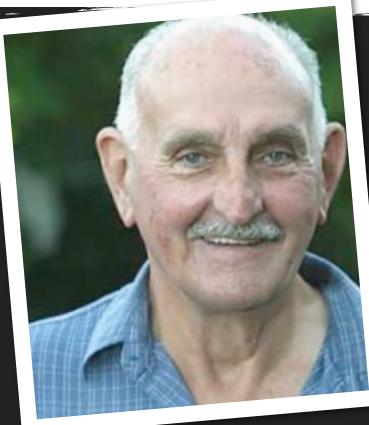


BRUCE DAWE

ST. ALOYSIUS' COLLEGE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

A CLOSE STUDY OF A POET



All the lives and characters explored in Dawe's poems establish the individual experience of colourful and finely drawn people, but at the same time look beyond the circumscribed to the fate of humanity, to universal abstracts of the meaning and purpose of life in the history of humankind. The emotive abstracts so explored in the poems are developed from a careful record of Bruce Dawe's own personal and physical experience.

Introduction

Learning in this unit focuses on students developing skills, knowledge and understanding by responding to a prescribed set of poems and accompanying commentaries and critical material. Students further develop their skills, knowledge and understanding by composing texts of both a critical and interpretive nature.

Students learn to critically evaluate poetic concepts and devices and learn about how poems are composed for particular purposes, audiences and contexts. They also learn about the effects that different perspectives can have on poetic expression through the work of Australian poet Bruce Dawe. Additional content has been provided in the unit. Students can broaden and deepen their skills, knowledge and understanding and extend their interest in English by undertaking a broader exploration of twentieth-century Australian poetry.

The FOUR prescribed poems set for study are:

- 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking'
- 'Life-cycle'
- 'Homecoming'
- 'And a Good Friday Was Had by all'

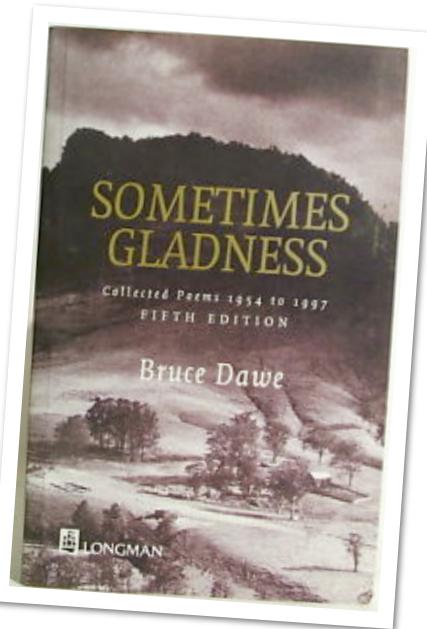


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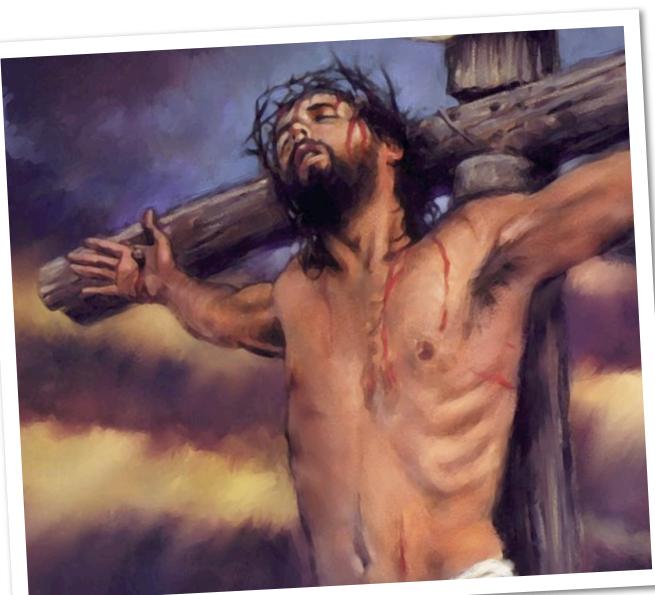
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Bruce Dawe - Biography

The poetry of Bruce Dawe represents events that are both personal and public history. “*Life-cycle*” celebrates the life of a Victorian football supporter while simultaneously examining the willing subjugation of self by modern sports fans to team loyalty and ethics, and to the embracing of their chosen sport and its rituals as religion. “*Enter Without So Much As Knocking*” chronicles the life of a typical urban child who is transformed, by a combination of family and society indifference to his individual needs, into a monster doing battle with his world and all who share his existence. “*And a Good Friday Was Had By All*” provides a fresh glimpse into the last hours of Christ, and chronicles the impact of the Crucifixion on the life of the rugged soldier who drove the nails into the cross. “*Homecoming*” and



“*Weapons Training*” deal with the lives and deaths of soldiers and the human cost of war in its destruction not only of their lives but the lives of their families and of their communities. The wars fought in peacetime by the world’s battlers are symbolized by the events of political wars. Set against such struggles, the peace found in a suburban backyard by ordinary suburban man captured in “*Homo Suburbensis*” is all the more inspirational and precious.



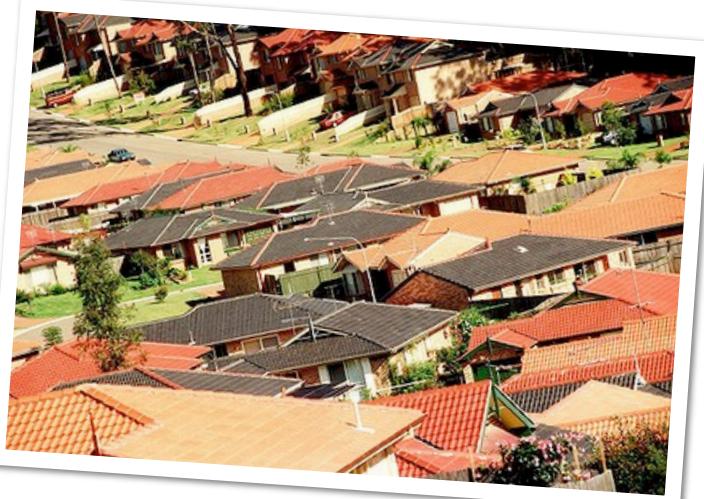
All the lives and characters explored in these poems establish the individual experience of colourful and finely drawn characters, but at the same time look beyond the circumscribed to the fate of humanity, to universal abstracts of the meaning and purpose of life in the history of humankind. The emotive abstracts so explored in the poems are developed from a careful record of personal and physical details.



In many of the individuals who are subjects of his poetry, Dawe fashions from the most unexpected material new heroes for the post-war age. These figures from a recent historical age are true to themselves and yet also figures whose rather ordinary actions are capable of being viewed as heroic. Their lives and experiences require them to deal with the practicalities of existence, with its material requirements of living, with the rules and restrictions and the difficulties and disappointments of the modern world, but at the same time to demonstrate possibilities for nobility or at least compassion in human action. They show us both the good and the bad that someone can do if they set their mind to it.

A Poet of Landscape

Urban and suburban worlds dominate Dawe's work and are carefully recorded with an artist's eye for detail, colour and atmosphere, and a poet's ear for sound. Explored with precision and depth and in literal and figurative imagery, the worlds in Dawe's poems are both private and public, ugly and beautiful. Their physical reality is developed into a symbolic significance. The city in '*Enter Without So Much as Knocking*' is a world city, frighteningly universal in its disregard for the individual and its, dehumanizing environment which nurtures the worst in his spirit. The suburban backyard and its vegetable patch takes on a new significance in '*Homo Suburbensis*'.



Dawe's poetry also draws on the natural world for its subject matter" its symbols and its inspiration. His poetry is patterned by many memorable images: the scatter of stars framing grotesque lovemaking on the large screen of '*Enter Without So Much as Knocking*'; the

diving crucified Christ in '*And a Good Friday Was Had by All*'; the steaming chow mien of the Vietnam jungle and the corpse skier and mourning hounds of '*Homecoming*'; and the Ute containing all one family's possessions in '*Drifters*' are but some of these images.



A Poet of Grief and Sometimes Gladness

Dawe's poetry explores humankind's strongest feelings: the grief and pain and suffering, and the odd moments of joy and fellowship and hope that are our universal experience in this modern world. His work is a human documentary of:

- The numbing effects of commercialism and consumerism: 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking'
- The horror of war and the grief it generates: 'Homecoming'
- The raw fear of combat: 'Weapons Training'
- Excitement and exhilaration: 'Drifters', 'Weapons Training'
- Despair which threatens to overwhelm the spirit: 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking', 'Drifters', 'Weapons Training'
- the joys of friendship and companionship: 'And a Good Friday Was Had by All'
- the abandonment of self, of simple human dignity: 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking'
- the craving of the human spirit for meaning: 'Life-cycle', 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking', 'And a Good Friday Was Had by All'
- the pain generated by the social and economic betrayal of the individual and of the family: 'Drifters'
- bemusement at the means by which individuals - especially in Australia attempt to give their lives meaning: 'Life-cycle'



A Creator of Myth

Dawe creates new myths out of the experience of ordinary figures. He redefines the meaning of the Crucifixion as an awakening of the crucifier to the

power of love in '*And a Good Friday Was Had by All*'. He reworks traditional motifs of courage and self-sacrifice in the soldier and the mother in '*Weapons Training*' and '*Drifters*'. Suburban man becomes a powerful symbol of human energy and strength of spirit in '*Homo Suburbensis*'. Urban man is the archetypal victim in '*Enter Without So Much as Knocking*'.



