

Pre-1914 Poetry

War

Compare and contrast the ways poets have responded to war in their writing.

Name:

What we have to do:

Read a substantial collection of pre-1914 poetry. We will look at between 10-15 war poems written before 1914.

Your essay should range across the collection, referring to about five or six poems, though not all poems need receive equal treatment.

You must respond critically and sensitively to a range of poems and show understanding of how meanings and ideas are conveyed through language, structure and form.

You should explore relationships and comparisons between texts, selecting and evaluating relevant material.

To start us off, write down here what the word 'war' means to you. What images or words come to mind when you think of war?

List below any wars that you have heard of. How many can you think of?

Compare your list with a partner.

War between England and France

The **French Revolutionary Wars** were a series of major conflicts, from 1792 until 1802, fought between the French Revolutionary government and several European states. They are usually divided between the First Coalition (1792–1797) and the Second Coalition (1798–1801), although France was also at war with Great Britain continuously from 1793 to 1802.

Marked by French revolutionary fervour and military innovations, the campaigns saw the French Revolutionary Armies defeat a number of opposing coalitions and expand French control to areas such as Italy, and the Rhineland. The wars were of titanic proportions, mainly due to the application of modern mass conscription.

All from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolutionary_Wars

The Napoleonic Era is a period in the History of France and Europe. It is generally classified as the fourth stage of the French Revolution, the first being the National Assembly, the second being the Legislative Assembly, and the third being the Directory. The Napoleonic Era begins roughly with Napoleon's coup d'état, overthrowing the Directory, establishing the French Consulate, and ends at the Hundred Days and his defeat at Waterloo (November 9, 1799- June 28, 1815). The Congress of Vienna soon set out to restore Europe to pre-French Revolution days.

All from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Era

The Drum

I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields,
And lures from cities and from fields,
To sell their liberty for charms
Of tawdry lace and glittering arms;
And when Ambition's voice commands,
To march, and fight, and fall, in foreign lands.

I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widows' tears, and orphans' moans,
And all that Misery's hand bestows,
To fill the catalogue of human woes.

John Scott (poem written in 1782)

As a Quaker Scott was opposed to all violence. The poem remained popular and was reprinted many times during the subsequent wars with France.

Questions to help with annotation of 'The Drum'

1. Why does the speaker in the poem 'hate' the sound of the drum?
2. Why is the word 'round' repeated on line 2?
3. Why are the youth described as 'thoughtless'?
4. What word suggests that youth are enticed away rather than being forced?
5. Which words tell the reader that the youth go from everywhere? Why do you think the poet wants to give this impression?
6. In what way is the word 'sell' effective on line 5?
7. Why do you think the poet has finished 'To sell their liberty for charms' on the next line (in other words used enjambment)?
8. Why does 'Ambition' have a capital letter?
9. Why is there a list of three actions that will happen to the young men in line 8?
10. What is the effect of repeating the same letter sound in line 8? What is the literary term for this?
11. Why has the poet repeated the first two lines of the poem at the beginning of the second verse (or stanza)?
12. What difference is there between the third line of the first stanza and the third line of the second stanza? What is the significance (the importance) of the difference?
13. Underline all the words the poet uses to describe the war landscape in lines 11-14. What comment can you make about the words?
14. Compare lines 7 and 15 of the poem. What can you write about the two lines?
15. What do you understand by the last two lines of the poem?
16. Look at the rhyme scheme of the poem. How does it add to the overall effect?
17. Count the number of syllables in each line of poetry. Why do you think the rhythm of the poem is so regular and what is it supposed to echo?
18. Why do you think the last line of each stanza is a different length to the rest of the poem?
19. Count the number of lines in each stanza; what comment might you make about this structure?
20. What are your feelings about the poem?

THIS battle was fought near the village of Blenheim, in Bavaria, on the left bank of the river Danube, on August 13, 1704. The French and Bavarians, under Marshall Tallard and Marsin, were defeated by the English and Austrians, under the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene.

