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Thomas Hardy's Shorter War Poems

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Thomas Hardy's

Shorter War Poems

(TITLE)

BY

Anne Marie Rodgers

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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During his lifetime Thomas Hardy wrote three groups of war poems, published within the books, Wessex Poems, Poems of the Past and Present, and Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses. These groups are about three different wars, the Napoleonic Wars, the South African War of 1899-1902, and World War I. In addition Hardy wrote six other poems, one of which is about the Indian War, which are spread out in his other collections. Hardy had different attitudes toward these wars; sometimes he had different attitudes toward the same war. Hardy learned about the Napoleonic Wars from his grandfather, neighbors, and veterans of the war whom he visited.[1] His poems about that war, mainly ballads, reflect the glory and excitement and cruelty of war in almost equal portions. Hardy strongly disapproved of the South African War, which he felt was an imperialistic adventure on England's part.[2] All of his poems written during this period show negative aspects of war. He had mixed feelings about World War I. He felt that it was necessary and that England was right in fighting. In fact, for a time he joined a group of British authors who were writing to arouse patriotic sentiments.[3] His poetry expressed a compassionate regret and protest that people racially related, like Germany and England, were fighting each other and cursed the ambitious leaders who drove their people to battle.[4]

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[1] James O. Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 114.

[3] Ibid., p. 417.

[4] Ibid., p. 416.

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Later, he became convinced that such idealistic poems would never stop war, and his poetry again reflects the unalleviated blackness of his South African War poems.

These poems cover all aspects of war from its effects to its causes to its aftermath, and while they cover different wars, if all of them are considered together, common themes appear, and it is possible to identify the main aspects of war which Hardy's poetry emphasizes. While Hardy included thirty-five poems in his war collection and another six with similar themes could be added, this paper will not discuss all of these poems. Poems such as "The Wife in London" and "The Dead and the Living One" while they are set in wartime are mainly poems about the twisted ironies of love, and do not depend upon a war for their meaning.[1] "The Sergeant's Song" is omitted because it comments more upon the absurdity of human nature than it does on war and seems to have been written more to fulfill the requirements of a scene in the novel The Trumpet Major, where it first was published, than as a comment on war. The sonnet, "A Call to National Service" and "His Country" are not specifically about war.

Of the thirty-three poems which are left, the largest group shows the negative aspects of war. In these poems the cause of war is variously ascribed to mankind who never learns to control his war-like nature and more specifically to power-hungry leaders who use their people to satisfy their ambitions. The effect of war is two-fold. It makes life seem hopeless, dreary, worthless, and hypocritical. In addition, it makes everyone a victim, not only those who are attacked but

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[1]Other poems in this category not in the war collections are "After the War," "The War-Wife of Catknoll," "A Wife and Another," and "Aristodemus the Messenian."

also those who do the fighting and those who send them off. Although Hardy's poems never suggest that war ought to be preserved, approximately one-third of the poems show more hopeful aspects of war. One poem suggests that fate, not man, is responsible for war. In spite of the depressing atmosphere war creates, some of these poems suggest that war is really not that important and that what is important in human life continues and survives during a war. Other poems focus on some other aspect of war that compensates for or at least balances war's cruelty.

Hardy's poetry suggests a variety of causes for war, but most of them involve man. In his Napoleonic War ballads he ignores the causes of war, but the old folks in "Leipzig" do ask of Christian preachers,

> When will men's swords to ploughshares turn?
> When come the promised prime?[1]

Later this same theme appears in an expanded form in both the South African War and World War I poems. The poems suggest that mankind does not learn from religion or from experience and will never turn his swords to ploughshares. Hardy's poetry does not totally condemn man however. At the end of the South African War, he wrote a poem which praised man for no longer worshiping war. When World War I broke out however, he was disillusioned and wrote a poem which savagely condemned man as being worse than ever. Another common theme in his South African War and World War I poems is that ambitious leaders go to war and use their people to get power for them. The people follow blindly without using reason. Finally, at the very end of World War I,

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[1] Thomas Hardy, Collected Poems: Lyrical, Narratory, and Reflective Vol. I of The Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy (2 vols.; London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1923), p. 24. All other references to this work will be designated C. P.

he wrote a poem which blamed fate for war and absolved man completely.

Four poems, "Channel Firing," "Embaracation," "Departure," and "I Met a Man," have similar themes, attacking man whose war-like nature never changes. In "Channel Firing" God is angry with people who start war. The narrator, a spirit from the dead, records the conversation of the other spirits and God when the former are awakened by gunnery practice which is held at sea but can be heard and felt inland. When the coffins were shaken and chancel windows were broken, they concluded it was Judgment Day, but God explains,

> It's gunnery practice out at sea
> Just as before you went below;
> The world is as it used to be:
>
> All nations striving strong to make
> Red war yet redder.
> (C. P., p. 287)

He calls men "mad as hatters" who do nothing for "Christé's sake." God is bitter here, but he is also resigned and even makes a wryly humorous joke as he reflects that it is a good thing for some of them on earth that is is not Judgment Day,

> For if it were they'd have to scour
> Hell's floor for so much threatening. . . .
> (C. P., p. 288)

Laughing aloud, he adds, "It will be warmer when I blow the trumpet. . ." Bailey points out, too, that God is compassionate toward man in spite of his displeasure;[1] he may never have Judgment Day, "for you are men / And rest eternal sorely need."

God is silent then and the other spirits debate whether man will ever change. Instead of piously bewailing man's folly, Parson Thirdly ironically comments,

> Instead of preaching forty years
> . . . .
> I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.
> (C. P., p. 288)

[1] The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 262.

He concludes that all of his work was a waste of time. Again the guns disturb, roaring

> As far inland as Stourton Tower
> And Camelot, and Starlit Stonehenge.
> (C. P., p. 288)

Critics have responded differently to the mention of these three places in the last two lines. Stourton Tower is a memorial commemorating the spot where in 878 King Alfred gathered together the forces which defeated the Danes who were destroying churches and monasteries in England.[1] Camelot, of course, refers to Arthur's legendary kingdom, and Stonehenge was a prehistoric place of worship. Gerhard T. Alexis explains that the sound of modern heavy guns contrasts with the real Alfred, the legendary Arthur, and the prehistoric Stonehenge, but ironically shows that man does not change.[2] John L. Bradley points out that King Alfred's defeat of the Danes practically decided the fate of Christianity. Arthur, in turn, defended Christianity, and now the guns are sounding again in 1914 as Germany prepares for war against Christian nations.[3] Bailey feels that the three places represent long dead dynasties which rose to power through battle and died away.[4] Actually all three are tied together by religion as well as war since Stonehenge was a sacred place of worship. The poem suggests that regardless of what religion people follow, they end up fighting to come to power and dying away in

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[1] Vivian DeSola Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940 (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1961), p. 189.

[2] "Hardy's 'Channel Firing,'" Explicator, XXIV (March, 1966), Item 61.

[3] "A Footnote to Hardy's 'Channel Firing,'" Notes and Queries, VII (January, 1960), 189.

[4] The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p.p. 262-63.

the same manner. This idea ties in with what Bailey believes is the theme of the poem, "that both theology and human experience seem powerless to make men melt their swords to plowshares--that man learns nothing from history."[1]

While some might question the effectiveness of presenting a believable criticism of man through ghosts whom people tend to refuse to take seriously, Jean Brooks comments on the effective combination of the supernatural and the real in this poem. "Channel Firing" is brought down to earth from the realm of fancy by its natural description of the environment; not only do ghosts awake from the sound and vibration of the guns but also the "wakened hounds" howl, the startled mouse drops his altar crumb, the alarmed worm draws back into its mound, and the parish cow drools in fear. These details contribute to making the conversation that follows believable.[2]

Echoing a similar theme, the sonnet "Embarcation" describes the scene as soldiers are boarding ship at Southampton to go to the South African War. In the first verse the narrator points out Southampton's historical significance in three imperialistic wars: Vespasian's Roman legions landed and fought there in 43-44 to establish a colony in Britain; Cerdic, the king of the West Saxons, brought in his troops there when Rome pulled out, and Henry V embarked from there to attack the French and establish claim to the throne.[3] Revealing that man has

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[1] The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 263.

[2] Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure (Ithica, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), p.p. 134-35.

[3] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 115.

not changed much, the narrator remarks that now "vaster battalions" are heading for other beaches "to argue in the selfsame bloody mode." They are using the time-honored bloody force of war to win their arguments. Even this modern age of "thought and pact and code" cannot mend war, just as experience and religion were not successful in "Channel Firing." The narrator describes the bands of men in ironically contrasting natural images. They are "yellow as autumn leaves" but "alive as spring." The contrast is between spring and autumn, life and death; they are as bright as autumn leaves and are as lively as new life in spring, but autumn leaves are soon to die and these men who are as young and as full of life as springtime are really as short-lived as autumn leaves when they fight a war. Having compared the soldiers in these terms, the narrator remarks, as if to say how strange it is, that as the boats go out toward "the tragical To-be," no man seems doubtful of the cause or murmurs against it. In the concluding couplet, he describes the contradictory scene on shore:

> Wives, sisters, parents wave white hands and smile
> As if they knew not that they weep the while.
> (C. P., p. 78)

The relatives left behind instinctively know the tragic future. They put on a good show, waving and smiling, but their hands are white with fear and they smile through tears. The poem leaves no hope here; the result of war is tragic. The soldiers are victims unaware, and their relatives are victims only too well aware. Yet war goes on.