A Recorder of Universal Experience

Dawe's poetic vision is characterised by his cosmopolitan focus on the universal experience of humankind in modern civilisation. Australia provides him with the average people and the images by which he defines this experience. Dawe's universal themes include:

- The power and strength of Christianity and Catholicism
- The reality of God
- The human need for faith
- The thirst of humans for meaning
- The saving power of love
- The immorality of mercantilism
- The destruction of individuality by the forces of consumerism
- The dehumanising impact of politics
- The stereotyping of individuals
- The power of the forces of conformity
- Itinerancy as a consequence of poverty
- The nobility which can be found in a life lived simply
- The struggle of existence
- The decay of culture and the degeneration of civilisation
- The human capacity for aggression and hatred
- The reality and common experience of stress
- The wastefulness of war
- The hatreds bred out of war
- The power of pain and the common bond of grief
- Suffering and decay in the contemporary urban environment
- The cycle of life



- The innocence of childhood and its corruption by modern forces
- The destruction of the sanctity of the family
- The intrusiveness of the media on ordinary life
- The values of the individual
- The decay of personal relationships
- Personal sadness
- The gladness that is only sometimes found in existence



Poetry Analysis Guide

Poetry is a very specialize form of communication. Its uniqueness depends on a range of factors like: the expression of a poet's deeply felt emotions; the effect of particular word choices, sounds and word combinations; the subject matter evoking certain themes and the type of poetic form or structure that the poets utilizes to relate the message.

The role of the reader is to enjoy the poem firstly but then also to analyse the style of the poem so to fully understand the poet's ideas, feelings and messages.

Techniques for Understanding a Poem

To gain an initial understanding of any poem you may wish to try the following techniques:

- Think about the title and why the poet chose those particular words. If there is no title think about why the poet didn't include one.
- Identify the setting.
- Identify any particular mood or tone within the poem.
- Read the poem through at least twice to get an understanding of how the poem could have a personal impact on you the reader.
- Read the poem aloud to get an understanding of the impact of any particular sounds.
- Highlight any key words or images (simile, metaphor, symbolism).

Identifying Poetic Themes

In order to identify poetic themes, you need to find the ideas, attitudes, feelings and philosophy presented by the poet through the subject matter of events, characters and philosophy; whether personal, religious or social. Remember that, although some themes are unique to every poem in the personal focus of the poet, many themes are universal to all poetry. These universal themes include:

- The nature of love and its associated happiness and trials.
- The patterns of Nature, including the cycle of the seasons.
- The anonymity and stress of urban life
- The nature of idealism and its defeat in the face of reality
- The special world view of young people
- The losses, wisdom, disenchantment and resignation of old age
- The corruption of humankind

- The pain and trauma of grief
- The futility and brutality of war
- The value of ordinary lives
- The value of solitude or the pain of loneliness
- The inevitability of decay and of death for all living things
- The power of the human imagination
- The often destructive power of religion and the human need for faith
- The eternal struggle between good and evil
- The beauty of the landscape
- The relentless power of the sea
- The bonds of our common humanity

Know Your Technical Terms

To develop your own working analytical vocabulary through the effective use of technical terms. Some important technical terms for you to identify and understand are listed below:

Allegory: literally 'other meaning'. In allegory, characters, incidents and setting operate on many levels. What is depicted as the life of an individual may represent a universal statement about the life of Everyman. The story of a wanderer may represent the journeys made by all people living out their individual lives. For example, Dawe's drifters in the poem of the same name are powerfully drawn individuals. The colour and tenor of their lives is drawn on the canvas of the poem with a few deft details, yet they are also representative of their kind and in the end, of all humankind/as they battle difficulties and experience the joys and sorrows of existence. They 'are Dawe's universal statement of the itinerant state that social and economic forces have foisted on many families.

Alliteration: literally, 'more letters'. Alliteration is the repetition of sounds (mostly consonants), usually at the beginning of words or of stressed syllables. Alliteration creates atmosphere, and emphasizes the poem's ideas and feelings by the sounds it interweaves into the poetic reading

Archetype: A character, image or story line, which is found repeatedly in myth and throughout literary tradition. The mother or nurturer is the strength of the family in Dawe's 'Drifters'. The scapegoat and the journey from life into the world of death are other archetypes explored in poems like 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking' and 'Life-Cycle'.

Assonance: literally, 'the answer to'. The repetition of the stressed vowel, and sometimes also of the following vowels within the poem. It often adds dramatic intensity to a poem, giving it a coherence of sound that is married to the coherence of ideas.

Ballad: The traditional ballad has given modern poetry a sense of drama, a vivid exploitation of dialogue, a simple stanza form of four lines, a sense of lilting rhythm and an appreciation of rhyme in reinforcing the metrical and semantic patterns. A ballad opens abruptly as the setting and the action are swiftly and economically drawn. It repeats key ideas or key events, often in a refrain. In the vividness of his images, in his appreciation of rhyme and rhythm and in his use of patterns and repetitions, Dawe has drawn greatly, upon ballad tradition.

Blank verse: Unrhymed verse, often written in iambic pentameters (five metrical feet, or ten syllables). It mimics natural speech, although it is a little more sophisticated.

Conceit: A figure of speech, which establishes a startling comparison between two apparently quite dissimilar ideas or images. The elaborate mathematical imagery of 'Homecoming' and the startling image of Christ crucified as a diver in 'And a Good Friday Was Had by All' are powerful conceits to be found in Dawe's work.

Dramatic monologue: The spoken expression of the poet as the main character. The speaker addresses one or more people who are not heard in the poem but whose reactions are responded to or foreshadowed by the speaker. The speaker's character is revealed by the content and the structure of what he or she says. 'And a Good Friday Was Had by All' demonstrates the sense of dramatic immediacy which Dawe achieves by his use of this, his favorite poetic form.

Elegy: A formal lament for the death of an individual, or for mortality in general. 'Homecoming' captures such sadness in a particularly poignant portrait of the Vietnam experience.

Enjambment: The flow-on of one poetic line into the next without a break and the consequent flow-on of ideas and feeling.

Epic: A long narrative on a serious subject, told with a sense of ceremony in formal speech and elevated style. The setting generally spans earth, heaven and hell. The action is heroic and often involves superhuman feats along a road of trials.

Epigram: A poem of two or three lines that makes a succinct, often witty, comment on a subject.

Figurative language: The imaginative use of language so that it has more than a literal meaning. Personification, simile, metaphor and symbolism are examples.

Free verse: Poetic utterance that does not conform to technical patterns of metre, rhyme or genre.

Heroic couplets: Rhyming pairs of lines; each with five units, each consisting of an

unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Heroic couplets were used by Shakespeare to round off his sonnets.

Imagery: The imaginative pictures created by the words of a poem. Imagery appeals to all five senses: sight, sound, taste, touch and hearing. Imagery is also used to describe the effect of figurative language.

Metaphor: A comparison of one thing, quality or action to another by directly stating that it is the other. It is a compact form of imagery, which expands in the imagination. It has a philosophical and intellectual confidence and often introduces a sense of drama. In his introduction to his anthology *Sometimes Gladness*, Dawe comments himself on his fondness for metaphor.

Metre: The regular rhythm given to a poem by the stresses of its words in isolation and in combination. Metre is the backbone or scaffolding of a poem's meaning.

Persona: literally, 'a mask'. The persona is the narrative voice, the point of view of a poem that is clearly not that of the author. These first-person narrators are deliberate constructions by the poet to achieve a particular purpose in an individual poem.

Poetic diction: The combination of the words, phrases and figurative language of a poem. Poets often give individual characters their own distinctive diction. A particular poet's work is often characterised by favourite words or turns of phrase.

Pun: A play on words to create a joke with meaning.

Ode: A long lyric poem, serious in subject, formal in style and complicated in verse pattern. Odes are poems of praise or contemplation.

Onomatopoeia: A word or combination of words whose sound recreates the sound it denotes.

Pastoral: Traditionally, a Greek poem written about the lives of shepherds and shepherdesses. Today, the term is applied to any poem, which celebrates the joys of simple lives led by working people. Many of Dawe's poems have a pastoral quality in their documentation of workers' experiences.

Personification: Assigning the qualities and feelings of a living being to an inanimate object. It thereby provides an imaginative expansion of the poem and is often a key to a poet's exploration of the meaning of universal themes.

Rhyme: The agreement of two metrically accented syllables in their vowel sounds and final consonants. Any unaccented syllables that follow unaccented syllables must be identical.

