



# The Trumpet-Major

*Thomas Hardy*

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## **The Trumpet-Major** Thomas Hardy

Hardy distrusted the application of nineteenth-century empiricism to history because he felt it marginalized important human elements. In *The Trumpet-Major*, the tale of a woman courted by three competing suitors during the Napoleonic wars, he explores the subversive effects of ordinary human desire and conflicting loyalties on systematized versions of history. This edition restores Hardy's original punctuation and removes the bowdlerisms forced upon the text on its initial publication.

## **The Trumpet-Major Details**

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### Issicratea says

In the second collected edition of his novels, of 1912 (the “Wessex Edition”), Thomas Hardy divided his production into three groups: “novels of character and environment,” “romances and fantasies,” and “novels of ingenuity.” This proved a defining critical move where the reception of his novels was concerned. The first and largest group, the novels of character and environment, evolved into the canon of “major” works—the Hardy perennials, we might call them (*Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Return of Native*, etc.) The novels excluded from this dominant group were left more or less to wither on the vine.

This seems a shame to me, on the basis of a few recent forays into the “minor” Hardy. I enjoyed my one novel of ingenuity to date, the Wilkie Collinsesque *Desperate Remedies*, and I was intrigued by my first venture into Hardyan romance and/or fantasy, the bizarre, perverse *The Well-Beloved*. Minor Hardy is more restless and unpredictable than major Hardy, and less uniformly tragic and monumental. Where the canonical novels have an impressive, granitic unity of aesthetic purpose (such that they all tend to merge into one in my memory), the non-canonical ones are much more erratic; you never know quite which Hardy will show up.

That is true in spades for *The Trumpet-Major* (1880), which offers up a highly unexpected genre-bending, or genre-blending, concoction. It is a historical novel, set in the Napoleonic period, with a convoluted romantic plot, and a surprising element of comedy, which the notes to my edition attributes to Hardy’s interest in the Victorian theatrical tradition of harlequinades, deriving ultimately from the *commedia dell’arte*. Anything less likely to have been penned by the author of *Jude the Obscure* can barely be imagined. It is recognizably Hardy-esque only in its “Wessex” setting and its rich evocation of a vanished rural world.

By chance, this is the third Victorian novel I have read in recent years which revisits the period of the Napoleonic wars, the others being Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1863). Similarities with both of these novels may be traced in *The Trumpet-Major*. All three feature a love triangle made up of a young woman and two sharply contrasted male admirers, one dashing, the other doggedly devoted—although Hardy ramps up the tension and poignancy by making his two suitors brothers. All three novels are concerned with the way in which personal lives are entangled with the larger forces of history (in which respect, they also connect with that other great Napoleonic-era historical epic, *War and Peace*.)

In its treatment of this theme, *The Trumpet-Major* reminded me especially of *Sylvia’s Lovers*. It chooses a rural setting, far from the sites of power, and it draws much of its philosophical depth from the conjunction of a timeless country life (the main setting of *The Trumpet-Major* is an ancient mill, its threshold “worn into a gutter by the ebb and flow of feet ... since Tudor times”) with an acute, historical crisis, in the form of the anticipated Napoleonic invasion.

The threat of war looms across the novel, in a strange—but, for me, successful—triangulation with the comedy and the romantic convolutions. *The Trumpet-Major* opens with the arrival of troops sent in 1804 to protect the port of Weymouth. This army sets up camp on the downs near Hardy’s fictional village of Overcombe, provoking unwonted ripples of excitement and foreboding among the locals. Across the course of the novel, the young men of the village come under increasing pressure to sign up for the war effort, voluntarily or otherwise (a dramatic press-gang episode is one of the features *The Trumpet-Major* shares with *Sylvia’s Lovers*.) The juxtaposition of comic and serious, high and low, in the novel recalls Shakespeare, whom Hardy cites frequently here.

One thing I loved in the novel is the way in which Hardy uses the motif of the written word to dramatize his rural world's liminality. In one episode, we learn of the trajectory of the village's sole newspaper, retained first for a few days by the decrepit "squireen" Benjamin Derriman; then passed on to the genteel, if impoverished, Mrs Garland, mother of the heroine, Anne Garland, before descending into the lower depths of Overcombe society, and eventually finishing up wrapping butter and cheese. Similarly, when Miller Loveday, father of the two rival brothers, receives news that a letter has arrived for him in Weymouth, the nearest post town, it sets off a frisson in the village such that, by the time he comes to read it, he is observed by an audience of neighbours, who line up in his doorway to watch, overlapping like a fanned pack of cards.

The introduction to the edition I read (Penguin Classics) speaks of the novel having attracted some criticism for its supposedly distant and ironic, empathy-sapping representation of its lead characters. I'm not so sure about that. I became quite involved in the entangled story of Anne's love quadrangle (besides John and Bob Loveday, she counts among her suitors the absurd—and splendidly named—Festus Derriman, a kind of latter-day *miles gloriosus*.) Anne is an interesting and distinctive figure, not always entirely likeable; and both the melancholy and stalwart John Loveday, the trumpet-major of the title, and his more mercurial brother Bob, are well-drawn. There is some magnificent descriptive writing, as well—perhaps most sustained in the poignant episode of Anne's pilgrimage to the isle of Portland to see the Trafalgar-bound *Victory* sail past.

