

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

The Charge of the Light Brigade

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the Valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
“Forward, the Light Brigade!
The charge for the guns!” he said:
Into the Valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the Valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to the right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in the air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wondered.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right through the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from the sabre stroke
Shattered and sundered.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

Cannon to the right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

Context:

- **Historical Context:** “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” was written by Alfred, Lord Tennyson in 1854 as a response to the catastrophic charge of the British Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War. The event took place on October 25, 1854, when a miscommunication of orders led around 600 cavalymen to charge directly into a heavily fortified Russian artillery position, resulting in significant casualties. Tennyson’s poem commemorates the bravery and courage of the soldiers, even as it subtly critiques the blunder that led to their near-annihilation.
- **Social and Political Context:** The poem was written during a period when the British public was grappling with the reality of war and its consequences. The charge of the Light Brigade became a symbol of heroic sacrifice and military valour, but it also raised questions about leadership and the futility of war. Tennyson’s poem, commissioned by the British government, served to honour the fallen soldiers and reinforce a sense of patriotism and duty.
- **Literary Context:** As the Poet Laureate of Britain at the time, Tennyson wrote “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” in a style that would inspire national pride while acknowledging the tragedy of the event. The poem’s structure and tone reflect both the admiration for the soldiers’ heroism and the futility of the sacrifice, making it a powerful piece of war poetry that has endured through the centuries.

Poetic Devices:

1. **Repetition:**
 - Repetition is used extensively throughout the poem to create rhythm, emphasize key points, and mimic the relentless forward motion of the cavalry charge:
 - “Half a league, half a league, / Half a league onward” reinforces the steady advance of the soldiers.

- “Cannon to right of them, / Cannon to left of them, / Cannon in front of them” emphasizes the soldiers’ exposure and the overwhelming odds against them.
2. **Anaphora:**
 - Anaphora (the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines) is used to build momentum and stress the bravery of the soldiers:
 - “Theirs not to make reply, / Theirs not to reason why, / Theirs but to do and die.”
 3. **Alliteration:**
 - Tennyson uses alliteration to create a musical quality and enhance the poem’s rhythm:
 - “Stormed at with shot and shell” (repetition of the ‘s’ sound).
 - “Boldly they rode and well” (repetition of the ‘b’ sound).
 4. **Imagery:**
 - Vivid imagery is used to depict the battlefield and the soldiers’ courage in the face of danger:
 - “Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of Hell” personifies death and hell, turning them into monstrous entities that the soldiers confront.
 - “Flashed all their sabres bare” creates a visual image of the soldiers drawing their swords as they charge.
 5. **Personification:**
 - Death and Hell are personified in the lines “Into the jaws of Death” and “Into the mouth of Hell,” making these abstract concepts appear as entities that actively consume the soldiers. This heightens the sense of danger and inevitability faced by the brigade.
 6. **Metaphor:**
 - The poem uses metaphors to convey the severity of the situation and the bravery of the soldiers:
 - “Jaws of Death” and “mouth of Hell” are metaphors for the overwhelming danger and the near-certain death awaiting the soldiers.
 7. **Simile:**
 - Tennyson uses a simile to describe the movement of the soldiers:
 - “Flashed as they turned in air” likens the soldiers’ sabres to flashes of light, suggesting their speed and precision.
 8. **Caesura:**
 - The poem uses caesura (a pause in the middle of a line) to create a dramatic effect, making the reader pause and reflect on the action:
 - “Rode the six hundred.” The pause after “Rode” gives a sense of finality and inevitability.
 9. **Enjambment:**
 - Enjambment (the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line) is used to create a sense of speed and continuous motion, reflecting the relentless charge of the brigade:
 - “Flashed all their sabres bare, / Flashed as they turned in air.”
 10. **Rhyme Scheme:**
 - The poem employs an irregular rhyme scheme, which, combined with its rhythmic structure, mimics the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the battle.
 11. **Onomatopoeia:**
 - The poem uses onomatopoeic words to mimic the sounds of battle and enhance the sensory experience:

- “Volleyed and thundered” imitates the sound of cannons firing.
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Literary Techniques:

