

THE DOUBLE VOICE in THOMAS HARDY'S "MEN WHO MARCH AWAY (SONG of THE SOLDIERS)"

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Abstract

"Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)" was written by Thomas Hardy, a poet who had never experienced the war first-hand. Alongside other famous authors of the age, he was asked by the British Government to contribute to the work of the War Propaganda Bureau by writing patriotic poems celebrating the British soldier, and at a meeting held in Wellington House in London, Hardy along with other British poets became attached to the British propaganda. "Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)" was published on 9th September, just a week after the authors' meeting at Wellington House. The poem that has two titles which are "Men Who March Away" and "Song of the Soldiers" and two intentions, presents us with the perspective of a soldier and an onlooker simultaneously. If one reads the speaker as a soldier, the writing becomes a manipulative propagandist poem; by contrast, understanding the speaker as an onlooker changes the style and reproduces the poem as an example of anti-war writing. In this article, I will apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "double voiced discourse" to highlight the simultaneously contrasting messages of the poem.

Anahtar Kelimeler: The First World War, War Poetry, Propaganda, Protest, Thomas Hardy.

THOMAS HARDY'NİN "MEN WHO MARCH AWAY" ŞİİRİNDEKİ ÇİFT SESLİLİK

Oz

"Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)" savaşı hiç deneyimlememiş olan Thomas Hardy tarafından yazılmış bir şiidir. Çağının diğer şairleri gibi Hardy de, İngiliz askerini öven vatansever şiiirler yazarak katkıda bulunmak üzere, Savaş Propaganda Bürosunun çalışmalarına hükümet tarafından davet edilmiştir. Böylece Londra Wellington House'da düzenlenen bir toplantıda, diğer İngiliz şairler ile birlikte İngiliz propagandasının bir parçası olmuştur. "Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)", Wellington House'da yapılan toplantıdan sadece bir hafta sonra 9 Eylül'de basılmıştır. "Men Who March Away" ve "Song of the Soldiers" adlarında iki başlığı ve iki ayrı amacı olan bu şiiir bize aynı anda hem askerin hem de askeri uzaktan izleyen bakış açısını yansıtır. Eğer anlatıcıyı bir asker olarak görürsek, bu eser manipülatif bir şiiire dönüşür. Oysaki anlatıcıyı dışardan gözlemleyen biri olarak görmek, şiiirin tarzını değiştirir ve onu savaş

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karşıtı bir eser olarak baştan yaratır. Bu makalede, Mikhail Bakhtin'in "çift sesli söylem" kuramını, bir şiirin aynı anda karşıt mesajlar içerdiğini vurgulamak için kullanacağım.

Key Words: 1.Dünya Savaşı, Savaş Şiiri, Propaganda, Protesto, Thomas Hardy.

"Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)" was written by Thomas Hardy, a poet who had never experienced the war first-hand. Hardy was an English novelist and poet who was born in 1840. Alongside other famous authors of the age, he was asked by the British Government to contribute to the work of the War Propaganda Bureau by writing patriotic poems celebrating the British soldier, and at a meeting held in Wellington House in London, Hardy along with other British poets became attached to the British propaganda. "Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)" was published on 9th September, just a week after the authors' meeting at Wellington House. The poem has two titles, the second in ellipses, and two intentions: "Men Who March Away" and "Song of the Soldiers". The poem presents us with the perspective of a soldier and an onlooker simultaneously. If one reads the speaker as a soldier, the writing becomes a manipulative propagandist poem; by contrast, understanding the speaker as an onlooker changes the style and reproduces the poem as an example of anti-war writing. In this article, I will apply Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "double voiced discourse" to highlight the simultaneously contrasting messages of the poem. I will start my analysis with a brief overview of the poems written in the period of the Great War to show the difference of Thomas Hardy's poetry among the poets of the age.

War poetry is one of the most well-established literary genres. When we go back to the epic cultures of the past we can see that twentieth century war poetry makes of established tropes and themes. Beowulf, for example, is an old Anglo-Saxon epic where the central protagonist, Beowulf, is portrayed as the saviour of an ancient folk community who are threatened by a monster. This ideal of the heroic saviour is still an important quality in the age of the First World War, as can be seen by the frequency with which poets reference the heroism of English soldiers. David Perkins says that "[t]hey voiced the simple, intense, and ideal emotion that swept England at the starts of the war, as it did all the combatant countries" (1976: 271) in his book. Some selected poems of Rupert Brooke, Jessie Pope and Rudyard Kipling show how differently the poets use the artistic form to encourage, or, less generously, manipulate society to go to the battle and fight to death to save their country. Rupert Brooke's poem "The Soldier", for instance, can be seen as a poem written in order to strengthen the patriotic feelings of the society as it emphasizes feelings of great devotion and love for one's country. In so doing, Brooke uses religious themes which encourage the reader to sign up.

