

Q. Discuss Owen's Attitude to War as Revealed in "Strange Meeting".

"My subject is war, and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity"

– Wilfred Owen.

INTRODUCTION: "Strange Meeting", the most forceful of Owen's imaginative statements of war experience, has won for him a 'passport to immortality' for its freshness and brevity. War is organized brutality. Because of war, men retreat from their material progress and civilization. The poem no doubt highlights the horrors of war. It is also to ascertain eternal truths of love, amity and good will. Nevertheless, his decisions collapse because of the sudden termination of life. The poem strange meeting is an imaginative recreation of a supposed happening after death or even a process in the imagination of a living man after death. It is a vivid experience.

THEME: 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.

DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT: 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 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. In the poem, the 'other' mourns because of the waste of his years:

"Courage was mine, and I had mystery,

Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery

Perhaps he would have been able to undo the destruction brought about by the war, wash the blood-clogged wheels of the chariots with truth drawn from the unpolluted spring-well of our heart which is finest and deepest in the human spirit.

To miss the march of this retreating world

Into vain citadels that are not walled".

The 'other' soldiers, Owen's mirrored self who takes part in war kills and become killed – underlines the fact that while participating in a war, every young soldier sacrifices the possibilities of a noble achievement for pursuing a vain, inhuman, disastrous end.

CONCLUSION: Thus, with a frank realism, free from the violent bitterness of so much of Sassoon's poetry, Owen set out to present the whole reality of war – the boredom, the hopelessness, the futility, the horror, occasionally the courage and self – sacrifice, but, above all, the pity of it. In addition, never has the pity of war been more deeply felt or more powerfully shown in any other poem than "Strange Meeting".