

The Sniper



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LIAM O'FLAHERTY

Liam O'Flaherty was a novelist and short story writer who was born on one of the remote Aran Islands off the Western coast of Ireland. O'Flaherty was a soldier in World War I, during which he sustained a serious injury in a bomb explosion. He suffered from depression during this period. He later fought for and participated in revolutionary activities in Ireland in the early 1920s through the Irish Republican Army. He settled in England in 1922, but returned to Dublin in the 1920s, where he lived until he died nearly sixty years later. During the Irish Civil War he identified as a Republican. His novel *The Informer* (1925), about a confused revolutionary who betrays his friends, was adapted in 1935 by John Ford into an Oscar-winning film. His autobiography, *Shame the Devil*, came out in 1934, even as he lived for another fifty years, though he was less prolific during these later years.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Irish Civil War that “The Sniper” describes was still ongoing at the time of its writing. The conflict occurred after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922, which ended the Irish War of Independence. In the War of Independence, Irish Republicans fought to gain independence from England, and the Anglo-Irish treaty that ended the war established an Irish Free State as a self-governing dominion within the British Commonwealth of Nations. (The Treaty also allowed the northern six counties of Ireland to secede if they so wished from the rest of the island's counties, which they did, becoming Northern Ireland.) However, nearly as soon as the treaty was signed a dispute broke out between the Free-Staters, who supported the treaty, and the Republicans who did not—they wished for more autonomy, even total independence, from Britain. The Free-Staters and Republicans, who had been allies in the fighting against England, suddenly became enemies and engaged in bitter and bloody warfare against each other.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Liam O'Flaherty writes in a realist mode like many other writers of his day, including Jack London and Ernest Hemingway. Like the short stories of these two other authors, O'Flaherty's sentences are short and direct, and the story enacts a close third person viewpoint. This style is in accordance with realism, which attempts to show everyday reality as truly lived by everyday people. The unadorned sentences and close attention to the details of the protagonist's consciousness work to suggest authenticity and unsentimentality. Hemingway, like

O'Flaherty in “The Sniper”, also wrote many short stories with a seemingly calmed and simple style that belie the underlying horrors and traumas of war that his characters experience.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Sniper
- **When Written:** 1923
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 12 January 1923, in the London-based Socialist weekly *The New Leader*
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** Dublin, Ireland
- **Climax:** The Republican sniper finds out the enemy sniper is his brother
- **Antagonist:** Enemy sniper, Man in armored car, the old woman
- **Point of View:** Third person limited (Republican Sniper)

EXTRA CREDIT

A New Nation. Liam O'Flaherty is often considered a leading figure of the Irish Renaissance.

Man of many hats, but no collar. O'Flaherty originally trained to become a priest, but gave it up at the start of the First World War, eventually, in addition to writing, becoming a lumberjack, hotel porter, miner, dishwasher, factory worker, and deckhand, among other jobs.



PLOT SUMMARY

“The Sniper” begins just before dawn in Dublin, Ireland, during the Irish Civil War. A Republic sniper sits on a roof and lights a cigarette despite knowing that the flash of his lighter might tip off his enemy. It does, and an enemy sniper, a Free Stater, sends a bullet flying overhead. The enemy is just across the **street** on the roof opposite the Republican sniper. At the same time an armored car comes down the street, and an old woman comes around the corner and informs the man in the armored car about the Republican sniper. Before the man in the armored car can shoot at the Republican sniper, though, the Republican sniper shoots the man dead. He shoots the woman dead, too, as she tries to run away.

Distracted for a moment, the Republican sniper gets hit in the arm by the bullet of the enemy sniper. In tremendous pain, he can't hold his rifle anymore. He pours an antiseptic over his

wound, which is also extremely painful. In order to escape, he puts his rifle on the edge of the roof with his cap on its end; the enemy sniper shoots at it, and the Republican sniper ingeniously makes it look like he has been killed.

