
War Tearing Families Apart in Dorris Lessing's *The Sniper* and Frank O'Connor's *My Oedipus Complex*

The Sniper by Dorris Lessing and *My Oedipus Complex* by Frank O'Connor both contain the theme of how war tears families apart. The theme is conveyed through irony, though in *The Sniper* irony is only obvious at the conclusion, whereas irony is present throughout *My Oedipus Complex*.

In *The Sniper*, irony is slowly built up and amplified through the characterisation of the Russian Sniper in the story. The characterisation of the Republican sniper was cold-blooded and professional. As he was about to kill his enemy, he 'smiled', showing his pleasure in the enemy's death which showcases his cold-bloodedness and lack of emotions. This has a stark contrast to the shock he receives as he recognised his enemy, looking 'into his brother's face'. The irony is thus significant as it shows how war can turn brother against brother, shattering families, tearing them apart. The sniper had taken great joy in killing his own brother, which also demonstrates the irony, further emphasizing the significance of irony in the theme of war tearing families apart.

The sniper was also characterised as professional, as despite being shot in his arm, he still felt 'no pain – just a deadened sensation'. He continued plotting a plan despite his injury and the danger of the circumstances, which enhances his professionalism as he is able to think of his feet. He also braced the pain as he endured the recoil of the gun with his injured hand. However, despite his proficiency, he still did not manage to identify his brother before he shot him. This ironic effect that his proficiency is now rendered useless, even backfiring at him as he killed his own brother, again enhances the significance of irony in the theme of war tearing families apart. Foreshadowing is also used as there is a longer description of the killing of his own brother and when 'the machine gun stopped' firing as the dead enemy was about to be revealed. This foreshadowing creates suspense and highlights importance in the dead enemy, which in turn amplified the irony, boosting its significance in the theme as it demonstrates bluntly that war turns brother against brother.

Irony is also present in *My Oedipus Complex*, with the same significance on the theme of war tearing families apart. The irony in *My Oedipus Complex* is that Larry describes his father in a negative way, but in reality these negative descriptions are describing him as well. Larry insults his father, criticising how he was 'sleeping with [the mother] without the least regard for her health', but in reality, Larry is the one in the wrong for sleeping with his mother. This ironic effect shows how Larry is angry and against his father, due to the father's sudden appearance after war. This showcases the distance in the relationship between father and son during wartime, as a conflict began soon after the father returned. Thus irony is significant here in showcasing the theme of war tearing families apart, as Larry is staging a war between him and his father.

Also, instead of Larry being delighted at his father's return from war, he is angry and annoyed at his return, and wants God to 'send Daddy back to war'. Although this might be due to the immaturity of Larry, the irony is also present, showing the annoyance of Larry towards his father. The stereotype of a reunion between families after a war is of a happy and cheerful

occasion, but the irony in this case is of a dull atmosphere, full of hatred, lack of love. Thus irony is significant in My Oedipus Complex.

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