



الشعر الحديث

المرحلة الرابعة

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War Poetry

Rupert Brooke "The Soldier"

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

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Analysis

1If I should die, think only this of me(3-1) :



Contemplating his own death, the speaker, the soldier of the title, addresses the reader in the imperative: "think only this of me." The effect is emotional, creating a sense of immediacy and establishing the speaker's romantic attitude toward death in the line of duty. He suggests the reader should not mourn: whichever "corner of a foreign field" becomes the soldier's grave will also become "forever England." Thus, the soldier will not only have died for his country; he will have left a monument to it in a foreign land, figuratively transforming foreign soil to English soil.

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is forever England. There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed(5-4) ;

The suggestion that English "dust" must be "richer" than foreign "earth" might seem chauvinistic to present-day readers. Still, it represents a real attitude that compelled the English people to explore and colonize the globe throughout the Victorian age. An alternate reading might infer that the "dust" is richer simply because it is what remains of a human being. Yet in the following line the speaker suggests that the soldier, like all his countrymen, derives his very existence from England—his life, his form, and his intelligence. England is thus personified as a mother to the soldier. His love of England, and his willingness to sacrifice himself for it, is equivalent to a son's love for his mother.

5 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware ,

Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam(8-6) ,

Brooke, is a member of the "Georgian" movement, named after King George V who ascended to England's throne in 1910. In addition to their traditional techniques—such as the use of the sonnet form—the Georgian



poets were characterized by their frequent meditations on the English countryside. These lines typify the Georgian view of nature's significance. England's "flowers," "her ways to roam," and "English air" all represent part of the speaker's identity. In the final line of the stanza, nature takes on a religious significance for the speaker. He is "washed by the rivers," suggesting the purification of baptism, and "blest by the sun of home." This exalted language directs the reader toward the second stanza, the sestet, in which the physical is left behind in favor of the spiritual.

A body of England's, breathing English air ,

Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home .

And think, this heart, all evil shed away(11-9) ,

The "heart" or the spirit, as opposed to the "dust" or the body in the first stanza, is now transformed by death. All earthly "evil" is "shed away." Here the poem takes on its major theme: once the speaker has died, his soul gives back to England everything that England has given it—in other words, everything that the speaker has become. In the octave, England is personified as a mother, bearing life. In the sestet, England takes on the role of a heavenly creator, a part of the "eternal mind" of God. In this way, dying for England gains the status of religious martyrdom. The speaker equates it to dying for God, which in religious terms promises redemption. It is therefore the most desirable of all fates.

10 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less

Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day (14-12) ;



And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

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Themes

1. Death

The very first thing the speaker of "The Soldier" talks about is his own death. Throughout the first stanza, he talks about himself as "dust," a word that makes us immediately think of funerals, death, and corpses. Good times! Death almost seems inevitable, and this despite the fact that speaker says "If" in the very first line! We're used to thinking of death as scary, but the speaker imagines a life after death that seems, at the very least, peaceful and familiar.

2. Warfare

The poem is called "The Soldier," so naturally it's about... war. Unlike many other famous World War I-era poems, however, Brooke paints a more optimistic picture. The soldier's possible death is mentioned, yes, but so is a blissful life after death. Moreover, the poem celebrates the fact that the soldier's death will give England another "corner" of land. So, for the speaker, all this warfare business seems like a big win! Of course, he hasn't actually been to war just yet.

3. Patriotism

Six times! That's how many times the word England or English occurs in this poem. The speaker emphasizes the organic relationship between the soldier and his country—the soldier is a part of England, and England is like his mother. In doing so, he underscores the importance of fighting for that country.

4. Man and the Natural World

The speaker of "The Soldier" is very closely linked to the natural world. He returns to the earth when he dies (in the form of dust). And, as a child, he was "washed" and "blest" by the rivers and suns of his homeland. The



natural world, it seems, plays a big role in our development as human beings, perhaps an even bigger role than our parents.

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Wilfred Owen "Strange Meeting"

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. . . .”

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Summary

The speaker escapes from battle and proceeds down a long tunnel through ancient granite formations. Along his way he hears the groan of sleepers, either dead or too full of thoughts to get up. As he looks at them one leaps up; the soldier has recognized him and moves his hands as if to bless him. Because of the soldier's "dead smile" the speaker knows that he is in Hell.

