

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

The Trumpet Major

THOMAS HARDY



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction. Those readers who are unfamiliar with the period of the Napoleonic Wars, however, may find it useful to read the following Historical Note before embarking on the novel.

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HISTORICAL NOTE

The Trumpet-Major is set during the Napoleonic Wars. The action begins in 1804, a year into the renewed hostilities with France that had succeeded a bare fourteen months of peace following the Peace of Amiens in 1802. The war with revolutionary France (1793–1802) and even earlier conflicts are therefore much in the mind of their veterans: Valenciennes (1793) and Minden (1759) are both mentioned. Referred to by the title of First Consul, which he had held from 1799, Napoleon had in fact been proclaimed Emperor of France in May 1804. King George III is both King of Britain and Elector of the German state of Hanover, hence the presence in the British army of Hanoverian troops and the German Legion. He brings his court to Weymouth (Budmouth in the novel) for a number of summers. The very real threat of invasion by Napoleon will be largely removed by Nelson's famous naval victory at Trafalgar in October 1805. In its final pages, and in a number of

earlier references to battles such as Albuera (1811) and Vitoria (1813), the novel refers to the Peninsular Campaign (i.e. Spain and Portugal) which begins in 1808. Here Wellington eventually defeats the French forces, before the war moves on to its final phase with Wellington's conclusive victory at Waterloo in 1815.

INTRODUCTION

The Trumpet-Major occupies a unique place among Hardy's novels. Most obviously, it is his only historical novel, set at a period some seventy-five years before its composition and including a background of nationally significant historic events, with both walk-on and speaking parts for genuine historical personages. It also stands apart from Hardy's other novels in its combination of a pervasive comic tone with powerful elements of pathos and tragedy; the mix is shown most dramatically in the novel's ending, which includes both the traditional comic resolution of a wedding and the looming death of the eponymous hero. Moreover, while Hardy does typically draw on a variety of different genres and traditions to create the particular textures of his novels, his range in *The Trumpet-Major* is exceptionally broad, for in addition to history, comedy and tragedy, critics have pointed to a large number of other elements, including pastoral, romance, pantomime and ballad. The smooth, detached tone is again unusual in Hardy. All in all, *The Trumpet-Major* is simply not typical of Hardy, and, as such, has puzzled the critics, though it has not prevented the novel from being thoroughly enjoyed by countless readers who appreciate the variety and vitality that result from the mix of genres.

Published in 1880, initially as a monthly serial in *Good Words* and then in its three-decker first book edition in the October of that year, *The Trumpet-Major* was the seventh of Hardy's fourteen published novels. Written at this mid-point of Hardy's novel-writing career, *The Trumpet-Major* forms with *A Laodicean* (1881) and *Two on a Tower* (1882) a trio of relatively lightweight novels which sit somewhat uneasily between the first flowering of Hardy's talent, that included *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Return of the Native* (1878), and the final great creative outpouring, which encompassed *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). To its first readers, uninfluenced by those later intense and tragic writings which have had such an influence in defining how

readers today view Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major* appeared as something of a reversion to type (compared with its predecessor *The Return of the Native*): it was another example of the work of a popular, professional 'good hand at a serial', to use Hardy's own term. As *The Spectator* put it, at the end of a review praising Hardy's command of humour and pathos and dismissing his foray into tragedy in *The Return of the Native*: 'if Mr. Hardy never writes a worse book than *The Trumpet Major* [sic], he will maintain a literary level which any contemporary writer of English prose fiction might be glad to attain. We may not, perhaps, look to see him produce anything wholly unlike or superior to what he has already given us; but we shall listen to his variations more comfortably than to the novelties of most novelists.'¹ With the not inconsiderable advantage of hindsight, this may appear not merely obtuse, but verging on the ludicrous; yet viewed from the perspective of 1880, the misunderstanding becomes explicable.

