

# Curiosity can kill

Literature



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here 8 August Curiosity Can Kill In Liam O'Flaherty's "The Sniper," the protagonist makes a peculiar decision toward the end of the story that may puzzle the reader, had he or she not known the true context of the Irish civil war in which he was engaged. Also, knowledge about the author's ties to the Irish civil war of the 1920s further helps the reader understand the intricacies of the psychological aspects of the divisive battles taking place within Dublin at the time. In the midst of the warzone on the rooftops of Dublin, Ireland, the young sniper from the Republican side of the conflict found himself in a situation where his life was in peril at any given second. Under the stealth of night, the sniper found himself playing mind games with the enemy, and had to calculate his every move to make sure his opponent would not receive any clues that could cost him his life. Throughout the short story, the sniper takes extra precautions and devises deceiving schemes in order to outsmart his enemy. This is why his last actions in the story are inconsistent with his meticulous attention to strategy and precautions prior to the story's conclusion – yet keeping in mind the context of the war helps the reader to understand his motivations.

From the very beginning, the sniper portrays himself as a very cunning young soldier, taking every measure to ensure that he does not give the enemy a foothold that could cost him his life – with the exception of foolishly lighting a cigarette at night to quench his intense nicotine addiction. He skillfully lays low in stealth from the rooftop and picks off a woman informant on the street below, as well as the enemy soldier emerging from the turret of the vehicle that he was attentively keeping under surveillance. Soon afterward, enemy fire from the rooftop of a building across the street caught him in the arm, and through trickery, the Republican sniper fooled his

shooter into believing that he was fatally wounded. Causing his opponent to let his guard down, the sniper was able to get a clean shot at him with his revolver, killing him with a round that plummeted his lifeless body to the street below. As the average reader would come to believe that this would be just another mundane casualty of war in the sniper's mind, readers with a knowledge of the Irish civil war of the 1920s – as being an up-close-and-personal warfare that often divided families and friends to war against each other – come to understand soldiers' uncanny curiosity to know exactly who their opposition is. Also, the author clues the reader in as to the extent of the sniper's curiosity when he reveals the young soldier's thoughts, " He wondered if he knew him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army." Combined with the side information provided to compliment the story, telling the reader that " neighbors fought neighbors and families were torn apart," the reader is riddled with anticipation that the sniper's victim could be someone very close to him. Consequently, when the sniper carelessly risks his life at the end, running through enemy fire to appease his curiosity as to the identity of his victim, the informed reader is not too surprised to see his flagrant disregard of his own life in order to find out who he shot. At the conclusion, when the protagonist discovers that he had fatally shot his own brother, the reader completely understands the risks he took.

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#### Works Cited

La Rocco, Christine Bideganeta. *British and World Literature for Life and Work*, Student Edition. New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill. 1997. Print.

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