The enemy sniper, thinking he is safe, stands up on his roof, and with a surge of pride and joy the sniper shoots him dead with his revolver. However, now that the adrenaline of battle is over, and the Republican sniper feels safe, “the lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse.” He throws his revolver “with an oath”, finishes all the whiskey in his flask, and begins to go down to street level to report to his commander. However, reaching the street, he feels “a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed.” Dodging gunfire behind him, he reaches the corpse and throws himself at it, as if he has been killed, too. Finally “the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his **brother’s** face.”



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Republican Sniper – The Republican sniper begins the story concerned only with his most immediate problems—his hunger, his desire to light a cigarette, and his desire to survive and defeat his enemies. He ends up being confronted by the question of the destructive divisiveness of war. The sniper contends with his glee and eagerness to kill his enemy even as he also feels remorse and loss at the inhumanity of war. His human impulse to identify the man he has killed at the end of the story leads him to discover that he is very intimately aware of his enemy’s humanity, as his enemy is also his **brother**.

Enemy Sniper – The enemy sniper is in no real way differentiated by O’Flaherty from the Republican sniper—that is, other than the fact that the two men lie on the opposite ends of the ideological battle raging at the moment, and on opposite roofs facing off against each other. The enemy sniper and the Republican sniper seem to mirror each other, each trying to shoot at the other and each trying to trick the other. The enemy sniper does not succeed and gets killed, and in the end the Republican sniper discovers that the enemy sniper is actually his **brother**.

Man in the Armored Car – The man in the armored car by chance drives up the **street** after the Republican sniper has flashed his lighter and the enemy sniper has fired at him. After the old woman informs the man in the armored car about the Republican sniper, but before the man can act on the information, the sniper shoots him dead.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Old Woman – This old woman comes out when she sees the man in the armored car and informs him about the

whereabouts of the Republican sniper. After the sniper shoots the man, he also shoots the old woman and she falls shrieking into the gutter.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



DIVISIONS

“The Sniper” abounds with all sorts of divisions, both figurative and literal. The story takes place just before dawn, the moment of division between night and day. Up until the end, all the action takes place on the rooftops of Dublin, where a Republican sniper and an enemy sniper face each other on roofs across the **street** from one another, another literal division. The story takes place during the early weeks of the Irish Civil War (1922-1923), itself a great divisive event, which erupted when two factions of Irish Republicans who had been *allies* during the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) disagreed and went to war with each other over whether to accept the terms of the treaty with England that had ended the Irish War of Independence. At the end of the story, when the Republican sniper realizes that the man he just killed was also his **brother**, the reader understands the full extent and cost of the divisions that have ripped apart Ireland, where even brother conceivably might fight brother for political reasons.

The divisions also extend to O’Flaherty’s description of the Republican sniper, who at once has “the face of a student” while his eyes hold “the cold gleam of a fanatic”; he is both sympathetic and destructive, a regular young man and a cold-blooded killer. Additionally, he also has to contend with the fact that he feels glee and enthusiasm about killing the enemy and in the immediate aftermath of that killing also remorse and sadness at taking human life. The intensity of the situation, however, makes it difficult for him to bridge the gap between all these divisions. He must readily kill and be violent for the sake of the war, and he has to forget, momentarily, his enemy’s humanity in order to kill him and save himself. The story thus dramatizes the way divisions cause violence to proliferate, how people on separate sides can become blind to the shared humanity of those they face.



WAR, VIOLENCE, AND ENMITY

“The Sniper” is a war story, and it explores questions of violence and enmity and how they affect the people who participate in and are caught

up in the war. The Republican sniper kills three people over the course of the story: the man in the armored car, the old woman, and the enemy sniper. The Republican sniper does not have much of a choice: for him it is either kill or be killed. He must kill even the old woman, for if she gets away she might inform one of his enemies about him. In this way, the story shows how war blurs the line between civilians and warriors become blurred, so that even an old woman is bound into the fight and becomes a threat.