Rhyme scheme: The pattern created by rhyme in the last words of each line. The pattern is described by giving a letter of the alphabet (a, b, c ... z) to each end-rhyme.

Satire: A satirical poem uses comedy as a weapon to promote laughter at the object or person or event so derided. By means of such laughter, readers are brought to recognize their own potential to commit the same error or to demonstrate the same egotistical action. 'Enter Without So Much as Knocking' is a powerful satire of the empty lives lived by many in contemporary society.

Simile: A comparison between two different things using 'like', 'as' or 'than'.

Sonnet: A one-stanza lyric poem of fourteen lines, linked by a complex rhyme scheme. Love was the traditional subject. However, they are now used to deal (either seriously or comically) with almost any subject in an elevated, formal way. Sonnets are characterized by intensity of thought and, often, a sense of drama. Dawe's reworking of the sonnet form to portray the life of an ordinary suburban man in 'Homo Suburbensis' contributes to the wit of the work. His choice of genre ennobles the subject matter.

Understanding Poetic Metre

A poetic line is a row of syllables. Each syllable has a metrical value - a degree of emphasis- which, when scanned, will give you the metrical pattern of the line. The simplest pattern is that of stressed and unstressed syllables. Together they provide the metrical scheme of the poem.

Stress is emphasis, the degree of loudness given to the articulation of any sound. Additional contributory factors are pitch and the duration or length of the sound, and the weight given to the sounds by the individual consonants. The relative amount of stress given to each syllable reflects the modification of its normal pronunciation by the logical demands of the ideas being presented and their emotional emphases.

The simplest means of marking stress patterns is to use a slanting stroke to mark the major stresses in a line, and a cross to mark the weak stresses. The patterns created by these strong and weak stresses fall into groups called metrical feet that are made up of a combination of two or three syllables, only one of which is stressed.

The kinds of metrical feet thus created have names adopted from classical sources. The most important are shown below:

Name	Syllable Pattern	Written As	Example
iamb	Unstressed-stressed	x/	Defence
trochee	Stressed-unstressed	/x	Feather
anapaest	Unstressed-unstressed-stressed	Xx/	Refugee
amphibrach	Unstressed-stressed-unstressed	x/x	Resemble
dactyl	Stressed-unstressed-unstressed	/xx	Magical

These metrical patterns allow us to formally characterize the poet's use of the rhythms of everyday speech. The most common metrical pattern is the iambic pattern. The next most common is the other two-syllable pattern, the trochee. Any variation from the usual iambic metre provides metrical emphasis to the words (and therefore the ideas) that are differently and unexpectedly accented.

Other elements of variety are added to the poetic line by:

- A pause in the middle of the line (marked by a dash or a full stop or colon), known as caesura.
- Patterns of sound created by the use of rhyme, usually a combination of assonance and alliteration.
- The use of enjambment.
- The interweaving of monosyllabic and tri-syllabic words within the standard iambic line.
- The use of couplets (two adjacent rhymed lines) which provide distinct units of sense.

Bruce Dawe has described this poem as 'a statement about the rat-race: the pressures of modern living'.

Enter without So Much as Knocking

Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris ...

Blink, blink, HOSPITAL, SILENCE.

Ten days old, carried in the front door in his

mother's arms, first thing he heard was

Bobby Dazzler on Channel 7:

Hello, hello, hello all you lucky people and he

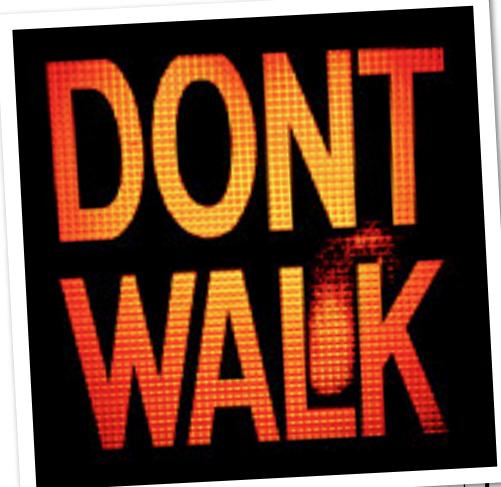
really was lucky because it didn't mean a thing

to him then ...

A year or two to settle in and
get acquainted with the set-up; like every other
well-equipped smoothly-run household, his included
one economy-size Mum, one Anthony Squires-
Coolstream-Summerweight Dad, along with two other kids
straight off the Junior Department rack.

When Mum won the
Luck's-A-Fortch Tricky-Tune Quiz she took him shopping
in the good-as-new station-wagon (£495 dep. at Reno's).
Beep, beep. WALK. DON'T WALK. TURN
LEFT. NO PARKING. WAIT HERE. NO
SMOKING. KEEP CLEAR/OUT/OFF GRASS. NO
BREATHING EXCEPT BY ORDER. BEWARE OF
THIS. WATCH OUT FOR THAT. My God (beep)
the congestion here just gets (beep)
worse every day, now what the (beep beep) does
that idiot think he's doing (beep beep and BEEP).

However, what he enjoyed most of all was when they
went to the late show at the local drive-in, on a clear night
and he could see (beyond the fifty-foot screen where
giant faces forever snarled screamed or made
incomprehensible and monstrous love) a pure
unadulterated fringe of sky, littered with stars
no-one had got around to fixing up yet; he'd watch them
circling about in luminous groups like kids at the circus
who never go quite close enough to the elephant to get kicked.



Anyway, pretty soon he was old enough to be
realistic like every other godless
money-hungry back-stabbing miserable
so-and-so, and then it was goodbye stars and the soft
cry in the corner when no-one was looking because
I'm telling you straight, Jim; it's Number One every time
for this chicken, hit wherever you see a head and
kick whoever's down, well thanks for a lovely
evening Clare, it's good to get away from it all
once in a while, I mean it's a real battle all the way
and a man can't help but feel a little soiled, himself,
at times, you know what I mean?

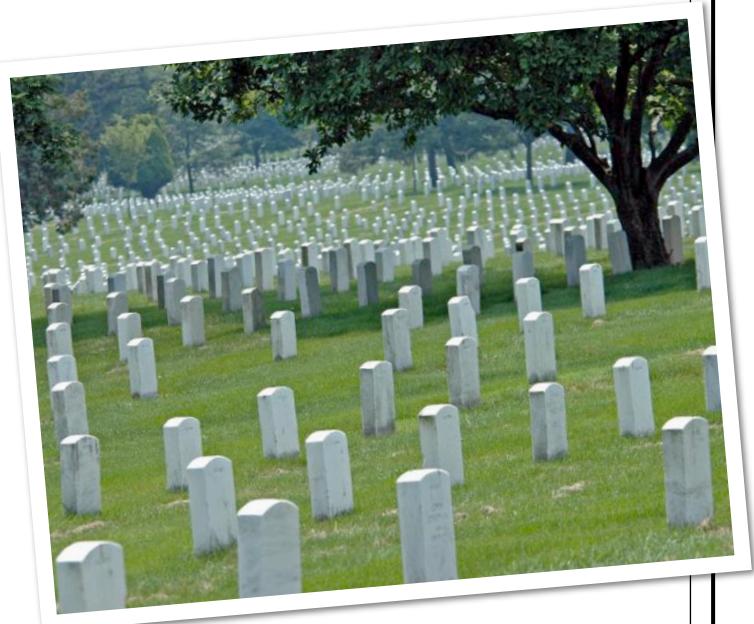
Now take it easy
on those curves, Alice, for God's sake,
I've had enough for one night, with that Clare Jessup,
hey, ease up, will you, watch it -

Probity & Sons, Morticians,
did a really first-class job on his face
(everyone was very pleased) even adding a
healthy tan he'd never had, living, gave him back for keeps
the old automatic smile with nothing behind it,
winding the whole show up with a
nice ride out to the underground metropolis:
permanent residential, no parking tickets, no taximeters
ticking, no Bobby Dazzlers here, no down payments,
nobody grieving over halitosis
flat feet shrinking gums falling hair.

Six feet down nobody interested.

Blink, blink, CEMETERY. Silence.

BRUCE DAWE



Questions

Support your responses to the following questions with evidence from the text.

1. The Latin epigraph of the poem:

Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris ...,

means:

'Remember, man; thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return'.

Comment on the origin and meaning of this epigraph.

2. Dawe says of the poem, 'It starts with the neon signs outside a hospital and ends with a neon sign.' Explain Dawe's framing of the poem between two blinking neon signs?
3. What is the poet's attitude to television and Bobby Dazzler?
4. What does the poet reveal about the family the child has been born into?
5. 'WALK. DON'T WALK. TURN LEFT. NO PARKING ... ' Why does Dawe include these literal references to road signs?
6. What does the repetition of (beep) in the third stanza signify?
7. What is the impression of the drive-in for the reader?
8. '... he was old enough to be / realistic'. What does being 'realistic' involve?
9. '*The old automatic smile with nothing behind it*'. How is the main character being criticized here?
10. Explain 'Six feet down nobody interested'?
11. How has Dawe created the impression of life being a rush?
12. Does Dawe achieve his purpose within the poem? Explain your view.

