

"Membangun Budaya Literasi yang Bermutu melalui Kajian Isu Mutakhir"

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## War Effects on Soldiers and Society Life in "The Sniper" (1923) by Liam O'flaherty

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### ABSTRAK

Perang adalah masalah kemanusiaan yang terjadi karena perselisihan dan bisa terjadi di mana saja. Perang tidak hanya berlaku antar negara, namun juga dapat terjadi antar warga negara dalam suatu negara, seperti Perang Saudara Irlandia yang menyebabkan terbentuknya dua kubu, *Free State* dan *Republic* seperti yang diceritakan dalam cerita pendek Liam O'Flaherty yang berjudul "The Sniper". Melalui latarnya, cerita ini secara tidak langsung menggambarkan dampak negatif bagi para tentara dan lingkungan tempat tinggal masyarakat di era perang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan dari M. H. Abrams mengenai salah satu teori sastra yang berbasis teks, yaitu teori objektif. Ia berpendapat bahwa teori objektif melihat unsur intrinsik dari karya sastra, seperti latar. Ini adalah elemen yang membangun karya sastra itu sendiri tanpa menghubungkannya dengan penulis, pembaca, atau alam semesta. Hal ini dapat dilihat dalam "The Sniper"; penulis berfokus pada pengembangan suasana yang menegangkan yang berkaitan dengan Perang Saudara Irlandia. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa masalah mental seperti kecemasan, masalah kepercayaan, dan perasaan bersalah terjadi pada para tentara yang diakibatkan perang tersebut, serta perubahan besar-besaran dalam kehidupan sosial lingkungan masyarakat yang menjadi lebih suram karena pengawasan ketat para tentara. Perang saudara merupakan hal yang paling ironis di mana masyarakat harus melawan kerabat yang memiliki perbedaan tujuan, yang pada akhirnya memperparah perpecahan dan melemahkan persatuan. Hal ini membuktikan bahwa perang bukanlah cara yang baik untuk menyelesaikan masalah karena semua orang yang terlibat di dalamnya mengalami berbagai dampak negatif.

Kata kunci: perang, masalah mental, latar, cerita pendek

### ABSTRACT

War is a humanitarian issue that occurs due to disagreement and happens anywhere. War does not only apply between countries but can also arise between citizens within a country, such as the Irish Civil War, which led to the formation of two camps, *Free State* and *Republic*, as told in Liam O'Flaherty's short story entitled "The Sniper." Through its setting, this story indirectly illustrates negative impacts on both the soldiers and the environment where people live in the war era. The current study employed M. H. Abrams' approach on one of the literary theories based on text, that is, objective theory. He argues that the objective theory is looking at the intrinsic element of the literature, such as setting. It is the element that builds the literary work itself without connecting it to the writer, reader, or to the universe. It can be seen in "The Sniper" that the author focuses on developing a tense atmosphere related to the Irish Civil War. The results show that mental problems such as anxiety, trust issues, and feelings of guilt occur in soldiers as a result of the war, as well as massive changes in the social life of the community environment, which became bleaker due to the close surveillance of soldiers. Civil wars are the most ironic, where people have to fight relatives who have disagreements, which

in turn exacerbates divisions and weakens unity. This proves that war is not a good way to solve a problem since everyone involved in it experiences various negative effects.

Keywords: war, mental problems, setting, short story

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## INTRODUCTION

War is referred to as a conflict between political groups involving enmities of major scale and duration (Frankel, 2024). War has been a violent tragedy for humanity since it can really destroy all aspects of life, such as social and mental conditions. The effects of war were not only felt by the civilian population but also by soldiers who were directly involved in the battlefield. As stated in "War and Society" by Upeniece (2016), war is negatively perceived as a phenomenon that shatters people's peaceful lives and dramatically affects their lives. Those who witness war may develop mental issues such as anxiety and form feelings of guilt.