The French and Bavarians were taken by surprise in the village, and their armies were badly handled. On the opposite side Marlborough and Prince Eugene showed themselves splendid cavalry leaders and led an attack that proved successful through its very recklessness. The French and Bavarians lost 30,000 in killed, wounded, and prisoners, while Marlborough's loss was only 11,000. The battle broke the prestige of the French king, Louis XIV; and when Marlborough returned to England his nation built a magnificent mansion for him and named it Blenheim Palace after this battle.

From: http://www.poetry-archive.com/s/the_battle_of_blenheim.html

The Battle of Blenheim

THE BATTLE OF BLENHEIM

by: Robert Southey (1774-1843)

It was a summer evening,
Old Kaspar's work was done,
And he before his cottage door
Was sitting in the sun,
And by him sported on the green
His little grandchild Wilhelmine.

She saw her brother Peterkin
Roll something large and round
Which he beside the rivulet
In playing there had found;
He came to ask what he had found,
That was so large, and smooth, and round.

Old Kaspar took it from the boy,
Who stood expectant by;
And then the old man shook his head,
And with a natural sigh,
"'Tis some poor fellow's skull," said he,
"Who fell in the great victory.

"I find them in the garden,
For there's many here about;
And often when I go to plough,
The ploughshare turns them out!
For many thousand men," said he,
"Were slain in that great victory."

"Now tell us what 'twas all about,"
Young Peterkin, he cries;
And little Wilhelmine looks up
With wonder-waiting eyes;
"Now tell us all about the war,
And what they fought each other for."

"It was the English," Kaspar cried,
"Who put the French to rout;
But what they fought each other for
I could not well make out;
But everybody said," quoth he,
"That 'twas a famous victory.

"My father lived at Blenheim then,
Yon little stream hard by;
They burnt his dwelling to the ground,
And he was forced to fly;
So with his wife and child he fled,
Nor had he where to rest his head.

"With fire and sword the country round
Was wasted far and wide,
And many a childing mother then,
And new-born baby died;
But things like that, you know, must be
At every famous victory.

"They said it was a shocking sight
After the field was won;
For many thousand bodies here
Lay rotting in the sun;
But things like that, you know, must be
After a famous victory.

"Great praise the Duke of Marlbro' won,
And our good Prince Eugene."
"Why, 'twas a very wicked thing!"
Said little Wilhelmine.
"Nay ... nay ... my little girl," quoth he,
"It was a famous victory."

"And everybody praised the Duke
Who this great fight did win."
"But what good came of it at last?"
Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why, that I cannot tell," said he,
"But 'twas a famous victory."

1. What starts the discussion of the Battle? Look in stanza 3.
2. What gruesome details does Old Kaspar recall about the Battle?
3. What does the old man not understand about the Battle?
4. What do the children want to know?
5. What are their opinions after the old man's story?
6. Why do you think the poem has been 'told' in this way, with an old man and two young children as the speakers?
7. Make a comment about the rhyme scheme and rhythm of the poem. Is its apparent simplicity effective?
8. What examples of repetition can you find in the poem. In what way are they effective?
9. What is your opinion of this poem?

The Crimean War

The **Crimean War** (1854–1856) was fought between Imperial Russia on one side and an alliance of France, the United Kingdom, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire on the other. The majority of the conflict took place on the Crimean Peninsula, with additional actions occurring in western Turkey, the Baltic Sea region, and in the Russian Far East.

The Crimean War is generally considered to be the first "modern" conflict and "introduced technical changes which affected the future course of warfare."

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_War

The **Charge of the Light Brigade** was a disastrous cavalry charge led by Lord Cardigan during the Battle of Balaclava on October 25, 1854 in the Crimean War. The charge was made by the Light Brigade of the British cavalry, consisting of the 4th and 13th Light Dragoons, 17th Lancers, and the 8th and 11th Hussars, under the command of Major General the Earl of Cardigan. Together with the Heavy Brigade comprising the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, the 5th Dragoon Guards, the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons and the Scots Greys, commanded by Major General James Yorke Scarlett, himself a past Commanding Officer of the 5th Dragoon Guards, these units were the main British cavalry force at the battle. Overall command of the cavalry resided with the Earl of Lucan.