Extended Response:

Do you agree with Dawe's view of modern life?



'Enter Without So Much as Knocking' – Analysis

The book of Genesis in the Bible tells us that from dust are we made and to dust shall we return. This is the epitaph of Dawe's poem about one individual's representative life, his long struggle, including his loss of innocence as he makes the journey from birth to death.

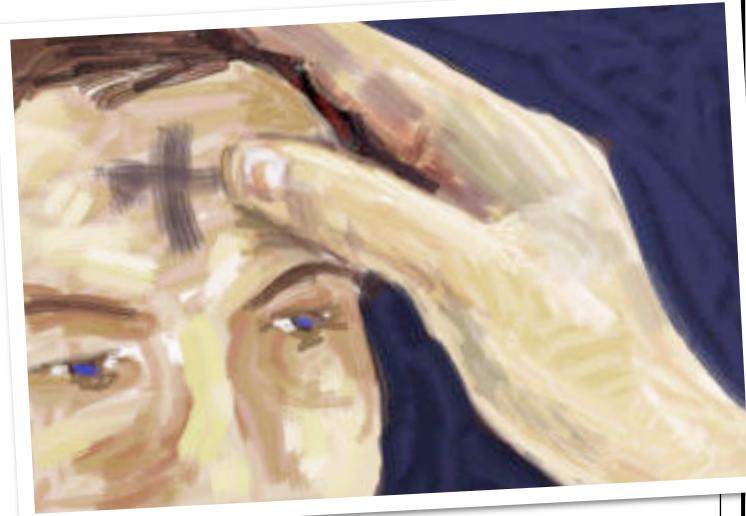
The poem transcends its setting. It is a parable of the disintegration of civilization and the degradation of modern citizens at the hands of social forces demanding stereotypical behaviour founded upon aggression and selfishness.

The subject's entry to the world is an insignificant event. He enters 'without so much as knocking' and if he did knock, would anyone, we wonder, really care? His first response is onomatopoeically presented like the turning on of a neon light: 'Blink, blink.'

The suggestion is one of surprise, of amazement. The gesture of blinking in its short rhythm is also, perhaps, suggestive of the unthinking responses of a mechanical being - this child will become a cog in a wheel and find his humanity and his individuality under attack from the very first breath that he draws.

He is not invited to speak: 'HOSPITAL. SILENCE.' Nobody is interested in what this child might have to say. The SILENCE is both: an imperative, an order for the child to be quiet, and a description of the hospital ward, the silence of which provides a frame around his life foreshadowing the silence of the grave. The absence of any reference to the mother at the moment of the child's birth is significant. The child is on his own from the beginning of the poem, despite being surrounded by his family.

The first voice that the child encounters is that of Bobby Dazzler: 'Hello, hello, hello all you lucky people and he / really was lucky because it didn't mean a thing / to him then ... '. The voice is loud and grotesque, a parody of the commercial voices that will fill the child's life. Bobby Dazzler bombards the child's awakening consciousness with the falseness of game-show commercialism. The reference to 'lucky people' is revealed by the events in the rest of the poem to be deeply ironic. He has hardly any reason to consider himself a lucky individual, especially after he has left the protective bosom of his family. That family itself has been standardized, their clichés of commercial conformity include their manner of dress



and their manner of thinking. The child is easily absorbed into a ritualized life that fails to accord any individuality.

The poem becomes an expression of ridicule. So controlled are the beings in its world that there will be: 'NO /

BREATHING EXCEPT BY ORDER.' This order and a plethora of others govern the life of the city environment in which the child grows: 'BEWARE OF / THIS. WATCH OUT FOR THAT.'

The car horns onomatopoeically bring to the poem the aggression that such a rule-dominated society breeds. It also parodies the beeps inserted into a media program in the place of expletives. We are left to decide for ourselves, which is which.

The child grows up in an angry attacking world, crowded and restrictive of most human freedom. We are left to wonder how the child's spiritual and emotional development could flourish in this environment. At the least it engenders hatred of one individual for another. There is no sense of community, merely a sense of shared inconvenience and discomfort. Every moment is a battle for survival.



The world of the child is enlarged by the trip to the drive-in. Presented to the child on the enormous screen is lust not love and a lack of morality. Again, the standard individual human relationships presented are aggressive and exploitative. Love itself is corrupted in this world.

When the child looks beyond the giant screen, he sees, albeit briefly, the beauty of God's creation. The beauty of the night sky provides a momentary spiritual

respite from a grotesque human world presented on-screen. In the words used to describe the child's emotional response to the stars in the night sky there is evidence of the seeds of doubt that will soon make him reject the purity of nature that they represent. Nobody had 'fixed up' the stars yet. Perhaps that is to come in the future. The child's phrasing and vocabulary used here add poignancy to the poem at this point in its reminder of his innocence and vulnerability.

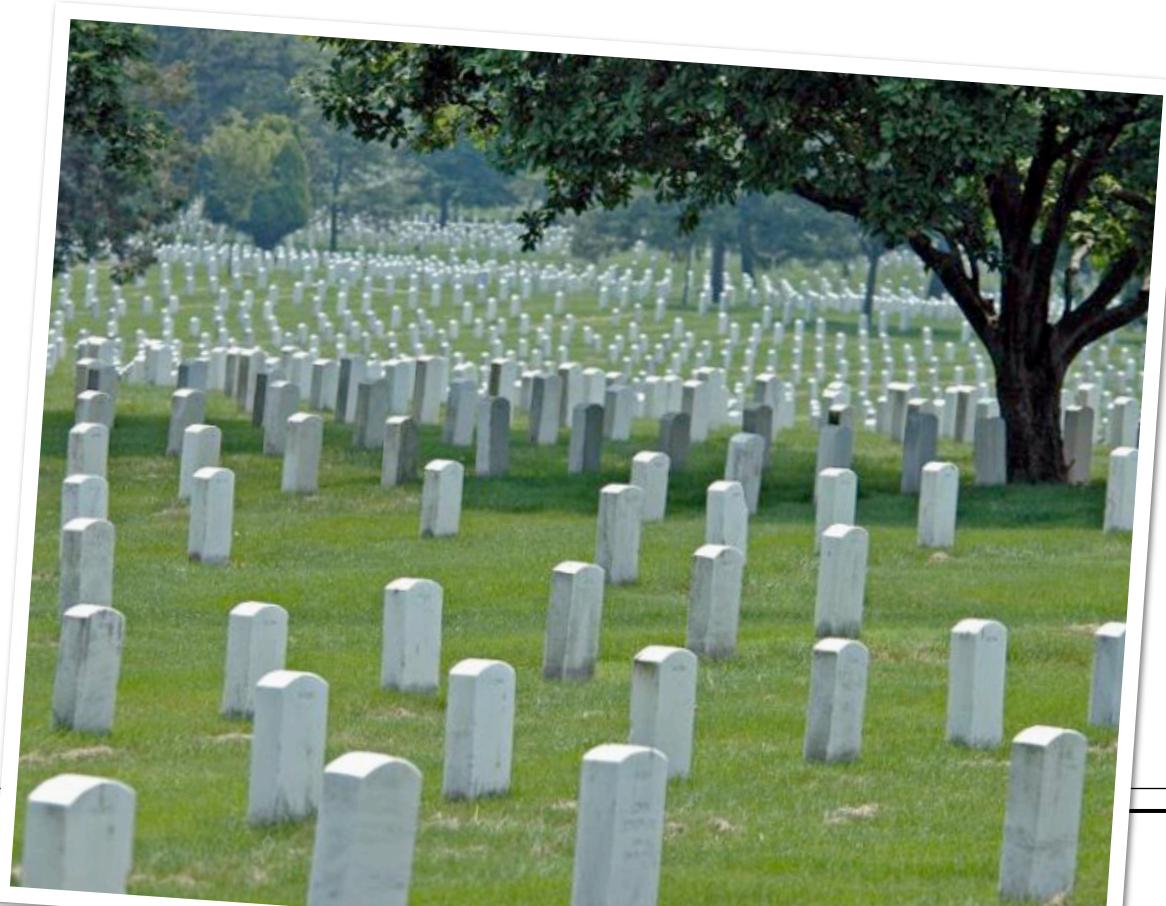


The delight in the stars and in the seeming eternity of the sky is destined to be short lived, as is the sense of mysticism that they might fleetingly inspire in the child. The beauty and its suggestion of meaning beyond the human world is shrugged off by the language and pragmatism of the adult world. The child is then transformed into a typical modern man, a 'money-hungry back-stabbing miserable /so-and-so'. Idealism and a sense of beauty belong with innocence to the passing world of the young. Adolescence, sexual maturity and the competitive ruthlessness of the adult world see a swift 'goodbye' to the stars.

The poem's next episode is the dinner party. The character is pretentious, selfish and hypocritical; angry at the nature of his life and fearful of being overwhelmed, replaced, used or succeeded by others. The dinner party - supposedly between friends - is marred by hypocrisy and the heated emotions that lead to the fatal car accident of the poem's subject. The rhythm of the poem captures well the discord between the couple. The accident symbolizes the collapse in modern society of interpersonal relationships, the decay of marriage and the abandonment of family values.

