

## Cluster 2

# Power and conflict



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Percy  
Bysshe Shelley

(1792–1822)

## *Ozymandias*

- 1 I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown  
5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
10 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.



William  
Blake

(1757–1827)

## *London*

- 1 I wander through each chartered street,  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
- 5 In every cry of every man,  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forged manacles I hear:
- How the chimney-sweeper's cry
- 10 Every black'ning church appalls,  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls.
- But most through midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot's curse
- 15 Blasts the new-born infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.



William  
Wordsworth

(1770–1850)

## *Extract from, The Prelude*

- 1 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
- 5 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,
- 10 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,
- 15 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
- 20 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,
- 25 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,
- 30 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  
35 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  
40 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.



Robert  
Browning  
(1812–1889)

## *My Last Duchess*

*Ferrara*

- 1 That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
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.
- 5 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
- 10 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 first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
- 15 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
- 20 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.
- 25 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  
30 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  
35 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  
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
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  
45 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  
50 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,  
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!





Alfred  
Lord Tennyson  
(1809–1892)

## *The Charge of the Light Brigade*

1.

1 Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

5 'Forward, the Light Brigade!  
Charge for the guns!' he said:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

2.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!  
10 Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
Some one had blunder'd:  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
15 Theirs but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

3.

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
20 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,  
25 Into the mouth of Hell  
Rode the six hundred.

4.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,  
Flash'd as they turn'd in air  
Sabring the gunners there,  
30 Charging an army, while  
All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right thro' the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
35 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke  
Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.

5.

Cannon to right of them,  
40 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,  
45 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.

6.

50 When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
All the world wonder'd.  
Honour the charge they made!  
Honour the Light Brigade,  
55 Noble six hundred!



Wilfred  
Owen

(1893–1918)

## *Exposure*

1 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 ...

5 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,

10 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

15 Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,  
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,

20 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,  
25 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  
30 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;  
35 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.

Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,  
40 Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.  
The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,  
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,  
But nothing happens.



Seamus  
Heaney

(1939–2013)

## *Storm on the Island*

- 1 We are prepared: we build our houses squat,  
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.  
This wizened earth has never troubled us  
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks
- 5 Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees  
Which might prove company when it blows full  
Blast: you know what I mean – leaves and branches  
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale  
So that you can listen to the thing you fear
- 10 Forgetting that it pummels your house too.  
But there are no trees, no natural shelter.  
You might think that the sea is company,  
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs  
But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits
- 15 The very windows, spits like a tame cat  
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives  
And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo.  
We are bombarded by the empty air.  
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.



Ted  
Hughes  
(1930–1998)

## *Bayonet Charge*

- 1 Suddenly he awoke and was running – raw  
In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,  
Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge  
That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing
- 5 Bullets smacking the belly out of the air –  
He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm;  
The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye  
Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest, –
- In bewilderment then he almost stopped –
- 10 In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations  
Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running  
Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs  
Listening between his footfalls for the reason  
Of his still running, and his foot hung like
- 15 Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows
- Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame  
And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide  
Open silent, its eyes standing out.  
He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,
- 20 King, honour, human dignity, etcetera  
Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm  
To get out of that blue crackling air  
His terror's touchy dynamite.



**Simon  
Armitage**  
(b. 1963)

## *Remains*

- 1 On another occasion, we get sent out  
to tackle looters raiding a bank.  
And one of them legs it up the road,  
probably armed, possibly not.
- 5 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 –
- 10 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
- 15 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.
- 20 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, possibly not.  
Dream, and he's torn apart by a dozen rounds.  
And the drink and the drugs won't flush him out –

25 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,  
30 his bloody life in my bloody hands.



Jane  
Weir

(b. 1963)

## *Poppies*

1 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,  
5 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  
10 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  
15 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  
20 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.

25 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.



---

30 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  
35 your playground voice catching on the wind.



Carol Ann Duffy

(b. 1955)

## *War Photographer*

1 In his darkroom he is finally alone  
with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.  
The only light is red and softly glows,  
as though this were a church and he  
5 a priest preparing to intone a Mass.  
Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays  
beneath his hands, which did not tremble then  
though seem to now. Rural England. Home again  
10 to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,  
to fields which don't explode beneath the feet  
of running children in a nightmare heat.

Something is happening. A stranger's features  
faintly start to twist before his eyes,  
15 a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries  
of this man's wife, how he sought approval  
without words to do what someone must  
and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

A hundred agonies in black-and-white  
20 from which his editor will pick out five or six  
for Sunday's supplement. The reader's eyeballs prick  
with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.  
From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where  
he earns his living and they do not care.



**Imtiaz  
Dharker**  
(b. 1954)

## *Tissue*

1 Paper that lets the light  
shine through, this  
is what could alter things.  
Paper thinned by age or touching,

5 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

10 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

15 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,

20 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.

25 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

30 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,

35 of paper smoothed and stroked  
and thinned to be transparent,

turned into your skin.



Carol  
Rumens  
(b. 1944)

## *The Emigrée*

- 1 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.
- 5 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  
10 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.
- 15 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;
- 20 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,
- 30 and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight.



John  
Agard  
(b. 1949)

## Checking Out Me History

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

Bandage up me eye with me own history

5 Blind me to me own identity

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

10 *Toussaint*  
*a slave*  
*with vision*  
*lick back*

*Napoleon*  
15 *battalion*  
*and first Black*  
*Republic born*  
*Toussaint de thorn*  
*to de French*

20 *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 ran away with de spoon

25 but dem never tell me bout Nanny de maroon

*Nanny*  
*see-far woman*  
*of mountain dream*  
*fire-woman struggle*  
30 *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  
35 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

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

50 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



**Beatrice  
Garland**

(b. 1938)

## *Kamikaze*

1 Her father embarked at sunrise  
with a flask of water, a samurai sword  
in the cockpit, a shaven head  
full of powerful incantations  
5 and enough fuel for a one-way  
journey into history

but half way there, she thought,  
recounting it later to her children,  
he must have looked far down

10 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

15 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  
20 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

- 25 - 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  
30 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*  
35 *as though he no longer existed,  
only we children still chattered and laughed*

- till gradually we too learned  
to be silent, to live as though  
he had never returned, that this*  
40 *was no longer the father we loved.*  
And sometimes, she said, he must have wondered  
which had been the better way to die.