



A Critical Appreciation of Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting"

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Abstract:

Wilfred Owen wrote poetry out of the experiences of the warfare in France and the First World War. His poetry can be found in his 27 poems in *Mind at War* and 19 poems in *Out in the Dark*. The present poem 'Strange Meeting' is highly dramatic, ironical and touching poem. The scene is hell. Two dead soldiers meet there by chance. It is a strange meeting at a stranger meeting place. However, this strange meeting refers to the stranger's fate for those who are the innocent victims of the war.

Keywords:

War and Pity.

Introduction:

Wilfred Owen is a war poet like Sassoon. He had a close experience of trench warfare. Under the influence of Siegfried Sassoon, he wrote war poetry. Owen hated war and aimed at writing poetry "to strike at the conscience of England in regard to the continuation of the war." He expressed his feeling in this remark, "Above all I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is war and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity." This strong anger and hatred of the War is sensitively and directly reflected in his poems such as 'Futility', 'Arms and the Boy', 'The Send-Off' and 'Strange Meeting'.

"Strange Meeting" is the very impressive war poem. This is a highly dramatic, ironical and touching poem. The opening line of the poem leads us into a dream-like world. The scene is the hell. The world in which the two protagonists meet remains ambiguous world for the reader. Two dead soldiers meet there by chance. One of them is a new arrival from the war front. The scene is gloomy and fearsome as it is the hell underground. The speech of the first speaker 'I know we stood in hell clearly reveals that the place of the meeting of the two dead soldiers is altogether a different. There are dead soldiers scattered all over the place. A strange meeting in an even stranger



meeting place makes the poem very interesting. However, this strange meeting refers to the strangers' fate for those who are the innocent victims of the war.

In the beginning of the poem Wilfred Owen sets the scene, profound dull tunnels, holes, hollows and caverns - these form a recurring image in his mind and find their way into the poem. The phrase 'Titanic Wars' means not only Owen's war but conflicts throughout history on a gigantic scale. It refers to the past, present and future.

The poem 'Strange Meeting' was written in the year 1918. This is one of the Owen's best poems. It recounts a dramatic meeting between two dead soldiers who had fought on opposite sides. As the new one walks through dead bodies in the hell, one of them, certainly a ghost, stands up and addresses him. The dead and deadly smile on his face confirms the fact that the place is hell. This is expressed aptly in these lines:

Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
 With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
 Lifting distressed hands, as if to bless.
 And by his smile, I knew we stood in Hell.

The term 'we' indicates that these are two dead soldiers in hell. So theirs is a strange meeting. Their conversation continues. As ordinary young men their life must have been peaceful and enjoyable. There must certainly have been moments of both hope and despair in their life too. But there is the hopelessness in their life because of war. The poet calls the enemy as 'strange friend' and says, Everything is normally meant for creativity and joy. So, the poet reveals the fact about the war in these words:

I mean the truth untold,
 The pity of war, the pity war distilled.

While reading this poem, a question is raised in the minds of the readers. The question is 'Does this poem refer to a dream?' It can be interpreted in two ways: (1) The soldier had died and gone to Hell and (2) The soldier had a terrible nightmare after killing the enemy in a battle

Wilfred Owen makes this poem a statement of personal experiences He uses T in the very first line and talks about his personal experiences. Then he turns to the theme of strange meeting. The poem records that men in Hell were sleeping restlessly. At the end of the poem, when the second soldier told him "Let us sleep now" it can be interpreted as if the first speaker didn't belong to Hell and yet it was time for him to sleep and let the rest do the same.



The title of the poem is suggestive. It suggests that the strange meeting is between a soldier and the enemy he had recently killed. The location of the meeting is Hell. The poet is the first soldier, the one who starts the poem. He regrets taking part in a slaughter. He was now in Hell, trying to get some rest after such a terrible death.

He calls the enemy "strange friend". He felt that Hell is a better place. At least there was no blood and no guns thumped. Both soldiers had fought as enemies, but they don't seem to be enemies any more. Yet both agree that war is cruel and pointless, and no glory or honor could be found after fighting or dying for the country. Both soldiers had the same hopes, dreams and aspirations, but they were crushed down due to war and this is the horrible reality of war depicted in this poem.

The poet further tells that fighting in a war, killing others and dying for the country is no passport to Heaven. This image of the life leads the reader to think about whether going to war is worth or not. In the very opening stanza, the poet Wilfred Owen describes the tunnels and caves that lead him to Hell. The Hell resembles a huge dorm room full of soldiers who died for their country, not having a pleasant rest, but troubled and distressful. This is a monologue of a dead soldier and it talks about his unsuccessful search for beauty, his achievements in life and the memory he might have left among those he knew. Now that he is dead, he feels that he needed time to tell the truth about war. He regrets being dead. So now it is the living soldier's turn to do something about it. His mission would now be making public what has been hidden in order to stop the war being something usual for the human kind. The world cannot just go on forgetting the horrors and the price that so many innocents had to pay, pretending nothing ever happened.

The poem 'Strange Meeting' consists of 44 lines of iambic pentameter divided into three irregular stanzas that do not correspond with the poem's natural constituents. Each word serves a specific purpose beyond the creation of basic meaning. Owen uses imagery that help the reader to have an idea of what soldier's Hell is like a profound dull tunnel, sullen hall, granites which Titanic wars had groaned. Certainly, this poem brings out the horrors of war and conveys the feeling of hopelessness and anguish that is experienced at the war front.

Acknowledgement:



During this research I am very grateful to the VVP INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY, SOLAPUR for offering facilities and resources.

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