Consequently, war creates a situation in which human beings lose their ability to see other people as full and nuanced humanity. Everyone becomes either an ally or an enemy, either people who will help the Republican sniper or people who will hurt him. When, at the end of the story, the sniper realizes that he has killed his own **brother**, he must face firsthand how forced violence and the enmity of war create a situation in which individual identities become clouded over. In fact, almost nothing in the story actually differentiates the two snipers besides their supposed ideological opposition—of which we hear nothing about. They do not have names: they are one Republican and one Free Stater. The violent politics around them subsumes their individuality, and the final revelation demonstrates the degree to which the categories of “enemy” and “ally” are simplifications – fatal simplifications – generated by the enmity of war.



CHANCE AND INGENUITY

“The Sniper” demonstrates how both chance and ingenuity are essential components to war—how sometimes they go hand in hand, and sometimes

they do not. The eponymous sniper is both lucky and clever in his survival and his defeat of the enemy sniper. From the start, the sniper understands that chance plays a large part in the ultimate survival of any soldier. He decides to take the risk of lighting the cigarette, despite the fact that his enemy might see the flash—as the enemy actually does. When he does get shot shortly afterwards, it is due only to chance that he is not hit in a more vital part of his body than his arm, just as it is chance that the old woman sees him just as the man in the armored car rolls down the **street**. Still, the soldier in war does not exist entirely at the whims of chance without control of any sort, and it is ingenuity that allows the sniper to trick the enemy soldier into thinking that he has been killed. However, in going to investigate the enemy sniper, the sniper gives himself to chance once more. It is chance that allows him to survive the gunfire that follows him down the street, and finally also chance that the man that he has killed is his **brother**—an irrevocably cruel act of chance, but one perhaps no more unlikely than any of the others. O’Flaherty, consequently, demonstrates how war often happens as a series of chance results that one after the other lead either to continued life or to death. That two specific people end up facing each other in war is also a matter of

chance, for the enemy sniper could have been nearly any young man from Ireland. Though ingenuity clearly plays a part in the sniper’s survival, it is mostly chance—and a chance decision—that leads him to survival even as he happens to kill, in his lucky fight against his enemy, his very own brother.



PAIN AND PERSEVERANCE

The sniper goes through a lot of physical pain in “The Sniper”—he gets shot in the arm, he uses a painful antiseptic to protect the wound from

infection, he drags himself from the roof of a building and manages even to run across the **street**—but by the end of the story the reader understands that the greatest pain that he will experience will be the emotional pain of having killed his **brother**, the enemy sniper. However, as a symbol, this brother represents more than merely the sniper’s actual kin, but also the larger circle of people who make up the Irish nation—from the man in the armored car to the old woman who informs the man in the armored car about the sniper’s whereabouts.

The Irish Civil War was an incredibly divisive moment in the history of Ireland, particularly as it came directly after the unifying and galvanizing Irish War of Independence, and involved allies from the former war suddenly becoming bitter enemies. The physical and emotional pain that the sniper experiences is an individual microcosm that reflects the civil violence suddenly erupting in a young country only recently independent from its English colonizers. Both the Republicans and the Free Staters think they know what is best for the new country, and part of the country’s first real test is how it can persevere past the pain caused by the newfound divisions that emerge from Ireland’s birth. For the snipers, this means, most immediately, destroying the enemy before the enemy destroys them, but in the long term, by the end of the story, we understand that the story suggests that the only way the country will persevere and survive is if the two sides do not destroy one another in the process and can find ways to forgive one another—or at least if the two sides can recognize their share humanity as Irishmen—once the war ends.



HUMANITY AND REMORSE

Despite the enmity between combatants, the story also shows that a strand of human curiosity, of desire to understand and connect with the enemy,

is present still. The Republican sniper proves himself to be not totally bloodthirsty, despite the surge of joy he feels upon killing his rival. Rather, after the adrenaline and drama of battle, the Republican sniper immediately understands that his rival was a person, and that the killing of a person is a tragedy and a waste. In fact, the Republican sniper is so overcome by his sense of the now dead enemy sniper’s humanity, that he feels the need to see the man he has killed.