The sonnet "Departure" is a companion piece to "Embarcation," which strongly attacks the fighting nations for continuing to war against each other and sacrifice their men in the process. The poem describes in its octave the boats leaving Southampton Dock in 1899. The dreary and somber picture emphasizes the hopelessness and despair

the speaker feels as he thinks about the war. The "farewell music," which one would expect to be bright and inspiring, "thins and fails," as if someone is too sorrowful to play it. The ships' "broad bottoms rip the bearing brine," suggesting the violence that will be done once the ships reach their new port. It is a "gray sea-line" the ships approach as they diminish in the distance, and "each significant red smoke-shaft pales" in the process. The red smoke-shafts are doubly significant because they are the part of the ships that stands out over a distance in the gray sea, but also because they announce the danger they bring and the blood that will be shed with their coming. Watching "the late long tramp of mounting men," the people feel " a keen sense of severance" which makes them shape the sound into words which are an appeal against war. The dominant races of the Western World, all engaged in "wroth reasonings" are personified as "Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels." The two words "wroth reasonings" ironically comment upon each other.[1] These races of men are asked how long they are going to "trade on lives like these, / That are as puppets in a playing hand." The use of the word "trade" suggests the callousness of these people in their playing with soldiers as one would play with a puppet. These soldiers are nothing but toys to be bought and sold, never mind that they might be damaged in the process. Those tramping feet also seem to ask, "When shall the saner softer polities / Whereof we dream, have sway in each proud land?" The word "sway" while meaning control also suggests the gentle movement of "saner, softer polities." Together they clash with that hard, unbending word, "proud," suggesting that pride would have to

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[1]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 117.

go if those polities ever gained strength. The final question the tramping seems to ask is when will "patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand / Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?" Patriotism now is the slave of each country and is used to justify whatever the country chooses. Patriotism has to become as powerful as a god and include the whole earth so that to fight any part of the world is to be a traitor to the whole.

"I Met a Man" is similar to "Channel Firing" in that it shows God angry with man. It goes further than "Embarcation," and "Departure," which show the soldier as part of the apparatus of war but also as a victim of it in that he cannot see the consequences, and is more critical of the leaders who start war. The poem which is unified by its Biblical allusions and medieval images is narrated by a man who has talked to a prophet who has seen God. It is apparent that the man is intended to be a prophet because of the comparison made between him and Moses at the beginning of the poem: The man spoke "with shining face and eye / Like Moses after Sinai." It is equally apparent that "the moulder of Monarchies / Realms, peoples, plains, and hills," whom the prophet saw is God because He mentions "that old mistake" He "made with Saul."[1] The prophet pictures God as a harmonious influence in nature. God sits on the "sunlit seas," pricking the water into little waves of ecstasy with His voice like a musical chant. God pictures man in nature, too, as something to which he could give harmony except for the unnatural condition of war. God compares the maimed and dead of war to plenteously blooming plants, full of promise of a fruitful harvest, mowed down before they have a chance to bear fruit. It is

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[1]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 426.

a comparison which shows God's compassionate concern and regret for man. In contrast the prophet reports God's condemning and belittling words for those who start wars. They are medieval "gambling clans / Of human cockers" who set up a war as a cocker would set up a cock fight; only instead of cocks liege men are pitted against each other; each fight is a "death-main" on which the cockers bet in hopes of swelling their "all-empery plans." The effect of this comparison is to make war a petty gambling game important only because the cockers have betrayed a trust and have lost their ability to value human life. They use their liege men, who have sworn their loyalty to them, in a sickening game of death which has no purpose but to satisfy ambition and provide something on which to gamble. Complaining that people today are no different than people in Biblical times, God contemplates destroying "all Lords of war / Whose sanctuaries enshrine Liberticide" if the Devil does not interfere. God's sad "utterance grew and flapped like flame," but "no celestial tongued acclaim / And no huzzas from earthlings came." Man seems to be outside of nature; in a state of war he cannot be charmed by God's voice unless he has a special vision like a prophet, and the heavens are "mutely masked as 'twere in shame" at the condition of earth.

Contrasting with the point of view expressed in these poems, "The Sick Battle-God," written at the end of the South African War asserts that men are not as bad as they used to be in their worship of war. The narrator begins by explaining that in the past "when men found joy in war" all over the world the god of war was worshipped. That the speaker does not approve of this god is apparent from his description of him in the next two verses. His crimson form suggests his association with blood. He appears at "each murk and murderous meeting-time"

as if war cannot take place in clear light and war is a crime. Kings ask for his help "for rape and raid," again words which suggest crime is taking place. His "fulgid beam" shines on all wounds of war, bruise, blood-hole, scar, or seam, and on its weapons, the blade and the bolt, used in the crossbow; it haloes the gore and corpses. "Fulgid" is a good word to use here because its most common meaning is bright and glittering but also its older meaning is fiery red with metallic reflections, suggesting the blood and gleam of weapons and armor. The war god's light illuminates an unpleasant picture most people would prefer not to see. The light appears when someone is in a frenzy to gain glory in war; kings, queens, and heroes, and even more specifically, Wolfe, Ney, and Nelson all saw the gleam. Major General James Wolfe died when he rashly took Quebec from the French in 1759. French Field Marshal Michel Ney led his troops repeatedly in a suicide mission against the English at Waterloo. Admiral Horatio Nelson was killed at Trafalgar because he wore all of his medals and was easily picked off by a sharpshooter.[1] In the second half of the poem the narrator explains the new hope that has come. A new light has spread in opposition to the war god, causing his gold cloud of glory, his coat of arms, and even his figure to become dim. There are different explanations for new light breaking, but they all add up to man's increased use of reason and his concern for other people. Champions ignore the battle-god now; "They do and dare, but tensely--pale of brow," instead of joyfully. The poem does not suggest that war is over, but that men have lost their zeal. The battle-god occasionally appears, but he has to be patched up with paint and small pieces of wood. The speaker concludes joyfully:

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[1]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 124.

Let men rejoice, let men deplore,
The lurid Deity of heretofore
Succumbs to one of saner nod;
The Battle-god is god no more.
(C. P., p. 90)

After expressing such hope in "The Sick Battle-God," Hardy was extremely disillusioned when World War I broke out. He wrote a poem, "Then and Now," which not only rejects the notion that men are getting better, but also goes beyond "Channel Firing," "Embarcation," "Departure," and "I Met a Man" to say man is worse than he used to be. The first two verses praise methods of warfare in the past because man "had a chivalrous sense of Should and Ought." Soldiers thought that regardless of whether they were alive or dead at the end, "Honour is some reward." In the open they fought and

They would not deign
To profit by a stain
On the honourable rules.
(C. P., p. 514)

In contrast today's methods of warfare have no honor. To show how methods have degenerated, the narrator compares them to Herod's in the town of Rama, near Bethlehem, where in his efforts to be sure Jesus was killed, he destroyed all children two years and under. Today's armies are gulty of killing civilians, especially children.[1] Contrasting the strict orderliness of battle in chivalric times, the narrator ends the first verse of the poem with

So, Gentlemen of the Guard
Fire first!
(C. P., p. 513)

Since today's method is underhanded, the last verse ends, we

. . .by modes once called accurst,
Overhead, under water
Stab first.
(C. P., p. 514)

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[1]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 424.

From "I Met a Man" comes the idea that leaders are responsible for war and soldiers are innocent victims just doing what they are told. In "England to Germany in 1914" the narrator by-passes the leaders, as if it were useless to appeal to them, and goes directly to the German people in an effort to stop the war. The poem criticizes the leaders by omission. Beginning with the slogan German leaders used to defend their declaring war on England,[1] "O England, may God punish thee!" the narrator tries to stop the war by complimenting the Germans, defending England logically, and sounding a warning. Mixing a compliment with the central question of the poem, he asks,

> --Is it that Teuton genius flowers
> Only to breathe malignity
> Upon its friend of earlier hours?
> (C. P., p. 508)

He then points out examples of Germany and England's friendship. They have shared each other's bread. English people have visited Germany and grown to love it as their own. In explaining this point, the narrator pays another compliment, praising the country lavishly. In the second verse, he points out that England has "nursed no dreams to shed your blood" even though England has matched Germany's power. Paying yet another compliment, he notes that a few Englishmen in "blatant mood" have suggested attacking Germany, but Germany, as intelligent and discriminating as England, has realized that that was not the true sentiment in England. Finally in the last four lines, he sounds the warning: if Germany, with face aflame and with cries of the German warlords' slogan, attacks, Germany will have a bad name today and in the future.

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 418.

The sonnet "The Pity of It" uses a similar theme, showing in what ways England and Germany are related, but also like "I Met a Man" it directly attacks the leaders who started the war. The octave recounts the narrator's experience as he walked in England far inland away from modern influences. Listening to people talk, he heard many German-based words. He remarks upon the fact, as was done in "Embarcation" as if to suggest it is strange, that the people who are getting ready to attack are indeed "kin folk kin tongued" to England, but he does not blame the common people who are ". . . spurred / By gangs whose glory threats and slaughters are." In the sestet he hears a Heart crying out against those who have brought on this war between England and Germany with the curse:

> Sinister, ugly, lurid be their fame;
> May their familiars grow to shun their name
> And their brood perish everlastingly.
> (C. P., p. 510)

By comparing those who start the war to a gang who loves threats and slaughters, he reduces them to common criminals, and by saying that a Heart cried out against them, the curse becomes the cry of not just one person or not just one country but the cry of humanity against those who start war.

"Cry of the Homeless," subtitled "After the Prussian Invasion of Belgium," carries further the curse delivered in the last poem. It is a bitter and ironic "greeting" from the victims of the Belgium invasion to their Prussian conquerors. Starting with the Roman sounding, "Conqueror, all hail to thee!" the victims curse those who are the "author, fount, and head for their wounds." After expressing the desire that "thy loved be slighted, blighted / And forsaken . . . And thy children beg their bread," the greeters change their minds and wish a worse curse upon their

conquerors: that on the night when comes thy call,

> That compassion dew thy pillow
> And bedrench thy senses all
> For thy victims,
> Till death dark thee with his pall.
> (C. P., p. 512)

Such a curse would be worse because the conquerors would then feel regret, but it would be too late to do anything to heal the wounds of war. They would die in frustration with a guilty conscience. By describing the night of their deaths as "the night of their calling," the poem suggests someone might call for an account after death.