In some ways, looking back, the Portland episode felt like the climax of the novel for me. The final fifth of the book reads as a little more rushed than what precedes it—the only reason why I gave this book four stars, rather than the five that it promised up to this point. Nonetheless, *The Trumpet-Major* was a hugely pleasurable read for me; and it left me determined to continue rooting around in Hardy's supposed B-list. I have three more "romances and fantasies" to go (*A Pair of Blue Eyes*; *Two on a Tower*, and the short-story collection, *A Group of Noble Dames*) and three more "novels of ingenuity" (*The Hand of Ethelberta*; *The Laodicean*; and the short-story collection, *A Changed Man*.)

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## Clara says

Sad - It started out great, but I was angry at the turn it took.

I would agree with the fact that Anne, the heroine of the book is the least likeable of Hardy's. I couldn't sympathize with her actions and her course left me angry and frustrated.

Because of this, I don't know that I would ever re-read this book.

However, *The Trumpet Major* has some of the most lively and interesting characters of Hardy's creation as well. I absolutely loved Uncle Benji who almost seemed to have stepped out of a Dickens' novel into this work, being such an eccentric and fun fellow. Festus was unlikeable in the sort of way he should have been, and so was fun to read about. *The Trumpet Major* himself, well, I for one was in love with him even though Anne was so stupid.

This book did have a lot of humor in the beginning that I quite enjoyed. I had hoped that it wasn't going to be a downer of a Hardy book, but, sadly, it is. Oh well.

Also, I enjoyed reading a work of Hardy's that is set back in time (early 1800's) as most of his works seem set thirty to 90 years later than the time frame of *The Trumpet Major*. The atmosphere of the military camps from the "Bonaparte" era really came to life for me.

I still love Hardy's narrative style and the details and what humor there was is excellent. I am glad for having read it at least this once.

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### **Vanessa Wester says**

I am amazed this is the first Thomas Hardy book I have ever read, and can't believe it took me this long to read one by this fantastic author! My husband gave me the DVD of "Far from the Maddening Crowd" and I decided to read some of his other works, this being one of them.

The plot of "The Trumpet-Major" is fantastic, with so many twists along the way that I was shocked on the last page at the outcome!

To summarise, Anne is a woman sought out by three different men... two brothers and the detestable Festus! The scenes where Festus gave chase made me laugh out loud and cringe at the annoying man's insistence!

The two Loveday brother's are the "Trumpet-Major", John and Robert (Bob), an able seaman.

Anne had her heart set on Bob before he leaves for a career at sea, and finds that he is to marry on his return. However, the woman he intends to marry, Matilda, is known by John to be not "honorable". To save his brother from a bad marriage he puts her off the marriage, and then tells Bob what he has done. Bob seeks Matilda out, but then gives up the chase and stays at the Mill to help his father - and in so doing decides that Anne is the girl for him after all.

His brother, John, is heart-broken since he had already tried to obtain Anne's hand in marriage to no avail - whilst Festus continues his pursuit.

Bob eventually gets the call back to sea (out of duty and honour - and the fact he does not really like working at the Mill), where his heart truly lies, and ends up on HMS Victory on whence Lord Nelson tragically died in the Battle of Trafalgar. Due to his bravery, he becomes a lieutenant and then, after another foolish encounter with another woman, decides to try to get Anne back! Now considering himself more worthy of her hand by his promotion.

But, unbeknownst to him, John had nearly managed to convince Anne that he was worthy of her hand after saving her from scalding water. However, when John finds out that Bob wants to secure Anne's hand he decides to let him have his go. Always thinking of what Anne might want...

Against these events, Uncle Derriman has been hiding his possessions from his nephew, Festus, and needs Anne's help to hide his precious documents.

Ultimately, who does Anne choose, and will Festus become a rich man on his Uncle's demise?

I have to admit that I did not expect the ending at all and leave you to read it to find out.

Considering that this book was published in 1880, I found it easy to read and gripping! Highly recommended and free to download via Amazon.

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## Bettie? says

fraudio

napoleonic

war

1880

victorian

historical fic (believe this is the only foray into hist-fic that Mr Hardy made)

Unabridged; 10.7 hours; read by Simon Vance.

*blurb - Anne Garland, who lives with her widowed mother in a mill owned by Miller Loveday, has three suitors: the local squire's nephew Festus and the miller's two sons, Robert and John. While Festus' aggressive pursuit deters the young woman from considering him as a husband, the indecisive Anne wavers between light-hearted Bob and gentle, steadfast John. But as their Wessex village prepares for possible invasion by Napoleon's fleet, all find their destinies increasingly tangled with the events of history.*

*The Loveday brothers, one a sailor and one a soldier, must wrestle with their commitments to their country and their feelings for Anne. Lyrical and light-hearted, yet shot through with irony, "The Trumpet-Major" (1880) is one of Hardy's most unusual novels and a fascinating tale of love and desire.*

**Who do you think you are kidding Mr. Bony?**

**If you think we're on the run,**

**We are the boys who will stop your little game.**

**We are the boys who will make you think again.**

**'Cus who do you think you are kidding Mr. Bony?**

**If you think old Wessex's done?**

Wessex Home Guard with added farce, sartorial observations, and sardonic hilarity. Perfect weekend travelling indulgence.

