

Poetry essay test questions essay

Profession, Poet



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The Balances and Distinctions of Two War Poems The subjects of “ The Man He Killed” by Thomas Hardy and “ The death of a Ball Turret Gunner” by Randall Jarrell have to do with soldiers in war situations. These poems reflect several factors that point to duty, commitment, and simplicity. Both poems suggest the responsibility of participation of war but not necessarily the obligation to join and the separate tones and imagery that imply the dark side of war and the decisions that need to be made. In “ The Man He Killed” it is obvious that the narrator willingly enlisted: “ He thought he’d ‘ list, perhaps, off-hand like – just as I -” (lines 13-14).

This soldier chose to fight out of financial reasons. He did not know the repercussions but knew the decision had to be made and it was something he needed to do. In “ The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner”, the character “ fell into the State” (1). It is likely one of the meanings of this line is that he was drafted into the military. “ State” could possibly mean the government, given the context, this was not by choice. Hardy’s and Jarrell’s renditions of their characters’ experiences in war are similar in that they are both young soldiers in a situation of necessity of a war that is unplanned and inhumane.

Hardy implied this In “ The Man He Killed” in line 9 “ I shot him dead because – because he was my foe,” and line 18 “ You shoot a fellow down you’d treat if met where any bar is,” This forces the reader to see the violence and cruelty of war. In “ The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner”, the reader sees brutality and cruelty. “ When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose” (5). This line is a little more intense than those of Hardy’s poem. The message is still the same: both were victims to circumstances and fate.

Hardy's character's view towards war is a little laid back and not very traumatized at this point in his career. He does not necessarily want to kill anyone. He states that he might have seen the person he is obligated to shoot in a bar and maybe even have bought him a drink. He feels remorse for having to kill this person but knows that it is just another inevitability of war. He is more concerned with the inhumanity of war than the fate of the man. This poem's character has the upper hand because he is the one that kills the enemy and he survives so far.

Jarrell's character's outlook on war is much different. This man is terrified. He is in a much different and very vulnerable situation. " And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze" (2). There are three likely meanings to this line; one of them being that he is frozen with fear. He is at the bottom of this aircraft in an exposed position. He is miles away from ground level. It is possible that the character feels he does not have a chance. This poem's character meets his demise and is killed. The tone and imagery in " The Man He Killed" is fast-paced and simple. The poem is somewhat jocular.

It displays the downfalls of war but the speaker understands the futility and senselessness. He describes war as " quaint and curious" (17). The poem is written with speech marks and in a conversational tone. The tone in " The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" is melancholy. This poem is very brief and there is little quotation. The imagery of the " wet fur" (2) " blak flack" (4) " nightmare fighters" and " washed me out of the turret" (5) display the dark, depressing, horrifying aspects of war. Both poems are straight forward and

easy to read. There is use of informal diction, middle diction, dialect and jargon.

These factors make these poems simply and not very complex. In “ The Man He Killed” and “ The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner” the message is that of war and its nastiness. It is easy to appreciate these poems and to identify with the soldier’s feelings and sympathize with them and their predicament. It is evident that both soldiers view the idea of war is nonsensical and they are obliged to carry out orders. On the other hand, these poems were written and are understood very differently. One is up beat and light-hearted; the other is depressing and slow, despite its minimal stanzas.