Having blamed mankind, individual countries, and the leaders of countries for war, Hardy finally wrote a poem during World War I which blames fate for everything and by implication absolves mankind, who must only bear war. "A New Year's Eve in Wartime" creates a dismal and pessimistic picture of a New Year coming in. The first two verses establish the gloomy atmosphere. It is a dreary, windy, dark night; the speaker feels "phantasmal fears." As the flame flaps, as if it were in the presence of a ghost, he hears eerie noises. The clock throbs as if it were alive. A loose slate scrapes on the roof. The "spectral" pines intone "the blind night's drone." The narrator, tense, hears the blood in his ears, "strumming always the same," and the weather vane makes an irregular grating noise on the roof. As midnight approaches, the hands on the clock hide each other "as in shame." The narrator opens the door as if to wait for the New Year to come in when suddenly a horse whose rider cannot be seen comes careering by. It is compared to the pale horse of Revelations upon which death sat for he rushes by

As if death astride came
To numb all with his knock.
(C. P., p. 517)

The narrator comes inside, aware that the old year is gone, and suggesting further tragedy, the New Year, barely alive, is already moaning. The narrator feels that the horse, like the other three horses of Revelations,[1] carry

. . . Tears!
More Famine and Flame--
More Severance and Shock.
(C. P., p. 517)

The rider is carrying these orders from Fate to Europe. Europe, pale and exhausted by war, must continue to bear what fate ordains, just as the pines outside, which are already tired, must continue to intone as long as the wind blows. This last comparison makes war an unpleasant but natural circumstance, like too much wind or rain, to be borne without complaint because it cannot be changed. Such a comparison is quite a change from much of Hardy's poetry, which makes man responsible; this poem absolves man, but it does not make his world any nicer.

Of the poems that criticize the effect of war, a small group describes the dreary, depressing situation people live in during a war. One, becoming more specific, shows the hypocrisy of Christian nations by questioning how they can support the Prince of Peace and war at the same time. The discrepancy between being a Christian and fighting a war has already been suggested but not developed in "Channel Firing," "I Met a Man," and even Leipzig." Two of the poems were written during the South African War, two during World War I, and it is hard to say which is the least pessimistic. However, in contrast to the pessimism, a more hopeful aspect of war is emphasized in another poem Hardy wrote in World War I, but which he had intended to write as early as 1870

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 425.

during the Franco-Prussian War.[1] Here war seems very insignificant and man's basic values triumph.

"At the War Office, London" compares the world of 1898 with the world of 1899. The speaker in the first verse remarks sadly that last year he thought the world was as dark as it could get, full of the circumstances that make tragedies. The people were so sad they were like a land making a great effort to "heave a pulse." Ironically, in the second verse he discovers that he did not appreciate that world enough and that 1899 is even worse. Starting with the effect of war on people, he personifies the forces of death, nature, and peace in the last three lines, making death in wartime impersonal and unnatural. Comparing the two years, he says that last year there at least were not any parents, wives, and daughters whose hearts were rent by the posting of the list of dead and wounded. Last year death acted according to Nature's custom; this year death has an hourly list of slaughtered to fill and stalks the living to meet his schedule. Peace last year, uninjured and unspoiled, smiled from East to West. With its ironic age-old observation that people do not appreciate what they have until something worse happens, the poem is wryly humorous, but it also presents a very pessimistic view of the world; the world is already in its worst condition, but it is never so bad that it cannot be worse if war breaks out.

The sonnet "In Times of Wars and Tumults" is another attack on war and also on the romantic notion that one person is important to the fate of the world. In the first verse of the octave, someone complains, "Would that I'd not drawn breath here!" This person, echoing Shakespeare, compares life to a play and himself to a character on the stage. A play

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 421.

about war he finds unpleasant, for it is painfully shaped and spread with blood, yet it continues "purposelessly month by month." A second speaker in the poem speculates about what would have happened if the first speaker had never lived. In the sestet he concludes it would have made no difference and describes a battlefield as it would be regardless of whether this person were alive or dead. "Life would have swirled the same," he says. By using the word, "swirled," he sets the tone for the confused and unnatural processes which he describes as going on in war. First he describes its effect on nature:

> Morns would have dawned
> On the uprooting by the night-gun's stroke
> Of what the yester noonshine brought to flower.
> (C. P., p. 510)

These lines create a contrast between the natural productive processes of nature, the morning dawn, the sunshine of noon which brings the flowers to bloom, and the unnatural violence of war which defeats nature. Using the word "stroke" with its connotations of a caress as well as a violent blow is ironic and a further comment on the unnaturalness of war. A gun's caress is a destructive blow. In the last triplet the speaker turns to the effect of war on man, but he does not describe the effect of war on people, but only on parts of them. He fragments people the way guns can fragment them. "Brown martial brows" have turned pale in their dying struggle as a plant in nature loses color when sick and dying, and hearts are broken apart "by Empery's insatiate lust of power." War then starts by an unnatural process; the empire, an inanimate institution, becomes a person, an unnatural, undesirable person who with his greedy, unsatisfiable "lust" for power preys on humanity and seems totally divorced from people who ought to control it. The tone of this poem is totally pessimistic. War is

part of life; it is unnatural, yet seemingly unavoidable, and it goes on without purpose, destroying and mutilating natural life, indifferent to the individual.

A simple, seemingly fanciful poem recounting a conversation with the moon, "I Looked up from my Writing" turns out to be another attack on war. The speaker, a writer like Hardy, is writing alone at night when he is startled by the moon which seems to be trying to read over his shoulder. Appearing like a ghost, she startles the writer into demanding why she is there. The moon replies that she has been searching for the body of a man who has killed himself because his son was "slain in brutish battle / Though he has injured none." Now she is curious to look into the mind of someone who wants to write a book in a world like this. Disturbed by the moon's thinking, the writer tries to move out of her light, for he is convinced that "she thought me / One who should drown him too." The moon to Hardy was consistently a symbol of reality.[1] From his conversation with the moon, it is apparent that the writer has avoided reality. The moon wants to look into his "blinkered mind," suggesting that the writer wears blinkers to avoid seeing anything but what is right in front of him. He has a limited perspective and cannot completely understand what he does see. He avoids seeing too much and going out of control like a skittish horse. When reality confronts him with evidence of what war is really like, he tries to get away, to escape her light, because he does not want to admit that she is right: he should not want to live in a world like this or want to write about it. The fact that he has to wear blinkers to get along in it at all suggests that he can think of no defense for the world; therefore, he shuts part of it out.

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[1]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 426.

From criticism of the conditions which war creates, Hardy's poetry becomes more specific and criticizes Christians for allowing war and making life miserable. In "A Christmas Ghost-Story" the speaker, a soldier, is a simple, honest fellow who expects the world to be that way too. Having died long ago fighting for his country, the soldier's bones have been mixed up and shoved together, but his mind is clear. Puzzled that his country is at war when it has accepted the rule of peace from Christ, he assumes that someone has decided it is "inept," and he wants to know who has set aside such "an all-earth-gladdening rule." Also, he is puzzled that the nation can truthfully or logically put "Anno Domini," in the year of our Lord, beside the years when two thousand men have hastened to their deaths in war and what Christ has died to change still remains. The speaker comes to no conclusions; he is merely puzzled. He leaves each reader to supply his own answers, to think rather ironically of the speaker who does not know about man' s hypocrisy and to realize the foolishness of Christians, who have the opportunity to keep the world full of gladness and disregard it.

In contrast to these poems which picture living during wartime as dreary and hopeless, Hardy wrote a poem which denies the importance of war and affirms the importance of man's basic values and rhythms of life, "In Time of the Breaking of Nations." As J. O. Bailey points out, the poem has a Biblical sound to it. Not only does the title come from God's judgment against Babylon, "I will break in pieces the nations" (Jer. 51: 20), but the theme, "man's basic life of labor and loves goes 'onward the same' in spite of the devastations of war"[1] is

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p.p. 421-22.

reminiscent of God's promise to Noah after the flood, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8: 22). The three verses describe simple scenes of country life: "a man harrowing clods" in a field with an old horse "that stumbles and nods / Half asleep as they stalk," "heaps of couch-grass" being burned to clear off the land, and "a maid and her wight" who "come whispering by." The scenes described are peaceful and slow-paced and subdued. The old horse is nearly asleep; the man walks slowly and silently; the couch-grass burns with no flame, "only thin smoke"; the maid and her fellow whisper as they go by.[1] There barely seems to be any life here at all, and yet paradoxically these are the things in life that are important. They will last long after people have forgotten the end of a dynasty or the record of a war.