5\* - 1872 - Under the Greenwood Tree

5\* - 1873 - A Pair of Blue Eyes

4\* - 1874 - Far From the Madding Crowd

4\* - 1878 - The Return of the Native

4\* - 1880 - The Trumpet Major

4\* - 1886 - The Mayor of Casterbridge

4\* - 1887 - The Woodlanders

4\* - 1891 - Tess of the D'Urbervilles

5\* - 1895 - Jude the Obscure

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## Kim says

The Trumpet-Major is a novel by Thomas Hardy set during the time of the Napoleonic Wars and first published as a serial in Good Words from January to December 1880. It seems like a lot of books in the 1800's were published in serial form, I'm glad I wasn't there for it, I want to read my books all at one time. Hardy says of the novel in the introduction:

*"The external incidents which direct its course are mostly an unexaggerated reproduction of the recollections of old persons well known to the author in childhood, but now long dead, who were eye-witnesses of those scenes. If wholly transcribed their recollections would have filled a volume thrice the length of 'The Trumpet-Major.'"*

I wish he would have wholly transcribed their recollections, I like long novels, this novel wasn't that long. The book begins with the sudden arrival in the village of Overcombe a great army. The villagers expect an imminent French invasion, and the arrival of soldiers close to the villager's homes only endorses these rumours. Throughout the book, in humorous scenes or serious scenes, there is always that hidden fear among the people in the area that they are about to be invaded. They spend quite a bit of time discussing when Buonaparte will invade their country; deciding it will be at night, during the summer, in 1,500 flat-bottomed boats that hold 100 men each, that they will land in Budmouth Bay within sight of the village and all sorts of other things they have no real way of knowing. There is an amusing scene where the men of the village who have "volunteered" to defend their country are going through the drills before the service at church:

*'Now, I hope you'll have a little patience,' said the sergeant, as he stood in the centre of the arc, 'and pay strict attention to the word of command, just exactly as I give it out to ye; and if I should go wrong, I shall be much obliged to any friend who'll put me right again, for I have only been in the army three weeks myself, and we are all liable to mistakes.'*

*'So we be, so we be,' said the line heartily.*

*'Tention, the whole, then. Poise fawlocks! Very well done!'*

*'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.'*

*'Please, sergeant, can I fall out, as I am master-player in the choir, and my bass-viol strings won't stand at this time o' year, unless they be screwed up a little before the passon comes in?'*

*'How can you think of such trifles as churchgoing at such a time as this, when your own native country is on the point of invasion?' said the sergeant sternly. 'And, as you know, the drill ends three minutes afore church begins, and that's the law, and it wants a quarter of an hour yet. Now, at the word Prime, shake the powder (supposing you've got it) into the priming-pan, three last fingers behind the rammer; then shut your pans, drawing your right arm nimble-like towards your body. I ought to have told ye before this, that at Hand your katridge, seize it and bring it with a quick motion to your mouth, bite the top well off, and don't swaller so much of the powder as to make ye hawk and spet instead of attending to your drill. What's that man a-saying of in the rear rank?'*

*'Please, sir, 'tis Anthony Cripplestraw, wanting to know how he's to bite off his katridge, when he haven't a tooth left in 's head?'*

*'Man! Why, what's your genius for war? Hold it up to your right-hand man's mouth, to be sure, and let him nip it off for ye.'*

The heroine of our story is Anne Garland, the only daughter of an impoverished widow. Anne's father was a

respected, local artist, but his death unfortunately left the mother and daughter in limited means, and giving up their larger home at the other end of the village, mother and daughter now occupy one half of Overcombe Millhouse with the miller, Miller Loveday, occupying the other side. There is a partition constructed to separate the two dwellings, with the Garlands occupying the smaller section, and there are also invisible class divisions between the two households. Materially the miller is better off than the widowed Mrs Garland, but she is considered more "genteel" socially than the miller. I am not at all sure why. It seems that a respected, local artist is socially above a respected, local miller. I never figured out why. I suppose that would mean that a respected, local musician may be socially above a respected, local merchant, or visa-versa, but I'm not sure.

Anyway, Anne has three suitors; the incredibly annoying Festus Derriman; nephew of Benjamin Derriman. Benjamin Derriman is owner of Oxwell Hall, once the seat of a family now extinct, and having no other family, his nephew is expected to inherit all his wealth when he dies. The other two suitors are John Loveday, eldest son of Miller Loveday and a trumpet-major in the army; and his younger brother Bob, a sailor.

