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Topic- Strange Meeting (Study Notes)

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Strange Meeting- Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, —
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said that other, "save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery;
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . ."

'Strange Meeting' is a poem by Wilfred Owen. It deals with the atrocities of World War I. The poem was written sometimes in 1918 and was published in 1919 after Owen's death. The central theme in 'Strange Meeting' is the futility and horror of modern war. There is no chivalry or honor, which the traditional poets found in war; instead, there is only suffering and death. Strange Meeting is one of Wilfred Owen's most famous, and most enigmatic, poems. It was published posthumously in 1919 in Edith Sitwell's anthology *Wheels: an Anthology of Verse* and a year later in Siegfried Sassoon's 1920 collection of Owen's poems. "Strange Meeting" was written in 1919, when Wilfred Owen was a soldier fighting on the Western Front during World War I. Owen is now recognized as a leading voice among a group of young English poets who fought in the war and wrote about their experiences. Owen's poem contains a message of love and forgiveness. This poem was written at a time when hate and loathing were at their height, when a war on an unimaginable scale took the lives of millions of young men and women. *Strange Meeting* is a poem about reconciliation. Two soldiers meet up in an imagined Hell, the first having killed the second in battle. Their moving dialogue is one of the most poignant in modern war poetry. Wilfred Owen fought and died in WW1, being fatally wounded just a week before the war ended in May 1918. By all accounts he wanted to return to the front line, despite suffering from shell shock, to justify his art. Owen disliked the gentle, sentimental poetry that gave a distorted view of the war. He wrote many poems depicting the horror and helplessness; he wanted to capture the pity in his poetry. Strange Meeting, the title taken from a poem of Shelley's, called Revolt of Islam, is full of metaphor and symbol. Religious allusions play a part too. Owen was very much torn in his faith but couldn't escape a strict religious upbringing. So biblical influences are to the

The poem's description of a soldier's descent into Hell where he meets an enemy soldier, he killed lends itself to a critique of war. The dead man talks about the horror of war and the inability for anyone but those involved to grasp the essential truth of the experience. The speaker of "Strange Meeting" is a dead soldier. In "Hell" he meets an enemy whom he killed the previous day. Since the poet, Wilfred Owen, fought in World War I—and wrote the poem while he was serving on the Western Front—most readers assume that the speaker is also a soldier in World War I. In the Christian tradition, Hell is usually understood to be a place of punishment and torment—a place that God Himself created. But in "Strange Meeting," God doesn't seem to have much to do with Hell. The poem doesn't make any other references to Christian theology, and God never appears in the poem to judge the dead soldiers. (Instead,

they judge each other). In "Strange Meeting," Hell is a creation and consequence of human violence. The setting thus supports the poem's broader argument: that war creates nothing but horror and pain. The poem is deeply pessimistic as it reflects on the shared humanity of these two men and the broader horrors of war. Though the poem suggests that human beings aren't going to stop fighting anytime soon, it also calls for such violence to be replaced by reconciliation and solidarity. In "Strange Meeting" a soldier finds himself in hell, having a conversation with another soldier who proclaims that he is "the enemy you killed". It is not that straightforward, however, for the "enemy" soldier is commonly assumed to be more than just a dead German boy - he is actually the speaker's doppelgänger, a manifestation of another version of himself. The soldier is confronted with his double because, dead, he can no longer be a witness to the truth of war. The other soldier is also seen as the speaker's poetic self; atrocity has stripped the soldier of his means of expression. Finally, other critics have referred to the dead soldier as the speaker's primal self/unconscious, from which he has been estranged while fighting in the war. This mythological journey has many literary precedents, but Owen's subterranean descent is one of the most memorable.

The idea of the futility of the soldiers' sacrifice is the theme of strange meeting. In fact, it is a poem of visionary dream. The poet soldier imagines that he has escaped from battle and gone to the other regions. As he keeps watching the corpses, one springs up with piteous recognition in fixed eyes. The other man in its cadaverous look, who is in fact the enemy soldier, relates the horrors and frustrations accompanying war. He is sad that he has been snatched away by death even before he could pass on to humanity the knowledge he acquired – the truth untold – the bitter experience on the battle field – the pity war distilled. He further voices against the abstract and unworthy glorification of war. An enemy in life becomes a friendly companion in the land of the dead, finally when disclosing his identity, he bids friend to join. In Strange Meeting, the dead man, however, is displeased with the cause of his death. Sacrificing life for the sake of others is a noble act; but the glorification of war is both abstract and unworthy.

The theme of universal goodwill, which Owen has been persistently advocating, seems reserved for the world of death where enemies become friends and engage in a discussion of their problems with an open mind. The poem underlines the theme of 'insensibility' also. The soldiers have grown insensible to pain and horror. It is paradoxical that the sense of goodwill does not exist where it is most needed and exists where it is not needed! The death of a young soldier in the battlefield is nothing but a total waste of his undeveloped

possibilities and talents through which he could serve humanity had he not joined the warfront to kill others and to be killed untimely by others.

Multiple Choice Questions.

Strange Meeting- Wilfred Owen

- 1) Where does the soldier in “Strange Meeting” find himself?
 - a. At home
 - b. In church
 - c. In heaven
 - d. **In Hell**
- 2) In “Strange Meeting”, what does the soldier see that leads him to believe he is in hell?
 - a. The dead man’s eyes
 - b. The dead man’s legs
 - c. **The dead man’s smile**
 - d. The dead man’s arms
- 3) The dead man in “Strange Meeting” says he used to possess-----
 - a. Good looks
 - b. **Courage and wisdom**
 - c. Money
 - d. Religion
- 4) In “Strange Meeting” the dead man says the truth is the -----of war.
 - a. Sadness
 - b. Reality
 - c. Irrationality
 - d. **Pity**
- 5) Who does the dead man in “Strange Meeting” say he is?
 - a. The brother of the soldier
 - b. **The enemy killed by the soldier**
 - c. A famous war general
 - d. The cousin of the soldier
- 6) How was the tunnel into hell formed?
 - a. **By the world's past wars**

- b. By a corrupt construction company
 - c. By the greed of wall Street
 - d. By the spilled blood of murdered people
- 7) According to speaker number two, what does war ultimately do for the countries involved?
- a. Makes them richer
 - b. **Makes them move in the wrong direction**
 - c. Makes them less populated
 - d. Makes them less popular
- 8) The soldier in "Strange Meeting" says there is no cause to
- a. Mourn
 - b. Fight
 - c. Live
 - d. **Smile**
- 9) The dead man in "Strange Meeting" wants to
- a. Get back on the battlefield
 - b. Go to heaven
 - c. Go back to his family
 - d. **Tell the truth about war**
- 10) What war does Owen write about?
- a. WWII
 - b. **WWI**
 - c. The civil war
 - d. The vietnam war
- 11) I am the enemy you killed, my
- a. Uncle
 - b. Sister
 - c. **Friend**
 - d. Son

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