On the face of the "vision" the speaker sees a thousand fears, but the blood, guns, or moans of above did not reach into their subterranean retreat. The speaker tells the soldier that there is no reason to mourn, and he replies that there is – it is the "undone years" and "hopelessness". The soldier says his hope is the same as the speaker's; he also tells him he once went hunting for beauty in the world, but that beauty made a mockery of time. He knows the truth of what he did, which is "the pity of war, the pity war distilled", but now he can never share it.

The soldier/vision continues, saying men will go on with what is left to them, or they will die as well. They will not break their ranks even though "nations trek from progress". He used to have courage and wisdom. He would wash the blood from the wheels of chariots. He wanted to pour his spirit out, but not in war.

Finally, he says to the speaker that "I am the enemy you killed, my friend," and that he knew him in the dark. It was yesterday that the speaker "jabbed and killed" him, and now it is time to sleep.

Analysis

"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. T.S. Eliot referred to "Strange Meeting" as a "technical achievement of great originality" and "one of the most moving pieces of verse inspired by the war." That war, of course, is WWI – the central element in all poems in Owen's relatively small oeuvre. The poet Ted Hughes noted in his writings on "Strange Meeting": "few poets can ever have written with such urgent, defined, practical purpose".

The poem is renowned for its technical innovation, particularly the pararhyme, so named by Edmund Bluson in regard to Owen's use of assonant endings. A pararhyme is a slant or partial rhyme in which the words have similar consonants before and after unlike vowels – escaped and scooped, groaned and grained, hair and hour. Almost all of the end lines in this poem are pararhyme; the last line is a notable exception. Critics have noted how this rhyme scheme adds to the melancholy, subterranean, and bleak atmosphere of the poem.

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. There is more than meets the eye, however, and many critics believe that the man in hell is the soldier's "Other", or his double. A man's encounter with his double is a common trope in Romantic literature; the device was used by Shelley, Dickens, and Yeats, among others. The critic Dominic Hibbard notes the poem does not "[present] war as a merely internal, psychological conflict – but neither is it concerned with the immediate divisions suggested by 'German' and 'conscript' [initially what the dead man calls himself] or 'British' and 'volunteer'." The dead man is the Other, but he is more than a reflection of the speaker - he is a soldier whose death renders his status as an enemy void. Another critic reads the poem as a dream vision, with the soldier descending into his mind and encountering his poetic self, the poem becoming a mythological and psychological journey. Finally, Elliot B. Gose, Jr. writes that "the Other...represents the narrator's unconscious, his primal self from which he has been alienated by war".



The style of the poem was influenced by several sources. "Strange Meeting" echoes Dante's pitying recognition of the tortured faces in Hell, the underworld of Landor's Gebir, and, of course, Keats and Shelley. Owen was an ardent admirer of both Romantic poets, whose *The Fall of Hyperion* and *The Revolt of Islam*, respectively, were no doubt instructive to Owen as he composed his own work. *The Fall of Hyperion* features the goddess of memory revealing her dying but immortal face and her blank eyes, allowing the poet to grasp her monumental knowledge of wars and heroes past. The emphasis in Owen's work on truth and dreams also resonates of Keats.'

The title of the poem, however, may be taken directly from Shelley's work: "And one whose spear had pierced me, leaned beside, / With quivering lips and humid eyes; - and all / Seemed like some brothers on a journey wide / Gone forth, whom now strange meeting did befall / In a strange land." In *The Revolt of Islam*, Laon tells his soldiers not to avenge themselves on the enemy who has massacred their camp but to ask them to throw down their arms and embrace their shared humanity. The two sides gather together in the "strange meeting".

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Themes

1. Reconciliation

The key theme of the poem is the need for reconciliation. Owen uses his poetry as a way of expressing his philosophy about the pity of war and 'the truth untold' (line twenty four). Owen introduces the idea of the greater love essential to wash the world clean with truth .



Hunting wild after the wildest beauty in the world l.17 is another theme which Owen explores. His search for beauty and truth was inspired by his reading of Keats:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all

Ye know on earth and all ye need to know.

This quotation from Ode to a Grecian Urn inspired a younger Wilfred Owen but was replaced in his later years by the philosophy and prophecy he puts into the mouth of the strange friend .