Although fairly early in the book Mrs. Garland marries our Miller Loveday despite her social beliefs, she isn't as open to her daughter marrying "beneath" her and therefore her choice for Anne would be Festus, this would satisfy her social ambitions. John is a good honourable man who is madly in love with Anne, but Anne we find, lost her heart to younger brother Bob when she was a young girl. Bob however, when he arrives home after years at sea arrives home with a fiance, Miss Matilda Johnson. He tells his family in a letter that he has known Miss Johnson for a fortnight which is ample time to study her character, and that she could play the part of mistress of the mill with "grace and dignity". When Bob arrives excited for everyone to meet his finance, who will arrive in a few days, he laughs at how he used to be Anne's beau when they were young. She leaves the room in tears. Miss Johnson arrives at the mill a few days later, preparations for the wedding are being made, but before the wedding is carried out Miss Johnson mysteriously disappears (don't worry she reappears later in the story).

Now Bob, who seems to jump from one woman to another quite easily turns his attentions to Anne. Now we get to see which one of these suitors Anne eventually chooses. Hopefully not the horrible Festus who takes advantage of every opportunity to corner her when she is alone. I find however, that Anne very rarely acts the way I would in the same situations, and I won't tell you who or what her final choice is. I will say that no matter what her choice, I don't see any happily ever after at the end of this book.

Before I end, just to show how my mind works (or doesn't) this is the one quote in the book I can't seem to forget, it is when he is describing Matilda Johnson when she first arrives on the scene:

*"The sun shone occasionally into Matilda's face as they drove on, its rays picking out all her features to a great nicety. Her eyes would have been called brown, but they were really eel-colour, like many other nice brown eyes; they were well-shaped and rather bright, though they had more of a broad shine than a sparkle."*

Her eyes were eel-coloured? I have brown eyes and never have I ever thought of them as being eel-coloured, nor do I want to. It just seemed the oddest way to describe someone's eyes. There is absolutely no fish that I can think of I want to be compared to, but that's just me. Ok, I'm done, I think I'll give it three stars. I liked the book, but I didn't love it, I'm not sure if the eel had anything to do with it.

### **Katie Lumsden says**

Maybe even 4.5. I really enjoyed this Hardy - it has an interesting and clever mix of light and dark tone, and is set not in the Victorian times but during the Napoleon Wars, which adds an interesting historical dimension to the book as well. Hardy's writing is beautiful as ever.

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### **Gopal Vijayaraghavan says**

The period was the closing years of the eighteenth Century . The place a small Wessex coastal village which is jolted rudely of its slumber by the arrival of the British Cavalry because Boney(Napolean) having conquered the Europe threatened the peace of England. Thomas Hardy weaves a tragic tale of Trumpet Major John Loveday “ a neglected heroic man, who, loving her(Anne Garland) to distraction, deliberately doomed himself to pensive shade to avoid even the appearance of standing in a brother’s way”. This tale of relationship between families of Loveday and Garland with the eternal triangle of Anne Garland, John and Robert Loveday is told in the backdrop of great historical events - a looming invasion of the British soil by the French Forces , the decimation of the French naval force at Trafalgar wherein occurred the tragic death of Lord Nelson and a hint of the deaths at distant battle fields of Spain . For a comic relief is thrown the characters of farmer Derriman and his nephew Festus Derriman a yeoman but hardly of soldierly type. This is a classical nineteenth century novel where all the loose ends are tied and with an ending where Anne gets Bob but John marches into darkness.

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### **Amy says**

I like that this was a book that Hardy actually researched for writing since it takes place during the Napoleonic Wars that he'd heard his elders talk about as a child. But, really, the story is really nothing all that great. The backdrop could have been more interesting and the storyline could have been more interesting. I really wasn't hoping anyone in particular would win the battle of the love triangle. In my quest to read everything Hardy has written, I could have skipped this one.

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### **Mlg says**

Another terrific glimpse into small town English life during the Napoleonic Wars. Anne Garland is living with her widowed mother in half of Miller Loveday's mill. She is courted by three men, one is the Squire's nephew, the other two are the Miller's sons, a trumpet major and a seaman.

I thought the character of Anne was unappealing, but the Trumpet Major who is the good man always in the background, is charming. I wish it had a happier ending!

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### **David Mcdowell says**

This is quite an uncomfortable read for a Hardy. I wasn't sure why I felt it to be so until I read the excellent

Introduction to this edition. It was perceived by readers at the time as a charming pastoral romance and the style was partly a response to the badly-reviewed 'Return of the Native' (a book I like a lot).

There are 3 sides to the book all of which take prominence at various times and result in the disjointed or uneasy feel.

The part that most readers would focus on is the romance 'quadrangle' which is ever-changing and doesn't end particularly satisfyingly. The heroine is good but fickle. The heroes are either good and weak or a pantomime villain (and therefore almost non-threatening).

This is also a historical novel - set during the period when threat of invasion by Napoleon was at its height, and the major players flit in and out of narrative even making personal appearances which distract from the romance plot.

The final aspect is comedy or farce, perhaps theatricality. Hardy was going to the theatre heavily while writing the book and there are various sections which are pure comic capers with frantic chases, grotesque caricatures and unlikely plot devices. This is something I have never come across before with Hardy. Again it is unsettling when shown against the background of a serious romance plot and portentous national events.

It's worth reading but definitely more challenging psychologically than other Hardy novels. You certainly won't come away from it with a happy glow.