- 1. Tone:**
 - The tone of the poem is both admiring and sombre. Tennyson praises the bravery and heroism of the soldiers, while also highlighting the tragedy of their loss. The phrase “All the world wondered” expresses admiration but also a sense of disbelief at the futility of the charge.
- 2. Structure and Form:**
 - The poem is written in six stanzas, reflecting the number of soldiers in the Light Brigade (six hundred). The varying line lengths and rhythmic patterns create a sense of movement and urgency, mirroring the intensity and chaos of the charge.
- 3. Narrative Style:**
 - “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” is written in a third-person narrative style, which allows Tennyson to adopt a detached yet respectful perspective. The use of third-person narration conveys a sense of collective admiration for the soldiers’ courage while maintaining a degree of separation from the events described.
- 4. Use of Imperatives:**
 - The poem uses imperatives such as “Forward, the Light Brigade!” to capture the direct commands given during the charge. These commands create a sense of urgency and authority, reflecting the soldiers’ unquestioning obedience and duty.
- 5. Juxtaposition:**
 - The poem juxtaposes the bravery of the soldiers with the futility of the situation:
 - “Theirs not to reason why, / Theirs but to do and die” contrasts the unquestioning loyalty of the soldiers with the tragic outcome of their charge.
- 6. Heroic Couplet:**
 - Tennyson uses heroic couplets (pairs of rhymed lines) at key moments in the poem to emphasize the soldiers’ bravery and resolve:
 - “While horse and hero fell, / They that had fought so well.”
- 7. Symbolism:**
 - The “valley of Death” symbolizes the inevitable fate of the soldiers as they charge into a hopeless situation. The valley represents both the physical location of the battle and the metaphorical descent into death and destruction.
- 8. Irony:**
 - The poem contains subtle irony, particularly in the line “Someone had blundered.” While Tennyson praises the soldiers’ heroism, he also acknowledges that the charge was the result of a mistake, highlighting the senselessness of their sacrifice.
- 9. Patriotic and Heroic Language:**
 - Tennyson uses language that conveys honour and glory, such as “Honor the charge they made!” and “Noble six hundred!” to reinforce the idea of the soldiers as heroes, despite the disastrous outcome of the charge.

COMPARISON WITH EXPOSURE

Comparison of "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and "*Exposure*" by Wilfred Owen

Both "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and "*Exposure*" by Wilfred Owen are powerful war poems that explore the experiences of soldiers. While Tennyson's poem focuses on the bravery and sacrifice of the British cavalry during the Crimean War, Owen's poem highlights the harsh reality and suffering of soldiers during World War I. Below is a detailed comparison of these two poems, examining context, themes, poetic devices, and literary techniques.

1. Contextual Comparison:

- **"The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:**
 - Written in 1854, "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*" commemorates the ill-fated charge of British cavalry during the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War. The poem was composed shortly after the event and serves as a tribute to the courage and heroism of the soldiers. Tennyson, as the Poet Laureate of Britain, wrote the poem to honour the bravery of the "noble six hundred" who was charged into a hopeless situation due to a miscommunication of orders.
- **"Exposure" by Wilfred Owen:**
 - Written during World War I and first published posthumously in 1920, "*Exposure*" is a stark portrayal of the extreme weather conditions and psychological trauma faced by soldiers on the front lines. Wilfred Owen, a soldier himself, used his poetry to expose the brutal realities of war, contrasting the idealized notions of heroism with the futility and suffering experienced by those in the trenches. The poem reflects the disillusionment and despair of soldiers, critiquing the romanticized views of war that prevailed in society.

2. Themes:

- **Bravery and Sacrifice:**
 - In "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*", Tennyson glorifies the bravery and sacrifice of the soldiers who followed orders without question, despite knowing the charge was a blunder. The repeated phrase "Rode the six hundred" emphasizes the collective courage and selflessness of the brigade.
 - In "*Exposure*", Owen depicts the soldiers as victims rather than heroes. Their sacrifice is not glorified but portrayed as futile. The soldiers endure extreme cold and fear, and their deaths are depicted as slow and meaningless. Owen's focus is on the physical and mental exhaustion of the soldiers rather than on any heroic action.
- **Reality of War:**

- “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” presents a more romanticized view of war. Although Tennyson acknowledges the error that led to the charge (“Someone had blundered”), he primarily celebrates the valour of the soldiers.
- “*Exposure*” presents a raw, unfiltered depiction of the realities of war. Owen highlights the relentless suffering and mental anguish of soldiers exposed to the elements and the constant threat of death. The poem’s focus on the harsh weather and its effect on the soldiers emphasizes the pointlessness of their suffering.
- **Nature as an Enemy:**
 - In “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*”, the enemy is human—the Russian forces armed with cannons and guns.
 - In “*Exposure*”, the primary enemy is nature itself. The “merciless iced east winds” and “pale flakes with fingering stealth” become hostile forces, more dangerous and destructive than the enemy soldiers.
- **Death and Futility:**
 - “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” acknowledges the deaths of many soldiers but frames them in the context of honour and glory. The phrase “Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of Hell” elevates the soldiers’ actions to a heroic level.
 - In “*Exposure*”, death is depicted as slow and inevitable. The poem ends with the haunting line “All their eyes are ice,” symbolizing the emotional and physical numbness of the soldiers. Death here is senseless and devoid of glory.