The war, then, does not completely cause the sniper to lose his sense of humanity. The final twist that the enemy sniper is his **brother**, of course, hammers home how war can make bitter enemies of anyone, but the sniper's urge to go and see the enemy out of remorse suggests that there is a fundamental humanity that continues to exist even within war, and gives some hope that it will continue to exist after the war as well.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE BROTHER

When the Republican sniper turns over the body of the enemy sniper, he “looked into his **brother's** face.” We may read this both as a literal fact—the sniper has killed his brother—but also as a symbolic representation of what happens in a civil war: the dead “brother” is both a part of the sniper's nuclear family as well as his national family.



THE STREET

Most of the action of “The Sniper” takes place along a **street** where the Republican sniper and the enemy sniper face each other on roofs on opposite sides of the street. This location is thematically important because it represents the divisions between the two enemies as well as the divisions between people and even family that the war creates. Moreover, the street, once surely a place of commerce or perhaps habitation, has turned in the ugliness of war into a killing field and battleground. What was once familiar, safe, and full of life, in war becomes distorted, dangerous, and full of death. But when the sniper crosses the street at the end of the story to identify his victim, he creates a kind of bridge between the two divided sides at the same time as he discovers the true intimate relationship—and the therefore deep tragedy—that lies at the heart of his confrontation with his enemy.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the St. Martin's Press edition of *Liam O'Flaherty: the Collected Stories* published in 1999.

The Sniper Quotes

☞ Here and there through the city, machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

The story takes place during the Irish Civil War of the early 1920s—a long, bloody conflict that turned the Irish people against themselves. During the Civil War, Ireland divided into two main military groups: the Republicans and the Free Staters. The Republicans believed that the entire island of Ireland should be independent of the United Kingdom, with its own rights of self-determination and democratic representation. The Free Staters, on the other hand, maintained that *some* of Ireland should be independent, but the northern states should remain a part of Britain, reflecting the states' close cultural and religious ties to Britain.

The Irish Civil War is still remembered as one of the bloodiest and most horrific wars in modern European history. As the passage illustrates, the war was waged with the most modern technology available—machine guns and rifles, perfected during World War I only a few years earlier. Instead of working together, the Irish fought each other for their divided political convictions.

☞ His face was the face of a student, thin and ascetic, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the fanatic. They were deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to looking at death.

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to a sniper who's loyal to the Republican cause. We're given very little information about who this person is—what his name is, for instance, where he's from, or what his socioeconomic background is. All we know about him is that he's fighting for the Republicans.

The lack of characterization of the Republican Sniper

emphasizes the fact that he a kind of personification of Ireland itself at the time. Just as the sniper is simultaneously innocent ("a student") and experienced ("the fanatic"), Ireland in the 1920s was a fledgling nation, newly liberated from Britain, and yet schooled in the methods and the machinery of modern warfare.

☛ The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead.

Related Characters: Republican Sniper, Enemy Sniper

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the Enemy Sniper hits the Republican Sniper in the arm. The Republican Sniper is forced to drop his rifle; moreover, the sound of the rifle falling is extremely loud.

The loudness of the rifle produces several literary effects. First, it foreshadows the final, much louder sound of the Republican Sniper's gunshot, which will kill the Enemy Sniper. Second, it underscores the seriousness of the event: the Republican Sniper has lost his most important tool, with which he defends his own life. Third and most important, the notion of a noise that can "wake the dead" is meant ironically, since the spirit of death hovers over the entire story--as we will see very soon, no noise, no matter how loud, can undo the act of murder.

☛ The Republican sniper smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the parapet...his hand trembled with eagerness.

Related Characters: Enemy Sniper, Republican Sniper

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the Republican Sniper prepares to kill his rival, the Enemy Sniper. Cleverly, the Republican Sniper has fooled his opponent into believing that he (the Republican) is dead--he's even dropped his rifle to the ground. Now, the Enemy Sniper is standing straight up, making himself an easy target for the Republican.