"The Sniper" (1923) by Liam O'Flaherty delivers us a story of the Irish Civil War, which is set in 1922–1923 because of differences in Anglo-Irish Treaty approval between the Free State (the party that wanted to have self-governing dominion within the British Commonwealth) and Republicans (the side that wanted to separate from the British monarch). This story is based on a historical event during the Battle of Dublin. The sniper, as the main character who was a Republican, provides us with what the war looks like from his perspective. He was steady on the rooftop in quiet Dublin, and out of a sense of caution and anxiety about being counterattacked, he shot another soldier from the Free State side who turned out to be his own brother in the end. This scene shows us how war really messed up the sniper's peace and traits.

This provides an exploration of how war impacts people's sense of well-being, particularly mental health and interpersonal relationships. It is important to emphasize the negative impacts of that period's war on society, especially problems with trust, guilt, anxiety disorders, and other issues. Additionally, to raise consciousness about the invisible costs of war, outside of physical destruction, including emotional, psychological, and social damage, encourage empathy for those affected and grow a broader understanding of the difficulties of war.

This paper analysis has differences from the previous study. This paper takes a different approach compared to Malesevic's (2020) study, which highlights soldiers' dread based on their personal experiences and employs direct

observation and interviews in order to examine the psychological effects of war on troops. Her study researched factors that were associated with anxiety and depression in a sample of 1,560 US Marines deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. Multiple factors appeared as significantly associated with depression and anxiety: combat exposure, attitudes toward leadership, deployment-related stressors, and symptoms of mild traumatic brain injury. In addition, the other study of Singer (2004) explores the psychological struggles faced by Vietnam War veterans who were involved in violence. It highlights their struggles with shame, guilt, and other moral injury, including self-hatred, which all contribute to heavy emotional and psychological distress, as well as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Singer argues that psychotherapy should encourage veterans to openly voice their regrets, as dealing with guilt and gaining self-acceptance are crucial steps in their healing.

This research is to enhance comprehension of the negative effects of war by focusing on two primary areas: the effect on the main character and the broader impacts on society at large. Thus, there will be more concern for the victims and soldiers of the war. This research foregrounds literary empathy, which is the use of fiction to humanize the psychological and social disadvantages of war, developing a deeper emotional connection, focusing solely on the setting and narrative elements in Liam O'Flaherty's short story. It also connects the micro-level (individual impact), such as the sniper's internal struggle, with the macro-level (societal impact), such as cultural decay and social division.

## METHOD

In this story analysis, M. H. Abrams' objective theory is used as the basis for analyzing the setting of the short story "The Sniper" (1923). Objective theory, according to M.H. Abrams, is an approach to literary criticism that focuses on the work itself, where we view the text separately from the external context, meaning that we analyze and understand a literary work based only on the elements in the text itself, without seeing or considering external factors such as the author's background, the historical situation when the text was written, or the reader's

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reactions and interpretations. This theory states that a literary work is considered an independent work, where it must be analyzed through the internal elements within the literary work. In the context of this research, the main object of analysis is the setting element, which includes descriptions of place, time, and atmosphere in the story "The Sniper." Based on the perspective of the sniper who is the center of the story, this objective theory has a role in which the story revolves not only around the internal conflict felt by the sniper, but also the impact of the war on the social environment of the community, which is depicted through the description of the setting, which is widely mentioned. All interpretations of the intrinsic elements must be based on the evidence presented in the work. All interpretations of intrinsic elements must be based on the evidence in the work. As an example of application, the objective approach focuses on analyzing how a conflict and setting in a literary work can influence the development of the characters.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Since the setting of "The Sniper" (1923) is about war, some explanations were found to support the point of the setting. War becomes the main setting in the literary work since the content shows the impact of war on the peace of individuals and their environment, solely due to differences in political interests, such as what happened in Ireland. The analysis brings to the fore the immense psychological and social impact of war, as displayed through the story of a Republican sniper during the Irish Civil War. Key findings include:

1. Impact on soldiers:
  - a. Trust Issues: Snipers' wariness and distrust of others, including civilians, highlight how war erases the capability to trust. This is evident in the sniper's instinctual action to shoot at the visible enemy without hesitation.
  - b. Guilt: The Sniper suffered deep regret at the realization that he had killed his own brother, depicting the moral injury caused by actions during the war.
  - c. Anxiety Disorder: Symptoms such as trembling hands and compulsive behaviors, such as smoking to relieve anxiety, reflect the psychological impact of continual danger and high-stress environments.