Probably the strongest argument against war as presented in Hardy's poems is that over and over people are shown to be victims--not just the people who are attacked but everyone who is involved. The largest group of Hardy's poems dwells on this aspect of war. The theme first appears in the Napoleonic War poems as an aspect of war which is often equal with the glory and excitement, but sometimes it alone is emphasized. The theme expands in the South African War poems until almost every poem concerns a victim of war in some way. In World War I Hardy's poems are concerned with other aspects of war as well but this theme is still strong. None of these poems moralize about how terrible war is. They are silent attacks which concentrate on the pathos of war's victims. One of Hardy's poems focuses on a potential victim of war who

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[1] Arthur McDowall, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1931), p. 195.

fears his property will be destroyed in a battle close by and who as a result becomes a victim of his own selfishness. The other two poems about war victims who have been attacked concern Belgium's plight when the country was invaded in World War I. A larger group of poems concentrates on the soldier as a victim of war. Usually, he is a victim unaware. Sometimes, his being a victim is merely a side issue which the speaker mentions in passing. In six poems it is the dominant issue. Probably, the most devastating image of the soldier as victim occurs in a poem already mentioned, "Departure," when he is described as a puppet who has given up his right to think and kills on command, even though he does not understand why. In other poems, the soldier tries to think, but he is blinded by the war and cannot understand the consequences of his actions. In only one poem do soldiers clearly understand that they are victims, but it is too late because they are already dead. In all of this blackness, some of Hardy's poems shed some light by dwelling on some hopeful aspect of soldiers at war. Four of these come from the Napoleonic War ballads and three from World War I. Most of these poems focus on the strength of man's spirit in the face of war, his valor, his selflessness, his refusal to give up, and on the pleasant memories one can associate with war. One World War I poem completely denies that soldiers do not know what they are doing when they go to war. In addition to presenting those attacked and those who fight as victims, three poems concentrate on the people who support the war and send their men off to fight. They understand all too well the consequences of the fighting and struggle to see some hope for the future in the midst of despair. Their misery in one poem contrasts with their happiness in another when they know the men are coming home. The final poem, one of Hardy's last poems on war, is almost a summary of all the negative effects of war emphasized in his other poems.

A comment on patriotism as well as on war victims, "The Peasant's Confession" deals with a war victim who helped himself instead of being patriotic. Many years later, the peasant, feeling guilty and approaching the end of his life, confesses his guilt to a priest. A ballad and dramatic monologue, like many of Hardy's Napoleonic War poems, this one is based on a particular historical incident. According to the head-note, quoted from Thiers, <u>Histoire de l'Empire</u>, "Waterloo," Napoleon sent someone to notify Field Marshal Grouchy to engage General Blucher before he could combine forces with Lord Wellington. The messenger, however, never arrived, and no one knows what happened to him. This poem is Hardy's explanation. An officer appeared late at night at this peasant's hut, offering gold and asking for a guide to take him to Grouchy, who had passed by earlier. The peasant and his family had heard the sound of fighting for three days with dread, and when Grouchy finally passed, he says, "We hoped thenceforth no army, small or vast / would trouble us again." Because the officer makes the mistake of explaining the message he is to take to Grouchy, the peasant has the opportunity to reason the situation out as he gets ready to join the man. He thinks thus:

> . . . If Grouchy thus and thus be told,
> The clash comes sheer hereon;
> My farm is stript. While, as for gifts of gold,
> Money the French have none.
> (<u>C</u>. <u>P</u>., p. 28)

On the other hand, he thinks, if the English win, his farm will be left to him, and the English will buy, not borrow, supplies from him. As a result of his reasoning, the peasant leads the man in the wrong direction. At noon the fighting resumes, and the messenger, aware that he has been tricked, starts to kill the peasant. The peasant, however,

kills the messenger with his own sabre and hides him in the grain-fields. The Battle of Waterloo is then told in epic proportions.[1] The two armies writhe, coiled like giant snakes of red and blue. The magnitude of the battle is indicated by a gigantic roll call of famous and obscure heroes from both sides. J. O. Bailey suggests that in giving this long list, the poem shows the great consequences that result from petty motives.[2] When the battle ended, the peasant was at peace; as he says,

> Safe was my stock; my capple cow unslain
> Intact each cock and hen.
> (C. P., p. 30)

As old age approaches, he finds saving his farm has not made his life much happier; his children are as selfish as he was:

> So now, being old, my children eye askance
> My slowly dwindling store,
> And crave my mite; till, worn with tarriance,
> I care for life no more.
> (C. P., p. 30)

He regrets what he has done, but he cannot change it. As he exclaims:

> O Saints, had I but lost my earing corn
> And saved the cause once prized!
> O Saints, why such false witness had I borne
> When late I'd sympathized! . . .
> (C. P., p. 30)

The reader sympathizes with the peasant. It is not so unusual for a man to believe in patriotism until he stands to lose something by it. The poem coincides with the situation in many of Hardy's poems; the "cause" really does not mean much to the peasant; the fear of war and of what he will lose by it makes him forget concern for people in his own homeland. It brutalizes him into weighing human gain against compassion

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 72.

[2] Ibid.

for his own people and letting human gain weigh heaviest. Ironically, he discovers later his actions were without purpose because his life does not turn out to be any happier; bothered by guilt as well as lack of material gain, he is considerably unhappier. Ironically too, his children follow his example, making the same choice even though there is no war; they weigh human gain against concern for their father, and the former weighs heavier.

The sonnet "On the Belgium Expatriation" concerns Belgium's refugees coming to England, and it also concerns dream and reality. Like Hardy, the speaker associates Belgium with the beautiful chimes for which the country is famous.[1] In the octave he dreams that people came from "the land of chimes" and presented the country with a gift of bells which rang at allotted times, night and day, that they "might solace souls of this and kindred climes." In the sestet the speaker wakes to find his dream ironically reversed; instead of Belgium's people comforting England, England must comfort them, for they are "pale and full of fear." The bells of his dreams do not exist any longer because

> Foes of mad mood
> Had shattered these to shards amid the gear
> Of ravaged roof, and smoldering gable end.
> (C. P., p. 509)

By describing the foes as being in a "mad mood," the speaker suggests the loss of reason in war which causes the senseless destruction of all that is beautiful as well as all that is useful in Belgium. The bells are shattered to shards which would be such tiny pieces they could not be repaired. The roof is ravaged, utterly and violently destroyed, and the gable-end smolders, silently continuing its own

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[1]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 418.

destruction. Again, as in "In Times of Wars and Tumults," by talking about the destruction of parts of houses instead of whole houses, the speaker suggests the fragmenting destruction of war.

Divided into two verses, "An Appeal on Behalf of the Belgium Destitute" first describes the plight of both Belgium and England at this point in the war and second appeals to America for help. The first verse describes the devastating effect of war on people. The speaker imagines seven million with "these ails unmerited," standing on the shores of Belgium looking out to sea in appeal. They are so emaciated the speaker never calls them people, but "souls," as if their bodies had become insubstantial. He amplifies that idea further in the next lines with ". . . naked, gaunt in endless bands on bands / Seven millions stand." They are naked with nothing to cover their bodies, and they are gaunt, thin, weary, and barren; they have nothing left but their souls. England, seeing this terrible devastation, can do nothing, for she is in bad condition too, "full-charged with her own maimed and dead / And coiled in throbbing conflicts slow and sore." England does not have people starving, but aside from the dead and maimed, it has such painful conflicts to face that people seem coiled like snakes ready to strike at each other, or they are twisted in such difficult conflicts it seems they cannot be extricated. In the second verse the speaker appeals to America in a conciliatory fashion. He says that "No man can say / To your great country . . . you must ease them in their loud need." Countries, selfishly, put their own needs first, naturally, but the speaker puts the thought in kinder words: "We know that nearer first your duty lies." Instead of trying to use force and instead of appealing to America to show a compassion equal to his own, he suggests that America let her own loving-kindness woo

her into helping. He implies that America just naturally has compassion equal to his own if she will just use it. Leaving something for America to think about at the end in case she is reluctant, he reiterates that no man can say all that America owes and must repay, suggesting that, in good conscience, America does have obligations and should come to Belgium's aid.

There are other poems that portray the people attacked as victims of war, but frequently too the soldier is considered a victim. Although it may not be the main idea of a poem, one idea recurs often in Hardy's war poems: soldiers are expected, and expect themselves, to fight in wars which they do not understand and to kill and be killed by other soldiers with whom they have no grudge. The narrators of Hardy's poems usually do not attack war, but concentrate on the victim's suffering. The idea of soldier as victim appears in poems from all three wars. For instance, the soldier-narrator of "Valenciennes" remarks in passing:

> 'Twas said that we'd no business there
> A-topperèn the French for disagreèn;
> However, that's not my affair--
> We were at Valencieèn.
> (C. P., p. 16)

This particular soldier lost his hearing in the battle and carries a silver clamp in his head, yet he does not consider it his affair to decide whether the fighting was right or wrong. In "Embarcation," a South African War poem, the narrator disapproves of the war venture; he describes the soldiers as bright autumn leaves soon to fall in battle; the relatives have no trouble seeing the tragic future, yet

> . . . as each host draws out upon the sea
> Beyond which lies the tragical To-be,
> None dubious of the cause, none murmuring.
> (C. P., p. 78)

The opening line of "Often When Warring," a World War I poem, runs

"Often when warring for he wist not what" and concerns an enemy soldier who, without thinking, acts naturally and helps an injured man although he is on the other side and his action is contrary to the whole idea of war. The father in "I Looked up from my Writing," another World War I poem, is driven to suicide by sorrow for his son

> Who is slain in brutish battle,
> Though he has injured none.
> (_C. P._, p. 519)

In two of the poems, one from the Napoleonic Wars and one from the South African War, the speakers are more critical of this strange situation. The narrator of "Leipzig" comments on the irony, unfairness, and unnaturalness of it all when he observes:

> Fifty thousand sturdy souls on those trampled plains and knolls
> Who met the dawn hopefully,
> And were lotted their shares in a quarrel not theirs
> Dropt then in their agony.
> (_C. P._, p. 24)

The soldiers are given shares in someone else's quarrel, although they are not interested in it, as a company would give out shares to people on the street who are not interested. Both are illogical. Then, the shares that are given out, by lot or chance, turn out to be death shares. This arrangement seems unfair when those who have the quarrel stay home and out of danger. Rather than suggesting soldiers who take part willingly in a quarrel not theirs are unintelligent, Hardy frequently portrays his soldiers as innocents who are too trusting, like the liege men who end up in a cock fight to the death. The most critical image used to describe soldiers going to war, mentioned earlier, is found in "Departure" when the narrator asks:

> How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels
> Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like these
> That are as puppets in a playing hand?--
> (_C. P._, p. 79)

The picture is flattering neither to the soldiers nor to the people who control war, but the idea of a soldier as a puppet is consistent with the ideas in the other poems; soldiers go to wars they do not understand and follow directions like puppets who cannot think, killing whomever they are told to kill whether it makes sense or not. The men who run the war are like children playing with puppets; they have a good time and enjoy themselves while they kill people.

