

# The man he killed by thomas hardy essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The pre Twentieth century poem I have chosen is, "The man he killed" by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), and the poem I have chosen that was written after the Twentieth century is, "Dulce et Decorum est.", by Wilfred Owen. Both these poems are about war, life during and after these treacherous times, and its lasting effects. In Hardy's poem, the poet adopts the persona of a war veteran in the Boar war. The poem is about his actions in this war and their lasting effects. The poet talks of the person he shot, of how this person was just like him, "of hand like- just as I".

How they could have met as friends in some "ancient inn" and could have shared a drink together, but instead they met as enemies, because they were on opposite sides in this battle. The language used backs up this statement; "I shot at him, as he at me". This indicates that the poet had to shoot this person as, it was what he was there to do and it was either himself or his victim who was to die. Then as the poem progresses, the poet tries to explain why he carried out the act, saying he, "shot him dead because- because he as my foe."

This indicates that the poet sees the fact that this person was on the other side of the battlefield as a just reason to take his life away, but the break up in the sentence and the repeating of the word "because", indicates some hesitation in the poet's explanation. He is thinking hard about why he did it, trying to rationalise some sort of reason, but he doesn't want to dwell on it, so goes on to state "that's clear enough", almost trying to reassure himself. Then doubt creeps back into the poet's mind, as he goes on to talk about reasons why this person would have been there, fighting in this war.

Enjambment is used, connecting the two stanzas in a flowing sentence, as the poet speculates on the occupation of this man he killed and why he was there. " Was out of work-had sold his traps, No other reasons why. " Then through this, it emerges why the poet joined the war himself. As he talks of reasons for his victim's enrolment, he states a connection between the two. " He thought he'd list perhaps, off hand like-just as I. " This indicates to the reader that the poet was apart of this war due to a spire of the moment decision, which would have been a common reason for men joining the Army at this time.

The last stanza brings a rather simplistic close to the poem, as the poet talks of war in general. " Yes, quaint and curious war is". He talks of how in a war, people are killed, and lives are destroyed without much thought, due to it being the purpose of why these young men are there, but all these people in the war are alike, as the poet talks again of how they could have been good friends, in different circumstances. " You'd treat if met where any bar is, or help to half-a-crown". But yet there unfortunate positions on the opposite sides " staring face to face", bought them both to their tragic misfortunes.

One man lost his life and the other lives with the pain and anguish of his part in the war. Hardy's use of language does indicate that the poet is troubled with guilt about his actions in the war, and this adds to the meaning of the poem, of how war has many lasting effects. The use of assonance through the second stanza slows the poem down as the poet talks of his position in the firing line. This provides the reader of a vivid picture of the battlefield and adds tension to what is happening. Then the pace picks up over the next

two lines, as the poet speaks of how he shot the person and “killed him in his place”.

The poet rushes over these lines as the pace increases. Indicating that the poet does not wish to think too much about it, due to his guilt. Also the use of dramatic monologue adds to the level of how personal the poem is. The poet explains to the reader why he did it. He feels he needs to explain it, but it is also a way for him to come to terms with it himself, and try to relieve some of the guilt. The use of repetition of words such as “because” and the use of dashes throughout the fourth stanza also adds to the poet's guilty feelings.

The break up in the sentence indicates that the poet is deep in thought, trying to puzzle out a reason for why he killed this person. Throughout the poem, Hardy's language is complex and straightforward. The structure and language of the poem all add to the message that is portrayed throughout the poem. “Dulce et Decorum Est”, by Wilfred Owen is also an effective poem about war. In this poem, Owen also adopts the persona of a war veteran, in the First World War. The title of the poem, when translated means, “It is sweet and fitting”.

This Latin phrase was a well-known patriotic slogan used to encourage people to join the armies and fight for their country. When Owen entitled his poem “Dulce et Decorum Est” he would have been confident that many of his readers would have understood that Latin tag and known the remainder of the phrase. This in turn makes the opening of the poem and the gory

details which follow all the more shocking. Owen opens the poem with a vivid explanation of a scene in the war.

Owen describes the soldiers, but the description is far from what the readers expect. Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, Knock-kneed, coughing like hags," This contradiction to the stereotypical hero, which the readers expect to hear about, brings about shock and confusion, as a vivid visual picture is portrayed. Owen uses strong imagery as he compares these, so well admired young men who are so brave, fighting for their country, to old women, withered and weak, who can barely make it through the mucky ground. " We cursed through the sludge. " This description indicates to the readers, the effects that war has on people.

For these young men to be described so horribly, shows just how weighed down by the burden of the war they are. Owen then goes on to explain what is happening in the scenes of war. How as these soldiers march on through the trenches, they remain inattentive to " haunting flares" that loomed overhead. Owen describes how the men " marched asleep". Not alert, worn out from their part in the war. As they carry on, in automatic pilot, limp and covered in blood, and having lost all senses. " All went lame, all blind Drunk with fatigue".

Owen indicates to us that these men are so worn out, and so lost in their surroundings that they remain oblivious to the " hoots of gas-shells dropping softly behind them". Then Owen goes into describing the actions of the soldiers in a life or death situation. The pace of the poem speeds up dramatically. As the soldiers scurry to protect themselves from the gas shells

that are raining down on them from above. Their actions are described as “an ecstasy of fumbling”, indicating how this sudden rush, was of both, fear and adrenalin, as the men hurry to put on their masks.