### 2. Impact on Society:

- a. Social Fragmentation: The war made a deep divide within Irish society, separating communities and even families due to the contrasting political ideologies (Free State vs. Republican supporters).
- b. Cultural and Environmental Damage: Dublin's vibrant culture and urban life were affected. Streets became hazardous, public spaces were left deserted, and citizens lived in fear under the watch of the army.
- c. Long-term Trauma: The war left lasting psychological and social scars, including community distrust and isolation.

## Discussion

### *Inner problems of the sniper*

Liam O'Flaherty's "The Sniper" (1923) depicts a sniper character during the Irish Civil War. From the story, we learn that war forces soldiers to be prepared to face life-threatening situations. This has a profound psychological impact on soldiers, one of which is the erosion of their trust in others. In psychological studies, Rotter defined trust as an individual's tendency to believe in others (McKnight et al., 2001). Trust is associated with being honest, showing integrity, and demonstrating care in communication, which strengthens positive connections between those involved (Mayer et al., 1995). In this story, the sniper faced the enemy alone, and this situation eroded their trust in others. Having trust issues means mistrusting that others do not have the ability or integrity to provide someone's needs in a situation (Stephen, 2006). Individuals with trust issues tend to feel unsafe relying on the actions, words, or decisions of others and often believe that others intentionally act in ways that could harm them (Lewicki & Weithoff, 2000). In the midst of the sniper being alone in facing a threatening war, they can only rely on and trust their own defense and vigilance, entirely with instinct and the weapons they possess, and immediately shoot someone they consider an enemy without hesitation rather than having to wait to see whether or not the opponent will attack. It can be seen from the scene:

"The turret opened. A man's [from the Free State side] head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 1).

The idea of trusting and depending on others on the battlefield can be frightening, as it involves life or death as well as victory or defeat. We know that on the battlefield, soldiers will always face uncertainty and the presence of unexpected enemies, or those who disguise themselves as allies. There are many enemies in disguise; these are the things that trigger their trust issues.

"She [informant civilian woman] began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. An informer." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 1).

Soldiers are also required to be vigilant towards civilians who may potentially collaborate with the enemy. Deception and betrayal in war are not uncommon and often occur, leading soldiers to always be on guard and wary of the loyalty of those around them.

In this story, *The Sniper*, as the main character, showed other possible effects of the war on him, especially the impact on his inner self. The second thing we found was the guilty feeling of the sniper. Robertson (1994) argues that "Guilt is an uncomfortable feeling resulting from the commission or contemplation of a specific act contrary to one's internalized standards of conduct; it requires reparative action for the harm done to another to alleviate the uncomfortable feeling (distress)" (p. 8). When a person considers that their actions have disrupted personal moral norms and have caused damage to others, guilt arises (Aurelien & Melody, 2019). The most impactful analytical reports are highly polarized in their insights into the behavior of soldiers in the warzone. For some experts, humans are "programmed for violence," thus, they are more likely to kill other humans if necessary for survival (Martin, 2018; Pinker, 2011 as cited in Malešević, 2020).

Furthermore, while shame and guilt are similar in many ways, soldiers frequently experience shame when they murder innocent civilians. In reality, they are distinct from one another and have to do with various psychological problems. Guilt links the soldier to his sadistic behavior, but the sense of shame stems from the self-understanding that a soldier did not live by the norms and did not fulfill his duties well. Being witness to the killing and dying is often connected to strong feelings, including sadness, horror, anger, fear, disgust, or panic (Bourke, 2000, as cited in Malešević, 2020).

