***The Man He Killed* by Thomas Hardy**

**Form**

The poem takes the form of a dramatic monologue in the voice of the returned soldier. It has five stanzas each of four lines which follow a regular metre and an ABAB rhyme scheme in each stanza. The first, second and last line of each verse is about six syllables long, while the third line is slightly longer at eight syllables. The regular metre gives the poem a ‘chatty’ tone, which helps to set the scene, as well as delaying the realisation that this is actually quite a dark poem.

The only place where the regular metre breaks down is in the fourth stanza. Dashes are used to break up the rhythm, perhaps to reflect the gradual realisation that the "enemy" soldier probably had more in common with the speaker than he may have thought.

**Structure**

The structure of the poem moves from a friendly opening to the idea that the speaker is talking about an enemy soldier, to the realisation that he is not an enemy, and finally to the last stanza which sums up the futility of war and its effect on the people who fight. This reflects the developing realisation on the part of the soldier.

# Language

The language of the poem is very simple, fitting the character of the speaker and creating a powerful anti-war message. It is written in the first person and the vocabulary suggests a local Dorset man – the word nipperkin, for example, was most widely used in the West Country. This increases the sense of the common man being the speaker, and the connection to the text for the reader.

## Imagery

In keeping with the simple form of the poem, there are no similes or metaphors. Instead the speaker imagines having met his enemy at the pub instead of on the battlefield. The image of the "ancient inn" gives the sense of a traditional British setting, and of a cosy drink, which contrasts with the reality of the shooting.

The dramatic monologue form shows the speaker imagining the back story for the man he killed. The use of the hesitant "perhaps" and the effect of the multiple dashes is to create a vivid picture of the speaker thinking and imagining without having any direct description at all.

## Sound

The poem uses a lot of repetition and parallel sentence structures to emphasise the pairings of the speaker and the man he has killed, such as "face to face" and "I shot at him as he at me". This is particularly true in the third stanza, where the repetition of the words "foe" and "because" add to the internal rhyme of "just so" to create the impression that the speaker is trying to convince himself.

# Attitudes, themes and ideas

There is a strong anti-war message in the poem. The fact that neither the speaker nor the man who has been killed is named gives it a universal feel – a sense that it could be anyone in this position.

The reasons given for killing the man are weak – he was a "foe" but the speaker cannot work out why that is true. This shows the stupidity of war, in that men kill each other because they are ordered to.

There is also an element of class in the ideas of the poem. The two protagonists have more in common with each other than they do with those who give the orders. The men who fight are either working class or out of work (as the speaker says in the fourth stanza), so they feel compelled to enlist (sign up to the army). It is these men who will suffer in the war, and are more likely to be killed. This is picked up in the reference to the "ancient inn", as well as the colloquial language like "nipperkin".

The ordinariness of the speaker brings home the realities of war: it’s also an appeal to the reader to consider the similarities between themselves and the Boers against whom the war is being fought. This connects to the poem as a protest against the Boer war – it helps to prevent the dehumanisation of the enemy.