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## **Sylvester says**

Hardy has written enough books to keep me happy for years now - and there are still more for me to read, thank goodness! There is something about him - an earthiness, a darkness, that makes his stories (which are always about the complications of human relationships, and explorations of human character weighed against fate) very satisfying and full, though not always happy. This one might be lighter than most, but I very much enjoy how he refuses to simplify relationships. I could say more, but I don't want to give the story away. This may not be my favorite of his novels, but every one has been worthwhile, and "The Trumpet Major" is no exception. It has definitely whetted my Hardy appetite.

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## **Jan-Maat says**

After reading Giap: The Victor in Vietnam I felt the need for something to settle my stomach - and hark what

lay to hand but an old edition of *The Trumpet-Major*, ripe for re-reading.

I read most of my Thomas Hardy in one go, one Easter in the mid 90s. I had got a boxed set from the Folio society of Hardy's novels for a fiver or some such in return for buying three full priced books a year from them (or something along those lines) and I read a hundred pages before breakfast, two hundred between breakfast and dinner and then as many as I could stomach before going to sleep. So I got through five novels in almost as many days. No doubt leaving me with literary indigestion and a Hardy reader's belly (view spoiler).

This one, *The Trumpet Major*, has a historical setting - in contrast to other more well known novels by Hardy which have contemporary or near contemporary settings. The action occurs during the invasion scare prior to 1805 when Napoleon moved the grand army away from Boulogne and crushed the Austrians and their Russian allies, as one recalls from *War and Peace* at Austerlitz instead, and that battle paralleled by Britain's victory at Trafalgar. The inevitable melancholy of a Hardy novel here is not over the loss of a rural culture, but instead over individual deaths, the drama of the story driven by the encampment of several regiments of horse and foot by the village of Overcome (Wessex), Hardy at moments will fire a canister of battle names at a sentence, reminding us that Waterloo and the Peninsula war lie ahead of these men and that there they will lie lonely in their graves before the fighting is done. This affected me with a little jolt of shock like the ballroom scene from *The Leopard* (view spoiler), an idea that reaches its apogee I feel in *Nostramo* serving to show how little future there will be for the characters even before the story gets going as though the author had scrawled "Futility" in big blocky letters over the front page of the manuscript.

Aside from all that it is a charming love square story, in which charming young Anne Garland is obliged to chose (view spoiler)between two doughty sons of the neighbouring miller Loveday (in whose mill building the Widow Garland and her charming daughter rent a dwelling), one - unreliable and a sailor as well as being her childhood sweetheart, the second - the eponymous and faithful Trumpet-Major, the third option is Hardy's take on Mr Darcy - a bombastic, boozy, braggart in this story known as Festus Derriman, whose only merit is his relative wealth.

From the first it was surprisingly comic - humour isn't a word I tend to yoke with Tom Hardy together, what with its "trifling deficiency of teeth" and other sly observations, the widow preferring to think of the flour dust that permeates her home as the 'stuff of life' or delightfully understated accounts of war wounds(view spoiler) and cussing parrots. Since this is an early novel - of 1880, originally published in three volumes as was the custom of those times it seems his vision got only darker over time until he gave up writing novels altogether.

In Hardy's later novels we see the destruction and disappearance of a way of life to be replaced by an English rural new order which in turn vanished round about WWII to be replaced by another, which with the possible appearance of US style Mega- dairies and potentially the end of some farm subsidies in our current brave new economic and political environment is itself to disappear, however in setting his story back in the 'good old days' we see a society that is not bucolic, it is interconnected with a wider world of violence, which is out of it's control, not just the shadows of future deaths but also the veterans of past wars like a man with a metal plate fixed in his skull and rattling arm bones. This is also an interconnected world, fine fabrics and fancy hats from foreign places also intrude but not yet tea or coffee, here beer & cider still reign supreme, and in that the happiness of some is affected by the inabilities of others to live with their own emotions, Derriman differs from D'arbyville in being unsuccessful as a rapist, his efforts tend more towards the comically melodramatic of a Dick Darstardly, winding up to marry that other threat to rural society - the actress who may, for a consideration rendered in coin of the realm,in a most intimate manner, have raised the morale of most of the officers of a regiment of dragoons, not for his own pleasure, but in the false belief that by so doing he'd spite a love rival (view spoiler). As tends to be the case in Hardy, and may be you've noticed this some times - hopefully at a safe distance - in the lives of others too, self-destructive drives produce a lot of collateral damage.

This volume I misappropriated from my mother's shelves, an old paperback originally six shillings in price, which sounds like an incredible sum of money even though 'tis only thirty pence in new money.

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## Julia says

I stayed with it to the end, but *The Trumpet-Major* didn't hold my attention very well. The various characters were each believable in their own right, but I didn't like the heroine very much; she was wishy-washy, self-centered, and uninteresting. The one major character I did like did not receive due rewards for his good character. There just wasn't much to the story other than wondering who the heroine would end up with. It was intriguing to get a glimpse into the life of the English in a time of preparation for war, and to see how village life was affected when the royal family came to town for its annual retreat. A minor subplot involving an elderly uncle and his subterfuge to keep his bully nephew from gaining his property was fun.