Hardy's previous novel, *The Return of the Native*, may be characterised as self-consciously literary, with claims to be considered a major tragedy; it had been born out of a two-year period of reading, note-taking and reflection. *The Trumpet-Major*, while demonstrating the protean nature of his creativity with yet another new type of writing, clearly lacks its predecessor's literary pretensions and power. Certainly, in offering the novel to various magazine publishers for serialisation (for, somewhat surprisingly, it was not easy to place), it was its likely popular appeal that Hardy was keen to stress. 'It is to be a cheerful, lively story,' he assured *Lippincott's Magazine*,² to which he was at that point offering the US serialisation (it ended up in *Demorest's Monthly Magazine*). The moral standards of the Revd Dr Donald Macleod, editor of *Good Words*, were so strict that, Hardy later reminisced, 'he asked me to make a lover's meeting, which I had fixed for a Sunday afternoon, take place on a Saturday, and that swear-words should be avoided' (Purdy, pp. 32-3). Hardy frequently had to make alterations to his novels for their serial versions, the most extreme cases being *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, from which whole episodes had to be excised. What is notable in the case of *The Trumpet-Major* is that the changes were of such a minor nature: on this occasion Hardy was evidently happy to conform to the expectations of editors and contemporary readers by producing a wonderfully readable novel which avoided any challenge to Victorian conventions. The engaging love

1 Cox, p. 77. For full details of this and other references turn to the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction.

2 *Collected Letters* (hereafter abbreviated to *CL*), Vol. I, p. 65

story of Anne Garland and the Loveday brothers, in which Hardy skilfully makes us feel for all the characters even as he shows us their limitations, is given a fascinating extra dimension through its historical setting. The colour and excitement of the court and the military events are beautifully drawn out from the very first pages in which the soldiers arrive to enliven the immemorial peace of Overcombe village. The narrative employs variety and suspense to hold our attention, while the actual writing is lively and frequently amusing. As might have been expected in a novel consciously designed for popular appeal, the reviewers of the day received the novel warmly, some even describing it as Hardy's best work to date.

Yet the relatively low-key nature of the novel and its intended popular appeal do not mean that Hardy was not breaking new ground, nor do they mean that he was dealing with a subject of little interest to him. Far from it. Making a note of what was to become one of the germs of *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy wrote passionately 'There is something [in this] the world ought to be shown, and I am the one to show it to them' (*Life*, p. 216). And despite the very different tone of *The Trumpet-Major*, this claim could be applied almost as aptly to the earlier novel. As he makes clear in his Preface (1895) and in his autobiographical *Life*, the germ of this novel lies in Hardy's own fascination with the Napoleonic Wars. He cites the 'recollections of old persons well known to the author in childhood', the remaining 'casual relics' such as 'fragments of volunteer uniform', and a stash of copies of a periodical called *A History of the Wars* which had belonged to his grandfather and contained 'melodramatic prints of serried ranks, crossed bayonets, huge knapsacks, and dead bodies' (*Life*, p. 21). Growing up in a county which might have been in the front line had Napoleon invaded, and close to George III's summer residence at Weymouth, surrounded by these stories and physical evidences of that period, it is clear that Hardy's childhood imagination was fired to the extent that the Napoleonic Wars became a constant interest for him throughout his life. On holiday with his first wife Emma in 1876 he explored the battlefield of Waterloo, and on at least four occasions prior to the writing of *The Trumpet-Major* he visited Chelsea Hospital and talked to veterans of the campaigns against Napoleon. As T. E. Lawrence wrote as late as 1923, when Hardy was in his eighties, 'Napoleon is a real man to him, and the country of Dorsetshire echoes that name everywhere in Hardy's ears. He lives in his period, and thinks of it as the great war' (Gibson, *Thomas Hardy: Interviews and Recollections*, pp. 182-3). There really was something in this that Hardy wanted to show the world, and in preparing for his first treatment of

the subject in *The Trumpet-Major* he determined to complement his knowledge of local traditions and 'casual relics' by extensive researches into documentary evidence in the British Museum. There he compiled what is now called the 'Trumpet-Major Notebook' consisting of notes and quotations from an impressive selection of contemporary newspapers and books, covering such matters as military and civilian dress, military regulations and practices, and details of royal and military activities in and around Weymouth.³ This is the only preparatory notebook for a Hardy novel, and bears witness both to Hardy's determination to get the historical background accurate and to his fascination with the period, for, as he later wrote, he had some '5 times as much' material as he needed for the novel (*CL*, Vol. III, p. 286). Such material was to stand him in good stead as his absorbing interest in the period later issued in short stories (for example, 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four' and 'The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion'), poems (such as 'The Alarm' and 'Valenciennes') and, of course, his massive epic-drama *The Dynasts* (1904-8).