Aside from these quotations, there are six poems that present the plight of the soldier as puppet, and in the process show the unnaturalness of war. "San Sebastion," Hardy's earliest poem which emphasizes war's victimizing effect, tells the story of two victims of war, a sergeant and a girl from that city. While both are victims, the poem focuses on the sergeant who is never free from guilt as a result of the war. War brutalized him and made him forget his compassion for a moment in time; his conscience has never allowed him to forget. This dramatic monologue opens with the sergeant talking to one of his neighbors. The neighbor finds it curious that every night the sergeant walks the roadway "as though at home there were spectres rife" when "from first to last" he has had a proud career, and now "in his sunny years" he has "a gracious wife" and a comely daughter. The sergeant explains by telling the story of the storming of San Sebastion. His account catches the excitement, the unpredictability, and the brutality of war. He describes "the flapping light from the burning towers" and "the mortar's boom" in the night as the soldiers top a breach and then cannot hold it. Then there is the long climb in the hot, still August morning, and five hours of "storm" and "reform" with "crashing balls of iron fire" falling and men dying "amid curses, groans, and cheers." Finally, when

the other side has bad luck and is blown off a hill, the soldiers enter the city just as rain and thunder burst upon them. The men go searching for their own rewards. Hungry and thirsty, they ransack buildings and find the puncheon of Spanish grape. Fired by the wine, the sergeant chases a girl, rapes her in her own room, and cannot forget her for the rest of his life, especially "her beseeching eyes." His conscience bothers him to such an extent that he feels that he carries the mark of Cain, and after the war when his own daughter is born, her eyes remind him of the other girl's. In fact, he is convinced that he "copied those eyes" for his punishment and that "the mother of my child is not / The mother of her eyes," as if some supernatural vengeance had taken place. His own explanation is simpler but just as unscientific:

> Maybe we shape our offspring's guise
> From fancy, or we know not what
> And that no deep impression dies.
> (C. P., p. 19)

His daughter is now about the age of the other girl, and it pains him to look at her. Every night he walks the street. He has no delight in his honorable career, and for him, ". . . 'tis coals of fire that a gracious wife / Should have brought me a daughter dear." The poem arouses sympathy for the girl who was defenseless and alone, but also for the sergeant who was caught up in a moment of drunken passion. The incident would have never happened except for the "brutish" war, and he has paid ever since. The poem leaves the impression that war victimizes; it is a trap in which conquered and conqueror suffer alike.

The sergeant blames himself solely for what happened at San Sebastion, but the colonel in "The Colonel's Soliloquy," who has also had an honorable career, comes close to seeing himself as a victim of war. The poem, specifically dated October 1899, is a view of the departure for the South African War from the soldier's point of view.

As the boat takes him away from the quay, the colonel, torn by doubt of his own ability and fear for his wife, justifies his going off to war. The poem moves from the positive and affirmative first line to the doubtful and negative last line. Ironically, the more the colonel assures himself, the less convinced he seems to be, and the very assurances he gives tend to confirm his doubts. J. O. Bailey points out that by the end of the poem the colonel is fighting not to mock himself.[1] Beginning with his "Hurray! Ahead we go!" the first half of the poem involves the colonel's efforts to convince himself that he is fit to go to war and the second half to his concern for his wife. Almost all of the adjectives he uses in talking about himself are words to describe something small or indefinite. The positive things he has to say about himself he phrases in a negative fashion, and the most forceful things he has to say are negative. Together all of these devices add up to a negative refrain echoing his doubts rather than confirming any faith. The colonel admits in the first verse that he has grown used to being home, that his joints are rusty, and his limbs are more fit to rest than roam. In defense, he assures himself that he can stand not a great deal, but "fair stress and strain." Instead of saying there is plenty of steel beneath the rust, he makes it negative, "There's not a little steel beneath the rust"; the "little" stays in the reader's mind. He admits, "My years mount somewhat"; he very carefully does not admit how much, and to reaffirm his drive, he uses the catch-all phrase, "here's to't again!" The most forceful thing he says in the verse is "And if I fall, I must"; this statement is both negative and fatalistic. Again deprecating himself, he asserts, "God knows that for myself I have scanty care." He means, of course, that he fights without regard for himself, but the man's modesty keeps him from

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[1] The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 117.

saying so in a more forceful way. In remembering his past glories, he uses the passive and the indefinite to cut the forcefulness:

> Past scrimmages have proved as much to all;
> In Eastern lands and South I have had my share
> Both of the blade and ball.
> (C. P., p. 79)

The first line refers to the fact that he fights without regard for himself; his fellow soldiers know this fact from "past scrimmages," but he uses the passive voice to record the fact now, and instead of telling all about his war wounds he only says he has had his share. When the colonel finally returns to a forceful sentence structure, he describes something negative that happened to him:

> And where those villains ripped me in the flitch
> With their old iron in my early time,
> I'm apt at change of wind to feel a twitch
> Or at a change of clime.
> (C. P., p. 79)

Continuing with the tearing down of himself, he again has to admit that when he looks in the mirror what he sees "Has more of blotch and wrinkle than of bloom," and his eyes, once strong, "heretofore all glasses scorning," "Have just a touch of rheum. . ." The colonel sounds most alive when the sound of "The Girl I've Left Behind Me" awakens memories of other partings:

> --Ah,
> The years, the ardours, wakened by that tune!
> Time was when, with the crowd's farewell 'Hurrah!'
> 'Twould lift me to the moon.
> (C. P., p. 80)

But that time is past, and the colonel's thoughts turn to his wife who is no more ready to cope with war than he is. She is a "poor soul" who will not be able to recover so quickly if "her man goes underground." Again, he cannot be so definite; he has a picturesque euphemism for death. He creates a sad picture of his wife on shore, waving but palely grieving. Paradoxically, she sheds fewer tears, but she is suffering

more now than she did twenty years ago when he left. His final thought for her is a prayer that "those left at home will care for her." Returning to himself, he is positive, "I shall come back," but he feels that he has to justify his statement with "I have before." Qualiftying his first statement even more, he adds his last sadly humorous comment:

> Though when
> The Girl you leave behind you is a grandmother
> Things may not be as then.
> (C. P., p. 80)

By the end of the poem the colonel, whether he admits it or not, has convinced himself that he has no business going off to war.

"The Man He Killed," a very simple poem, is a dramatic monologue in which a soldier who has just killed one of the enemy asks himself why. Like the colonel, he attempts to reason things out, but he is unsuccessful in seeing the senselessness of his actions. He concludes that he killed a man who could have been his friend if they had met outside the war because he was his foe. David Perkins, analyzing the soldier's character, points out that the man is really unsure of himself; the soldier repeats the fact that the man was his foe as if he were not satisfied. He means well, and he is bothered by killing a man he does not dislike, but he is unable to go beyond established answers. Subconsciously, he realizes this man is not his enemy. He identifies with him. Like himself, he figures the other man drifted into the army because he had nowhere else to go. At this point instead of attacking war as being terrible, the soldier satisfies himself with this understated conclusion:

> '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.'
> (C. P., p. 269)

There is double irony in this poem. First, it is ironic that men kill each other who have no quarrel, and second it is ironic that a decent man like the speaker is not more disturbed by that fact and satisfies himself with the remark that war is curious and quaint.[1]

If soldiers are puppets who cannot feel or think, it follows that a soldier's death is not particularly important. He is only a broken toy to be stuck in the ground and forgotten. The poem "Drummer Hodge," dealing with a soldier's death, is a simple, understated poem, which without moralizing makes one see the tragedy of a person destroyed by an inhuman war.[2] Hodge is already dead when the poem begins; he no longer knows or cares what happens to his body. The poem bases its appeal, however, on the premises that anyone's death ought to have some dignity and meaning, and that a person taken by death to such a final and unknown experience ought to at least be buried in a familiar place. The people who bury Drummer Hodge ignore all these ideas. Bailey explains that Hodge in Hardy's time is a nickname for a country bumpkin or yokel. He believes Hardy used this name to show the attitude of the war machine toward country boys: they were merely food for the cannon.[3] Jean Brooks suggest that Hodge is the representative unknown soldier.[4] Vivian Pinto points out that the name fits; Hodge was an ignorant country boy.[5] The lack of personal concern for Drummer Hodge

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[1]David Perkins, "Hardy and the Poetry of Isolation," in A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Albert F. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p.p. 144-45.

[2]Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940, p. 45.

[3]Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 120.

[4]Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 76.