It's important to notice the obvious pleasure that the Republican Sniper takes in shooting his opponent. Murder is a bloody, savage act, but because the Republican Sniper is so separated from his opponent, he can enjoy the thrill of winning the "game" he's been playing with the Enemy Sniper, instead of thinking about the flesh-and-blood human being whose life he's about to end. Notice also that the Republican Sniper's eagerness in this passage is also *our* eagerness: on some level, we want the Republican to win. Very subtly, Flaherty tricks us into rooting for the Republican, only to dash our hopes with the final sentence of his story.

☛ Then when the smoke cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit.

Related Characters: Republican Sniper, Enemy Sniper

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the Republican Sniper shoots his opponent, the Enemy Sniper, and cries out with joy: he's won the fight by tricking the Enemy into standing up and making himself an easy target.

The Republican takes an obvious pleasure in killing his opponent. Separated from the Enemy Sniper by "smoke" and distance, he doesn't have to look at his victim's cold, dead body--he can rejoice in having "won the battle." It's also worth noticing that Flaherty suggests that the Republican Sniper could easily have been the one to be killed, had the circumstances been even a little different. Here, the Republican Sniper shouts for joy--a bad move for any sniper, since it draws attention to his position. The Republican has won his duel with the Enemy, but Flaherty gives us the sense that he could have lost just as easily.

☛ The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

Related Characters: Enemy Sniper

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the text, the Republican Sniper has no idea who the Enemy Sniper is. Separated by the distance between the buildings in Dublin (and by the ideological differences that have led them to fight for different sides), the Republican barely thinks of his opponent as a human being at all: he's been conditioned to feel no sympathy whatsoever for his enemies, and has become desensitized to bloodshed. Flaherty conveys the Republican Sniper's dismissive attitude toward the Enemy Sniper by describing the Enemy as nothing but a "body." From the Republican's point of view, there's absolutely nothing to distinguish the Enemy's body from any other body: it's just a piece of meat, lacking humanity.

☞ The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse...he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered, he began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

Related Characters: Republican Sniper

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Despite his previous coldness and delight in murder, the Republican Sniper here has a sudden change of heart. While dueling with his opponent, the Republican didn't feel any sympathy for him. In part, the Republican didn't feel sympathetic to his opponent because he was trying to protect his own life; also, the Republican was separated from his opponent by a large divide (of both ideology and distance), making it more difficult for the Republican to conceive of his Enemy as a full human being.

Here, however, the Republican finds that it's harder to ignore his own guilt *after* the duel. Faced with the Enemy's body, the Republican Sniper feels a natural sense of guilt and self-hatred at having murdered another human being. Even though the Republican has no idea who his opponent was, his natural human decency prevails--thus, he curses himself, and the war that has compelled him to commit murder.

☞ He felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed...Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army.

Related Characters: Republican Sniper, Enemy Sniper

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the Republican Sniper decides to investigate who his opponent was. It's worth wondering why, exactly, the Republican does so--he has no rational reason for risking his own life by looking at the Enemy Sniper's face. Nevertheless, the Republican Sniper is the victim of a basic human emotion, curiosity. He wants to know what kind of man would join the Free State side of the Civil War. (The Republican Sniper's curiosity is also *our* curiosity: we want to know who the Enemy Sniper was, just as badly as the Republican does!) Finally, the Republican Sniper seems to feel a natural sense of sympathy for his opponent; he senses that he and his enemy have a common humanity, and may even have fought in the same section of the army. Flaherty sadly alludes to the time before the Civil War, when all of Ireland was (relatively) united.

☞ Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

Related Characters: Republican Sniper, Enemy Sniper

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

In the final sentence of the short story, the Republican Sniper seems to realize that his opponent, the Enemy Sniper, was actually his own "brother." Taken literally, this sentence reinforces the savagery of the Irish Civil War: a bloody conflict that split up families and entire communities by forcing everyone to pick political sides. Throughout the story, the Republican Sniper has tried and failed to think of his opponent as abstractly as possible. Here, though, the Enemy Sniper's full humanity comes surging back: he and the Republican Sniper are related by blood.