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## Tristram says

*"Gratitude is not love, though I wanted to make it so for the time."*

A woman and three suitors, and Thomas Hardy. That sounds a lot like the frivolous Bathsheba Everdeene and her entourage in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, but, in fact, it seems to be quite a recurrent constellation in Thomas Hardy's works. *The Trumpet-Major* tells the story of the rather bland heroine Anne Garland, the genteel daughter of a defunct landscape painter, who is wooed by two working class brothers, the sons of the miller Loveday, in whose house Anne and her mother have taken up quarters, finding that, financially, they have slightly come down in the world. The younger brother Robert Loveday is a sailor, and Anne's childhood sweetheart, but he has grown somewhat oblivious of his affections for Anne and even considers marrying other women. He actually puts his tendency to look on the other side of the garden fence like this:

"[W]hen you come ashore after having been shut up in a ship for eighteen months, women-folks seem so new and nice that you can't help liking them, one and all in a body; and so your heart is apt to get scattered and to yaw a bit [...]"

His elder brother John is the eponymous Trumpet-Major, and unlike Robert, his love for Anne is more serious and lasting, but of little use to him because Anne regards him more in the light of a brother. At the same time, notwithstanding his strong feelings for the young woman, John would not for the world step in between her and his brother. Last, but not least, there is the uncouth braggadocio yeoman Festus Derriman, *miles gloriosus*, fortune hunter and bully, who has also taken a fancy to Anne and takes it as a matter of course that that "misguided rosebud", as he once calls her, should prefer him over his less well-to-do rivals.

This complicated love story carries the bulk of the novel, but it is so full of twists and unforeseen situations – some of them more believable than others – that you will not get tired of the novel, although you may of Anne's prissiness and stupidity, and may not even guess who is going to lead her to the altar. As you know, true love does not alter when it altaration finds. What makes the novel even more interesting is the fact that Hardy set it into the period of the Napoleonic Wars, when the south coast of England was in constant dread of a French invasion, or, as Hardy wryly puts it:

”It should be stated that at this time there were two arch-enemies of mankind — Satan as usual, and Buonaparte, who had sprung up and eclipsed his elder rival altogether.”

Although very light-hearted and playful in tone, unusually so for Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major* gives a vivid idea of how the imminent danger of war and of French occupation haunts the countryfolks of that time – just remember the false alarm that starts a mass exodus of the villagers of Overcombe and that eventually exposes Festus as the coward he is – and how, in spite of all that, everyday life goes on as usual to a certain extent. Boney might be a daily worry of people like Anne and her mother, but still some worrying time must be set aside for considering which of the three suitors is the best catch. Quite at the beginning of his novel, Hardy cleverly implies that even the great footsteps of history and the great names of the people who think they are making it – we actually have real historical people such as Captain Thomas Masterman Hardy, Admiral Nelson and King George III. among the characters of the novel –, do not obliterate the tipper-tapper of the “common” people, who will not even leave a footnote in the history books. When he introduces the miller Loveday, he says,

”His ancestral line was contemporaneous with that of De Ros, Howard, and De La Zouche; but, owing to some trifling deficiency in the possessions of the house of Loveday, the individual names and intermarriages of its members were not recorded during the Middle Ages, and thus their private lives in any given century were uncertain. But it was known that the family had formed matrimonial alliances with farmers not so very small, and once with a gentleman-tanner, who had for many years purchased after their death the horses of the most aristocratic persons in the county — fiery steeds that earlier in their career had been valued at many hundred guineas.”

This, of course, also ironically comments on the matrimonial pretensions of Anne and her mother, but at the same time it makes us think of how History and history might be connected. Hardy definitely manages to draw a colourful picture of how the big events cast their shadows or their lights on everyday people’s lives – like in Gaskell’s *Sylvia’s Lovers*, the press gangs, as harbingers of naval battles “out there” can change the course of simple people’s lives, and men born in quiet English villages will find premature death on the battlefields of sunny Spain, “lying scattered about the world as military and other dust”. The voice of History will hum her thunderous tune, even though Overcombe people still dance to their rural ditties.

What I found quite unusual about this novel was the extensive use of farcical elements that Hardy makes: Festus Derriman is quite a ridiculous figure in many ways, until towards the end he suddenly reveals himself as a potential rapist and a mean schemer, and his uncle, the squire, is a typically Dickensian miser, whose exploits belong exclusively into the realm of gross comedy. And yet, they do not spoil the novel but add to its colour and appeal, although they may sometimes leave us bewildered.

You might not like the ending of the novel, but on second thoughts you might learn to like it because it teaches you one great truth that is everywhere around you but that you might want to deny for the sake of your peace of mind and your trust in humankind. The novel left me with a deep insight in that respect, but also with the unanswered question what “an anonymous nose” is.

## Phil says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I read it for O level English Lit - oooh, SO many years ago now. But it had exactly what I want from a Hardy novel. I've never bought into the "misery is good" atmosphere of Tess of the d'Urbervilles or Jude the Obscure. What I want from Hardy is fabulous descriptions of Wessex country life in the 1800s, great characterisation, one or two tangled love affairs and a sense of a world no longer here.