This combination of personal memories and painstaking research leads to a convincing recreation of Dorset in the early 1800s. Hardy's technique is to immerse us in the period through a large quantity of historical detail, using historically-appropriate terminology. Though fairly typical of the historical novel, the accumulation of such detail is far from typical of Hardy's writing outside *The Trumpet-Major*. Elsewhere in his novels, Hardy is a master of the use of carefully selected detail to reinforce his focus on characters and narrative. Some examples will illustrate the contrast between Hardy's typical approach in this novel, and his more usual method. This is our first view of Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd*:

A hand seized the lantern, the door was opened, the rays burst out from their prison, and Bathsheba beheld her position with astonishment.

The man to whom she was hooked was brilliant in brass and scarlet. He was a soldier.

[*Far from the Madding Crowd*, Chapter 24]⁴

Viewing the scene with Bathsheba, we are given no more than the key colours of Sergeant Troy's attire, which are quite sufficient to enable us

3 The 'Trumpet-Major Notebook' is transcribed in *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*.

4 Quotations from *Far from the Madding Crowd* are taken from the Wessex Edition (Macmillan, London 1912).

to follow Bathsheba's thought process and 'see' a soldier. Very different is the opening description of the York Hussars in *The Trumpet-Major*:

Their uniform was bright and attractive; white buckskin pantaloons, three-quarter boots, scarlet shakos set off with lace, mustachios waxed to a needle point; and above all, those richly ornamented blue jackets mantled with the historic pelisse . . . [p. 7]

Here, in contrast, the uniform is described at length, using the terms of the day. Hardy wants us to visualise every element of the Hussars' flamboyant dress, to feel its 'romantic' appeal to the Garlands, and to see how it is distinguished from the many other uniforms that will be described in the course of the novel. This distinction holds good for Hardy's descriptions of civilian dress in the two novels. Consider Gabriel Oak's first view of Bathsheba Everdene:

It was a fine morning, and the sun lighted up to a scarlet glow the crimson jacket she wore, and painted a soft lustre upon her bright face and dark hair.

[*Far from the Madding Crowd*, Chapter 1]

Again, Hardy restricts himself to a few key details: of all her clothing only the scarlet jacket stands out to Gabriel Oak, and that is all we see; the type of jacket is immaterial, and the eye soon moves on to the face and hair. In contrast, Matilda Johnson is first seen wearing:

a green and white gown, with long, tight sleeves, a green silk handkerchief round her neck and crossed in front, a green parasol and green gloves. [p. 98]

This is rather like a commentary at a fashion show. By foregrounding his characters' clothes, Hardy ensures that we enter visually the historical period of the novel. Such attention to dress is prominent throughout *The Trumpet-Major*, even though it is most untypical of Hardy.

Other types of detail are more reminiscent of other Hardy novels, but their sheer quantity here is striking. Hardy describes in detail, for example, milling processes and the miller's household goods, nautical matters such as sails and rigging, military organisation and equipment, and food, as well as a whole host of incidental references which build up a picture of the way of life of the day, such as the scarcity of newspapers and the rarity of letters for villagers. Many of the details come straight from his notebook jottings, including items of dress and material (sarsenet, white Chip bonnets, Foraging Cap), life in Budmouth

/ Weymouth during the king's residence (Royal Family out by 6 a.m., the Hanoverian white horses) and military matters –notably the definition of a Trumpet-Major's rank and responsibilities quoted by John (p. 69). As always in Hardy, while precise visual description is his strongest attribute, and he is also inclined to lists (as of the food prepared for Bob's aborted wedding feast in Chapter 16), he calls on a variety of our senses to make us feel the life of the novel: there is, for example, the smell of the roast dinners being collected from the bakehouses in Casterbridge (p. 96), while sound is used frequently, as in the trumpeters' calls for '“Mess, or Feed, or Picket, or some other of their vagaries”' (p. 102). Dialogue is used to reinforce the period feel. Bob constantly uses naval terms of the day, while exclamations include 'La' and 'Dash my wig'.