"He [the Republican sniper] became bitten by remorse. He revolted at the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy [the Free State sniper]." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 2).

After a battle, a soldier's shame might drive him to live in the shadows, while guilt distorts his hostility to himself. "He [the Republican sniper] began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 2). Shey (2014) and Litz et al. (2009, as cited in Malešević (2020)), found that killing on the battlefield is traumatic and distressing for most people. They created the term "moral injury," a type of cognitive dissonance that entails a major moral violation that leads to feelings of anxiety, shame, or guilt. It is where individuals encounter a dissonance between their moral beliefs and the actions they are obligated to take based on the commands of a legitimate authority.

Besides experiencing trust issues and guilt, the sniper also experienced anxiety disorder. Constant news about war, carrying out risky missions and tasks, and terrible human suffering and destruction can trigger significant anxiety since war is the situation where people kill each other, including soldiers, who must be on guard all the time and always cautious. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the disorder most clearly linked with combat exposure (Dohrenwend et al., 2007, as cited in Booth-Kewley, 2012); combat exposure also causes high levels of anxiety. The definition of anxiety is a mental condition typified by an apprehension, worry, or intense sense of tension about unpleasant things that are possible in the future; it is described as a more momentary response to unfavorable situations (Saviola, Pappaianni, Monti, 2020).

Feeling anxious is a normal reaction to pressure and stress, and soldiers may experience anxiety for a variety of reasons. It could be caused by pressure on the battlefield or by a past event, like a traumatic experience in combat or military training. In this story, *The Sniper* indeed had an unpleasant experience seeing many people die painfully in the Irish Civil War. The trait that showed the sniper had anxiety was when he shot another sniper from the Free State side:

"He [the Republican sniper] took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and fired. He was almost deafened with the report, and his arm shook with the recoil." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 2)

From what can be seen from *The Sniper*, the most common symptoms of anxiety can involve hands, arms, and possibly the whole body shaking or trembling, depending on the level of the anxiety. This happens when the body's natural response to fight is triggered or activated

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in response to perceived danger. When the response is triggered, it causes an increase in the stress hormone adrenaline, which activates nerves and muscles, preparing the body to flee or even attack. Anxiety is also connected to fear and manifests as a future-oriented state of mood made up of a complex system of physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses associated with preparing for anticipated circumstances that are considered a threat (O'Sullivan & O'Donnell, 2022). Besides trembling hands, we assume that when The Sniper smoked, it could be a clue he had anxiety.

"He [the Republican sniper] paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a smoke. It was dangerous. The flash might be seen in the darkness, and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk. Placing a cigarette between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly and put out the light." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 1)

In addition, the act of smoking shows that the sniper needed something to relieve himself from anxiety in the middle of the war's chaos. Evidence indicates that individuals with heightened anxiety are more likely to smoke (Brown et al., 1996, as cited in Moylan et al., 2013). However, nicotine inside a cigarette only creates an immediate sense of relaxation; thus, people smoke in the belief that it reduces anxiety. It reduces withdrawal symptoms, yet in fact, it does not reduce anxiety or deal with the reasons someone may feel that way and start to use the cigarette as a form of self-treatment. The sniper used this since he was alone on the rooftop, and he had to handle his anxiety alone by smoking, which he may consider self-treatment.

### ***Effects of the war on society's life***

War, in the context of international armed conflict, is the use of armed force by the two conflicting parties against each other, either starting with a declaration of war or without a declaration of war (Achtar, 2017). In a broader sense, war is related to concepts such as crisis, guerrilla action accompanied by violence, occupation, threat, conquest, and terror. War situations will certainly cause many losses to the perpetrators of the war themselves, as well as adverse effects on the environment and social interactions where the war occurs.

Referring to the story of "The Sniper," the same thing happened to the city of Dublin. Before the war, Dublin was a bustling city with a lot of culture and entertainment. However, by 1922, Dublin was experiencing very dynamic and often tense times, especially as it coincided with the period of the Irish War of Independence (1919–

1921) and the beginning of the Irish Civil War (1922–1923).