Then suddenly the pace of the poem slows right down, as the readers learn of a poor soldier who was too late. A frightening and graphic image is painted for the reader, who learns of the slow and painful death of a person who inhaled the fatal poison of the shell gas. “And floundering like a man in fire or lime”. Then we are told how the other soldiers look on as their comrade drowns in his own body fluid, surrounded by the green light of the chlorine gas, “As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.”

Then the poet goes on to tell us how this image of, this person's death before him, comes back to him at night, haunting his dreams. He cannot escape from the torment of the war. This adds to the meaning of the poem, how war has so many lasting effects, how the soldiers are cursed with their days in the war, even when it is over. “In all my dreams before my helpless sight, He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning”. Also here we learn the brutal reality of the disposal of the dead soldiers' bodies.

How no time or respect is given to the dead, that they are thrown aside like an old rag, for nothing worse can happen to them anyway. “Behind the wagon that we flung him in”. This is followed by a gruesome detailing of the effects of the gas on a person, once inhaled, and the slow and painful death the person goes through. “And watch the white eyes writhing in his face, His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin”. This strong description indicates the pain of the poet, in remembering these times.

The language used here in the last verse, indicates to the reader how we cannot even begin to imagine the pain suffered by these soldiers. In the closing stanza, the pace of the poem slows down, and an angry and bitter sarcastic tone is introduced, as the poet addresses his audience. This form makes it more personal and effective to the readers. The poet states that unless you have been there, you will never know the torment of being at war. It may appear to the reader that the poet is referring to those who advocate war, when he says; " My friends, you should not tell with such high zest".

This bitter irony indicates such anger in the poet. This clearly shows that the poet feels strongly about people who try to recruit young men and woman to war, without having suffered it themselves. Then the poet states: " To children ardent for some desperate glory". This may indicate that these people who encourage others to go to war, only target the young and ignorant, those who are desperate to seek glory. The last two lines of the poem are the same as the title. The patriotic slogan is repeated, and the rest of the slogan is added. " Dulce et decorum est, Pro patria mori"

The translated in full, this means, " it is sweet and fitting to die for your country". Before the poet, repeats this slogan he states, " the old lie", this final statement brings the poem to a dramatic close, as the poet speaks out against these people who thought up these myths in order to maintain their success in recruiting soldiers. For the people who use these old sayings, were usually the people who had never went into a war themselves, and yet

they say how sweet it is for one, to die for their country. It is at this point that the reader finally understands the meaning of the poem properly.

That in fact the poem is a contradiction of its title. Both these poem are the same to the extent that they are about the affects of war, and are Cleary against war. Both poems have the advantage of being written by people who have actually experienced the horrendous times, and we are given real examples of this in each poem. In Hardy's poem we are told about how he had to shoot another man, and what it was like for him, in Owens poem, we are told of the horrible death of a person who had been subjected to chlorine gas, which was a common weapon used in wars at this time.

But in each case we are told of how the poets suffer as a result of each happening. Hardy is wracked with guilt, and still feels he needs to explain his actions, when in actual fact, he is still trying to come to terms with his actions himself, and Owen is still haunted in his dreams about the death of his fellow soldier in front of him. The poems differ to the extent that Owens is a lot more detailed in the description of the happenings. He uses effective imagery and vivid descriptions of the mans death and of the appearance of the soldiers themselves.

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags," Where as the language used in Hardy's is quite basic and not as descriptive. In each poem the pace differs a lot. In Hardy's the pace changes as the poet discusses his actions, when he talks about how he shot the other man, his pace increases as he does not wish to dwell on the matter, and the pace decreases as hardy tries to puzzle out a just reason for taking this persons life, showing he has to think hard about it.

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In Owens poem the pace also differs, when describing the soldiers at the beginning, the pace is slow and dragged out as Owen paints a vivid picture of these men, then as he retells a life of death situation, the pace increase as the men in the poem scuffle into action to save their lives. Then the pace decreases once again towards the end, as Owen sums up the meaning of him poem. The form of poem used in both poems differs also; in Hardy's poem dramatic monologue is used. The poet is talking directly to his audience, explaining his actions to them, where as in Owens poem, the form changes.

Dramatic monologue and ballad form is used. At the end of the poem, Owen is talking to someone he refers to as " you", the reader can take this to be anyone, even themselves. But as the poem progresses, and the reader becomes more familiar with the meaning of the poem, it may become apparent to them that the person Owen means, is those who advocate war, and uses such blind patriotic slogans such as this. Both poems are effective in bringing out the horrors of war, both during and after. They both describe to their readers how, war has so many lasting effects.

So many lives are destroyed, either my deaths, or by peoples part in the war. Many soldiers come away from war situations mentally and physically scared, and find it hard to go back to a normal life routine, examples of this is in Owens poem, where we are told of how his sleep if affected by the images of the death of his fellow soldier. Personally I prefer the poem " Dulce et Decorum Est". I feel this poem has more life, and is more effective in its purpose, to bring across the horrors of war.

I feel this poem is more personal to its audience and through the language he uses, the audience are able to paint a better visual picture of the scenes of war in the poem. Owen uses effective descriptions of the soldiers and the scenes, where as Hardy's language is quite vague and basic. I feel that Owens poem is different, and unique, the readers don't know what to expect, and don't know what is coming next. The title of the poem leads the reader into expecting to hear reasons why it is so rewarding to die for your country, and then find that the poem is about the complete opposite.