Rudyard Kipling's poem "For All We Have And Are" presents a stark contrast to Brooke, and makes use of racist stereotyping and abstraction in characterising the enemy as dangerous and barbaric (thus invoking the old folk-term of "Hun" to describe the Germans). Kipling continuously emphasises the necessity of being prepared to fight and die for one's country saying that "There is but one task for all – One life for each to give". His compelling tone and patriotic message makes for a

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powerful piece of propagandist poetry. When it comes to Jessie Pope's "Who's for the Game?" it becomes crucial to bear in mind that the poet is a woman who does not fight yet still calls men to fight using a cynical discourse. She makes the call for enlistment seeing the war as a play, yet the "red crashing game" she depicts in her poem actually is the bloody war on the Western Front. She characterises fighting not only as a game but also a "show" and a "picnic" in the poem and, through deliberately down-playing, or refusing to acknowledge the grave realities of conflict, produces a bizarrely jingoistic poem which deliberately neutralises the brutality of war.

While even though the poets reflected the general mood in the earliest moments of the Great War that it could indeed be "the war that will end war", in H.G. Wells's memorable phrase- and as it progressed it became clear that it was a war which was unlike any other seen before" (George Walter, 2006: 10). Soldiers and civilians alike started to see the dark face of the war, destruction, fear and death and live through the experience of the hardships of the battlefield. Ultimately, the soldiers themselves became the corrective to the propagandists and began to create a new genre of anti-war poetry, which shunned the jingoism that came before. These poets are named the "Soldier Poets" and "[t]hese soldier-poets (and a number of others) are reacting to many things: particularly to the hype that exalted the war as a sacred crusade and that celebrated death in battle..." (Don Gifford, 1995: 50). For example, heroic representation of soldiers is destroyed and replaced with hopeless victims with simple dreams in Siegfried Sassoon's "Dreamers". The speaker shows the hard conditions of the battlefield and trench. Similarly, Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum est" displays the horror of the war stating that Horace's famous "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" is a big lie. The soldiers in this poem, are confused and mutilated because of the bombardments, unable to walk, hear or see properly. "Dreamers" and "Dulce et Decorum est" clearly unfold the cataclysmic effect of the war on servicemen, both physically and psychologically. The speakers of these two poems ignore the concept of masculinity and heroism rather they focus on the deplorable situation faced by the soldiers.

It is clear that the poets of the First World War period either make propaganda of the war or protest the violence within very clear-cut bounds.

However, Thomas Hardy breaks the taboos and creates an ambiguity combining two different understanding in his poem "Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)". The poem starts with the emphasis on the concept of justice under the title "Song of the Soldiers".

What of the faith and fire within us Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say Night is growing gray,
To hazards whence no tears can win us; What of the faith
and fire within us
Men who march away? (Kendal, 2014: 5)

If we consider the narrator to be a soldier, the poem starts with a rhetorical question, asked by a fellow soldier to his comrades. In "Writings of Persuasion and Dissonance in the Great War" Owen and Pividori say "The question is rhetorical, but also invites us to wonder about the nature of their faith, and of the sparks that set it alight" (2016: 143). This soldier is the speaker, for now, whose primary concern is to interrogate the intention behind his own and his fellow comrade's willingness to "march away" and, most importantly, to identify the "fire" which makes soldier set off before sunrise; his preliminary answer appears to be "faith". The soldier-speaker references the dark challenges of life as a soldier, highlighting its absolute difference to the daylight of civilian life; thus the soldiers have to head towards the war before dawn. The poignant opening implies that the soldiers know they are heading into the danger, yet they believe in victory deeply. Even though the speaker thinks over the war and the hardships they experience, the crucial thing is that the speaker has no doubt about the soldiers' faith and courage which will allow them to face the fight with fearless commitment. However, the poem begins to introduce alternative viewpoints in its second stanza;

Is it a purblind prank, O think you, Friend with the musing eye
Who watch us stepping by, With doubt and dolorous sigh?
Can much pondering so hoodwink you!
Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye? (Kendal, 2014: 5)

When we come to the second stanza, the speaker focuses his attention on the bystander – the "friend with the musing eye" who represents those who do not take an active part in the fighting effort, who simply watch as the soldiers march by. The speaker seems to be critical of those who think too much yet take no action, suggesting that all thoughts and no action are the result of having been deceived, because battle needs action and a fire within the people. He asks the pondering and watching onlookers that if they as the soldiers have all been duped by a joke into signing up to go to war. The speaker knows the answer, this is not a "purblind prank". He calls the watching onlookers to understand saying that "O think you".

