

## English 12 H

### “The Man He Killed” sample answer

“The Man He Killed” by Thomas Hardy suggests that situations change relationships; particularly, the situation of war makes men mortal enemies that might well have been friends under other circumstances. Hardy asserts this theme using a smoothly surfaced poem with a disturbing message. (To achieve his chilling effect, Hardy uses Poe’s effective combination of ordinary telling-extraordinary events.)

#### Form

The smoothness of the poem finds expression through tightly rhymed quatrains (abab) that use mostly iambic trimeter. The short lines emphasize the meter and rhyme, and the effect of these attributes alone is upbeat.

#### Theme/Gesture

Across the five stanzas of the poem, the message becomes stronger and more baldly stated; the middle stanza, beginning “I shot him dead” makes clear what’s at stake in the poem, and by stanza five, the poem is positing plainly that war is “quaint and curious” as it changes these peer relationships in such a horrible way.

#### Speaker and Occasion

The speaker is a young soldier who casually enlisted in the army. His innocence is shattered by the situation of the war.

#### Image

The setting in the poem is an imagined “ancient inn” where the speaker and his foe might have met for a drink. This place, mentioned in stanzas 1 and 5, is a main image. In stanza 2, we see the soldier and his enemy “ranged as infantry.” The contrasting images contain the theme of the poem.

#### Sound

The main sonic effects—smooth surface, conversational tone—come from the choice and deployment of the form: the already mentioned tight rhyme and meter. The pace becomes uneven in stanza 4 with the dashes, and this unevenness echoes the theme. The repetition of “foe” is important, and finds further emphasis in the internal rhyme in that line with “so.”

Overall, the formal tightness and conversational diction contrast sharply with the theme, and the result is a chilling ironic effect.