

## Wilfred Owen: Strange Meeting

One of the most powerful statements about the meaning of war, 'Strange Meeting' exposes the futility, the horror and the pity of war. Far from glamorizing fighting, Owen lays bare the naked reality of war. The poem recounts the experiences of a soldier just killed meeting his enemy he killed the day before. The poem expresses the meaning of pity through the dialogue of the dead men who meet in after life in an underworld, a joyless place resembling the classical underworld. Technically the poem is noteworthy for its half-rhymes in groined/groaned; bestirred/stared etc., - a device that was later imitated by poets like W.H.Auden. The half-rhymes suggest the frustration and incompleteness of life brought about by war. "Strange Meeting" depicts the sufferings of war. They have the poignancy of a firsthand experience and stir the reader's imagination. Owen reflects on the irony of war: the ruling class declare war and it is the common soldier who is left to bear the actual brunt of it. The soldier at the war front has nothing to do with the causes of war. The poet exposes the hypocrisy of the war mongers. Actually war is a useless enterprise, a senseless brutality. Owen wrote: "My subject is war, and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity."

### Annotations:

Lines 2-3: the pits of hell

1.3 titanic wars: great wars

Lines 4 to 5 the place was fully occupied

1.4 sleepers: the classical tradition represent death as a tranquil sleep but the Romantics depicted the state as a less desirable, and perhaps a fatal one.

Lines 6-10: As he recognizes a dead man, who stirs as if to bless him, the speaker realizes that this is no ordinary place.

1.7: fixed eyes: associates the stranger with Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner' and Keats' *The Fall of Hyperion*.

Lines 11 to 12 The lifeless place is full of suffering

Grained: dug, carved up, ceased with suffering

1.13 No sound of war

Flues: pipes or channels for the passage of smoke, hot air, gas etc.

17-24 He had loved life and the immediacy of experience, Death has undone all that.

24-25 He regrets the untold truth, the pity of war

1.26 Someone should present the real picture of war. It is neither glorifying nor heroic. The ruling classes declare war but it is the common soldier who suffers. Unless the emptiness of war is revealed people will continue to glorify war and petty discontents would frequently escalate into full blown wars.

27-28: Civilizations will suffer regress as men destroy each other with the singlemindedness of a tigress.

1.29 None will break ranks: No nation will go against the grain to publicly declare the futility of war and refrain from it.

29-31: The speaker recognized the truth of war and tried to withstand its empty pursuits. But destiny, in the shape of the enemy, stepped in.

35-36: He would have preferred to spend his energies in bringing an end to war.

1.38: cess of war: the moral filth and corruption of war

1.43: loath- slow, lazy

1.44: Nothing matter any more. There is no scope for quarrel after death

Parried: evaded

Sources:

“Poems Old and New” edited by Board of Professors, Macmillan.

: C.T.Thomas *Twentieth Century Verse: An Anglo-American Anthology*