Candidate 2 evidence

To what extent do Du Fu's poems express the effect of conflict on his reality?

Du Fu (712 – 770) was and still is one of the greatest Tang dynasty poets. Born into a scholarly family, like any child he was raised on traditional Confucian education yet failed at his attempt at the imperial exam.[1] Subsequently, he set off to travel east, to the districts of Qi and Zhao (present day Shandong and Hebei) gaining experiences and meeting great poets along the way, including the 'immortal' Li Bai. His poems during this time were reflective of his carefree youth and appreciation for his surrounding environment. Later in life as a prominent member of high society, he was gifted the ability to observe cultural and social changes, and express his dissatisfaction with the status quo,[2] while advocating for change and voicing his opinions through his verses. Upon his return to the capital Chang'An (present Xi'An), he returns to the traditional Confucius lifestyle and attempts to penetrate the high courts.[3] His efforts weren't in vain, after sending a series of literary products he was granted a 'nominal' position. His success was short lived as not long after in 755, the An Lushan rebellion began, causing Du Fu to begin to feel a sense of crisis is a state of mind characterised by anxiety and unease that arises from social crises.[4] During these times, Du Fu's famous works such as "春望" and "月夜" describe his longing to be reunited with his family after being trapped in Chang'An for three long years, while commenting on the current state of the political landscape, maintaining a sense of patriotism. "佳人" reflects on the devastation of the rebellion. After escaping the capital, Du Fu, and his family escape from the north, after losing one of his sons to the famine sweeping through the country. "佳人" serves as a reflection on the fickleness of life and the ruthless reality of war. Throughout his poems, Du Fu has remained an honest and forthcoming literary critic, allowing his stories and lessons to travel through the ages.

Depicting the tone of sorrow, in the spring of 757, Du Fu composed "春望". "国破山河在，城春草木深" describes the stark contrast between the rebellion and the enduring natural world. "国破" immediately followed by "山河在" creates an irony, highlighting the fickleness of human affairs in the eyes of nature. Both lines here parallel, establishing a sorrowful tone. "感时花溅泪，恨别鸟惊心" This couplet is an example of the pathetic fallacy. The poet projects his inner torment onto the external world: the spring blossoms appear to scatter drops of sorrow; the harmonious songs of spring birds, instead of bringing joy, agitate his heart. According to 枝垂れ桜(2025), 春望 "portrays a devastated capital where "even nature mourns" amid the chaos of war."[5] This literary power is found in this contrast of

[1] Britannica Editors, Encyclopaedia Britannica, "DuFu | Chinese Poet & Tang Dynasty Innovator," last updated [12 Apr. 2024], Available at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Du-Fu

[2] 吴明贤 "试论杜甫诗歌的忧患意识"，杜甫研究学刊 2001 年第一期，第 67 期，pg. 11

[3] Britannica Editors, "DuFu | Chinese Poet & Tang Dynasty Innovator"

[4] 吴明贤 "试论杜甫诗歌的忧患意识"，pg. 11

[5] 枝垂れ桜 "Considering how Du Fu's Poetry provides insight into modern society", published [16 Feb. 2025], Available at: https://note.com/regal_toucan390/n/n340831a09db6

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the vitality of nature, standing in sharp opposition to the poet's heartbreak, intensifying the depth of the grief. "感时花溅泪" and "恨别鸟惊心" are not only expressions of personal emotion; they imbue the indifferent flowers and birds with the tragedy of the entire age. In the final couplet, "白头搔更短，浑欲不胜簪", condenses the intangible sorrow for country and family onto the poet's own aging, physical form. In 余玉橙 opinion, this couplet expresses "时代背景下所生成的典型感受，[…]同时代的人们热爱国家",[6] vividly depicting a state where care hastens aging, even to the point of physical decline. The single word "scratched" fully reveals a condition of restless. It concludes with the detail of the hairpin barely holding. The image of a poet, melancholy and haggard for his country and the times, becomes more evident and moving.