That is exactly what I got from this novel. The story is as good as any Jane Austen, what with the two brothers both in love with Anne Garland, the dastardly and cowardly Festus Derriman, the miserly old Squire Derriman and the unusual, but fascinating, backdrop of the mid-Napoleonic war. Most of Hardy's novels were almost contemporary, so this is unusual in being set roughly 75 years before it was written, at a time when the threat of invasion was real and expected (and without any form of speedy communication beyond fire beacons along the coastline, also the first you might know would be the French walking up the footpath to the mill).

In other reviews on here, I think that Anne Garland is treated harshly, as though she were a modern woman, with modern attitudes to marriage and modern freedoms. But she's not, she's as hidebound and restricted by convention as any Austen heroine. She's also probably only 17 when the novel opens (although we're never actually told her age). I liked Anne, and she was put into difficult situation by all three men who come courting her. Her decision was made not using modern reasoning, such as being in love, but by pre-Victorian reasoning such as "will this man be a good husband, will he be a suitable match". Anne is feisty enough, without being sugary sweet.

One thing that was a surprise me though was that Mrs Garland, Anne's mother, is considered an old woman when she's only about 40. when I read it at school, I thought that she and the Miller must have been ancient when they got married.

Ho-hum, time comes to us all. Anyway - go read this, don't accept the dashing it gets from the miseryguts who prefer their Hardy to be a bottomless well of despair.

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## Kezia says

Anne Garland is quite possibly Hardy's least appealing heroine, which unfortunately makes this his least appealing novel. Status-conscious, shy, cold, boring beyond her years, with no apparent talents or hobbies, Anne finds herself the object of the affections of two working-class brothers as well as the heir of the kindly local squire.

Anne is unlike other 'Hardy Girls' and Hardy is unlike himself in this story. He more interested in the military maneuvers during the Napoleonic wars than he is the characters and their interactions, adventures and romances.

Supporting players like Squire Derriman, Anne's mother, the miller, the vixen Matilda, and the servants make a much stronger impression than our heroine and one of our heroes. The title character, the army trumpeter John, son of the miller, makes no impression whatsoever other than his dedication to Anne. His brother Bob the seaman gets very little 'screen time,' and the suggestion that Anne and Bob were childhood sweethearts feels like an afterthought - because in fact it was: Hardy added that nugget in between the novel's appearance as a serial in a newspaper and his preparation for the book to appear in novel form. Of her suitors, only the big, strong, cowardly guardsman Festus has a personality worth noting, albeit an unpleasant personality.

I recommend this book only to serious students of Hardy or nutsos like me who merely want to read everything ever written by significant English novelists.

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### **Alan Blood says**

Those who criticise this remarkable novel should really go back to school to find out why they are missing the point. It has never achieved the accolades that so many of Hardy's other novels have. Although I more than adequately could, I will not repeat the several other complimentary reviews which are on this site.

Suffice to say that 'The Trumpet Major' occupies an almost unique slot in the Hardy 'repertoire' in that, unlike many of his works (such as 'Jude', Far From The Madding Crowd and 'Tess') there is not such a great preponderance of morbidness and death considering that it takes place in the shadow of of war. Conversely, the book is laced with the humour of rustic characters and situations such as the romantic disasters of Festus Derriman or the pride that an old military veteran has in the metal plate within his head. The ribald guttsiness of rural Wessex shines through despite the huge Army encampment mushrooming above the village and the endless rumours of imminent Napoleonic invasion.

For years, this book was a school examination (especially 'O' Level) text - but deserves far greater respect than this. An ex-English Teacher, now an Author, I can vouch for that !

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### **Luís C. says**

A good time at reading with the beautiful Anne Garland and the two brothers John and Bob Loveday, and many other minor characters (not always nice elsewhere), all in a beautiful English countryside at the time of the Napoleonic wars. A provincial idyll? Not only.

3 worthy stars.

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### **Courtney Stirrat says**

Oh Thomas,  
Read June 2014

We were doing so well, you and I. I was thinking of reading your poetry and planning Far from the Madding Crowd as my next big read. And then came along The Trumpet-Major. It started well, although a bit mellow for you, but then turned into what felt like (but was not actually) a long, long, long read. Your love quadrangle between boring Anne and her three suitors is a bit, well, dull. The plot and choices are very Austen, but without her sparkle. Your characters are a bit Elliot, only without her themes, prose, or depth, and I am left wondering why you would ever serialize anything. I think there are bits you actually stuck in between serialization and publication.

Anne, our heroine, such as she is, is a painter's daughter brought low(ish) by her Father's death. She lives in a partitioned mill with her mother, despite their obviously superior class. They initially do not deign to socialize with the Miller Loveday, but finally Mom is just in the mood for fun. She throws a ribbon in her hair and

ends up married to Mr. Loveday. Anne, on the other hand, is very much above the Lovedays, initially bad-mouthed by her Mom, her now-step songs Bob (the boring sailor) and John (the dreamy Trumpet major) both think Anne is the greatest. She's not. Early in this book I was struck by the potential for star-crossed love between John and Anne, something you do so well, Thomas. But no. Not to be. Boo!!!!!!!

