

War, civil war, comes
to suffer from



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War, a controversial dilemma, can often resolve itself through an orderly fashion, rather than an atrocious disaster. In "The Sniper," written by Liam O'Flaherty, a Republican soldier who fights for his life against the so-called "Free Staters" in the Irish civil war, comes to suffer from drastic emotional trauma when someone he loves becomes fatally wounded. In Liam O'Flaherty's story, "The Sniper" uses irony to demonstrate how war reduces human beings to mere objects. Unexpected occurrences happen when dramatic irony comes into effect. The irony demonstrates itself when the sniper discovers that the soldier he has most recently shot reveals as his brother, who now rests lifeless on the street. Rena Korb clarifies in her commentary on the story "only when the other man ceases to be a threat does the sniper acknowledge his status as another human instead of merely an enemy soldier" (Korb 227). She implies that war transforms people's mental train of thought.

O'Flaherty emphasizes this idea by giving no context into the characters of the story. He gives the characters in the story no names or faces.

Korb's commentary states "if not for this problem, these men could have been colleagues or friends—even brothers" (Korb 227).

She discusses about how because of war, men become desensitized to violence, and never think of the consequences of their actions. The diversity of the Irish civil war causes the country to split into two, and unfortunately the sniper and his brother engage on opposing sides. This creates the chance of the brothers going to war with each other on the battlefield. The sniper assesses everything but himself as the enemy, so when he shoots what he thought stood the enemy, he thinks nothing of it. But when he proceeds to

look at his victim, he faces a lifetime of agony,” the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother’s face” (O’Flaherty¹). “ The Sniper” uses irony to expose how war has the ability to reduce human beings to mere objects, and how it expresses the pain, sorrow, and agony one suffers caused by war. Another instance of situational irony occurs when the sniper lights his cigarette, only to become the target of an enemy sniper across the way. By providing very little information about the sniper, the story concentrates primarily on his actions.

The sniper, filled with excitement, does not bother to eat before he climbs onto the roof to keep watch for Free Staters. He then kills an armored car, and an informant. It is not until the Republican sniper lights a cigarette that he becomes aware of another sniper nearby. As feared, once he lights the match, “ a bullet flattened itself against the parapet of the roof” (O’Flaherty¹). As if on command, the enemy sniper shoots at any sign of movement, alike to a machine. He did not even think twice before pulling the trigger of the gun, which supports the fact that war reduces human beings to mere objects.

It resides within human nature to have compassion and feelings for one another, but war can change that. Rena Korb states in her commentary “ this lapse into human feeling is momentary, however” (Korb 227). She states that when the sniper kills a person from the opposing side, he realizes what he has done; only to shrug it off his shoulders, and move onto the next target.

He has become desensitized to death and violence; the sniper can no longer distinguish what exists and what does not. Because of war, he views other

people as objects, and once they die, he shows no human response to the death that he has caused. O'Flaherty's used irony demonstrate the murder of the informant for the enemies, also named the "Free Staters." During the Irish Civil War, everyone must take a side to support their belief. Korb further explains this in her commentary, stating "the Irish civil war also emerges as a battle between individuals.

All citizens must take sides" (Korb 227). O'Flaherty's story explains that everyone must take a side, even the elders. This provides an advantage for both sides; for no one expects an elderly person to take an active role in the civil war like this. But her cover makes sense, since no one suspects her of trading information with the enemy, and many will easily and quickly dismiss her.

However, the sniper manages to gun her down, which was something he has not expected as well. Throughout the story, the sniper gives less emotion, and gets keener on the war. Korb's commentary states "no doubts about his actions or about the war itself distract him, not even when he kills the raggedy old woman who dies like a dog in the gutter" (Korb 227). This shows how the sniper displays no compassion or emotion when taking another life. War programs people to show no emotion when taking the life of another, destroying their humanity. The only moment in the story where the sniper reveals his emotions occurs when he "gibbers to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody" (O'Flaherty 1). This event brings up the emotions that he buries deep down from war. O'Flaherty uses this line of the story to communicate the disunity and cold-heartedness caused by the Irish civil war.

Finally, "The Sniper" reveals the absurdity and futility of fighting against individual human beings. The theme of "The Sniper" illustrates a sequence of ironic events to communicate a message that war is pointless and objectifies people. This revelation is one of which some level of change in the sniper becomes evident. He realizes this development when he finds the target revealed to be his brother. War strips people of their humanity, and transforms them into mere objects.

It becomes the change that results from the death of his brother, that the sniper learns a truer meaning to the purpose and function of war.