

How the poets of
happy is england now
in the anthology up
the line to death
prese...

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



The section Happy is England Now is situated at the start of the anthology, Up the Line to Death.

In this section, the editor, Brian Gardner has arranged the six poems in such a way that it is clear these poems are largely pro-war. Therefore, most of the poems in the section uphold the stereotypical beliefs held by the public before and during the war. However, this is not always the case; with the inclusion of “ Men Who March Away” (“ Men...

”) by Thomas Hardy, Gardner adds a poem whose stance towards the war is at the very least ambiguous. As a result, Gardner can show that he is not forgetting the real horrors of the war, horrors which are hardly mentioned in this section. This fact is very important to Gardner; in the introduction to the anthology, he describes the war as a ‘ tragedy’. From this it can be seen clearly that Gardner wants to make sure the brutalities of the war are not forgotten and so with the inclusion of “ Men...

” he makes sure that everything is not as it seems. It is almost as if Gardner is trying to give a subtle hint to the reader as to what might follow in the rest of the anthology. This is juxtaposed with the poems “ Happy is England Now” (“ Happy...) and “ England to Her Sons” (“ England.

.. “), which are very pro-war. The contextual nature of the poets can be looked at to determine the way they present war.

For example, although Hodgson wrote “ England... ” before the war started, nevertheless he knew that he was going to go there and fight. As a result, the poem is more personal and has a different style compared to the other

poems. This can be seen with the inclusion and acknowledgment of pain and suffering, which insinuates that Hodgson had at least some inkling of what he was going to face even though he had not faced it yet.

Hardy and Freeman, on the other hand, never went to war as they were too old, so they had to write their poems from second hand knowledge; indeed Hardy wrote an earlier poem, “ Charge of the Light Brigade” solely from information according to a newspaper article. As a result, these poems are more detached and with comparably less feeling behind them, which can be seen when analysing these poems in detail. Firstly, the poems “ Happy...

” and “ England... ” have many things in common which shows how they are used to present the war. The immediate noticeable thing is that England is personified in both poems.

By doing this, the poets can make it seem as though soldiers going to war is something which is approved by England itself. As a result, this can be seen as a very pro-war stance, as the poets are encouraging people to go to war. Furthermore, by portraying England as a woman, “ England to her sons” the poems make it as though the soldiers are going to war to fight to save their motherland. Normally, sons are very protective of their mothers so by doing this; the poets reinforce the message that they are doing a duty when they fight.

In “ Happy... ” a lot of natural imagery is used by Freeman, “...

ark woods, green fields, towns... ” This shows the beauty of England and what a wondrous place it is and therefore, it needed to be safeguarded from any attack. The fact this is conveyed as an asyndetic list reinforces the idea of the natural wonder and so is able to portray going to war as a positive thing. In contrast, “ Men.

. ” does not mention England at all; it is a more general poem about war, which perhaps makes it more ambiguous and shows that unlike the other poems, there is no positivity towards the war. Another technique used to present the war in “ Happy..

. is the archaic and mythological language. By using words such as “ destroying dragon”, along with the alliteration, it points to England’s great history and perhaps St. Georges defeat of the dragon. This highlights England’s rich heritage and so therefore makes it seem even more imperative that the soldiers’ should do all they can to preserve and safeguard a land so steeped in wonderful history. This is mirrored by “ England.

.. ” as well, by using archaic words such as “ ye” and “ giveth”, Hodgson is able to give a feeling of the history, much like “ Happy..

. ” and show how important it is protect it. However, “ Men... ” uses a very interesting approach.

Initially, Hardy uses high and grand language, “ victory crowns the just” but later on, when describing the death of the enemy, he uses more down-to-earth language; “... braggarts must/Surely bite the dust “.

This has a sarcastic effect, as like the other poems, Hardy uses grand language for the positive things, but then converts to a lower style of register. This can be used to pour scorn over the fact that people think everything is bright and rosy; indeed the common thinking at the time was that the war would be 'over by Christmas'. By using the word "surely" in a sarcastic way, Hardy plays upon the British idea of quick victory and the opposition being crushed very easily. In this way, it can be seen that Hardy's approach to war is very different from the approach taken by Freeman and Hodgson and consequently, he is successful in making this poem less pro-war, although this point of view is open to debate. In the poems "Happy.. " and "England...

"the 'bad bits' of the war are skated over to an extent, and euphemisms are used instead to portray the war; an interesting fact is that the word "war" is never mentioned in any poem. For example, in "England..." the euphemism "beloved sleep" is used to describe death. Although the ideas of death are mentioned, they are used to signify the greatness of war and not to show it as something horrific.

This can be seen with the line "Happy is England in the brave that die". By using "brave", Freeman shows that death is looked upon with happiness and that if they die, then they will know that they gave their life for an honourable cause, a cause which tried to protect their homeland. In "England..