In the following years in 756AD during the An Lushan rebellion Du Fu would compose "月夜", a rare love poem, making it even more of a 'precious gem'.[7] This poem uses the act of gazing at the moon to express feelings of separation,[8] yet it conveys not the ordinary sorrow of a husband and wife parted. The characteristics of the era are revealed, the pain of wartime turmoil and the anxiety within their heart. In the opening two couplets "今夜鄜州月, 闺中只独看。遥怜小儿女，未解忆长安". Facing the moon with melancholy, sighing with worry and longing, the poet places his hope in an uncertain future. In the second couplet, '遥怜' serves as a double meaning, "怜爱" represents the love he feels for his children, "怜悯" emphasises the pity he feels for his children, unable to grasp the sorrows of his wife, their mother constantly missing a place beyond her reach. Moreover, they should be considered in connection with "今夜" and "独看." The bright moon depicted in the poem is a symbol of love and connection between Du Fu and his wife. The emphasis on "alone gazing" suggests this was something the poet enjoyed doing with his wife before becoming estranged. In the following couplets, Du Fu keeps the perspective on his wife, but from a third person perspective. "香雾云鬟温，青辉玉避寒。何时倚虚晃，双照泪眼干". These final two couplets evoke strong sensory imagery and encompass both emotional perspectives of Du Fu and his wife's turmoil, by reaching a type of poetic climax. The description of his wife elicits the tactile olfactory sensations of the night time,[9] such as the fragrant mist in the coils of her hair and the dampness of her jade arms. This further highlights Du Fu's emotional state of longing for his wife and children.

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[6] Baidu Wiki, "*春望～唐代杜甫诗作*", last updated [14 Oct 2025], Available at: https://baike.baidu.com/item/春望/263

[7] Chow B., "Moonlit Night by DuFu.", published 2022, Available at: https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/moonlit-night-du-fu#forms-and-devices

[8] Baidu Wiki, "*月夜～唐代杜甫诗作*", last updated [18 Mar. 2026], Available at: https://baike.baidu.com/item/月夜/10641322

[9] eNotes Publishing, edited by eNotes Editorial, eNotes.com, Inc., "*Summary - Moonlit Night.*", edited (18 Mar. 2026) https://www.enotes.com/topics/moonlit-night/in-depth#in-depth-summary

Du Fu's perspective on the war and its' effects, deteriorates further after escaping the capital, reuniting with his family, and experiencing the death of son to famine, causing great suffering.[10] In 包敏杰 opinion, "佳人 is the reflection of this death, and his feelings of disappointment with the political landscape, commitment to himself and his family,"[11] embodied by the image of the woman's fate in the poem. The opening is like a cinematic close-up, focusing on the bleak contrast between "绝代有佳人" and "幽居在". The juxtaposition of "绝代有" and "幽居在" sets the poem's tone of sorrow but also hints at the great conflict between her fate and her environment.[12]
"自云良家子，零落依草末", with this the perspective shifts from the poet to the lady's own account, revealing her origin and current state. "良家" indicates her original social standing and upbringing, while "零落依草末" captures the tragic fate of a woman from a good family who, amidst war, loses her support and sinks to the bottom of society. The drastic contrast in her destiny begins to emerge."关中昔丧乱，兄弟遭杀戮。官高何足论，不得收骨肉。" These two couplets detail her family tragedy. The line "官高何足论" is particularly important. It exposes how, in the face of catastrophe, former social status and power prove utterly fragile, unable to fulfil wish to bury one's kin. This poem is not only a personal family tragedy, but also a portrayal of how all order and values were destroyed in a time of war.[13] "世情恶衰歇，万事随转烛" Her account moves from specific events to a placing emphasis on human fickleness and worldly affairs. "恶衰歇" directly points to the cruelty of a mercenary reality; "随转烛" uses the image of a flickering candle flame to symbolize the impermanence of fate.[14] This is the lady's summary of her own troubles, carrying a philosophical sense, while directly articulating the common experience of survival in a war-torn age, a direct reflection of Du Fu's mindset during these years.

Throughout Du Fu's poems it is evident that his poems have served as a method to express himself freely through the ages, and serves as an insight to his ever-changing mind. Du Fu uses imagery of natural landscapes and direct experiences to convey his feelings; be that of hopefulness in his youthful days or feelings sorrow and distaste after experiencing the An Lushan rebellion. No matter how far Du Fu climbed the social ladder to establish himself at the top of the poets, he always made a point to reflect the true devastating nature of war and its consequences.

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[10] PHILLO-SOPHIC-ALLY-SPEAKING, "*A Beautiful Woman (Alone in Her Beauty)*", Published: [12 May 2025], available at: https://100tangpoems.wordpress.com/2025/05/12/a-beautiful-woman-alone-in-her-beauty/

[11] 包敏杰, 云南大学文学院"*杜甫《佳人》的审美解读*", pg. 172

[12] 包敏杰, 云南大学文学院"*杜甫《佳人》的审美解读*", pg. 173

[13] 包敏杰, 云南大学文学院"*杜甫《佳人》的审美解读*", pg. 172

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