Invoking an imagined onlooker as "Friend with the musing eye" becomes the key discursive device for the stanza, allowing the poet to imply a deeper ambivalence that is present on the surface of the poem. Thus, Michael Millgate has read the allusion to "friend with the musing eye" as an "incorporated reference to the poet himself" (1982: 461). It is very possible that the attribution of "the musing eye" refers to the writers and poets as they are seen as the thinking – "pondering" men. It can be argued that Hardy as a poet is ironically addressing himself. Even though the poetic speaker seems to be one of the marching soldiers, the poet Hardy nods to his identity implicitly as the musing friend who never fought in his life but was always the distanced observer.

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The third stanza supplies the answer to the second stanza, and a censure to the musing poet of Hardy's pacifist past;

Nay. We well see what we are doing, Though some may not see –
Dalliers as they be –
England's need are we;
Her distress would leave us rueing: Nay. We well see what we are
doing,
Though some may not see! (Kendal, 2014: 5)

The speaker opens this riposte with a very strong "Nay", in response to the pondering onlookers of the second stanza. The speaker asserts the soldiers' self-belief and self-assurance that going to the war is a worthy cause and decision well taken with clear-sightedness, which can be deduced from the speaker's emphasis on the line of "We well see what we are doing". The soldiers' decision to surrender themselves is taken for England's sake. The speaker advocates for his fellow soldiers' choice, invoking patriotic duty - for "England's need are we" - and celebrates the choice to sign up as saving England from "distress". Onlookers are castigated as feeble "dalliers" - those who waste time on unnecessary things. By contrast to these "dalliers", the soldiers are involved in matters of life and death and civilizational survival, saving England rather than leaving themselves "rueing" at her "distress". Here Hardy likewise personifies England as "her", reminding us of Brooke's "The Soldier" and Pope's "Who's for the Game", both of which feminise England as the mother land in need of manly protection by her squadrons of soldiers. Here it is again seen that England (notably not the Great British Empire) is once again characterised as a defenceless, helpless woman who waits for her saviour. This personification is highly effective in producing the sympathetic feelings of patriotism and thus strengthens the effect of the propaganda message of the poem. The speaker continues:

In our heart of hearts believing Victory crowns the just,
And that braggarts must Surely bite the dust,
Press we to the field ungrieving, In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just (Kendal, 2014: 5)

The fourth stanza's two big themes are justice and "victory", as can clearly be seen. The speaker opens by ventriloquizing the soldiers' self-belief in their own righteousness. Believing sincerely in the rectitude of their cause, they take confidence from the idea that "[v]ictory crowns the just". The word "victory" is likewise personified here and referenced as an agent capable of choose and "crown[ing]" the rightful side. The speaker emphasises that England is the side who deserves to win, as if the triumph is destined. Accordingly, the message of the poem is that the most important deciding factor in the outcome of a war is the justness of one side over the other. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word "just" as "[b]ased on or behaving according to what is morally right and fair"; thus it is clear that the soldiers of poem see themselves

and their country as morally justified in their action against the aggressive enemy. The enemy is characterised as boastful and bragging, with the speaker announcing that “Braggarts must surely bite the dust”. Thus the soldiers of Germany, in this context, are the braggarts who will be unable to achieve victory as their rivals enjoy the moral high ground and therefore go to the war “ungrieving”, confident that they will win as their cause is worthy. The stanza ends as it began with the line “Victory crowns the just” and thus reiterates the notion that England is right and will therefore be crowned with the victory. The speaker starts the final stanza with an explanation;

Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away Ere the barn-cocks say Night is growing gray,
Leaving all that here can win us; Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away (Kendal, 2014: 5)

Repeating the lines of the first stanza almost word by word, but with the crucial replacement of “What of” with the determined “Hence”, the final stanza gives the reader the crucial answer to the question which starts the poem. In this context, “Hence [can be understood as “this is the reason for”] the faith and fire within us”, answering the crucial question of motivation posed in the opening stanza. This device is a powerful rhetorical mechanism which ensures that the poem ends on a note of certainty and moral victory, despite the uncertainties which lie ahead for the marching soldiers.