The inclusion of such a quantity of historical detail in a novel always risks slowing the progress of the narrative, and in many hands may also threaten a descent into costume drama, in which such details assume an exaggerated importance. Hardy succeeds in avoiding these dangers through his skilful integration of historical details into a lively text, in which he ensures that historical colour supports characters and action. Nevertheless, at a period when we read even Hardy's most contemporary novels at a greater distance of time from the period those novels were set than is the gap between the writing of *The Trumpet-Major* and the time of its action, we may perhaps question the need to include so much detail in order to create a convincing impression of a particular period of time. After all, we can visualise the characters and action of *Far from the Madding Crowd* or *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* without it. But that is in a sense beside the point, for in *The Trumpet-Major* Hardy is not simply recreating a historical period. Paradoxically, he is using his careful accumulation of detail both to bring the period vividly to life and to emphasise its remoteness from the world of its readers in 1880: he makes us feel the past-ness of the past as well as its life.

This dual perspective is an intriguing and key feature of the book. In his short stories, Hardy not infrequently employs the device of a narrator telling a story from his past, as a means primarily of introducing verisimilitude and a particular angle on the story told. In keeping with this framing device, Hardy is usually careful to avoid disturbing the teller's narrative flow. The difference in *The Trumpet-Major* is that Hardy employs prolepsis to jolt the reader repeatedly into standing back from the vividly-created world of the novel to see it objectively as past. Thus, in the third chapter, as the soldiers gather around the mill stream to be given cherries by Miller Loveday, the narrator comments: 'It was a cheerful, careless, unpremeditated half-hour, which returned

like the scent of a flower to the memories of some of those who enjoyed it, even at a distance of many years after, when they lay wounded and weak in foreign lands' (p. 17). Again, at the Miller's first party: 'Poor Stanner! In spite of his satire, he fell at the bloody battle of Albuera' (p. 26). In this chapter the narrator also establishes his own relationship to the story: 'The present writer, to whom this party has been described times out of number by members of the Loveday family and other aged people now passed away, can never enter the old living-room of Overcombe Mill without beholding the genial scene through the mists of the seventy or eighty years that intervene between then and now' (p. 29). The same distancing perspective recurs at other key moments throughout the novel, providing some powerfully written, poignant moments. Consider, for example, the elegy after the review scene: '[The downs] still spread their grassy surface to the sun as on that beautiful morning not, historically speaking, so very long ago; but the King and his fifteen thousand armed men, the horses, the bands of music, the princesses . . . how entirely have they all passed and gone! - lying scattered about the world as military and other dust' (p. 76). It culminates of course in the novel's final pages: 'Battles and skirmishes, advances and retreats, fevers and fatigues, told hard on Anne's gallant friends in the coming time. Of the seven upon whom these wishes were bestowed, five, including the trumpet-major, were dead men within the few following years' (p. 256), and in the novel's final, moving words: ' . . . the ring of his smart step dying away upon the bridge as he joined his companions-in-arms, and went off to blow his trumpet till silenced for ever upon one of the bloody battlefields of Spain' (p. 257). Time is of course a constant theme, even an obsession of Hardy's, but this forceful use of a dual perspective to explore the theme is striking. It appears to stem from a determination that even as we share the feelings of Anne, John, Bob and the others, we see them as victims of time, and realise that whatever the apparent importance of their actions and feelings, they are now long dead. The approach goes some way to explain the disturbing undertones that are felt beneath the novel's comic surface.