[5]Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940, p. 45.

is established in the first two lines of the poem which describe his burial:

> They threw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
> Uncoffined--just as found.
> (C. P., p. 83)

The remainder of the poem establishes Drummer Hodge's personality and emphasizes the unnaturalness of the situation. Drummer Hodge had just come from Wessex, and he was ignorant. He did not understand the war; he did not understand the land of South Africa, the kopje-crests, the veldt, the broad Karoo, the Bush, or even the dusty loam; he did not understand why strange stars rose in the sky which he could not name. Yet, South Africa is his burial place. His life counted for nothing here; his death meant nothing. Now this homely soldier is buried in a foreign country which meant nothing to him. Its strangeness is emphasized by all the unfamiliar place names. Even so the narrator unsentimentally reflects that Hodge will become part of the plain on which he is buried.[1]

> His homely Northern breast and brain
> [will] Grow to some Southern tree.
> (C. P., p. 83)

Even if he does not understand why those stars are there,

> . . . strange-eyed constellations [will] reign
> His stars eternally.
> (C. P., p. 83)

The poem uses simple, dignified language to talk with deep emotion about an undignified, unnatural situation.[2]

The subject of "The Casterbridge Captains," unlike Drummer Hodge, is a survivor of war, but like Drummer Hodge, he does not understand war either. The only poem written about the war in India, it tells the story of three friends who went off to war, but only one returned, who

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[1] Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 76.

[2] Pinto, Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940, p. 45.

"wore the laurels all had earned." At church he sits in the pew where the three boys had carved their names in equal size, and thinks with some satisfaction that their names are now unequal. As he says,

> 'Twas theirs to aim,
> Mine was it to fulfil!
> (C. P., p. 42)

At that moment the minister, unaware of the returned soldier, preaches "Who saves his life shall lose it, friends!" and everything changes for the soldier. Even though it was "the chance of war" which determined who lived and who died, he saw

> Transcendence rayed the distant urn
> Where slept the fallen twain.
> (C. P., p. 43)

He no longer felt any transcendent triumph for having returned alive. J. O. Bailey comments that the poem is "a delicate study in compunction influenced by religious emotionalism."[1] The poem is an ironic reflection on the glory of war, for as the soldier moves from feeling glory in having survived to seeing glory for those who died, the reader ceases to see transcendent rays for either one.

"Souls of the Slain" is the only poem in which soldiers discover they are victims of war, but the discovery comes too late. This poem is even a stronger attack than "The Casterbridge Captains" on the idea that there is glory in dying for one's country. The setting of the poem is Portland Bill, a dangerous spot on the British coast found on a line between England and South Africa. The war that is mentioned in this poem is obviously the South African War.[2] Hardy uses the place which is described as "that engulphing, ghast, sinister place," for

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[1] The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 84.

[2] Ibid., p. 122.

atmosphere and as a symbol of hell.[1] Barton Friedman, in examining the poem as a "dream vision," points out that the landscape is "an elaborate psychic metaphor defining the state of [Hardy's] persona. Its features have the qualities of human features. The ground on which the narrator ostensibly finds himself is 'Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face.' The slope of the land is 'bent-beared.'"[2] The narrator, whose dream begins as "the thick lids of Night closed," is "an old man caught in a dilemma, a conflict; the spectres whose talk he overhears externalize his internal brooding."[3] In the poem a group of spirits, victims of the war, fly in from the South and expect to go home to feast on their fame. From the North appears "a senior soul-flame," a General, who like the Holy Ghost, appears in "cloven tongues like as a fire at Pentecost."[4] The General, having examined the terrain ahead, advises them that though they have died for their country, ironically no one remembers them for that. Mothers remember them for "the quaint ways of . . . babyhood's innocent days" and hope that their religious faith was stronger and their joys higher before they died. Fathers brood that they had not set their sons "to some humble trade" and calmed their "martial desire" by telling no tales to convince them to go to war. Wives remember

> Deeds of home; that live yet
> Fresh as new--deeds of fondness or fret
> Ancient words that were kindly expressed or unkindly.
> (C. P., p. 86)

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 123.

[2] "When There Is Nothing: Hardy's 'Souls of the Slain,'" Renascence, XVII (Spring, 1965), 121-27, quoted in Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 123.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Only those who might use it to their own advantage remember the men as warriors: ". . . many sweethearts think / It is not unattractive to prink / Them in sables for heroes . . ."

Some of the spirits are made bitter by the knowledge that they are not remembered for their martial deeds, but the rest prize the fact that they are remembered for "old kindnesses." Almost like the Last Judgment those whose records were "lovely and true" go home, which to them is heaven, to stay as long as they are remembered. Those of "bitter traditions" plunge into the Race below the Port. Outside of the resemblance to Judgment Day, it is logical for these men to disappear because they are remembered by no one. In Friedman's dream vision, the ocean represents the human psyche which is appropriate because according to the poem submerging these souls is like a forgetting; in other words the persona represses the attitudes they represent.[1]

Noticeably missing in the poems emphasizing the soldier as a victim of war are any poems from World War I. There are poems in the World War I collection in which the soldier is a victim, but the poems dwell on some aspect of the situation which to some extent balances or compensates for the cruelty. There are also poems from the Napoleonic Wars which have similar elements. Noticeably missing in this group, however, are any poems from the South African War.

One of the first poems in the Napoleonic War group which emphasizes the positive rather than the negative is "Valenciennes." Like "San Sebastion," it recounts the taking of a city, but it is more hopeful in spite of the fact that war victimizes. The speaker, identified by Hardy

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[1]Friedman, "When There Is Nothing," in Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 123

in a headnote, is Corp'l Tullidge, a character in the novel The Trumpet Major. He obviously considers himself an expert on this battle. He praises and defends his commander, the Duke of York, apparently a controversial figure in the battle, makes the physical sights and sounds of war seem real, and almost brags about how tough the fighting was. As he says,

> Such snocks and slats, [smart blows and slaps] since war began
> Never knew raw recruit or veteran:
> Stone-deaf therence went many a man
> Who served at Valencieën.
> (C. P., p. 16)

He was one of those who went away stone deaf, but in telling of his wounding, he has no regrets but rather considers the war his moment of glory. "A shell was slent to shards anighst" his ears, and it was nearly the end of all his "hopes and fears," but the doctor put him together and proclaimed, "We've fetched en back to quick from dead." In spite of all the excitement of this story, J. O. Bailey comments on the "subtle swipes" in the poem against war.[1] As was suggested in "Then and Now" civilians are victims of war; Corp'l Tullidge acknowledges that "harmless townfolk fell to die / Each hour at Valencieën." As the earlier quoted verse from this poem suggests, the corp'l suspects the English should not even be fighting the French, but he refuses to use his rational powers to judge for himself. Unable to hear or know much since his injury, he lives in his memories of Valenciennes, and he is looking forward to heaven. As a further attack on war, Jean Brooks points out that Hardy uses natural description as a contrast between "the destructive interruptions of war and "the eternal values of

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 63.

human relationships linked closely to the life cycle."[1] One example in "Valenciennes" is this wistful verse from Tullidge:

> I never hear the zummer hums
> O' bees; and don' know when the cuckoo comes
> But night and day I hear the bombs
> We threw at Valencieën. . . .
> (C. P., p. 17)

To hear the sounds of spring and summer is the natural birthright of man, but for Corp'l Tullidge war has replaced those sounds with the continuous humming of the bombs he talks about throwing in the first verse. Time has stopped for him because he can no longer hear. Yet, paradoxically, in spite of his war wounds that have cut him off from life and give him pain on "wild wet nights," he says, "at times I'm sor o' glad / I fout at Valencieën." Too, when he longinly thinks of heaven, he jokingly relates it to the battle:

> Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls
> As we did Valencieën.
> (C. P., p. 17)

Bragging again, he suggests if the Devil would equal what they did at Valenciennes, Heaven would be in trouble. Corp'l Tullidge affirms the value of human life in spite of war as does the speaker in "In Time of the Breaking of Nations." War wounds him, but it does not break him. As Jean Brooks commments, the poem reveals the eternal human values of courage, fairness, resignation, pride, and humore which cannot be destroyed by war.[2] Corp'l Tullidge has the spirit of the greeters in "Cry of the Homeless," but he lacks the bitterness.

In "The Alarm" the soldier again appears to be a victim. Like the colonel in "The Colonel's Soliloquy," he is torn by duty to his country and duty to his wife, but as the situation works out, the soldier is able to fulfill both duties. Though he suffers some anguish, the poem suggests

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[1] Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 131.

[2] Ibid., p. 132.

that if one does his duty to his country, with God's help everything will be all right. Written about an actual event in Hardy's family, this ballad of the Napoleonic Wars, concerns a soldier who is called to duty to defend the coast of England when Napoleon is expected to land. Because he is especially worried about his wife, who is soon to have a baby, he pauses on his way to the coast to reassure her. From his many and varied instructions and assurances to her, one suspects that he is trying to reassure himself. He tells her he has brought in enough food, that if the baby is about to be born to send the char-wench to get assistance, that she should forget about Buonaparte because he is not likely to land and if he does, who would fight better than men fighting for their homes. On and on he goes. On the way to the coast after taking leave of her, he hears that Napoleon has landed. All of his certainty that "those strike with aim who strike for wives and sons!" deserts him. The best way to protect his wife, he concludes, is to "seek the woods with her till times have altered." After all, "Charity favors home." Though patriotism is strong in England now, and he will not be forgiven by people here, he decides, "Such sin, to save a childing wife, would earn it Christ's remission." At that moment while all of these thoughts are going through his mind, he notices a little bird, drinking in the river, who has become caught in the "stringy arms" of crowfoot tufts. With instant compassion, he goes to release it. Remembering that "Signs Divine" sometimes appear ere battle, he decides that Heaven has sent the bird as a guide. He prays that the Lord will show him where his duty lies by sending the bird toward home if he should go to his wife and to the coast if he should defend his country. The bird's flying to the coast seems to be a a divine directing because when the soldier arrives there he finds the news of Napoleon's landing

was a false rumor, and he returns safely and honorably to his wife. Even though the soldier never fights, the poem seems to encourage patriotism because the soldier does his patriotic duty, and with God's help everything works out right. On the use of the bird image, Jean Brooks comments that only Hardy could have prevented "the ballad prop of the guiding bird-omen" from making the poem artificial. He prevents the artificial tone from developing by his acute and compassionate description of the situation:[1]

