What happens?

A soldier’s physical rush into battle disrupts abstract ideas of patriotic purpose.

The main idea

Physical terror strips the soldier of the abstract ideals that might once have justified battle.

1. “Suddenly”

Method: In medias res

The opening denies the reader a calm approach to the action.

2. “cold clockwork”

Method: Metaphor

The soldier imagines himself as a component in an impersonal mechanism.

3. “yellow hare”

Method: Animal imagery

The injured creature exposes the indiscriminate cost of violence.

4. “etcetera”

Method: Dismissive listing

Public ideals become dispensable when immediate survival dominates.

Form and structure

Three unequal stanzas in free verse; disrupted movement and enjambment follow a disorientated consciousness.

Development, voice and tone

Running — Breathless and shocked. An abrupt start places the reader inside motion before an explanation arrives.

Hesitation — Bewildered. The soldier questions his place in forces larger than his understanding.

Hare and renewed charge — Desperate. Animal suffering precedes a return to instinctive survival.

Context

Hughes was born after the First World War. The poem imagines combat rather than reporting his own military experience.

Comparison links

The Charge of the Light Brigade: public ideals versus individual experience.
Remains: psychological cost.

Recall question

How do physical sensations challenge patriotic abstractions?