Taken more abstractly, the word "brother" could suggest

the broader cultural and historical bonds that unite all the people of Ireland together--bonds that were broken during the Irish Civil War. "The Sniper" is a heavily symbolic story,

and on a symbolic level, it shows that war forces otherwise decent people--people with a common humanity, if not a literal common bloodline--to kill each other.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE SNIPER

The story begins in darkness near dawn. The city of Dublin, Ireland is undergoing a battle between Republicans and Free Staters. It is the Civil War. The night is silent except for the occasional machine guns and rifles, which sound like “dogs barking on lone farms.” Near O’Connell Bridge a Republican sniper lies on a rooftop along a deserted **street**. He has “the face of a student” while his eyes have “the cold gleam of a fanatic.” He looks like someone “used to looking at death.”

After hungrily eating a sandwich, the sniper takes a swig of whiskey and wonders whether he should risk lighting a cigarette. The danger is that the flash of the match might be seen in the darkness. Still, he decides to go ahead with it. After he strikes the match, a bullet hits the parapet of the roof he is on. Swearing, he looks over the parapet and sees a flash, after which a bullet strikes nearby. He realizes that an enemy sniper is on a roof just across the **street**, under cover.

An enemy armored car comes down the **street** and the sniper wishes to fire at it, but he knows his gun will not be able to damage “the gray monster.” An old woman appears on the street and talks to the man in the car, then points up at the Republican sniper’s position. The man gets out of the top of the car, ready to shoot, but the sniper shoots first, killing the man. The woman tries to run away, but the sniper fires at her and falls into the gutter, screaming.

Suddenly the enemy sniper on the other roof takes his chance and shoots the sniper. The sniper drops his rifle with a noise he thought might “wake the dead.” He can’t pick up the rifle because “his forearm was dead.” He exclaims that he is hit as blood starts oozing through the sleeve of his shirt, but he does not feel pain, just a numbness “as if the arm had been cut off.”

The beginning of the story immediately alerts the reader to the dichotomies that are present in the city: roof vs. city, Free Stater vs. Republican, students vs. fanatic. These exist side-by-side but also in tense opposition to one another. War has distorted the landscape, turned a city into a battlefield and made life used to death.



In war, even the slightest choices, like choosing to light a cigarette, take on big significance as they can lead to death. The sniper here takes the risk, and is lucky not to get killed (though perhaps one could also argue that perhaps the other sniper is just not quite skillful enough).



The armored car is depicted as a kind of unnatural beast in the city street, again highlighting how war has distorted this world. The sniper now must kill or be killed: he cannot think. That he must kill the woman—who has informed on his position and might warn someone else were he to let her live—too shows how war blurs the line between soldiers and non-combatants, between innocence and complicity.



One event leads to the other, and though the sniper saves himself from the man in the armored car and the old woman, this act makes him vulnerable and leads to him being shot in the arm. His numbed reaction to his wound, along with the descriptively powerful portrayal of it, reflects his attempt to deal with his pain first in order to deal with the enemy second: if he lets himself feel the pain, he might get killed and never feel anything again. His arm feels like it is cut in two in a kind of literal division between body and mind, life and death.



The sniper rips off his sleeve and ascertains that the bullet has lodged in his bone. He pours some iodine, a mild antiseptic, over his wound, and tries to withstand the terrible burning pain of it over the wound. In the **street**, the two corpses are immobile. The sniper realizes he needs a plan to escape, but he's sure the enemy sniper has any escape route covered. He therefore has to kill his enemy, but because of the gunshot to his arm he can only use his revolver, not his rifle.