3. Tone and Mood:

- **“The Charge of the Light Brigade”:**
 - The tone is admiring, respectful, and celebratory. Tennyson uses phrases like “Boldly they rode and well” to convey admiration for the soldiers’ bravery, even in the face of certain death. The mood, however, carries a sense of tragedy and loss, as the poem recounts the devastation of the charge.
- **“Exposure”:**
 - The tone is bleak, despairing, and resigned. Owen uses words like “forgotten,” “worried,” and “ghosts” to convey the soldiers’ sense of hopelessness and isolation. The mood is cold and desolate, reflecting the endless suffering endured by the men in the trenches.

4. Poetic Devices:

- **Imagery:**
 - “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” uses vivid battle imagery: “Cannon to right of them, / Cannon to left of them, / Cannon in front of them.” This imagery captures the intensity and chaos of the charge, making the reader visualize the soldiers surrounded by danger.
 - “*Exposure*” uses stark natural imagery to depict the harsh weather: “the merciless iced east winds that knife us...” and “snow-dazed.” The imagery focuses on the cold, barren landscape, emphasizing the soldiers’ suffering and helplessness.
- **Repetition:**
 - Tennyson uses repetition to emphasize the unity and determination of the soldiers: “Rode the six hundred,” and “Cannon to right of them, / Cannon to

left of them.” The repetition mimics the rhythm of the horses’ hooves and the relentlessness of the charge.

- Owen uses repetition to emphasize the monotony and despair of life in the trenches: “But nothing happens.” This line is repeated to reflect the soldiers’ inactivity, waiting for an end that never comes.
- **Personification:**
 - Tennyson personifies Death and Hell: “Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of Hell,” making these abstract concepts appear as entities that actively confront the soldiers.
 - Owen personifies nature as an enemy, with phrases like “merciless iced east winds that knife us” and “Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army.” Nature is depicted as a more powerful and deadly foe than the actual human enemy.
- **Metaphor:**
 - In “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*”, the phrases “jaws of Death” and “mouth of Hell” are metaphors for the extreme danger faced by the soldiers and their near-certain death.
 - In “*Exposure*”, the metaphor “All their eyes are ice” symbolizes the emotional numbness and loss of humanity experienced by the soldiers. It also reflects the literal freezing conditions they endure.
- **Alliteration:**
 - “*The Charge of the Light Brigade*” uses alliteration to create a rhythmic, musical quality: “Stormed at with shot and shell.”
 - “*Exposure*” uses alliteration to enhance the harshness of the conditions: “silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous.” The ‘s’ sounds create a whispering effect, adding to the sense of anxiety and unease.
- **Contrast:**
 - Tennyson contrasts the soldiers’ bravery with the tragic outcome of the charge, highlighting both the heroism and the futility of the event.
 - Owen contrasts the expectation of action and glory with the reality of inactivity and suffering. The soldiers are not engaged in heroic battle but are instead slowly worn down by the elements.

5. Structure and Form:

- **"The Charge of the Light Brigade":**
 - The poem is structured in six stanzas, reflecting the number of soldiers in the Light Brigade. The stanzas vary in length, with a regular rhythm that mimics the forward motion of the charge. The rhyme scheme is irregular, adding to the sense of chaos and unpredictability.
- **"Exposure":**
 - The poem is structured in eight stanzas, each with five lines. The fifth line of each stanza is shorter and often disrupts the rhythm, reflecting the soldiers’ disrupted lives and the unpredictability of war. The repeated refrain “But nothing happens” at the end of several stanzas underscores the monotony and futility of their situation.

6. Overall Message:

- **"The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:**

- Tennyson's poem glorifies the bravery and heroism of soldiers, even in the face of a disastrous mistake. While the poem subtly acknowledges the error that led to the charge, its primary focus is on honouring the courage and self-sacrifice of the men who followed orders without question.
 - **"Exposure" by Wilfred Owen:**
 - Owen's poem critiques the romanticized view of war by portraying the suffering, fear, and emotional numbness of soldiers in the trenches. The poem emphasizes the futility of war, where soldiers are exposed to the cruelty of nature and the indifference of those at home.
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Conclusion:

Both "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*" and "*Exposure*" deal with the experiences of soldiers in war, but they offer contrasting perspectives. Tennyson's poem celebrates the bravery and sacrifice of soldiers, presenting war as a place where honour and duty are paramount. In contrast, Owen's poem reveals the bleak and brutal reality of war, focusing on the suffering and futility experienced by soldiers. Through vivid imagery, repetition, and powerful metaphors, both poems capture the physical and emotional toll of war, making them timeless explorations of the human cost of conflict.

It is also compared with the bayonet charge