Lucan received an order from the army commander Lord Raglan stating that "Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front, follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Horse artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate." The order was drafted by Brigadier Airey and was carried by Captain Louis Edward Nolan, who may have carried further oral instructions, but as he was killed during the charge this remains conjecture. In response to the order, Cardigan led 673 (some sources state 661) cavalry men straight into the valley between the Fedyukhin Heights and the Causeway Heights, famously dubbed the "Valley of Death" by the poet Tennyson. The opposing Russian forces were commanded by Pavel Liprandi and included around 20 battalions of infantry supported by over fifty artillery pieces. These forces were deployed on both sides and at the opposite end of the valley.

It appears that the order was understood by Cardigan to refer to the mass of Russian guns in a redoubt at the end of the valley, around a mile away, when Raglan had in fact been referring to a set of redoubts on the reverse slope of the hill forming the left side of the valley (from the point of view of the cavalry). Although these latter redoubts were clearly visible from Raglan's vantage point, they were hidden from the view of the Light Brigade on the floor of the valley.

The Brigade set off down the valley. Nolan was seen to rush across the front, possibly in an attempt to stop them, but was killed by an artillery shell.

The Light Brigade was able to engage the Russian forces at the end of the valley and force them back from the redoubt, but suffered heavy casualties and was soon forced to retire. Lucan failed to provide any support for Cardigan, and it is speculated that he was motivated by enmity for his brother-in-law. The troops of the Heavy Brigade entered the mouth of the valley but did not advance further. The French cavalry, the Chasseurs d'Afrique, were more effective in that they broke the Russian line on the Fedyukhin Heights and later provided cover for the remaining elements of the Light Brigade as they withdrew.

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charge_of_the_Light_Brigade

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' by Alfred Tennyson

I

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

II

Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

III

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
Rode the six hundred.

IV

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not,
Not the six hundred.

V

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

VI

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

Questions to help with annotation of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'

1. What does the rhythm of the poem imitate?
2. There is a lot of repetition in the poem. Highlight at least some examples of it and explain its effect.
3. How do we know a mistake has been made?
4. In the second stanza is a pattern of three. Find it and explain why it is effective in this poem.
5. In the third stanza what impression do the first three lines give?
6. Find some examples of alliteration from the poem; highlight or underline them, and explain why they are effective.
7. Why are the last line two lines of stanza four so effective?
8. Look at the use of questions in the poem and explain its significance.
9. Look at the use of exclamation marks. Why do you think so many have been used in the last stanza?
10. Find examples from the poem where Tennyson shows his admiration and pity for the soldiers and where he reveals his attitude to what happened.

The American Civil War 1861-5

The **American Civil War** (1861–1865) was a major war between the United States (the "Union") and eleven Southern states which declared that they had a right to secession and formed the Confederate States of America, led by President Jefferson Davis. The Union, led by President Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party, opposed the expansion of slavery into territories owned by the United States and rejected any right of secession. Fighting commenced on April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces attacked a United States (federal) military installation at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, the first state to secede.

During the first year, the Union asserted control of the border states and established a naval blockade as both sides raised large armies. In 1862 large, bloody battles began, causing massive casualties as a result of incompatibility between new weapons and old battlefield tactics. In September 1862, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation made the freeing of slaves in the South a war goal, despite opposition from northern Copperheads who tolerated secession and slavery. Emancipation reduced the likelihood of intervention from Britain and France on behalf of the Confederacy. In addition, the goal also allowed the Union to recruit African-Americans for reinforcements, a resource that the Confederacy did not dare exploit until it was too late. The border states and War Democrats reluctantly accepted emancipation as part of total war needed to save the Union. In the East, Confederate general Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia and rolled up a series of victories over the Army of the Potomac, but his best general, Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, was killed at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. Lee's invasion of the North was repulsed at the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania in July 1863; he barely managed to escape back to Virginia. The Union Navy captured the port of New Orleans in 1862, and Ulysses S. Grant seized control of the Mississippi River by capturing Vicksburg, Mississippi in July 1863, thus splitting the Confederacy.

