

Shooting stars

-analysis by nikita k

The poem “Shooting Stars” explores the horrific ordeals experienced by a female prisoner held by the Nazi’s in a concentration camp around the time of the holocaust. It’s set in the 1940’s. Duffy’s use of vivid imagery and her choice of words makes this poem so vivid and haunting.

- The title of the poem effectively describes what the poem is about in an ambiguous manner. The literal meaning of the title is the shooting (murder) of jews who were identified by the star of david.
- there are 6 stanzas to perhaps represent the 6 million jews who died
- Tone: sinister, anger
- Themes: death, suffering, abuse of women.
- Global issue: politics, power, and justice.

Stanza 1

After I no longer speak they break our fingers

to salvage my wedding ring. Rebecca Rachel Ruth

Aaron Emmanuel David, stars on all our brows

beneath the gaze of men with guns. Mourn for the daughters,

Use of present tense- makes the reader feel as if it's taking place now- stirs up emotions of horror and pity within the reader.

Use of first person- more direct and involves the readers emotions. The speaker is nameless, so the speaker may represent the 6 million jews who died during the holocaust.

Euphemism- she may be speaking beyond the grave-the purpose of reanimating her may be to give her back the voice/life that she lost. She also may be pretending to be dead to survive or she's silent in shock.

Juxtaposition between 'salvage' and "break our fingers"- emphasis on the brutality.the idea of things that have little financial value is more valuable than a human life- highlights the horror and cruelty faced by the jews.

"Stars" after "David" may represent the star of David- religious symbol that the Nazi's used to differentiate Jews from other people. Repetition of the soft 'b' sound to represent the jewish victims and the harsh 'g' sounds to represent the Nazi's and their brutality.

All jewish names with no punctuations between them to show unity and to give them back the identity and life that was stolen from them.

Poem is about male aggression.

upright as statues, brave. You would not look at me.

Simile to reinforce the point- Statues show no emotion and this represents their bravery, dignity and pride as they did not beg

You waited for the bullet. Fell. I say, Remember.

Remember these appalling days which make the world

This may display the guilt the soldiers felt if they looked at whom they were killing or it could mean the ignorance of the rest of the world towards the inhumane actions that are taking place.

Forever bad. One saw I was alive. Loosened

This indicates that shots were fired and they all fell to the ground. It's a short, one word sentence to create a more dramatic effect.

The feeling of anticipation is created here by using second person. The slow process of her coming death can be felt by the readers as well due to the continuation of traumatic events by using many sentences to describe the event. - to create feelings of horror and sympathy within the audience.

The very fact that these horrific events even took place reminds us that nothing could ever change what happened and it reminds us to learn from these mistakes.

Enjambment- this creates suspense for the reader. What happens after one of the soldiers realised that she wasn't dead?

The repetition of 'remember' emphasises one of the main points of the poem which is to learn from our past mistakes and to never repeat what took place during the holocaust. Duffy is telling us to remember the bravery of these women and the horrors that they went through.

his belt. My bowels opened in a ragged gape of fear.

Between the gap of corpses I could see a child

The soldiers laughed. Only a matter of days separate

this from acts of torture now. They shot her in the eye.

This may indicate that she was going to be whipped with the belt or it could indicate another form of abuse.

This may suggest that we have not progressed from the past and these acts of torture are currently displayed in different forms around the world- people have still not learned from the horrors that took place in the past.

This represents the extent to which she feared what was about to happen or what had already happened.

Children are supposed to be a sign of hope. But instead this line indicates that the child is dead and this showcases the cruelty of the soldiers. The juxtaposition between child and corpse adds to the readers shock and overall sense of horror.

Again shows the cruelty of the soldiers and adds to the anger felt by the readers. It's also a juxtaposition of laughed and torture.

No more hope, "she" is one of many who died.

How would you prepare to die, on a perfect April evening
with young men gossiping and smoking by the graves?

My bare feet felt the earth and urine trickled

Down my legs until I heard the click. Not yet. A trick.

The use of sensory imagery to depict the sense of fear she felt.

Internal rhyme- The 'ck' sound represents the sound of the gun clicking and this internal rhyme is used to also display how the soldiers were dehumanizing her by toying with her feelings and her life.

A mocking tone is used. A rhetorical question is asked to involve the reader and also to mock the reader. In a very sarcastic way, the question tells us that we aren't in this situation. It also helps the reader picture the situation and to somewhat help the reader feel what she feels. The young men gossiping and smoking by the graves indicates the normalcy of these horrors at that time and shows the lack of respect they had for Jews even after their death. "Die" and "April" are juxtaposed. April is a time when things are brought to life in nature (plants) and this is contrasted to the mass death taking place. This represents that everything taking place was going against the laws of nature.

After immense suffering someone takes tea on the lawn.

After the terrible moans a boy washes his uniform.

After the history lesson children run to their toys the world turns in its sleep the spades shovel soil Sara Ezra ...

Alliteration and sibilance of the 's' sound is used for auditory imagery of a grave being dug. The ellipsis is used to show that there are more names to be added. This highlights the ignorance of the world towards these horrific past events.

This may symbolise that the boy is washing his sins away, like as if the terrible events didn't even occur- normalisation of death and horror. Some of the soldiers aren't men and yet they're taking part in the horrific events.

Repetition of the word "after" tells us that time and the world continues to move on regardless of the suffering and horror that goes on around us and it shows that lack of guilt that these soldiers felt. The word also suggests that it was in the past- forgotten about.

This is ironic because it implies that the soldiers lead a civilised lifestyle which is untrue as its clear that none of their actions were anything but civilised.

The terror and the death is boxed under the category of "history lesson" which again shows that the world moves on and forgets about that suffering that the victims of the holocaust endured.

Sister, if seas part us, do you not consider me?

Tell them I sang the ancient psalms at dusk

inside the wire and strong men wept. Turn thee

unto me with mercy, for I am desolate and lost.

ironic

Rhetorical question- to make the reader reflect on why we haven't shown enough remorse and sympathy for the victims of the holocaust. It's also a call to all the women to always support one another.

Final plea is addressed from women to women.

She does not question the existence of god and maintains her faith and hope.

Dusk symbolises peace which is juxtaposed to the conflict and horror.

Enjambment- the reader is given hope from the previous line that the woman survived these horrors but that hope is diminished in this line because she's still in the concentration camp. This reflects the similar feeling the jews had felt in the concentration camps.