After putting his cap over the muzzle of his rifle, the sniper pushes the rifle over the parapet as if edging forward to shoot. The enemy sniper takes the bait, shooting the cap. The sniper lets the rifle and his hand hang over as if he is dead, eventually letting the rifle fall onto the **street** as he pretends to sink back onto the roof. The enemy sniper, tricked into thinking the Republican sniper has been killed, now stands up on the roof clearly silhouetted against the sky.

Smiling, the Republic sniper aims his revolver as his "right arm was paining him like a thousand devils." His aim is steady even as "his hand trembled with eagerness." He fires and his shot hits the enemy sniper, and the sniper peers "across and uttered a cry of joy" as the man "was slowly falling forward as if in a dream". Finally the enemy sniper's "body turned over and over in space" and "lay still" on the **street** below.

Suddenly, looking at his dead enemy, the sniper has a change of heart. "The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse." He has been "weakened" by his long day, the ongoing battle, his hunger, and he is "revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy." Talking to himself, he curses the war, himself, and everybody.

Caring for his wounds, the sniper wills himself to get over his pain so that he may think rationally about an escape route. The two corpses seem to be a reminder for the sniper of the fate that might befall him if he is not ingenious enough or is too slow. He does not feel remorse at the people he has killed because he cannot: he is in too much pain and must concentrate on protecting himself.



Here the sniper proves himself to be an ingenious soldier, one who masters physical pain and outsmart his enemy. Why the enemy soldier stands up is a question to consider: sure, he thinks he has killed his enemy, but standing in such a way still seems like a risky act. But in some ways not any more risky than the Republican sniper's earlier decision to light a cigarette.



Once again, the pain the sniper feels does not stop him from managing to effectively and swiftly remove his enemy. The fervor of war and the competition between the sniper's makes the Republican sniper feel a surge of joy at killing, at winning. He has survived, and he has outwitted his enemy. Meanwhile the description of the enemy sniper's falling body accentuates its lifelessness, accentuates that war involves the taking of life.



Now that the adrenaline of battle leaves the sniper, he realizes his own human feelings: hunger, disgust, remorse, and anger. He cannot so easily live with his single-minded goal of killing, or the justifications for the war, or even people who wage wars, now that his life is not threatened. War has created an us vs. them that the sniper must abide by in his effort to survive, but when he is not in a survive or die situation he once again is aware of the complexities of life, and the preciousness of life.



The sniper throws his revolver “with an oath.” It fires, but doesn’t hit him, though the shock “frightened [him] back to his senses.” He drinks all the whisky from his flask, and decides to find his commander, to report. Going downstairs, he does not believe there is much danger, since everything is quiet. When he reaches the **street**, though, he feels “a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed.” He wonders whether he knew him, whether the man “had been in his own company before the split in the army.”

Taking another risk, the sniper crosses the **street**. There is suddenly heavy firing near him, and he runs across the street with machine gun firing behind him, until he throws himself down against the enemy sniper’s corpse, in effect again successfully pretending to be dead to save himself. Having escaped immediate danger, “then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his **brother’s** face.”

The sniper is suddenly frustrated by the war, but the firing of the gun when he throws it signals that he can’t just leave the war: he is stuck in it; guns will fire, and at him, whether or not he believes in the war. He does not abandon the war, and instead decides to meet the formal demands of soldiery—he will go report to his commander. Yet before he does he is overcome by a basic human emotion and need: curiosity and the desire to know another. He starts to imagine a world before the Civil War, when the split in the army had not yet occurred, and all soldiers were in it together. He wonders at a common humanity with the soldier he killed.



The sniper is not done fighting: he runs at the moment of danger and ingeniously hides among the enemy’s sniper’s body for protection. When he manages to satisfy his curiosity about the identity of the enemy sniper he suddenly has a revelation that is pure a chance as any: the sniper is his brother. O’Flaherty means this both figuratively and literally: the full cost of the war—a rupture of both families and the nation of Ireland in this Irish Civil War—becomes clear, and the reader is forced to see that beyond the question of who wins this war, the war’s real test will be whether the sniper, or Ireland, is able to persevere past the profound breakage of family and nation created by the war.





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