Thomas Hardy, whose patriotic pro-war poem “Men Who March Away” was discussed before, is in fact a poet of many anti-war poems, such as “Drummer Hodge” which was written during the Boer War and “Channel Firing” which was written on the eve of the First World War. Both are marked by their pessimism and lamentations for the death-driven future of mankind. However, his involvement with the War Propaganda Bureau in London during the first months of the First World War, produces a poem markedly different in tone, as we have seen. We may go so far as to say that “Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)” creates the sense of that the poem is written specifically upon the request of British Propaganda Bureau. “Men Who March Away” can easily be seen as a jingoistic poem at first sight, yet with Hardy’s characteristic ambiguity, it is possible to interpret it as an anti-war poem. This becomes clear when Mikhail Bakhtin’s “double-voiced discourse” theory is applied to a reading of the poem. Bakhtin (1975) explains his theory in his *Discourse in the Novel*, saying that “[Double-voiced discourse is a device which] serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (as cited in Holquist, 1981: 324). The ramification of this explanation is that it is possible that an author may hide the real meaning of work behind the speaker’s literal narration. According to Bakhtin’s proposals it can be said that using the double-voiced discourse, the author takes the role of a tailor mending his/her refracted message in his/her work in a “...comic, ironic or parodic discourse” (as cited in Holquist, 1981: 324). When we

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look at "Men Who March Away", from this perspective, we can infer that Thomas Hardy may hide a refracted anti-war message in his supposedly jingoistic poem of "Men Who March Away". Firstly, "Men Who March Away" was analysed via the primary voice of the speaker, who was understood to represent the soldiers who were confident in the virtue of their decision to go to war, despite the implications of questioning bystanders. We will now reconsider the message of this poem by analysing it through the eyes of those onlookers, now considering the "we" to refer to the onlookers and "you" to be the soldiers. By using ambiguity Hardy creates an irony and an alternative and hidden anti-war message is revealed. For this reason, it is worth revisiting the poem in the company of the anti-war poets of the First World War.

The poem starts under the title of "Men Who March Away" which clearly signifies that the title is written from the perspective of those who are not marching – in other words, the onlookers at the side-lines. Yet the reader is quick to understand the poem as pro-war. Thomas Hardy starts his poem addressing a question about the "faith and fire" within themselves to the soldiers:

What of the faith and fire within us
Men who march away Ere the barn-
cocks say Night is growing gray,
To hazards whence no tears can win us;
What of the faith and fire within
us
Men who march away? (Kendal, 2014: 5)

If the speaker instead puts himself in the position of an onlooker this time, and asks questions to the soldiers, then, we see the speaker standing still watching the soldiers marching away towards the battlefield. This distance immediately renders the poem more ambiguous and philosophical: now the speaker seems more curious about the initiating factor in the hearts of these men by rhetorically asking "What of the faith and fire within us" – implying does this faith and fire justify such a choice, and can they really be measured by taking an active part in battle? When the effects and difficulties of the war and finally the death are considered, it is clear that wars do not come to an end because people are willing to fight, nor can "faith and fire" not be limited to active participation in battle.

What follows is the speaker's warning to the soldiers that the war is no joke – it is not a "purblind prank".

Is it a purblind prank, O think you, Friend with the musing eye
Who watch us stepping by, With doubt and dolorous sigh?
Can much pondering so hoodwink you! Is it a purblind prank, O think
you,
Friend with the musing eye? (Kendal, 2014: 5)

The speaker starts the second stanza with an exclamation of "Is it a purblind prank" and shows his consternation in the presence of this situation. It can be stated that the speaker warns the soldiers about their way of thought and wants them to think that pondering like a hero should not deceive them because the reality of the war is

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different. Now, "Friend with the musing eye who watch us stepping by with doubt and dolorous sigh" can be said to addressee to the soldiers who are thinking and concentrating on their belief about fighting and in the meantime they are watching the observers passing by. The crucial thing here is that, in this reading, the soldiers have "musing eye", implying perhaps their fascination with the magical atmosphere of the battlefield and a belief in the rectitude of martyrdom. As they march on confident, they watch others who feel "doubt and dolorous sigh" and feel pity towards those who do not, as Kipling mentioned, "Stand up and take the war". The speaker continues to emphasize the reality that the soldiers are in fact deceived by using the phrases of "musing eye" and "hoodwink". It can be said that the belief that fighting will bring happiness and peace to the country is deceiving these soldiers. According to the speaker, the soldiers cannot clearly see the truth about fighting and the rhetorical question of "Is it a purblind prank" again underlines the fact that the war is not a joke. He then argues that their stillness has its reasons.