2. The future

Owen foresees a post-war period with the world changed for the worse by war. He expresses his fear that:

Men will go content with what we spoiled l.26

-that they will accept the shattered world as the norm. The alternative will be 'discontent' and further regression into 'this retreating world' - a frightening (and accurate) prediction of events.

3. The power of poetry

In order to halt this course of events, Owen, through the strange friend, explores ways in which poetry and pity can restore the human spirit. The poet has the courage, mystery, wisdom and mastery to stop 'the trek from progress' l.28. When the flight can go no further and the nations retreat into 'vain citadels' l.33; when 'much blood had clogged their chariot wheels' l.34, the poet will 'wash them from sweet wells' and reveal 'truths that lie too deep for taint' l.36. In order to achieve this, Owen - the poet, the strange friend, the Christ figure - 'would have poured my spirit without stint.' l.37.



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[Wilfred Owen: "Parable of the Old Man and the Young"](#)

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
and builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.



Summary

Abram rises, chops the wood, taking fire and a knife with him. Father and son journey together, and Isaac, the first-born, asks, as he has observed



the preparations, where the lamb is for the burnt offering. Abram binds his son and builds up the earthen walls and trenches. He holds the knife out to slay his son. Suddenly an angel from heaven calls out and tells him not to touch his son. There is a ram caught by its horns in a thicket and Abram should use this "Ram of Pride" instead. The old man decides not to use the ram and slays his son instead; he then slays half of Europe's young men, "one by one."

Analysis

"Parable of the Old Man and the Young", one of the poems that appears in Benjamin Britten's War Requiem, takes the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac and gives it new vitality and resonance in the context of the First World War. It was published posthumously by Siegfried Sassoon in 1920 in Owen's collected poems. Owen wrote this poem sometime in early 1918 and sent it to the poet Osbert Sitwell. Sitwell had written a poem entitled "The Modern Abraham" where Abraham is a wealthy arms manufacturer who prides himself on having sent off one of his sons to fight and die, and says he would gladly send his ten other sons to fight as well. Owen may have been influenced by this work.

The poem is written in iambic pentameter but uses blank verse rather than traditional rhyme. This metre gives the poem its solemn, preachy quality; it is intended to be a parable and surely succeeds as one. Owen's customary pararhyme pops up here as well ("together, father"). The poem does a good job of hewing to a narrative flow even though it possesses an irregular sound pattern. The language is closest to the text from the King James Version of the Bible.

In the biblical version (Genesis 1-19), Abram takes his son Isaac up into the mountains and prepares his sacrifice. It is to be Isaac, and Abram is anguished. He is just about to take his son's life in order to fulfill God's command when an angel appears and tells him to stay his hand. A ram caught in a nearby thicket is sacrificed instead. In Owen's poem, there are a few modern touches that ground it in the context of WWI. Abram builds "parapets and trenches" and holds Isaac down with "straps and belts".



Where the poem most markedly deviates from the biblical story is when the angel instructs Abram to sacrifice the "Ram of Pride" instead of Isaac, but the old man slays his son anyway and then, in one of the most memorable and disconcerting lines in Owen's oeuvre, also slays "half the seed of Europe, one by one."

It is commonly assumed that Abram stands for the rulers of Europe and Isaac is a typical soldier, representative of all the young men slaughtered so such rulers could play out their games of conquest. Rather than slay their own pride, the military machine sacrificed the next generation. Owen's poem may be traditional in its structure, but the seething commentary is certainly not ambiguous. Scholar Andrew Gates writes, "Owen's poem is not one of idealized glory and divine mystery, but an account of true and bitter reality of his day".

The poem also points to perhaps a different conception of God than Owen had previously expressed in other poems. The angel, the mouthpiece of God, orders Abram to stop. It is clear that Abram defies God and continues his warmongering. God here is much different than the God of "Soldier's Dream", in which the Archangel Michael repairs weapons destroyed by Jesus in the quest for peace. Owen's perversion of a biblical story also serves to contradict the glory and justification of the nobility of war, cloaked in what Owen called "false creed".

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Theme

In The Parable of the Old Man and the Young inhumanity is the main theme. The 'old' leaders of nations made willing sacrifices of their 'young' for the sake of maintaining their own military and political status. The understandable fear and confusion of the innocent sacrifices on the Western front, represented by Isaac, contrasts to the arrogance (and safety) of those who send them.

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