In addition to the man Anne should have married but instead sent to war with Napoleon and his brother Bob, the one she actually married for reasons best known to no one, Anne is also hounded (perhaps literally at one point) by Festus Derryman, who is such a ridiculously awesome character, he should have had more air time. If Charles had written The Trumpet-Major instead of you, Derryman would have been the star and it would have been a different book. As it is, you relegate him to a funny side line.

As a result, the characters don't move the plot. While two of them want something, they are stymied by Anne's indifference, and we wait for you to tell us the direction, instead of feeling the book move from the urgency of the characters. So it plods.

At the same time, this is your only historical novel, set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic wars. And while this could have been an interesting way to move the story, or set the story, or drive the story, it ends up being like a studio movie back drop. All scenery and no movement. When John leaves for the war, your reader SHOULD feel bereft, he's going to fight in some of the scariest wars of the 19th century. Instead, it's like by brother-in-law/step-brother. I'm going to hang at the mill. Drop me a line.

Oh Thomas.

To be fair, Thomas, this book has its lovers, but I think they might all be Conrad fans or stark realists, so I'm a bit inclined to disregard their opinions, or understand their enjoyment in the context of the prose style and storytelling they enjoy. For me, this is a necessary read for any serious student of 19th century literature or any Hardy lover, but really in the context of understanding what doesn't work now (although it may have at the time. The word on the street was that you published (serialised) The Trumpet-Major after you received poor reviews on my very favorite of your novels The Return of the Native. The explanation makes sense, because in almost every way, this is the anti-Native, and I think you thought so too, because not only is the prose stiff, but you return to your earlier style in later books Jude, Tess, Casterbridge. To paraphrase Frost, this didn't begin as a writing experiment, but turned into one when it became unsuccessful.

The two things most striking about The Trumpet Major are the stiffness of the writing and the blandness of your heroine. It feels a bit like you were pretending to be Austen, but couldn't bring yourself to go through with it. I hope you learned your lesson with this and stuck with your guts in later novels (as I know you did from reading Jude and Tess), because regardless of reviews, Thomas Hardy, you have an amazing mind and I want to hear more of what you have to say, not what you think you should say.

A bientot. See you mid-July.

Courts

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## Val says

The best adjective I can think of for this unique Hardy novel is "undulating." Like the waves at the coast near to the town that provides the setting for the story, the central plot of relationships between Anne and her various suitors flows in and out, in and out, until the end. These plot undulations effectively create the wary feeling that either everyone is going to end up happy, or everyone is going to end up crushed, alone, dead, or

a combination of these latter three. Without giving away any details, Hardy fans who like tragedy will find enough of it, and those who like true love to win in the end will also find enough of that, though each side can rightly debate which of the suitors loved Anne best. Where you stand on that issue will determine how much of the novel is a tragedy and how much is an endearing story of inexplicable true love. Hardy again shows he is the master novelist of human character and emotions, even in a work that is slightly more than half as long as his more famous novels.

This novel has all the ingredients Hardy fans love: instant passing love, deep and abiding love developed over years, jealousy, deception, words spoken that should never have been uttered, words left unspoken that should have been shared, pompous nobility, humble self-deprecating poor, tragedy on the precipice of happiness, and vice-versa, and heaping helpings of simple misunderstandings and mistaken perceptions helped along by well-meaning family or townsfolk, or aided malignantly by rivals. The setting for this story, Hardy's dip into the genre of historical novel, is an interesting departure from his other works, and he entertainingly captures coastal Britain's feelings toward Napoleon and his perpetually threatened invasion. Hardy is just as brilliant portraying life near England's coasts and ports as he is depicting the pastoral landscapes and agrarian life so beloved in his enduring classics. He also provides descriptions and narrative observations of military life in the army and navy that are not found in his other works.

As Anne's relationships wax and wane, they are building to an eventual climax when she must make a choice and this is where readers will divide over whether she makes the right one. The fact that two of her suitors are siblings complicates matters throughout the story right up to the end. In my opinion, Chapter 38, "A Delicate Situation," is one of Hardy's best chapters in any novel. This chapter presents a finely-crafted scenario in which one of the suitors has finally won Anne over to some degree and is ecstatic about his good fortune, only to receive news that one of the other suitors, his brother, is returning to town and intends to resume wooing Anne. The brother who has made great strides in his relationship with Anne feels, out of loyalty to his brother, a need to put the brakes on things and has to stop reciprocating Anne's flirtations and begins to ignore small moments when he could have done chivalrous acts to endear himself to her even more fully. She realizes what he is doing and why, and likes him the more for it. Their conversations, and his self-conflicted efforts to not woo her further while she is trying to throw herself at him in a lady-like way make for a fun and lively chapter.

If you like Thomas Hardy as a storyteller you will enjoy this novel. I rated it 5 stars because in its uniqueness within Hardy's works, it holds its own as a romantic semi-tragedy, but also adds a historical wistfulness through various characters going off to war and returning...or not.

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