Nay. We well see what we are doing, Though some may not see –
Dalliers as they be –
England's need are we;
Her distress would leave us rueing:
Nay. We well see what we are doing, Though some may not see!
(Kendal, 2014: 5)

The stanza starts with the answer to his previous questions: "Nay". The continuous lines also carry responsive statements as the speaker says they, as the ones who do not enlist to go to the war, know what they are doing as if somebody told them they were wrong. The speaker tries to prove that there is nothing wrong in being on the observers' side, and that they too are very sure of themselves. According to the speaker, some people cannot see the truth and they are probably "dalliers". It can be stated that the speaker regards these soldiers as the people who are wasting time in a futile action which cannot rescue England. The lines show that, according to the speaker, England needs more people of this dissenting perspective, as can be understood from the line "England's need are we". In other words, the war cannot solve the problems, but only bring them; questioning bystanders are rather in search of new ways of conflict resolution, which do not include fighting. Paul Fussell also emphasizes in his book that "[e]very war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends" (1975: 7). Fussell chooses "irony" to express the depressing contradictions of wars, which time and again repeat the tragedy that soldiers expect a great success, yet they lose either the war or their lives. Victory in the war is only possible through their deaths. That is the reason why the speaker casts doubt and concern over the soldier's convictions. Moreover, the repetition of "Nay. We well see what we are doing/Though some may not see" reiterates this conviction, with

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this reading emphasising that it is the soldiers and not the onlookers who are blind to the realities of their situation and of war.

The speaker continues by pressing the dubious onlookers cause:

In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just, And that braggarts must Surely bite the dust,
Press we to the field ungrieving, In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just (Kendal, 2014: 5)

As in the first stanza, the speaker affirms that his perspective is the right one. However, from this new perspective, a more nuanced position emerges, the speaker suggesting that victory – moral victory – can only come through a decision to not take part and remaining on the side lines. It may be interpreted as the speaker having faith in his attitude against fighting and that justice will prevail. That is why he says "Victory crowns the just". The word of "just" is crucial here as it symbolizes the moral value which the speaker attaches to it. According to the speaker, moral rectitude brings victory and in this case being right is to absent oneself from a lost moral cause – that of fighting and killing others. What is more, the speaker says "...Braggarts must surely bite the dust" which can be interpreted as a warning to those who boast of moral certainties in the war as the realisation of their mistake will be a hard consequence to bear.

On the other hand, the speaker causes to an understanding of that the observers want people to bury themselves without grief. While the same line in the poem was interpreted as a proud battle cry of a brave soldier in the first analysis, when we interpret it as the statement of a bystander, the meaning changes direction. Seeing that the speaker the moral clarity of the bystanders as the future of England, he considers himself and the observers as saviours too. That is why he wants people to stay still and be strong while burying them and creates the atmosphere that people will feel sorrow because they lose war heroes. The poem comes to an end by returning to its beginning:

Hence the faith and fire within us Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say Night is growing gray,
Leaving all that here can win us; Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away (Kendal, 2014: 5)

The final stanza carries again the function of a response, starting with the word of "Hence" – this is the reason for. Here, the faith and fire are the moral certainties who look on that to question if the war is right, and thus the speaker gives the answer to those men who march away to the battle. On the contrary, the speaker and his friends behave according to the faith and fire within themselves, and avoid fighting. Thus Hardy's skill as a poet to express ambiguity allows the poem to function simultaneously as a call to arms, sympathetic to the pure intentions of the thousands on thousands of boys and men who signed up to fight a war between the Great Powers, and as a caution to the jingoism that helped send such men to a futile death.

Finally, it can be concluded that the poem can be read from the two contrasting perspectives that create an ambiguity and a polyphony. Thomas Hardy, differently from the poets of the age, proves that his poem gives either the direct message that supports the necessity to go to the war or refracted anti-war message when Bakhtin's double voiced discourse theory is applied to it. He hides the anti-war message in his so-called propaganda poem. So, it becomes clear that "Men Who March Away (Song of the Soldiers)" creates a difference in all the clear-cut poems of the age of the Great War.

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