The subject's death smile, a gift from the mortician, is as characteristically false on the corpse as it was on the living man. The smile has behind it a sad irony. Perhaps after the kind of life that contemporary society offers any who are born into it, death and the silence of the grave is preferable. The deceased will no longer be plagued by 'parking tickets' and 'taximeters', nor in death will the subject of the poem have to endure the physical degeneration of old age and its humiliation of the body.

As soon as the coffin comes to rest the man is forgotten: 'Six feet down nobody interested'. This is the final damning satirical observation on life and death in our world that the poem makes. No one person's passing is significant, death is naught but a giant relief that the battle with life is over.



The Imagery

- The conforming clothes of the family symbolising the straight-jackets which encase their personalities
- The city signs - symbolise lives devoid of spontaneity
- The giant obscenities on the drive-in screen - powerful symbols of the collapse of personal and social morality
- The beauty of the night sky - a suggestion of the possibilities of beauty and serenity which could characterise human life; perhaps a hint at the presence of God
- The happy corpse - an ironic statement on the lack of value in life and the real joy of escaping all the Bobby Dazzlers of the world

The Themes

- Alienation of the individual
- The breakdown of the family
- The noise and restrictions of modern existence
- The corruption of innocence by the forces of the modern world
- The media's corruption of public values and morals
- The triumph of conformity
- The vacuum created by the abandonment of faith and imagination
- The welcome peace of the grave

The Universal Elements

- The inevitability of death:
- The loss of respect for the individual
- The stress of modern life
- The stereotyping of individuals in response to economic necessity
- The "intrusion of the media into the home - its persuasive power
- Commercialism as the foundation of modern life
- Growth of regulation in ordinary life and the resultant loss of freedom

Glossary

- **Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris:** This Latin quote on the theme of mortality translates: 'Remember, man, that you are dust, and to the dust you will return.'
- **Bobby Dazzler** (line 14): Australian post-war slang for something which is new, shiny, excellent, also in the poem, the name of a television show and its compere character.
- **Anthony Squires" Coolstream-Summerweight** (lines 11-12): A lightweight, mass-produced suit made from synthetic materials.
- **Luck's-A-Fortch** (line 15): A corruption of an older saying, 'Luck is a Fortune', a reference to a media quiz program.

Bruce Dawe has described this poem as 'something like a religious love poem'. He strongly denies it is an attack on Australian Rules Football.

Life-cycle *for Big Jim Phelan*

When children are born in Victoria
they are wrapped in the club-colours, laid in beribboned cots,
having already begun a lifetime's barracking.

Cam" they cry, Carn ... feebly at first
while parents playfully tussle with them
for possession of a rusk: Ah, he's a little Tiger! (And they are...)

Hoisted shoulder-high at their first League game
they are like innocent monsters who have been years swimming
towards the daylight's roaring empyrean

Until, now, hearts shrapnelled with rapture,
they break surface and are forever lost,
their minds rippling out like streamers

In the pure flood of sound, they are scarfed with light, a voice
like the voice of God booms from ,the stands
Ooohh you bludger and the covenant is sealed.

Hot pies and potato-crisps they will eat,
they will forswear the Demons, cling to the Saints
and behold their team going up the ladder into Heaven,

And the tides of life will be the tides of the home-team's fortunes
- the reckless proposal after the one-point win,
the wedding and honeymoon after the grand-final ...

They will not grow old as those from more northern States grow old,
for them it will always be three-quarter-time '
with the scores level and the wind advantage in the final term,

That passion persisting, like a race-memory, through the welter of seasons,
enabling old-timers by boundary-fences to dream of resurgent lions
and centaur-figures from the past to replenish continually the present,

So that mythology may be perpetually renewed
and Chicken Smallhorn return like the maize-god



in a thousand shapes, the dancers changing

But the dance forever the same-the elderly still
loyally crying Carn ... Carn ... (if feebly) unto the very end,
having seen in the six-foot recruit from Eaglehawk their 'hope of salvation.

BRUCE DAWE



'Life-cycle' Questions

In 'life-cycle' Dawe creates powerful satire of an aspect of Victorian life by using an extended image which becomes increasingly far-fetched He supports this image with details of life dominated by football: references to hot pies and chips as the (almost sacred) food of the football supporter, and the mention of the badges' of various teams.

1. The poem details the life of an Australian Rules supporter. What are the major events in his life? Does the poem cover all the phases of his life?
2. Which is more dominant in the football supporter's life, football and his team's fortunes or the events dealing with the non-football world? Find examples in the poem that support your answer.
3. What in the poem determines the allegiance of a supporter to his team? Is it an act of choice?
4. What or who determines the religion to which most people belong in the world?
5. What images of religion, either Christian or pagan can you find in the poem?
6. To what is the Victorians' support of Australian Rules being compared?

7. A cycle is something that ends at its beginning like a wheel, and constantly repeats itself. In what ways are the Victorians' lives in this poem, like a cycle? In what ways is football in the poem cyclic?
8. Consider the third stanza of the poem. To what are human beings compared?
9. Consider the process of their initiation into this religion in stanza four. Comment on the images in lines 10-11: ... hearts shrapnelled with rapture, they break surface and are forever lost,
10. What images in the poem relate to water or water creatures? Are any of these images of cycles?
11. Given that the monster and sea-creature images are used to describe the people, are there any other animal images used for this purpose? Do you think that these and the religious images have the effect of making Victorians' approach to football and life seem sophisticated or primitive?
12. Is Bruce Dawe criticizing or praising the way Victorians feel about football?
13. Do you feel the tone of the poem is serious or light? You might consider whether or not his comparisons are far-fetched. Consider, too, the number of puns and other devices which he has used to create humorous effects
14. This poem is written in free verse. How has the poet structured it?



'Life cycle' Analysis



- Big Jim Phelan (pictured) was a committee member for the Melbourne football team, Collingwood. His enthusiastic barracking made him a well-known figure at Melbourne football grounds.

'Life-cycle' is a celebration of the obsession of Victorian families with Australian Rules Football. The poem is a satire that celebrates as it parodies, in language reminiscent of a religious ritual. The Melburnian fervour for football is a fervour that reaches religious proportions and fulfills the spiritual needs of a great many of its followers. It is a record, a finely observed portrait of a phenomenon in Australian society. It delineates the obsession that grips hundreds of thousands of people in each of their stages of life from birth to death. This obsession makes their lives a journey to nowhere; it engulfs' every aspect of their personal experience and allows others to live the high points of life for them.

The children are taken by their parents on a cycle that will submerge their individuality to the faith and to the behaviour of the crowd. They are transported as trophies, not presented as individuals. And they are indeed already trophies before they enter the football arena. They are testimony to the successful brainwashing of their parents and to their parents' inability to view life other than through their allegiance to their football team. The ribbons that bedeck their cots are symbols of a culture that threatens the

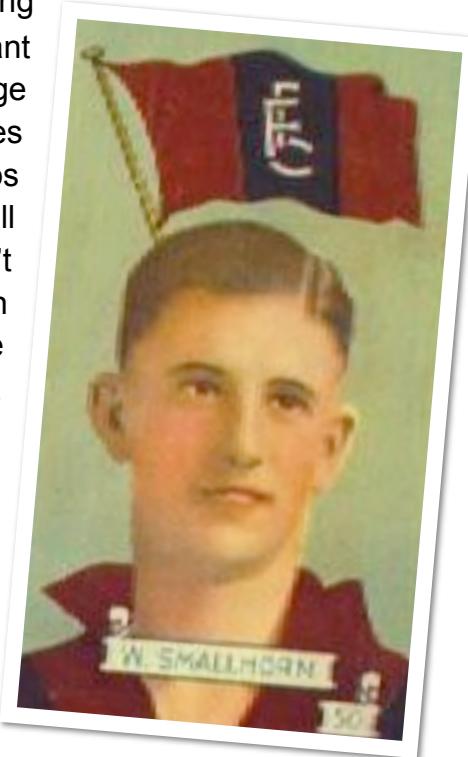
growth of their individuality.



At the ground, the children and their parents enter a mythological existence, a state of being that transports them away from the mundane realities and the challenges of ordinary existence into a world of combat between superhuman heroes. They are forever lost in the ritual and the dream. Autonomy will never be theirs again. Their commitment to the cause is reinforced by the war imagery of the word 'shrapnelled'. They are at war with the other football

tribes. Their life-long allegiance is impressed on the reader by Dawe's use of religious imagery in his reference to Baptism: '*they break surface and are forever lost*', an immersion into another dimension from which they will, emerge with renewed commitment. '*The voice of God booms from, the stands*' is a reference to their belief that their allegiance to their team is the only true faith.