Such remarkable chronological shifts of perspective may be seen as manifestations of that constant shifting of visual and narrative perspective which gives all of Hardy's novels their particular texture and power. Far from presenting a constant narrative stance, either in the first person or as an impersonal, omniscient voice, Hardy builds up a composite picture rather as a pointillist painter creates an effect through a series of dots, using a mixture of visual and perceptual perspectives from main and subsidiary characters, implied observers,

and a narratorial voice which may be either objective and omniscient, or limited. Thus, we overhear the beginning of the Miller's first party from the perspective of Mrs Garland and Anne, hearing 'a slamming of doors and a clinking of cups and glasses' and catching 'an occasional blink of bright colour' through the foliage of the garden (p. 18); we enter the party only as they do. This technique creates an element of narrative suspense, and also increases our sense of involvement with two of the novel's central characters by making us share the moment with them. Again, when the soldier nails up the proclamation on the elm tree across a paddock from the mill, Bob fails to read it from a distance even with his glass, and we are only given the proclamation's text as Anne and Bob reach the tree and read it themselves (p. 138). We peep at Festus's party in Oxwell Hall with John and Anne as they 'look through a chink into the room' (p. 53), and memorably we share Anne's view of the *Victory* disappearing down Channel, as she describes the scene for the benefit of old sailor Cornick (pp. 212-13). In addition to these individuals' perspectives, there are times when eyes are everywhere:

Though nobody seemed to be looking on but the few at the window and in the village street, there were, as a matter of fact, many eyes converging upon that military arrival in its high and conspicuous position, not to mention the glances of birds and other wild creatures. Men in distant gardens, women in orchards and at cottage-doors, shepherds on remote hills, turnip-hoers in blue-green enclosures miles away, captains with spy-glasses out at sea, were regarding the picture keenly. [p. 8]

We are shown both the crowd and the individual: Hardy describes the glittering review on the downs and then reflects: 'Who thought of every point in the line as an isolated man, each dwelling all to himself in the hermitage of his own mind?' (p. 74). Clearly we have here in embryo those amazing changes of perspective in *The Dynasts*, in which we zoom in on individual soldiers, statesmen and Wessex folk, pan back to see aerial views of marching armies and battles, and further back still to see the whole as the workings of the Immanent Will, as viewed by the Spirits. Hardy demonstrates a similar mastery of perspectives in *The Trumpet-Major*, in his depiction of the relationship of his individual characters to what he terms 'the stream of recorded history' (Chapter 13).

Our awareness of the main events of this period of the Napoleonic Wars is from the perspective of what Hardy ironically terms 'unimportant natives' (p. 72), who are shown in all their unique individuality,

and who occupy centre stage. The military arrangements to protect George III during his summer stays in Weymouth, about which Hardy had read in his historical researches, are brought to life through the participation of John Loveday in the camp of dragoons, the opportunities offered to the locals to trade with the soldiers and the picket duties in Budmouth viewed by Anne. Reports of Napoleon's manoeuvrings of his troops on the other side of the Channel are given as eye-witness accounts by characters, while we hear of the victory in the naval battle off Finisterre by its announcement during the play attended by most of the major characters (p. 185). Bob's interview with Captain Hardy effectively integrates a significant historical character into the narrative, while Anne even converses with the King. The tension of the times is shown most memorably through the invasion scare and Bob's escape from the press-gang, while the Battle of Trafalgar is a major presence off-stage, felt through its effect on the local population, in particular the Loveday household. Hardy believed that a story 'must be exceptional enough to justify its telling' (*Life*, p. 268), and this is a well-paced narrative, with plenty of incident, which successfully interweaves the lives and loves of fictional characters with major historical events. Despite the importance of the historical events, individuals are in fact set against 'history', much as in *Two on a Tower* Hardy set 'two infinitesimal lives' against 'the stupendous background of the stellar universe' to show 'that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men' (Preface).