> While he stood thinking,
> A little bird, perched drinking
> Among the crowfoot tufts the river bore,
> Was tangled in their stringy arms and fluttered, almost sinking
> Near him, upon the moor.
> (C. P., p. 33)

The bird, used in several ways in the poem, is a symbol of the soldier: both are trapped in a dilemma which could destroy them; both are released by an act of loving-kindness, one from God, one from man. The bird is also part of nature which in this poem is all wise and directed by God. In the beginning of the poem a peaceful scene is described:

> Near the great South-Wessex Highway,
> A homestead raised its breakfast-smoke aloft;
> The dew-damps still lay steamless, for the sun had made no skyway,
> And twilight cloaked the croft.
>
> It was almost past conceiving
> Here, where woodbines hung inweaving,
> That quite closely hostile armaments might steer.
> (C. P., p.p. 30-31)

It is as if nature knows with this peaceful scene and is giving a sign that it is past conceiving that war could appear here. At the end of the poem, God uses nature in the form of a bird to tell the soldier

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[1] Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 131.

what to do. The bird seems to tell him to go to war, which contradicts the way that nature is used in many of Hardy's other poems, as a contrast to war and as a symbol of the natural and peaceful way man's life should run. Actually this use of nature is not contradictory because while the bird seems to tell him to go to war, it is really telling him the best way to be at peace with himself. The soldier is able to fulfill both duties without anyone suffering by following nature's direction. The suggestion of nature being in harmony with God is consistent with the images in "I Met a Man."

Another Napoleonic War ballad, "Leipzig" describes the battle for that city in such heroic terms, emphasizes the happy aspects of the victory and recalls such pleasant memories that one tends to forget the cruelty even when it is presented. As a result it stands in opposition to all the poems which depict war as victimizing people and making the world gloomy and depressing. One reason "Leipzig" fails to convey the cruelty and immediacy of war is that the narrator is not a victim of war nor is any individual character in the poem. His mother has told him many times of the battle of Leipzig of which she seems to have considered herself a victim; he recalls that she said "the Allies / Burst on her home like flame," but he always remembers her telling the story when "she used to sing and pirouette and tap the tambourine" to a particular march that was current at the battle. She told the story at happy moments which minimizes the cruelty of war; she survived, married a British soldier, and seems to have lived happily ever after. Another positive aspect of war in this poem is the exciting battle which was a defeat and turning point for Napoleon. The combined forces of Russia, Prussia, and Austria had closed in on Napoleon "like a gin"

in a semi-circle with the only escape route the Bridge of Lindenau.[1] Napoleon, who the narrator describes as "in equal fight . . . the match of none," chose heroically to stay and fight. The ballad effectively catches the sights and sounds of the battle which "raged" for days: the flares that signaled the night before that all was ready, the watch-fires that glowed showing Napoleon had not retreated, the five hundred guns that started the fighting, the Confederate Powers "glittering" in their lines before the battle, and the battle itself continuing on three sides with the French, unlikely to win, nevertheless holding "all at bay." Napoleon with proper braggadocio is heard to say:

> 'Tis well to cover a feeble skill
> By numbers' might! . . .
> But give me a third of their strength I'd fill
> Half Hell with their soldiery!
> (C. P., p. 25)

The French fight bravely which the ballad records in true epic fashion with a roll call of heroes: brave Ney, the true Bertrand, Victor, and Augereau, and bold Poniatowski and Lauriston.[2] Also in the epic tradition there is a premonition of disaster:

> But as in the dream of one sick to death
> There comes a narrowing room
> That pens him, body and limbs and breath,
> To wait a hideous doom,
>
> So to Napoleon, in the hush
> That held the town and towers
> Through these dire nights, a creeping crush
> Seemed borne in with the hours.
> (C. P., p. 25)

Finally the French are in retreat across the bridge when it blows up, and the remnant flees to France. The ballad celebrates the victory in

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. 68.

[2] Ibid., p. 69.

grandiose fashion:

> And thus did Leipzig City sound
>   An Empire's passing bell;
>
> While in cavalcade, with band and blade,
>   Came Marshals, Princes, Kings;
> And the town was theirs . . . .
> (*C. P.*, p. 26)

In contrast to the epic celebration of war, the poem also depicts the cruelty of war. In addition to the verse quoted earlier describing the 50,000 who died in agony for a quarrel that was not theirs, the ballad describes the "mad and mangling cannon-play" that tore the human lines, and the "miles-wide pant of pain" "that ever upspread from the dank deathbed" at night. In the bridge explosion men are blown up as impersonally as stones:

> When there surged on the sky an earthen wave,
>   And stones, and men, as though
> Some rebel churchyard crew updrave
>   Their sepulchres from below.
> (C. P., p. 25)

The aftermath of the explosion is the river running red with blood. Also, as was mentioned earlier, the old folks in the city ask the Christian preachers if there will ever be peace.

In spite of all of this criticism of war, the poem ends with the victory celebration and the old man remembering his mother with pleasure as she danced to the tambourine. While "Leipzig" has elements that make it possible to talk about it with other poems about war victims, it celebrates the glory and greatness of war. It conveys a distance and impersonality between the narrator and the tragic aspects of war. Fifty thousand soldiers' deaths do not mean as much as Drummer Hodge's death. Men riding an earthen wave is a startling, memorable, and remarkably graceful image of death; the wave is a colossal natural force which belongs in an epic tale of war. This poem glides over the horror

of war and emphasizes the glorious striving of men, ending on the happy victory celebration and the narrator's smile as he remembers his mother's dancing. The pain of war has been pushed back far enough into the poem that it does not show.

In the World War I poem, "Before Marching and After," war is much more unpleasant; there are no happy memories as in "Leipzig," only satisfaction that a soldier has won something in a game in which only death was likely to win. Unlike the South African War poem, "Souls of the Slain," this poem suggests that if a soldier fights with honor and courage, his name will be remembered. Written in memory of Frank William George, a cousin whom Hardy loved as a son, the poem is a rather fatalistic one with the first two verses devoted to the soldier's meditations before going off to war and the last verse to his death. The soldier, late at night, looks out at the land that he loves, and hears the familiar whirr of the household-clock, and his mother's "low sighing" from inside the house; yet he is unmoved by all of these. He is wondering,

> What great thing or small thing his history would borrow
> From that Game with Death he would play on the morrow.
> (C. P., p. 512)

In late summer news comes of his death, but he fought gallantly and heroically. In the end ". . . his name was to borrow / [from death] A brightness therefrom not to fade on the morrow." War is pictured grimly in this poem. It is a "Game with Death" from which Death stands to win, but man can borrow something from its triumph which will reflect upon his name. Frank George had taken an enemy trench and captured fourteen prisoners. Later, as if he sensed his death approaching, he divided his water among those in his own trench. He then advanced

and was killed.[1] The simple, understated language and the comparison of war to a deadly game prevent any notion of joy in dying for one's country from creeping in. There is a simple satisfaction in taking away from death some glory for oneself, but that is all. Nature is used for several purposes in this poem. In the first verse nature seems to be in pain at the soldier's leaving. Orion shines down "where the starved Egdon pine trees had thinned." The Pleiads seem to pant, winking in time to the twitching of the heather in the wind. In the third verse nature's normal life cycle is contrasted to the soldier's. In late summer as nature has reached its prime, and as the heath wears its summer robe and the fuchsia-bells hang red by the door in the hot sun, news comes that the soldier's marching is done. Life is over for him before his time. While the contrast may be painful, he is yet different from the flowers. Now dead, he is a part of nature that has no cycle. Like the stars that shine forever in the beginning of the poem, his name takes on a brightness that will never fade like the flowers. This last contrast emphasizes the soldier's triumph.

"Often When Warring" is an optimistic poem, also written during World War I which especially balances "The Man He Killed." While it suggests that war is unnatural, and that soldiers still do not understand war, it also shows that man can do better than be a puppet fighting a war he does not understand if he just allows himself to act naturally. The octave of this sonnet presents a situation in which an enemy soldier passing someone wounded from the other side tries to ease his misery. "Amid the roar and reek" of war the soldier probably forgets

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[1] Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, p. p. 422.

his "deed of grace," but the narrator concludes he reached a larger vision than people fighting ever can. In the sestet he explains that "natural mindsight" has triumphed "over the throes of artificial rage." In other words, man's natural compassion has won over the artificial anger induced by war makers. He may be moved to anger by artificial means, but it passes away in the face of the real distress of another human being. Such an act is a triumph over war, the narrator concludes, even if the soldier does not know it. It muffles the bells that ring in pride at the time of a victory because it shows more concern for the defeated than self-satisfaction in winning. It tears to ribbons deceptive pages of policy that talk about codes, pacts, and evasions because it is an honest act of concern instead of a pretense. The codes and pacts are only a pretense of concern for each other signed by nations who do not intend to keep them. His act makes all apologies for war appear foolish and illogical because there is no acceptable apology for war if people are really, naturally concerned about each other as this ordinary soldier was. In contrast to the speaker in "In Times of War and Tumult," this speaker is saying one person can make a difference, and even more optimistically the title suggests that soldiers often act this way.