The enjambment throughout assists the poem in building to a crescendo, that being the sealing of the covenant between the supporters and the sports god. It is strange that Dawe mixes his religious metaphors with references to Christian, Jewish and pagan rituals and rights. Perhaps this type of covenant with the sports God transcends all other religion. As long as you wear the colours, it doesn't matter what other allegiances you have. The loud, drawn out '*Ooohh you bludger*' is significant in that the barrackers speak with one voice. They achieved - at least for the duration of the game – that sense of community that the human spirit craves. Heaven can ultimately be reached on this earth, it is done by watching your team win the Grand Final at the ground surrounded by your congregation. The barrackers have their own special food, a form of Communion here. They have their own devils to forswear, their own creed, their own saints and their own testimony.



The tone changes with the poem's focus on more philosophical matters in its reference to 'the tides of life', it becomes less exaggerated and more pointed. Here we are focusing on the actions of individuals away from the action, how they conduct themselves away from the ground so they don't miss their weekly winter ritual.

The poem ends with another exaggerated reference to the ANZAC tradition: '*They will not grow old as we that are left grow old.*' This is a mockery of the enthusiasm of the football fanatics, a sending up of their absurd contention that their 'religion' keeps them young.

The players then take on the identity of actors in ancient harvest rituals. They practice their own form of resurrection - one to which the elderly cling in their feebleness as a last hope of defeating death. Salvation comes not from eternal life beyond the grave, but from the pagan renewal of a new season and new players to reinvigorate the their ritual.



The Maize god

The Imagery

- Religious ritual and doctrine
- Water- and sea imagery
- The cycle of birth, maturity, age and death

The Themes

- The attraction of aggression
- The decay of relationships
- The human need for fellowship and community
- The vulnerability of childhood
- The cycle of existence from birth through maturity to death
- Living vicariously through the achievements of sports heroes
- The communal yearning for a new messiah

The Universal Elements

- The power of parental attitudes
- The rise of the religion of sport
- The new sporting mythical heroes - the cult of the physical
- The loss of respect for children
- Crowd euphoria
- The reality of passions
- The human search for meaning through the exploits of sports heroes
- Contemporary attitudes to the aged and infirm

Glossary

- **Carn** (line 4): A corruption of 'Come on!'.
- **empyrean** (line 9): Of the highest heaven.
- **Tigers, Demons, Saints, Lions**: Nicknames of Melbourne football clubs.
- **Maize-god** (line 29): An ancient god of fertility who represented the cycle of nature. He was thought to die each year in winter and be reborn again in the spring in the same way as maize or corn regrows every year. In some primitive societies a perfect young man was chosen to represent the maize-god. For a season he represented the strength, fertility and aspirations of his people and was given adulation by the people. At the end of his season he became a human sacrifice and was replaced at the beginning of the next year by another perfect young man.
- **Chicken Smallhorn**: a famous Fitzroy footballer and later a football commentator

In 'Homecoming', Bruce Dawe makes us aware of the senseless waste of human lives during the Vietnam War.

Homecoming

All day, day after day, they're bringing them home,
they're picking them up, those they can find, and bringing them home,
they're bringing them in, piled on the hulls of Grants, in trucks, in convoys,
they're zipping them up in green plastic bags,
they're tagging them now in Saigon, in the mortuary coolness
they're giving them names, they're rolling them out of
the deep-freeze lockers-on the tarmac of Tan Son Nhut
the noble jets are whining like hounds;
they are bringing them home

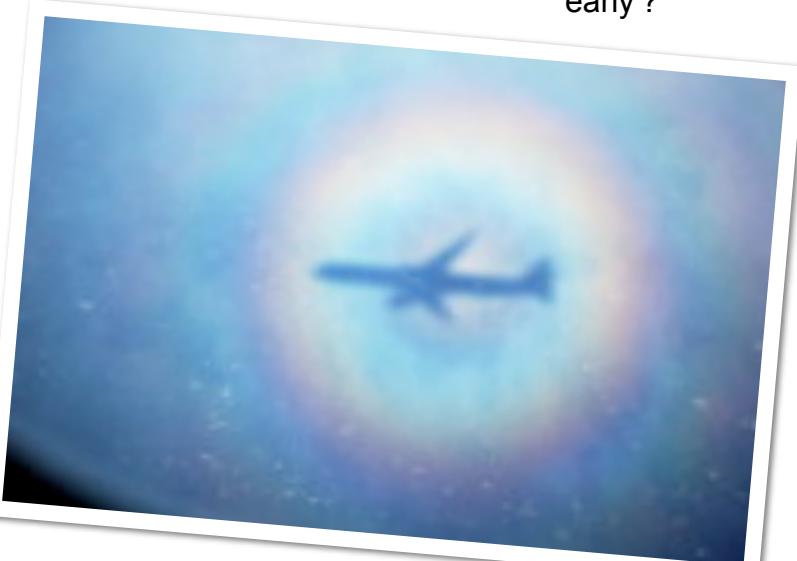
- curly-heads, kinky-hairs, crew-cuts, balding non-coms
- they're high, now, high and higher, over the land, the steaming *chow mein*,
their shadows are tracing the blue curve of the Pacific
with sorrowful quick fingers, heading south, heading east,
home, home, home-and the coasts swing upward, the old ridiculous
curvatures
of earth, the knuckled hills, the mangrove-swamps, the desert emptiness ...
in their sterile housing they tilt towards these like skiers
- taxiing in, on the long runways, the howl of their homecoming rises
surrounding them like their last moments (the mash, the splendour)
then fading at length as they move
on to small towns where dogs in the frozen sunset
raise muzzles in mute salute,
and on to cities in whose wide web of suburbs
telegrams tremble like leaves from a wintering tree
and the spider grief swings in his bitter geometry
- they're bringing them home, now, too late, too early.

BRUCE DAWE



Homecoming Questions

1. What does the poet achieve by the repetition of the word 'day' in 'All day, day after day'?
2. Why is the poem called 'Homecoming'?
3. Those they can find.' What point is the poet making?
4. How does the poet create the impression that many soldiers have been killed?
5. How does the poet show that the dead men have lost their individuality?
6. Why does the poet mention 'the deep-freeze lockers'?
7. 'The noble jets are whining like hounds'. What is the poet making us aware of in this scene? . . .
8. What effect does the poet create by describing the different hairstyles of the dead soldiers?
9. Why do you think the poet compares the Mekong Delta in Vietnam to a 'steaming chow mein'?
10. '... heading south, heading east' .. Where are the planes going?
11. What impression does the poet give of the Australian landscape?
12. What do the words 'the mash, the splendour' suggest about the last moments of the soldiers in battle?
13. How do the dogs in the small towns react to the arrival of the bodies of the dead soldiers?
14. How is grief brought to those living in the cities?
15. Do you think the poet's 'spider grief' metaphor is effective? Why or why not?
16. 'They're bringing them home, now, too late, too early'. Why 'too late'? Why 'too early'?



17. What techniques has Bruce Dawe used to make us aware of the horrors of war?
18. After reading this poem, what are your feelings about the dead soldiers?

Commentary

'Homecoming' is a parable of war and its devastating and far-reaching effect on ordinary people in ordinary homes. It is a funeral song for all those whose lives are cut short in the name of political expediency and particularly for those who lost their lives in the jungles of Vietnam. It is also, by implication, a denunciation of the unrealistic rhetoric of war reporting and of the ideologies used to justify what in the end is pointless combat.



Dawe wrote the poem in response to two *Newsweek* items on the Vietnam War. The first showed a picture of a young American soldier riding on a tank draped with the bodies of his dead and wounded comrades. The second reported the flights in and out of Oakland Airbase in California, the first carrying out plane loads of new recruits bound for Vietnam, the second bearing home the corpses of those who had been slaughtered there.



Analysis

The poem opens with the droning intonation of the engines of the plane that are bringing the corpses home. The cumulative effect of the assonance of 'ay' and the resonating 'ome' of 'home' combined with the anonymity of 'they' and 'them' is a significant support to the repetition in creating an effect of an overwhelming number of dead.

As well as the echoing of engine sounds, the pattern of assonance is also suggestive of the groans of the wounded and perhaps also the agonised weeping of those who grieve.

The effect of line length in the poem with long lines and the drawn-out rhythm suggests the monotony of the awful duration of the task of collecting bodies. The sheer numbers of them are also caught up in the imagery of the convoys.

The feelings evoked by the zipping up of the green plastic bags are of necessary indifference on the part of those who deal with the human detritus of war. The individual dead soldier is anonymous, their identities only recorded with the tagging exercise. Death in war reduces the living to simple objects that need to be labeled.

There is an implied contrast between the 'coolness' of the mortuary to which the bodies are brought and the hot steaming jungles where their last moments of life were lived, reminding us of the coldness of death. Note the repeated emphasis upon this coldness in the description of the bodies (frozen stiff) being rolled out of the deep-freeze lockers. Coldness is taken up again in the later skier image. Dawe seems to say that this is all that war achieves, the processing of the living into packages of the dead.



The simile of the jets 'whining like hounds' introduces the world outside Vietnam into the poem. The sound is symbolic of the universal cry of grief at the sacrifice of so many lives as well as the pain of individual bereaved families. The description of the dead men's haircuts is a reminder of their humanity, of their individual personality.