One further ramification of Hardy's exploration of perspectives is his use of false appearances. Play-acting and deception occur again and again, and Hardy explores their effect on the other characters while generally avoiding the temptation to use the mystery-writer's technique of mystifying the reader. Matilda Johnson is the most obvious example, using her actress's ability in her social life; her exaggerated reaction to country noises on her arrival at the mill is a richly comic example, and her acting skills are also to the fore as she leads on Festus towards marriage. Festus himself constantly assumes valour he does not possess, as during the invasion scare and in his dealings with the Loveday brothers, while his Uncle Benjy feigns love for the nephew he detests and fears. Festus indeed has many of the attributes of a stage braggart, and in his exaggerated theatrical manner appears to exist in a different dimension from that of the other characters – a further facet in the novel's variegated texture. But ironically, in terms of deception it is the upright Loveday brothers who outperform them all: John Loveday determines to hide his feelings for Anne in order to allow Bob to court her, even to the extent of allowing himself to be completely

misunderstood as regards his role in Matilda's flight, while Bob mirrors his brother's actions by belittling his own love for Anne and leaving her to John as the sailor brother-departs for the *Victory*. And 'Captain' Bob is of course no captain, not even when he is promoted towards the end of the novel. Pretence is all around. Moreover, Hardy time and again prevents us from seeing his characters as unified or understandable; they are to a degree unknowable: to the other characters, to themselves and even to us as readers. Anne Garland completely mistakes her feelings for John Loveday, recognising later, '“I was greatly mistaken about myself”' (p. 256), while she clearly does not understand the 'not altogether unrelished fear and excitement that [Festus] always caused her' (p. 118). We are also made to ponder the relation between the individual and the role assumed by their uniform: James Comfort is 'a soldier by courtesy, but a blacksmith by rights' (p. 22); the 'three or four thousand men of one machine-like movement' encompass both 'swashbucklers' and others 'of a quiet shop-keeping disposition' (p. 8-9). Moreover, people do not remain static, but change with time. Bob looks unseeingly over Anne at the review (p. 75), while John finds it hard to reconcile Mrs Garland's 'little girl' with the young woman she has grown into (p. 20). While misunderstandings and mystifications, duly resolved, form part of the staple of the comic novel, Hardy is also using these ploys to probe into the nature of individuality. 'Who, really, are these people?' he asks in effect. In such ways, Hardy introduces philosophical questions and uncertainties into his superficially simple story, without detracting from the novel's readability.

Hardy's primary means of exploring individuality and the relationships of individuals is through an exploration of many different types of love. Against John's single-minded devotion to Anne, in which concern for her welfare leads him to extremes of self-abnegation, is contrasted the genuine but shallow and fluctuating love of his brother Bob. Different again is the 'earnest, cross-tempered and even savage' love of Festus (p. 44) for Anne, which in the end turns so easily to spite, as he triumphantly marries Matilda. In Anne herself, Hardy remarkably manages to provide a sympathetic portrait of a rather shallow girl who is at times unsure of her own feelings, is capable of jumping to erroneous conclusions on little evidence, and sets rather more store by class and rank than sits easily with the thrust of the narrative. Following the rift caused by his neglect of her, it is significant that Bob first manages to reawaken Anne's interest by parading up and down in the garden in his lieutenant's uniform, in spite of John's prediction that the promotion might influence the mother and not the daughter. But this merely hastens the inevitable. As Anne concludes, '“Gratitude is not

love" (p. 256) and for all her wish to make herself love John, and for all her uneasy fascination with Festus, we are shown in Anne someone who in the end maintains a steadfast love for one man, even though, against the conventions of romantic fiction, Bob is not the worthier of the brothers and there is no real indication that his character will change. There is a similarity to the end of *The Woodlanders*, in which Grace Melbury goes back to Fitzpiers, despite knowing his wandering nature. Against all of these forms of young, romantic feeling is set the matter-of-fact but strong middle-aged love of Miller and Mrs Loveday. The love stories are developed through a series of incidents, in a lively if mainly undramatic narrative; in addition to the major events noted above, Hardy concentrates on everyday happenings such as Anne's visits to Oxwell Hall, the expedition to see the night-time passing of the royal procession, and the walks to the White Horse and to the Faringdon ruin.

A number of the events are strikingly comic. The drilling scene is an obvious example, albeit one that owes something to Hardy's reading as well as to his invention, as he admits in his Preface:

'Please, what must we do that haven't got no firelocks!' said the lower end of the line in a helpless voice.