A night in Dublin in 1922; the usually bustling streets are now quieter, with fewer people venturing out after dark, as shown in the sentence, "In the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet." (O'Flaherty, 1923, pp. 3). There were many pubs in Dublin; however, pubs there that are usually full of laughter and music are quieter, with patrons speaking in whispers and being wary of who might be listening. Military and police patrols were often seen, creating a tense atmosphere on streets lit by gas or car lamps. It showed from the scene when an armored car slowly crossed the bridge, advanced up the street, and came to a stop fifty yards ahead on the opposite side (O'Flaherty, 1923).

Some areas were dark and abandoned, deemed too dangerous to pass through. The sound of footsteps echoed through the stone streets, and every little sound magnified in the silent, cautious night. Theaters and cinemas remained open, but with smaller audiences, many of whom had come to forget for a moment the political tensions engulfing the city. Overall, in 1922, Dublin's evenings were filled with tension and uncertainty, with a cautious public facing a politically and socially turbulent time of transition. This is the result of how war really brings massive effects and destruction to countless societies due to the destructive power of weaponry (Milward, 1977).

In addition to the changing atmosphere of Dublin, the social interactions of the Dublin community also changed. It was divided into several communities between supporters and opponents of the agreement. The agreement in question was the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which included a number of important points that underpinned the relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK) and the foundations for the Irish Free State. There were machine guns and rifles sporadically breaking the night's silence, echoing the chaos of the civil war between Republicans and Free Staters (O'Flaherty, 1923). Based on the data, the separation of the two regions due to the war also created a gap in social life, which then started a silent society; the thing that might be the reason is because the Free State was primarily backed by a coalition of groups, including the middle class, large farmers, merchants, employers, 'big business' professionals, remnants of the Anglo-Irish gentry, and various 'establishment' like the press, the church, and local governing bodies. On the contrary, the strongest support was

assumed for the Republicans among small tenant farmers, agricultural laborers, and the 'land-hungry,' as well as the 'intellectuals' in the urban petty bourgeoisie. While the more affluent and influential members of Irish society favored renewed peace, political stability, and continued economic ties with the Empire, the less fortunate and marginalized segments of society believed that a full-scale revolution could lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth and power (Foster, 2015). Because of that, people of Ireland decided to break away from UK rule since the native Irish were often discriminated against; however, some Irish immigrants still agreed to remain under UK rule. It caused conflict and tension in society, including in families. Some family members chose to run away from home or emigrate and evacuate from Dublin. Such incidents are caused by the destruction of physical infrastructure, such as buildings and roads, resulting in the remaining civilians living in unsafe buildings without clean water, sewerage, or electricity and basically dirty. Wars of different types and intensities can bring about distinct migration paths, and, in certain cases, there is no migration altogether, but otherwise, inadvertent immobility (Lubkemann, 2008, as cited in Pegna, 2012). War zones can turn previously thriving neighborhoods into slums. There were also people who were traumatized by the war and closed themselves and their access to social interaction.

From the explanations above, some information is gained about the impacts of the Irish Civil War, creating tension and social upheaval, often leading to conflict. It destroys communities and families, hindering social life development (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). It is also involving soldiers who also end up experiencing the changes and adverse effects of war on themselves.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it is concluded that war is damaging to everyone who is victimized as well as to those who are involved, such as the sniper in this story. The effects of war, as mentioned above, are not limited to the Irish Civil War but can occur in war in any era. In addition to physical and environmental damage, war causes major effects such as mental and moral problems, which can be fatal and affect people's and soldiers' lives. On the other hand, it also shows that a soldier can also feel mental problems, as the impact is like any other human being. Overall, the adverse impacts of war are complex and touch almost every aspect of human life, and the effects can be prolonged. Therefore, peace and conflict resolution efforts

should be prioritized to prevent war and reduce the suffering caused by armed violence.

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