Hardy's most patriotic war poem, written during World War I, is the most positive picture of men going to war and contrasts strongly with the South African War poems which describe the men leaving Southampton. It emphatically denies that men act blindly in going to war and know nothing about the reasons for fighting. "Men Who March Away," subtitled "Song of the Soldiers" is a ballad with questions and answers, the first two lines of each verse making a refrain at the end. In the first two

verses the soldiers ask the questions which they think they see in the eyes of those who are watching them march away. First, they think their "faith and fire" in going off to war and leaving all that they value behind them is questioned. In the second verse the soldiers think someone standing near believes their marching off is a half-blind prank they do not really understand. Toward the end of the second verse, the soldiers begin their affirmation by asking that person standing near a question in return, "Can such pondering so hoodwink you!" In the third verse they explain that they clearly see why they are going to war. They describe themselves as "England's need." England is a lady in distress and they would regret not helping her. Those who do not help are "dalliers." In verse four they explain their faith; they believe that their cause is right and "Victory crowns the just." Their foes they characterize as "braggarts" who are bound to fall. Having explained themselves, the soldiers exchange the question of verse one, "What of the faith and fire within us" for the affirmative "Hence the faith and fire within us" and in the last verse march off singing it.

Hardy's poetry shows that the people attacked are victims of war, and the soldiers themselves are victims. Even though his poetry does not waste any sympathy on them, even leaders are victims of war because they become brutal and inhuman. Finally, the people who send their men off to war are shown to be victims too, seeing only tragedy for themselves and those who fight. They will only be happy again when their men come home.

"Embarcation" portrays the pain of parting for relatives at home while the soldiers are full of life, willing to go, and unaware of approaching tragedy. The same themes are echoed in "The Going of the Battery," subtitled "Wives' Lament." The poem is an account of the men

embarking for the South African War from the wives' point of view looking back after the event has happened. In the first verse the wives berate themselves for ever having fallen in love with soldiers. Doing such a thing was "sad," "weak," and "mad" first because soldiers are "light in their loving" and second because they may die in battle. The next five verses describe the dismal scene at Southampton the day the soldiers left. The rain poured, making it muddy to walk, and the men were only too ready to go. The great, gleaming yellow guns seemed things alive, cloaked in tar-cloths with mouths open to the night. Their throats were "blank of sound" but "prophetic" to sight; the wives could hear, as they looked at them, the guns firing soon. Parting with one kiss, the urged against glorious striving in war, "Not to court perils that honour could miss." Returning the way they had come, one wife predicts, "Nevermore will they come: evermore / Are they now lost to us." The other wives, sure she is wrong, reply:

> Though may be hard their ways, some Hand will guard their ways,
> Bear them through safely, in brief time or long.
> (C. P., p. 81)

Now in the nightime, voices, "haunting," daunting," and taunting" them, say "other and graver things. . . ." The wives instruct themselves:

> . . . Hold we to braver things
> Wait we, in trust, what Time's fulness shall show.
> (C. P., p. 81)

The poem paints the sorrow and uncertainty that befall a wife who sees her husband off to war and must wait for his return. The soldiers, on the other hand, are not very sympathetic to their wives' unhappiness. They are eager to go to battle, and one suspects that they will "court the perils that honour could miss."

Contrasting with the uncertainty and unhappiness of "The Going of the Battery," "Song of the Soldiers' Wives and Sweethearts," also written during the South African War, is a song of rejoicing. Completely optimistic, the wives and sweethearts are expecting the soldiers

home the next day and tell the dawn, "hold not long the day from us, / But quicken it to prime." They believe the soldiers will never roam again and make extravagant promises of what they will do for them. Only the third verse is pessimistic, and only because it recounts the doubts and doubters who have bothered them during this time. They have been told not to expect the soldiers home again, for

> . . . in a while, uncharily
> And drearily
> Men gave their lives--even wearily,
> Like those whom living tires.
> (C. P., p. 88)

The soldiers are caught in that hopeless atmosphere suggested in "In Times of War and Tumult." However, now there are no doubts, and the women sing the last verse, almost a complete repeat of the first except for the first two lines and the fact that they have become a little more realistic and it "may be" that their soldiers will never roam again.

A poem that contrasts with "Song of the Soldiers' Wives and Sweethearts," "And There Was a Great Calm" also deals with the suffering of people at home and with the ending of a war. One of the last poems about war in Hardy's first volume of collected poems, it sums up many of war's negative aspects. In its dreary portrait of life in the home country during a war it more closely resembles "The Going of the Battery" than "Song of the Soldiers' Wives and Sweethearts." Even when the war is over, the poem does not have the unrestrained joy of the latter poem. Written "on the signing of the Armistice, Nov. 11, 1918," the poem creates the grim, depressing atmosphere people live in during a war, points out the miseries of people, animals, and even inanimate nature involved in the war, and borrowing the spirits from

The Dynasts, asks the question why. The first three verses describe the world during the war; the last six the world when peace is declared. The world during a war is peopled by passions, scorching or cold: despair and anger are heaved high; care watches whitely in fear; sorrows are everywhere. Everyone left at home is aware of them. Over everything ". . . the pensive spirit of Pity" whispers, "Why?" However, as the second verse explains, in time of war there is no reason. Men did not pause to answer such a question; they were too busy fighting. Instead, "Foes distraught / Pierced the thinned peoples in a brute-like blindness." Not knowing why they are fighting, enemies run around killing people, and the number of people available to be killed gets smaller and smaller. War in effect crazes people and turns them into animals. Philosophies, systems of reason, and selflessness, a human quality that might stop the war, are unknown, and anyone who might argue for loving-kindness is yelled down by "Hell!" and "Shell!" The people are worked into a frenzy, and their compassion is gone. People at home cannot escape thinking about the war even though they are not fighting in it; it is in their language and in their dreams. Everywhere the slang of war, "dug-outs," "snipers," "Huns," is heard. The knowledgeable talk about nothing else in the morning, and the war is the only thing in the evening paper. It is a world in an unending dream; if the people pause to muse, they daydream about millions of soldiers; if they try to sleep they have nightmares about millions of soldiers. Waking from such nightmares, they wish existence would become "timeless" and "null." Trying to escape, they turn to nature and look up at Sirius, but the narrator implies that there is no escape; over beneath Sirius armies of men are falling. The news that war has ended is so profound that Sirius almost ceases to wink. The

boom signaling the end is like "the dull plunge of a stone dropped into some deep well," echoing and reverberating in the night. Immediately, in spite of the death and damning of "old hopes that earth was bettering slowly," the bereft and meek and lowly, daring to hope again, ask, "Will men some day be given to grace . . . as our dreams used to run?" On the battlefield there is stunned silence. J. O. Bailey compares the soldiers to a machine that is turned off, but the men do not know how to act individually and still move in precision.[1] The "about-to-fire" do not fire. The "aimed-at" move "away in trance-lipped song." One regiment, a machine gone wild, slings "a clinching shot," as if to be sure and turns also. Nature too exhibits some irrevocable effects. The poplars no longer stand alive on the plains because of this "four years' dance of Death." Inanimate nature, though affected, will survive. Gray skies will no longer be inflamed by flying fires. Dewdrops will no longer be shaken from the thorn by hurdlings. No airplane engine's vibrations will blur man's vision, making it seem the "moon's thin horn" is shaking. Part of animate nature will recover. Worn horses will recover who are no longer whipped. Birds will no longer be puzzled by moans of suffering. Part of mankind though is changed irrevocably: "Some could, some could not, shake off misery." A sinister spirit suggests war could not be avoided. He says, "It had to be!" The Spirit of Pity only whispers, "Why?" as though war could end if the reason could be found. The poem is a mixture of abstract and concrete. Jean Brooks comments that its effectiveness lies in this combination of an "overworld philosophy of war as an image of tragic cosmic absurdity with the microscopic details of its physical impact

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[1] _The Poetry of Thomas Hardy_, p. 448.

on human beings and lesser creatures."[1]

Consistent with his own attitude, Thomas Hardy's war poetry reflects most frequently the negative aspects of war. His poetry, through the voice of God or war's victims, condemns mankind or the nations' leaders for starting wars. It describes the effects of war: the dark, gloomy, hopeless atmosphere which enwraps a country at war and the countless victims, especially the soldiers who cease to be human beings because they quit thinking and act like animals or puppets but also everyone who loses his property, his life, or his peace of mind. How intensely the poems emphasize the negative aspects of war and how frequently the positive aspects of war are in focus apparently depends upon the war about which Hardy is writing. The South African War poems emphasize the negative aspects of war; man, the cause, is condemned, the atmosphere is gloomy, and victims abound. The only positive poems are "Song of the Soldiers' Wives and Sweethearts," which rejoices that the men are coming home, and "The Sick Battle-God," which rejoices that war is no longer worshipped and might eventually be abolished. The Napoleonic War and World War I poems, on the other hand, while never completely positive, reflect the positive and negative more equally. The former have the most equal mixture. The negative aspects are all there, sometimes in abbreviated form, to be developed in the later collections. However, with the excitement of battle, the pleasant memories, the divine assistance, and the valor and determination of man, the negative aspects are brought into perspective. The World War I poems are more negative because not only are there more completely grim poems but also the grimness seldom leaves even when the positive

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[1] _Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure_, p. 75.

aspects are there. For instance, several poems blame man for war. In the one poem that suggests fate is the cause, man still has to bear the misery. A soldier may win a name for himself in war that will be remembered, but death still wins his life. Soldiers may be able to damage the whole idea of war by acting compassionately, but they are still willing to fight in a war which they do not understand. If the soldier does know the reason for fighting, he goes to war out of duty, not for pleasure. Even the most frequently emphasized positive aspect of war, the fact that the collective human spirit is stronger than war, has its negative side. Though Hardy seems to have had some hope that man could destroy war, the human spirit's triumph so far has been to rise above or outlast war, not to destroy it. Hardy's poetry then moves on a continuum from an almost equally balanced perspective on war in the Napoleonic War poems to an almost totally negative perspective in the South African War poems and finally to a negative perspective with some bright spots in the World War I poems. Sometimes there are positive aspects, but the negative ones are always there.

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