wind.

**Jane Weir**

Compare how poets present individual experiences in London and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

# **London**

I wander thro' each charter'd street,

Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.

And mark in every face I meet

Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,

In every Infants cry of fear,

In every voice: in every ban,

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry

Every blackning Church appalls,

And the hapless Soldiers sigh

Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

How the youthful Harlots curse

Blasts the new-born Infants tear

And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

**William Blake**

Compare how poets present the power of humans in Tissue and in **one** other poem from ‘Power and Conflict’.

**Tissue**

Paper that lets the light  
shine through, this  
is what could alter things.  
Paper thinned by age or touching,  
the kind you find in well-used books,  
the back of the Koran, where a hand  
has written in the names and histories,  
who was born to whom,  
the height and weight, who  
died where and how, on which sepia date,  
pages smoothed and stroked and turned  
transparent with attention.  
If buildings were paper, I might  
feel their drift, see how easily  
they fall away on a sigh, a shift  
in the direction of the wind.  
Maps too. The sun shines through  
their borderlines, the marks  
that rivers make, roads,  
railtracks, mountainfolds,  
Fine slips from grocery shops  
that say how much was sold  
and what was paid by credit card  
might fly our lives like paper kites.

An architect could use all this,  
place layer over layer, luminous  
script over numbers over line,  
and never wish to build again with brick  
or block, but let the daylight break  
through capitals and monoliths,  
through the shapes that pride can make,  
find a way to trace a grand design  
with living tissue, raise a structure  
never meant to last,  
of paper smoothed and stroked  
and thinned to be transparent,  
turned into your skin.

[**Imtiaz Dharker**](https://www.poemhunter.com/imtiaz-dharker/poems/)