



## After Blenheim

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**Analysis** : 'After Blenheim' by Robert Southey is an anti-war poem that centres around one of the major battles of eighteenth century – the Battle of Blenheim. Written in 1796 in the form of a ballad, it offers deep insights on war and its consequences. The 1704 War of Spanish Succession, in which a coalition of forces including the English, defeated the Franco-Bavarian army on the land of Blenheim, a small village in Southern Germany, supplies its ingredients.

### Extract I

**And the old man shook his head.....great victory.**

**i) Who was the old man? Who else were with him? Where were they?**

**Kasper was the old man. His grandchildren Peterkin and Wilhelmine were with him. They were sitting in the sun before their cottage door.**

**ii) Why did the old man shake his head and had a natural sigh? Who found the skull?**

**Kasper shook his head with a sigh to reflect his disappointment at the war that took place years ago only to devour innocent lives.**

**iii) Where was the skull found? Why does the speaker say that the skull was some 'poor' fellow?**

**The skull was found beside the small stream where Peterkin was playing. The skull belonged to one of the many innocent people who lost their lives in the tragic war. The poor fellow became a victim of the war.**

**iv) How common were the skulls there? At which place many of them could be found?**

**The skulls were a common sight there. Many of them could be found in the garden or in the field that Kasper used to plough.**

**v) What victory is referred to in the extract? Who was responsible for the victory?**

**The victory of England in the war of the Spanish Succession (1702-1715) is referred to here. Duke of Marlborough and Savoy's Prince Eugene were responsible for this victory.**

## **Extract II**

**Now you tell us what 'twas.....what they fought each other for**

**1. Which topic is being discussed in the extract? Who were Peterkin and Wilhelmine? Whom was Peterkin questioning?**

**The cause of the war in which many innocent people were killed is being discussed here. Peterkin and Wilhelmine were innocent grandchildren of old Kasper. Peterkin was questioning his grandfather, Kasper.**

**2. In the context of the poem, what special significance do the adjectives young and little have?**

**The adjectives 'young' and 'little' are important to highlight the innocence and purity of Peterkin and Wilhelmine. It is through their innocence that the poet, has condemned the war.**

**3. What is meant by 'wonder-waiting eyes'? Which figure of speech is used here? Why did Wilhelmine look up with such eyes?**

**'wonder-waiting eyes' is used for Wilhelmine, who was expecting to know the cause of the war from her grandfather. The figure of speech used here is alliteration.**

**She looked up with such eyes because she could not comprehend the cause of the war. It filled her with wonder. She anticipated to get a favourable answer from Kasper.**

**4. Who fought the battle? Was Peterkin given a satisfactory reply? What does the reply show about a common man's attitude towards war?**

**The battle was fought between the English and the French forces. Peterkin was not given a satisfactory reply. Kasper did not know the cause of the war but still referred to the victory as great. It shows that a common man's ignorance and complacency about the cause and purpose of war.**

**5. Give a brief character sketch of Kasper.**

**Kasper was a farmer. He was loving grandfather as he spent time with his grandchildren and tried to answer their queries. Kasper was an old man, who was disappointed with the outcome of the war. However, he was complacent about the cause of war and had accepted the loss of innocent lives as the inevitable price of victory in the war.**

### **Extract III**

**With fire and sword the country.....at every famous country.**

**1. Which country is referred to in the extract? What is meant by 'was wasted far and wide'?**

**The country referred to is Blenheim, which is the English name for the German village of Blindheim,**

situated on the left bank of the Danube River in Bavaria in Southern Germany. It refers to the death and destruction caused by the war.

2. What did the speaker say about the effects of the battle on his own family?

The speaker tells that during the war his father lived by a stream at Blenheim. As a result of the war, his father's house was burnt which forced him to flee with his wife and child, Kasper. They were thus rendered homeless.

3. What is meant by 'a childing mother'? Why do you think the poet specifically points out that 'many a childing mother....newborn baby died'?

'Childing mother' is a phrase used for a mother expecting a baby. The poet specifically refers to the deaths of childing mothers and newborn babies to underline not only the horrors of war but also the irony of a famous victory.

4. What do the last two lines in the extract tell you about the attitude of the speaker towards the events that he is narrating? What are your feelings for the speaker?

The speaker has been conditioned by the perpetrators of war in such a way that he readily accepted the loss of innocent lives as the price for victory in the war. I pity for the speaker as he sighed at the sight of

a poor fellows skull but his conditioning was such that he justified war.

5. By referring to the incidents in the poem, state how After Blenheim can be said to be an anti-war poem?

After Blenheim has a scathing criticism of the horrors of war. it shows that international diplomacy, politics and war are matters which are cut off from the lives of common men. In an outburst of praise for the heroes who won the war Old Kasper reveals the typical inability of an ordinary citizen to grasp the reason why the war took place.

#### Extract IV

They say it was a shocking.....a famous victory.

1. To whom does 'they' in the extract refer?

They refers to those who must have reported the entire battle scene and its after effects to Kasper.

2. Why do you think the sight was shocking even when the battle was won?

The sight was shocking because the war was won at the price of thousands of lives. The sight of many thousand bodies lying rotting in the sun was gruesome.

**3. What is the tone of the last two lines of the extract? What, according to you, the poet want to convey in these lines?**

**The tone is ironical and sarcastic. The poet wants to question the utility of waging a war, which causes destruction of both human lives and property.**

**4. What was the occupation of the speaker of these lines? How do you know about his occupation?**

**Old Kasper appears to be a farmer by profession. He lived in a cottage in a countryside, where there was a stream nearby and he mentioned that he used to find many skulls while ploughing the field. This indicates his profession.**

**5. State clearly how the poet creates an atmosphere of devastation caused by war in the poem.**

**The devastation caused by war is reflected through the following:**

**The presence of skulls all over the field,**

**Kasper's family rendered homeless when Kasper's father's dwelling was burnt,**

**The deaths of expecting mothers and newborn babies,**

**The gruesome sight of dead bodies lying on the battle field and rotting.**

## **Extract V**

**Great praise the Duke....famous victory**

**1. Who was Duke of Marlbro? Why did he win great praise?**

**Duke of Marlbro was an English General. He was the Commander of British forces in the War of the Spanish Succession. He was prised because he defeated the French forces.**

**2. Who was Prince Eugene? Why does the poet refer to him as 'our good Prince Eugene'?**

**Prince Eugene was an Austrian General, born in France. He is referred to as 'our good Prince Eugene' because with Marlborough, he defeated the French at Blenheim.**

**3. What 'thing' according to Wilhelmine was wicked? Do you agree with her comment? Give reason to support your answer.**

**Wilhelmine did not approve the praise that Duke and Prince Eugene received because she considered their act of killing innocent people in the name of victory was wicked.**

**Yes, her comment is appropriate as it is the common man who has to suffer where the politicians and the rulers escape and idly boast of wars.**

**4. State briefly the moral of the poem, After Blenheim.**



The poem disapproves of any war as it brings with itself death, devastation, loss and grief. The poet conveys that great victories are rendered useless when everything else is lost.

5. What according to you is the relevance of the poem in contemporary times? Give reasons to support your answer.

The poem is relevant as it has a universal appeal. The poem is timeless and can be read irrespective of the time it was written. It is the common man and innocent children who suffer in a war. Modern politicians dismiss the deaths of innocent people in war by referring to them with the impersonal phrase: collateral damage.