. this technique is also used: “ Steeled to suffer uncomplaining/Loss and failure, pain and death”. Although the issues being dealt with here are very serious, Hodgson tries to emphasise the fact that they are not in vain. By using a syndetic list and highlighting that England admires the fact that they do not complain when under hardship shows how courageous the soldiers are, that they are willing to lay down their life for their country.

However, in the same poem, this stance is reversed in the last line when Hodgson says “ I accept it nothing asking, save a little space to weep”. Here for the first time, some of the uncomfortable aspects of the war come to the fore and because of the fact the rest of the poem is largely upbeat, it makes this last line even more hard-hitting. In “ Men...

” a euphemism is used to describe the only place death is mentioned, “... bite the dust...

” Although in the other poems, euphemisms are used to avoid the horrors of the war, here it is used for the opposite purpose. By using such a strong phrase, it can be argued that it has a stronger effect than simply saying ‘ death’. This, coupled with the marked change in register, emphasises the idea of death and how significant it is in war. This way of approaching the war is in contrast to the other poems, perhaps showing why it is therefore considered to be so ambiguous in its stance in this section. Another way war is presented in the poems is using the ideas of religious imagery and the subject of purity.

The idea of religious imagery is present in both “ Men... ” and “ Happy..

. ” although it is used for quite different purposes in each of the respective poems. Firstly, in “ Men... Hardy makes it clear that the “ faith and fire” belongs to the men and is not a sentiment shared by him.

By doing this, he is able to add a sarcastic touch to the idea of faith and how the soldiers behave when they are backed by faith. Repeating this in the same stanza reinforces his message and makes it clear that he considers religion to play no part in the success of the soldiers against the opposition. In stark contrast, “ England...

” uses religion to buoy the troops; “ Go, and may the God of battles... ” This shows that God is behind them and so they have nothing to fear. It is important to note the contextual nature of the time to fully grasp this idea. At the time, religion was a lot more widespread and common than it is today, and was held in greater esteem.

Therefore, by using such a statement, it would have a greater effect on people at the time because, being very religious, they would be comforted by the idea that God was on their side. This fact is played upon by Hodgson and so it can be seen as a way of presenting the war very positively; that even God approves and is guiding them in this task. Although religion is directly not mentioned in “ Happy... the subject of purity is.

By doing this, Freeman is almost suggesting that going to war makes them more complete somehow, and so they should do their duty and fight. The structures of the poems also mirror their message and how they present war. In “ England...

” for example, there is quite a hymn-like regular rhythm, which sounds almost like a marching chant, which emphasises the soldiers marching towards the war. This is present for four lines of the stanza, but in the fifth line, this pattern breaks down, with the line longer and with no apparent rhyme scheme. The effect of this is to emphasise these lines and so they can be looked at in more detail and so their meaning can become more clear. As a result, many of the important aspects which Hodgson wants to convey are present in these last lines, for example the aforementioned last line about England weeping for her sons’ death.

Similarly, “ Men... ” is also very hymn-like, but this structure is used, not for promoting the war, but to emphasise the satirical nature of the war. The marching rhythm can be tied in with the title of the poem, “ Men Who March Away”. The fact that Hardy adds the word “ away” shows that soldiers are literally going away, possibly never to return.

This reinforces the poem’s overall message of the negativity of war.

Conversely, the structure of “ Happy” is not hymn-like, but very regular, with six lines in a stanza all through the poem. This perhaps mirrors the consistent nature of the message; it is regular to go to war and is something which is the norm and as a result, reinforces the poem’s pro-war stance. In conclusion, all three poems studied have different approaches towards the war. The poems “ Happy..

. ” and “ England... can be considered similar as they are both pro-war and so essentially contain the same message. However, the way they portray this message is quite different.

Naturally, as Hodgson was going to actually go to war, he would have had a different point of view. On the other hand, Freeman, being too old, would have held no kind of affinity to the war so presumably just wrote in order to earn a living, not for any sort of direct purpose. This can be seen in the poems; “ England... ” is a lot more personal than “ Happy.

.. ” which seems more detached. The ‘ odd one out’ is considered to be “ Men..

. as it is very ambiguous about the war. Many people consider it to be pro-war, but just as many believe it to portray the war negatively. In any case, it is very clear that it is written in a very different way to the other poems, this fact being emphasised by the satirical nature of the poem.

It is interesting that Gardner placed this poem in this section, but what is even more interesting is that it is in second place. This is significant because after reading the “ Fourth of August”, the reader feels as though the rest of the anthology is going to be largely pro-war, on the basis of the first poem. However, the presence of “ Men..

. ” is a stark reminder to the reader that the anthology is not like that at all, but about the “ unparalleled tragedy” which was the war, according to Gardner. Therefore, Gardner is able to make sure that the reader is not lulled

into a false sense of thinking positively about the war; he wants to make sure the soldiers are remembered in the anthology, which after all, in the words of Gardner is a “tribute” to those who fought in the Great War.