

Poem: Conquerors

Poet: Henry Treece

Theme: This poem is about the horrors of war. It shows that although the soldiers may be victorious, their conquest brings nothing but suffering and death for those they defeat.

The slow build-up of tension in the poem which culminates with the horrific sight of the dead child drives home the message of the poem. At first, all the soldiers see is a 'hidden village' which, unfortunately, was not hidden enough to escape the invading army. There is no sign of life and only 'the

melancholy song of swinging gates’ to be heard. The sibilance in ‘song of swinging gates’ emphasises the eerie quietness of the place.

Next, the soldiers see ‘A dead bird I a rusting cage’. His beak is open and ‘his thin tattered breast’ presses against the bars of the cage. It is clear the little creature died of starvation because there was nobody left alive to feed him.

As the soldiers hurry through the village, they startle an emaciated dog. On ‘legs as thin as sticks’, the dog shambles off into the wood ‘to die at least in peace’. The words ‘at least’ are troubling as they imply

that the rest of the inhabitants did not have this luxury. The contrast between the words 'die' and 'peace' drive home the message.

Finally, and most shockingly, the men come across the body of a 'grey child' sprawled in a doorway. The soldiers all think of their own families at home and reflect that 'No one told us victory was like this'.

Although the poem was written in 1933, its theme is as relevant today as it was then. There is no such thing as a war without victims. For every winner, there is someone who loses everything.