



The Man He Killed

THOMAS HARDY



"Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin*!

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because —
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

"He thought he'd 'list*, perhaps,
Off-hand like — just as I —
Was out of work — had sold his traps —
No other reason why.

"Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."

*nipperkin – a small quantity of alcohol.

* 'list = enlist – to join the military.

The speaker is very aware that 'context' has a big influence on how we view people. What contexts are most important to Josh's relationships in *Grow*?

The poem's powerful action comes early on, and is bluntly described. What impact does that have on the rest of the piece?

How many signs of the speaker's uncertainty are there in this stanza? Does Josh use any of these techniques at any point? Why?

What clues do we get about the speaker's background here? Why does the speaker make these assumptions about his 'foe'?

'Quaint and curious' are quite weak adjectives. Why do you think this speaker is so off-hand about the impact of war?

Behind the soldier's 'brave face' lie Hardy's thoughts on the realities of war. What are these?

Where do you imagine this poem happening? Where is the speaker, and who is he speaking to?

Now imagine this speaker a few years in the future. Has he gone back to his old life and forgotten what he experienced? Or has his life changed? If so, how? Now compare 'The Man He Killed' to a more modern war poem, like 'War Poem' by Warsan Shire (poem available here: <https://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/from-war-poem/>). What are the differences in the presentation of War in these two poems?