Dawe is playing on words when he refers to their being 'high'. It is also a reference to the drug fueled relief from war that might have been shared by the casualties themselves whilst still alive

The reminder of heaven, and presumably God's overseeing of it all is significant because it creates a suggestion that there will be a judgment here. The steaming jungles below create a sense of depth as the poem's focus moves skyward, the imaginative reach of the poem is from hell to heaven.



The reference to 'their shadows' is suggestive of the souls of the dead men accompanying their bodies journeying home. The 'blue curve of the Pacific' echoes the curve of the heads of the soldiers previously described. Perhaps this is yet another reminder of our mortality. The jet streams with their 'sorrowful quick fingers' in combination with the Pacific's curve conjure the image of a macabre figure of death joining together two distant lands - Vietnam, the land of death, and America (east) and Australia (south), the lands of life. The planes drone on as the assonance of home' is repeated. So too do the moans of grief.

The coasts of home - the images are Australian and American – welcome the home-comers but mock them in their curvatures and 'knuckled hills' and in their reminder in the mangrove swamps of the land of death from which they come.

As the planes bearing their grim cargo taxi in the grotesque sound rises to a crescendo of weeping. The grieving hound image returns as a powerful symbol of the agony of loss. This is the dead soldiers' second and last moment of glory. The sound then fades as the corpses' are distributed - to country towns and to suburbs and cities. Their personal homecomings are bathed in 'frozen sunsets' and mute salutes of their hometown dogs. The most profound grief is expressed in silence rather than sounds. Note how the diction has quieted, the sounds interwoven through the last lines are soft and gentle.

The final focus of the poem is on private doorsteps and individual telegrams making their way there with their grim announcements of loss.

To the spider, grief is given the last gesture. It spins a web that links all touched by the Vietnam experience - by any experience of war. It is a web of pain expressed in the resigned hopelessness of the final line of the poem.



The Imagery

- Geometry: planes, arcs, perpendiculars and horizontals - the chow mein of war, the ingredients of the spider's web of grief
- The symbols of grief - the whining hound, the frozen sunset, the trembling telegrams
- The cold indifference of the earth with its coastal curvatures and knuckled hills and empty deserts
- The Grant tanks - the trucks and convoys of war - the monsters that inhabit the landscape of war
- The symbols of anonymity - the green bags and their tags

The Themes

- The common experience of horror of the Vietnam soldier
- The enormous numbers of casualties in the Vietnam War
- The horrors of jungle warfare
- The necessary objective processing of the dead
- The pattern and process of grief and the social, economic and physical boundaries its experience breaks down - the bond between all who are bereaved
- The silent rebuff of the ideology on which the Vietnam War was founded
- The sense of America's and Australia's involvement in Vietnam as a continuation of a fruitless cycle of intrusion in Asian jungles by Western nations

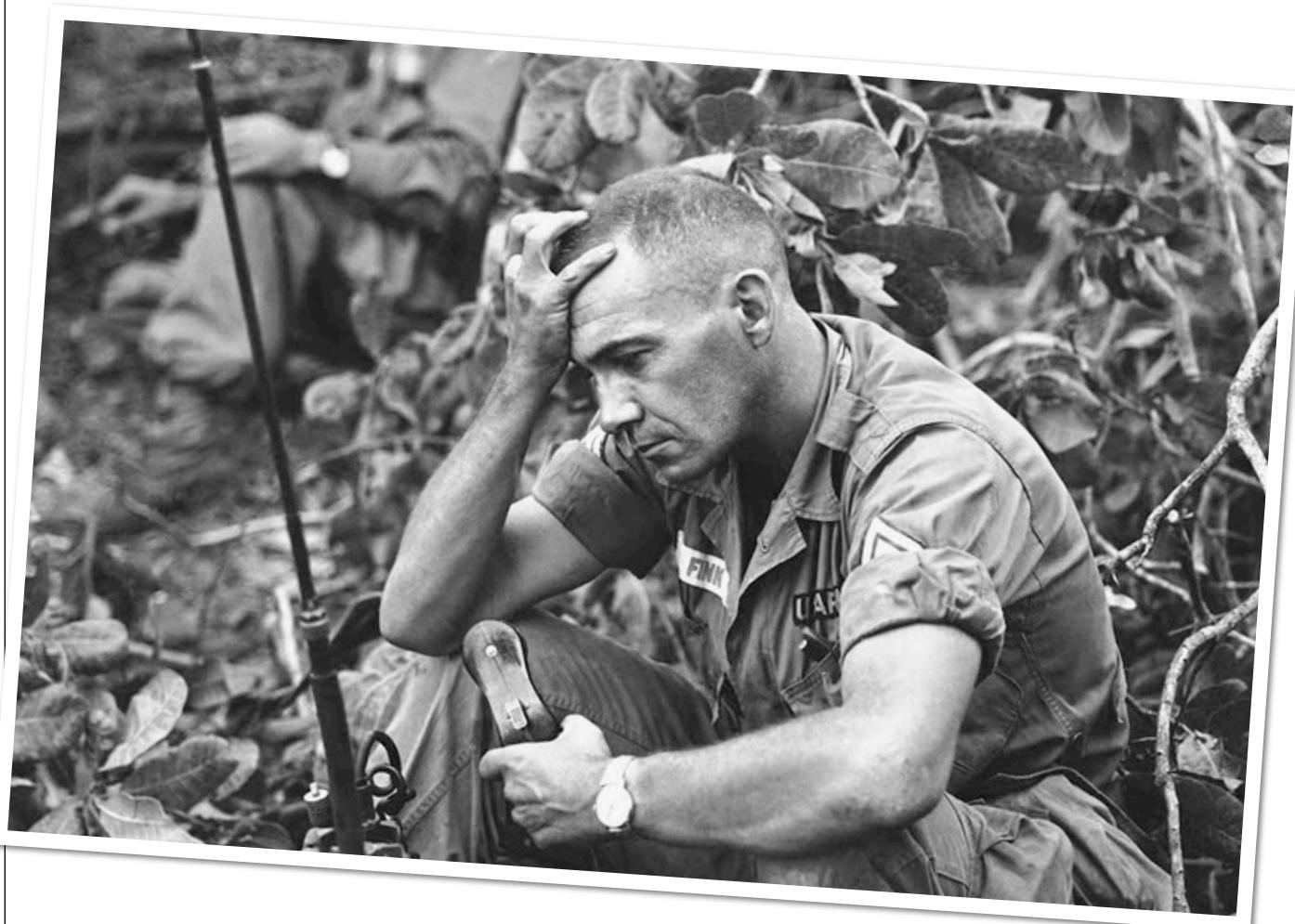
The Universal Elements

- The ugliness and destructiveness of war
- The soldier's loss of individuality
- The pointless and callous sacrifice of individuals to political causes
- The 'chow mein' that was Vietnam and all wars
- Heaven's awareness of man's inhumanity to man
- The human cost of war for those killed and those bereaved
- the common bond of grief - a 'bitter geometry' that is capable of enmeshing an entire country

Glossary

Tan Son Nhut: The main American air base in Sth Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Situated just outside of Saigon.

chow mein: Chinese dish of stir fried noodles.



And a Good Friday Was Had by All

You men there, keep those women back
and God Almighty he laid down
on the crossed timber and old Silenus
my off sider looked at me as if to say
nice work for soldiers, your mind's not your own
once you sign that dotted line Ave Caesar
and all that malarkey Irnperator Rex

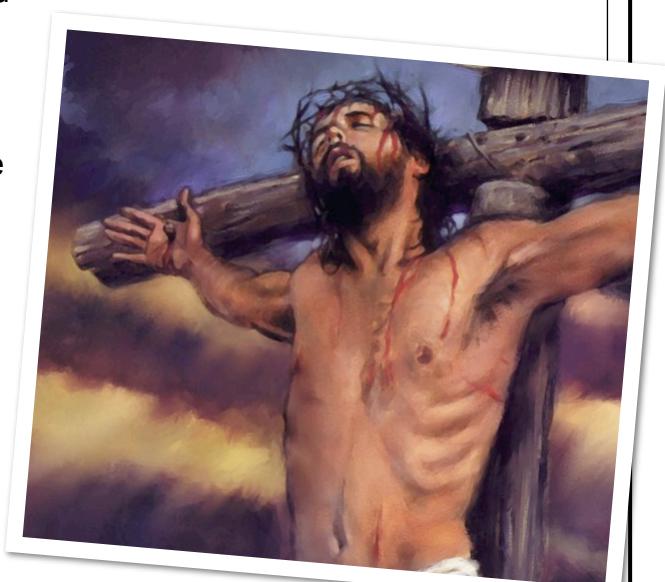
well this Nazarene
didn't make it any easier
really - not like the ones
who kick up a fuss so you can
do your block and take it out on them

Silanus

held the spikes steady and I let fly
with the sledge-hammer, not looking
on the downswing trying hard not to hear
over the women's wailing the bones give way.
the iron shocking the dumb wood.