'Now, was ever such a question! Why, you must do nothing at all, but think *how* you'd poise 'em *if* you had 'em. You middle men, that are armed with hurdle-sticks and cabbage-stumps just to make-believe, must of course use 'em as if they were the real thing. Now then, cock fawlocks! Present! Fire! (Pretend to, I mean, and the same time throw yer imagination into the field o' battle.) Very good – very good indeed; except that some of you were a *little* too soon, and the rest a *little* too late.' [p. 141]

It's the same kind of genial humour, grounded in an accurate presentation of history, as was responsible for the success of that often-repeated television comedy series, set during a later invasion scare, *Dad's Army*. There are numerous minor humorous incidents, such as Matilda's feigned swoon at hearing the sound of a cow, or Miller Loveday seizing Farmer Derriman in mistake for his returning son. Almost every incident involving Festus includes broad comedy: he pretends a swoon and ends up being ducked in the stream; he is locked out of Oxwell Hall by a trick of his returning uncle; he pretends valour during the invasion scare, as a result of which he is chased in fury by his comrades; attempting to corner Anne in the deserted cottage, he is outwitted as she escapes on his horse. There is more than an element of real menace in these scenes (particularly the last), but the treatment

ensures that we concentrate on their comedy, while never forgetting entirely the undercurrent of threat. Festus occupies a humorous subplot. But even in the main plot, there is a deliberate sense of the absurd in the determination of both brothers, at different times, to forward the other's suit. Critics have pointed to the prevalence of what are from one viewpoint stock comic characters: the jolly miller, honourable soldier, the sailor with a girl in every port. Despite the background of war, and the forewarnings of an early death for the soldiers, the world of *The Trumpet-Major* is infused with comedy.

Moreover, much of the narrative has a conspicuously light tone. Hardy follows a long comic tradition in the use of some humorously appropriate names, such as Cripplestraw and the dentist Rootle. In many of the passages describing Festus, he employs deliberate overwriting to create the ludicrous effect noted above, averting what might have been genuine menace. Here is Festus after he has seen Anne give away to John the flower he threw to her: 'Festus, seeing this, enlarged himself wrathfully, got hot in the face, rose to his feet, and glared down upon them like a turnip-lantern' (p. 80). After he has fallen in the stream: 'Festus's eyes glowed like carbuncles, and he gave voice to fearful imprecations, shaking his fist in the soft summer air towards Anne, in a way that was terrible for any maiden to behold' (p. 150). The novel is indeed suffused with wit, of many different types, as the following examples will illustrate. 'It was also ascertained that Mr Loveday's great-grandparents had been eight in number, and his great-great-grandparents sixteen' (p. 9); '... the horse shied at a milestone, a piece of paper, a sleeping tramp, and a wheelbarrow, just to make use of the opportunity of being in bad hands' (p. 96); 'Before they were quite overwhelmed by the interest of this discourse' (p. 103); 'Bob went off like a swallow towards the house, and the miller followed like the rather heavy man that he was' (p. 111); 'On reflection he remembered that since Miss Johnson's departure his appetite had decreased amazingly. He had eaten in meat no more than fourteen or fifteen ounces a day, but one-third of a quartern pudding on an average ...' (p. 128). Such passages, of which there are a great number, do not require individual analysis, but cumulatively they make a major contribution to the novel's vivacity and comic verve.

Yet *The Trumpet-Major* is of course not simply a comic novel. Hardy was well aware of the relationship between comedy and tragedy, referring to 'the tragedy that always underlies Comedy if you only scratch it deeply enough' (*Life*, p. 474), and on another occasion stating, 'If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy; and, on the contrary, if you blind yourself to the deeper issues of a

tragedy you see a farce' (*Life*, p. 224). Festus may be a figure of fun, but there are times, particularly during his siege of Anne at the deserted cottage, when he is a real threat. On the other hand, the more worthy Loveday brothers can appear ludicrous in their well-meaning but heavy-handed efforts to forward each other's suits. For all the comic movement of the novel towards victory in the war with Napoleon and the resolution of misunderstandings with the marriage of the heroine to the man she loves, sadness, pathos and even tragedy lie only just below the surface. The heroine has chosen the less worthy man, and is likely to live to regret it. John Loveday, the worthier brother, goes off to die on 'one of the bloody battlefields of Spain' (p. 256), having to leave with a final 'affectation' that his love is readily transferable elsewhere. The Miller loses his cherished wish that Anne should marry John and John succeed him in the mill, and will shortly lose his elder son forever. The historical framework of the novel emphasises that all the characters are victims of time.

