Major themes in the *Conflict* collection

- SILENCE
- SUFFERING
- DEATH
- ABANDONMENT
- DESTRUCTION
- IDENTITY
- PERSONAL/INTERNAL CONFLICT
- NATURE
- FEAR
- DECAY
- LOSS
- FUTILITY
- ISOLATION
- OUTRAGE
- REGRET
- FREEDOM
I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree..
With care and culture all may find
Some pretty flower in their own mind,
Some talent that is rare.

Envy

Personal Conflict/Inner conflict
And if this tree were discontent,
Or wished to change its natural bent,
It all in vain would fret..
It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure.
I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars
With trembling hands I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.
In my thoughts
There was darkness – call it solitude,
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.
For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!
And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:

Conflict + Death

The Destruction of Sennacherib
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.
And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;.
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.
Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
  We can find no scar,
  But internal difference,
  Where the Meanings, are –

Personal Conflict/Inner conflict

There’s a Certain Slant of Light
None may teach it – Any –
‘Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

Conflict + futility

There’s a Certain Slant of Light
When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, ‘tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

Conflict +
futility/loss/silence

There’s a Certain
Slant of Light
Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have set us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!
But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.!
I shot him dead because –
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That’s clear enough;

Conflict +
regret/futility/Identity

The Man He
Killed
Yes; quaint and curious war is!

You shoot a fellow down
You’d treat, if met where any bar is,
Or help to half a crown.
What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells, 
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, – 
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells; 
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?

Conflict + loss/futility

Anthem for Doomed Youth
we found the place again, and found the soldier sprawling in the sun.
As we came on that day, he hit my tank with one like the entry of a demon.
We see him almost with content, abased, and seeming to have paid and mocked at by his own equipment that’s hard and good when he’s decayed.
But she would weep to see today
how on his skin the swart flies move;
For here the lover and killer are mingled
who had one body and one heart.
And death who had the soldier singled
has done the lover mortal hurt.;
Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?
Were they inclined to quiet laughter?
Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.
When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream.
Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.
All the bones were charred

Conflict +
outrage/ suffering

What Were
They Like?
It was reported their singing resembled the flight of moths in moonlight. Who can say? It is silent now.
For her eggs laid in their nest of sickness.
For the ocean’s lap with its mortal stain.
For Ahmed at the closed border.
For the soldier with his uniform of fire.
For the hook-beaked turtles, the dugong and the dolphin, the whale struck dumb by the missile’s thunder.
For the burnt earth and the sun put out,  
the scalded ocean and the blazing well.  
For vengeance, and the ashes of language.
Little adulteress,
before they punished you.

Conflict + injustice/futility

Punishment
almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur.
I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings
who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.
How can I possess such a cloth?
Just ask for a flag, my friend.
Then blind your conscience to the end.
What’s that fluttering in a breeze?
It’s just a piece of cloth
that brings a nation to its knees.
What’s love in all this debris?
Just one person pounding another into dust,
into dust. I do not know the word for it yet.
Where is the British Consulate? Please explain. What does it mean? What must I do? Where can I find? What have I done? I have done nothing. Let me pass please. I am an Englishwoman.
This is my front room

where I’m lost in the action, live from a war, on screen. I am Englishwoman. I don’t understand you. What’s the matter? You are right. You are wrong. Things are going well (badly). Am I disturbing you?
At last I’m taking off this coat, this black coat of a country?
I’m taking off this veil, this black veil of a faith that made me faithless to myself,
that tied my mouth,
gave my god a devil’s face,
and muffled my own voice.
Let’s see
what I am in here
when I squeeze past
the easy cage of bone.
Let’s see what I am out here, making, crafting, plotting at my new geography.
She was nineteen-years-old then and when she stood in her garden, she could hear the cries of the people stranded in the Ahmedabad railway station.
But she felt afraid, 
felt she could not go with her aunt – 
So she stood in the garden 
listening. Even the birds sounded different – 
and the shadows cast by the neem trees 
brought no consolation.

Conflict + 
nature/isolation

Partition
And then she asks me:
‘How could they have let a man who knew nothing about geography divide a country?’