Orders is orders, I said after it was over
nothing personal you understand - we had a .
drill-sergeant once thought he was God but he wasn't
a patch on you

then we hauled on the ropes
and he rose in the hot air
like a diver just leaving the springboard, arms spread
so it seemed
over the whole damned creation
over the big men who must have had it in for him
and the curious ones who'll watch anything if it's free
with only the usual women caring anywhere
and a blind man in tears.



'And a Good Friday Was Had By All' – Notes

The dominant feature of this poem is the way the poet has made use of a personality and his speech mannerisms to convey a message. Dawe's skill is most notable in the sureness with which he handles the Australian idiom in such an unlikely setting.



1. The title for this poem contains a pun. What two possible meanings could the title have? In what ways do both meanings apply to the poem?
2. How does the soldier create an emotional distance between himself and unpleasant or frightening things he has to do in the poem?
3. Before you study the poem in any great depth, read from at least one of these Gospels:
 - John, Ch. 19, verses 17-31, !
 - Matthew, Ch. 27, verses 27-51 I,i • Mark, Ch. /S, verses 16-40,
 - Luke, Ch. 23, verses 26-49.Write a brief summary of one Gospel recording of the Crucifixion of Christ.
4. What persona does the poet adopt in the poem? Why is the speaker's status important to the message of the poem?
5. The events of the poem are being re-told after they are over. To whom do you think the soldier might be speaking?
6. How does the speaker usually avoid becoming involved with the horror of what he is doing?
7. Is the speaker able to look at everything he is doing? What can't he bring himself to watch?
8. In the last stanza do you feel that the speaker has developed any sympathy for the man he is executing? Can you find other evidence of this in the poem?
9. Consider the tone of the poem. How does the speaker feels when he is telling the tale.
10. The poem is written' in the form of a *dramatic monologue* (a monologue is a speech by one person). What makes the monologue 'dramatic'? ,
11. The events described in this poem took' place 2000 years ago. Why has Dawe chosen to use modern Australian colloquial language for the monologue?

12. Women are mentioned three times in the poem: at the beginning, the middle and the end. Why does Dawe refer to them on several occasions?

13. The last line refers to 'a blind man in tears'. How does he contrast with the speaker? What person or people do you think Dawe is referring to with this character in the last line of the poem?

14. Explain the puns: 'God Almighty' (line 2) and the phrase, 'the whole damned creation'?



Commentary

Grabbing attention by the colloquialism of its title and its play on the clichéd phrase 'a good time was had by all', this poem is a statement of faith in its study of the awakening of spiritual awareness in the man who crucified Christ.

It utilises all the drama and sense of immediacy and depth of psychological insight into aberrant personalities with which the dramatic monologue arms the poet. The speaker's honesty is its strength. The situation in which he finds himself that of the practitioner of the Crucifixion – is the source of its startling hold over the imagination.

Analysis

The poem comprises two breathless statements, having only two fullstops in its whole, the haste of its utterance necessitated by the fact that the poem's imagined setting is the Crucifixion in progress. The speaker's narration of the one special case he has come across in his line of work is spoken in a brief pause in the continuation of his employment.

The tone of the opening line is imperative, confident and direct, creating a dramatic sense of authority. Men and women are brought together in the action just before the mention of 'God Almighty' in the second line. This brings together the essential participants in all creation and elevates this moment well above a mere execution of a prisoner.

Moving on quickly from his present to his recollection, the persona names his past subject as 'God Almighty'. This term could also be read or heard as an expletive, a slang expression of frustration or surprise. The ambivalence of the victim's meaning to his crucifier and to the crowds of onlookers - and even to some of us the listeners or readers – forces us to decide whether this victim was man or God.

There is more ambivalence in stanza three with the phrase, 'not looking on the downswing'. Is it the speaker or Silenus who is not looking? The message it conveys condemns the action as misplaced force and cruelty. The speaker rationalizes his actions with the phrase 'orders is orders', the universal excuse of the soldier and of the official executioner, sometimes referred to as the 'Nuremberg Defence'. We know from history that the worst kinds of atrocities are often hidden behind the argument of deeds done in service of a ruler like '*Imperator Rex*'. It is interesting to consider that if the person being crucified is Christ or merely a man; then the moral questions raised are the same. It is just that the crucifixion of Christ has far more personal resonance for each reader and so the horrible violence of the Crucifixion is made more real for the audience.

The choice of the word 'malarkey' to describe the soldier's situation highlights the fabrication of authority used by some to compel others to perform their will. The soldier understands the lie in which he is living but it is all too difficult and damning for him to contemplate at too great a depth. This why the soldier dismisses these thoughts with the verbal and implied physical shrug of, 'well this Nazarene'.

The reference to Nazarene introduces the political nature of Christ's execution and emphasises his humanity and representative quality as the Everyman executed for his ethnic origins.

The speaker reveals in the second stanza another method he uses to cope with the abhorrence of his job. If a prisoner becomes abusive or resistant there is refuge for the speaker in hatred, allowing himself the comfort of anger and violence to express his self-loathing, seen in the lines:

*not like the ones
who kick up a fuss so you can
do your block and take it out on them*

He delights in violence because it allows him freedom from the reality of his situation.

The metre of the poem gathers pace from this point as the speaker hurries through the description of the nailing of the Nazarene to 'the crossed timber'. The breathlessness captured in the enjambment and the rising expectation of that moment when the man lies affixed to his cross is brought to an awful climax in the deadened, heavy sound of 'wood'. The alliteration and assonance of 'women's wailing' contribute to the cacophony of the sound. Dawe builds to the awful moment of Crucifixion by capturing the background sense of hysteria in the watching crowd and



by creating a suitably repugnant auditory and visual prologue to the horrific image and sounds of the next lines: ' ... the bones give way / the iron shocking the dumb wood.' Dawe creates an echo of horror here, bringing the crucifixion into harsh physical and auditory reality. It is no longer an abstract idea, something from which we are distanced.

The pause is dramatic at this first fullstop in the poem allowing the reader to contemplate the sense of horror on the part of the onlookers who were present. Given the full break in

the rhythm of the poem and the momentary silence it creates the speaker is no longer convincing in his confident tone of as he attempts to dismiss the experience as routine. Despite the speaker's assertion that it was 'nothing personal you understand', it has become personal for him.



The last section of the poem perhaps provides the answer to why the speaker has singled out the particular experience of this crucifixion from his subconscious memory of all crucifixions in which he has played the pivotal role. As he and his companions 'hauled on the ropes' the Nazarene was transformed into the saviour of the world. A moment of horror is transformed into a moment of beauty and Dawe achieves this through the extended simile of the diver. The diver simile creates a symbol of love out of the ugliness of the crucified man, embracing all of humanity.

Despite the crying women and the blind man in the last two lines there is a sense of joy at the end of the poem because of the notions of redemption and forgiveness that conquer the horror of Christ's death highlighted by the irony in the use of the description 'damned' to describe the whole of creation. This reminds us of the goodness of God represented in the sacrifice of His Son.

The inclusion of the 'blind man in tears' in the last line of the poem is open for interpretation but one credible view is that it is a reference to Longinus, the Roman centurion who pierced Jesus side with his lance to ensure that he was dead. Longinus was said to have resigned from the Roman army and



converted to Christianity shortly after the Crucifixion and was canonized after his death. Longinus' lance is said to be a holy relic, preserved within the Vatican to this day.

Dawe's reference to Longinus leaves us with a story of redemption and forgiveness that transcends the horrible violence and human self-loathing of the poem. It is this reference to Longinus that reminds us of our shared humanity and the potential salvation open to all of us through coming to know the full meaning of the man who was suspended above him on the crossed timber.



The Imagery

- The images of this poem are extraordinarily powerful:
- The starkness of the crossed timber'
- The implied pushing crowds of women and among them a blind man, also crying
- The physical grotesqueness of the iron spikes driven by a 'sledge-hammer' through the limbs of a silently acquiescent man
- The physical exertion of hauling the cross into the hot, tense air
- The visual and spiritual beauty of the diver

The Themes

- The power of conscience and of memory
- The human capacity for cruelty and violence
- The power of grief
- Awakening spirituality
- The love and generosity of God to all of creation, symbolized in the Crucifixion of His Son.

The Universal Elements

- The charismatic power of Christ
- The rationalisation of cruelty
- The evils perpetrated against humanity in the name of politics
- The triumph of humanity over arrogance, of love over evil
- The power of faith
- The human yearning for spiritual fulfillment

Glossary

Silenus (line 3): A Roman name.

Off sider (line 4): Australian slang; helper.

Ave Caesar (line 6): A Roman military salute.

Malarkey (line 7): Australian slang; meaningless, unimportant, irrelevant, information.

Imperator Rex (line 7): The term applied to Roman Emperors; the Commanders-in-chief of Roman armies.

Nazarene (line 8): An inhabitant of Nazareth, the town Christ came from.

Do your block (line 12): Australian slang; to lose one's temper. . .

Wasn't a patch on (lines 21-2): Australian slang; not worthy of comparison.

Had it in for (line 28): To hold a grudge against.