Hardy was evidently not quite certain of exactly where to pitch the novel in terms of the balance between comedy and tragedy, and made a series of significant changes in the early editions before he established in 1895 the basic text that we read today (later changes were of a very minor nature). These crucial changes occurred in the title and the final chapter. As it appeared in *Good Words*, the title is simply *The Trumpet-Major*, and although the death of the eponymous hero is clearly implied ('Anne . . . smiled her reply, not knowing that the adieu was for evermore'), there is no specific mention of his death as one of the five who were to die, and in the final sentence he 'went off to blow his trumpet over the bloody battlefields of Spain'. Despite the reader's feeling that Anne has chosen the wrong man, it is still possible for the magazine reader to perceive this as basically a 'happy' ending: Anne is to marry her true love, and soldier John goes off, as one would expect, to war. The first volume edition transforms the ending by stating explicitly that the five who died included the Trumpet-Major, and then adding that telling phrase, 'till silenced for ever', to the final sentence. The resonance of these words makes the entire tone of the book more sombre, and the title leaves the focus clearly on John Loveday, simply adding the sub-title 'A Tale'. However, in the Osgood, McIlvaine edition (published in 1895, though post-dated 1896) Hardy extended the title by the addition of a lengthy sub-title which emphasised the role of Bob: *The Trumpet-Major: John Loveday, a Soldier in the War with Buonaparte and Robert his Brother, First Mate in the Merchant Service: A Tale*. The effect of this addition is to give more prominence to the positive side of the novel's ending. Bob is established thereby as one of

the novel's two key characters, and his wedding and good fortune therefore have a far greater weight as a counter-balance to his brother's looming death.

Hardy was of course an inveterate reviser of his work, but these revisions are of particular interest as they appear to indicate that he had some difficulty in getting the right tone to express his vision for *The Trumpet-Major*; they also show that by 1895 he felt he had got it right, since he made no later changes. His final version of his title and last chapter presents a balance of the different elements, but it is not a harmonious blending of them. It is therefore an accurate reflection of the novel as a whole, for Hardy's vision in *The Trumpet-Major* is neither comic nor tragic, but an unsettling and fascinating mixture of the two. As such, it is perhaps closer to many readers' experience of life than are the pure literary genres of 'comedy' or 'tragedy'. Lying behind the obvious attributes of the novel in terms of the vitality of the different elements, and its great readability, this vision of life may help to explain why to so many readers *The Trumpet-Major* is both approachable and memorable.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

As noted in the Introduction, relatively little of the vast amount that has been written on Hardy has concentrated on *The Trumpet-Major*. Nevertheless, for those who wish to read further, there are a number of interesting avenues to explore. This bibliography is divided into two broad sections. 'Background Information' covers such matters as the composition and evolution of the text, and Hardy's life, including his interest in the Napoleonic period. The second section, 'Critical Appreciation', includes both books with chapters devoted explicitly to *The Trumpet-Major* and others whose less extensive considerations of the novel are of particular interest.

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The text of the first book edition of the novel is available in the Penguin Classics edition, edited by Linda M. Shires, Penguin Books, London 1997.

An e-text of the novel is available on the Project Gutenberg website (<http://promo.net/pg/>). Please note Robert Schweik's General Caution about the authority of e-texts on The Thomas Hardy Association's website.

The Thomas Hardy Association website (www.yale.edu/hardysoc/Welcome/welcomet.htm) contains a wealth of information on Hardy, including very useful evaluated links to over 200 other sites of Hardy interest.