By 1864, long-term Union advantages in geography, manpower, industry, finance, political organization and transportation were overwhelming the Confederacy. Grant fought a number of bloody battles with Lee in Virginia in the summer of 1864. Lee's defensive tactics resulted in extremely high casualties for Grant's army, but Lee lost strategically overall as he could not replace his casualties and was forced to retreat into trenches around his capital, Richmond, Virginia. Meanwhile, William Tecumseh Sherman, the leader of the Union Military Division of the Mississippi, captured Atlanta, Georgia. Sherman's March to the Sea destroyed a hundred-mile-wide swath of Georgia. In 1865, the Confederacy collapsed after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House; all slaves in the Confederacy were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves in the border states and Union controlled parts of the South were freed by state action or by the Thirteenth Amendment.

The full restoration of the Union was the work of a highly contentious postwar era known as Reconstruction. The war produced about 970,000 casualties (3% of the population), including approximately 620,000 soldier deaths—two-thirds by disease. The war accounted for more casualties than all other U.S. wars combined. The causes of the war, the reasons for its outcome, and even the name of the war itself are subjects of lingering controversy even today. The main results of the war were the restoration and strengthening of the Union (mainly by permanently ending the issue of secession), and the end of slavery in the United States.

From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War

Come up from the fields, father by Walt Whitman

Come up from the fields, father, here's a letter from our Pete,
And come to the front door, mother, here's
a letter from thy dear son.

Lo, 'tis autumn,
Lo, where the trees, deeper green, yellower and redder,
Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages with leaves
fluttering in the moderate wind,
Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and
grapes on the trellis'd vines,
(Smell you the smell of the grapes on the vines?
Smell you the buckwheat where the bees were lately buzzing?)
Above all, lo, the sky so calm, so transparent
after the rain, and with wondrous clouds,
Below too, all calm, all vital and beautiful,
and the farm prospers well.

Down in the fields all prospers well,
But now from the fields come, father, come
at the daughter's call,
And come to the entry, mother, to the front door come right away.
Fast as she can she hurries, something ominous,
her steps trembling,
She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor
adjust her cap.

Open the envelope quickly,
O this is not our son's writing, yet his name
is sign'd,
O a strange hand writes for our dear son,
O stricken mother's soul!
All swims before her eyes, flashes with black,
she catches the main words only,
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the breast,*
cavalry skirmish, taken to hospital,
At present low, but will soon be better.

Ah, now the single figure to me,
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with all
its cities and farms,
Sickly white in the face and dull in the head,
very faint,
By the jamb of a door leans.

Grieve not so, dear mother (the just-grown
daughter speaks through her sobs,
The little sisters huddle around speechless and
dismay'd),
*See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will
soon be better.*

Alas, poor boy, he will never be better (nor maybe
needs to be better, that brave and simple soul),
While they stand at home at the door he is
dead already,
The only son is dead.

But the mother needs to be better,
She with thin form presently drest in black,
By day her meals untouch'd, then at night
fitfully sleeping, often waking,
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with
one deep longing,
O that she might withdraw unnoticed, silent
from life escape and withdraw,
To follow, to seek, to be with her dear dead
son.

Questions to help annotation of 'Come up from the fields, father'

1. Why does the speaker encourage both parents to come to them?
2. What season is the poem set in and why might this be symbolic? Think about what traditionally used to happen at this time of year.
3. How and why in stanzas three and four does the speaker comment on the beautiful, and luscious, landscape?
4. Why do you think the 'o' sound has been repeated so much in the seventh verse? Do you remember the literary term for this?
5. How is the mother's shock and distress presented to the reader? Look at the word choice (diction), punctuation and sentence structures.
6. Why do you think the other children's behaviour and reactions is in brackets in stanza 9?
7. The information in stanza 10 is very shocking. What is it? How does the poet emphasise this terrible news?
8. The last stanza is all about the mother's grief. How is the extent of her unhappiness shown to the reader? What do you think the last stanza means? There is no right or wrong answer so explore your interpretation.

What the Bullet Sang by Bret Harte

O **JOY** of creation
 To be!
O rapture to fly
 And be free!
Be the battle lost or won,
Though its smoke shall hide the sun,
I shall find my love,—the one
 Born for me!
I shall know him where he stands,
 All alone,
With the power in his hands
 Not o'erthrown;
I shall know him by his face,
By his godlike front and grace;
I shall hold him for a space,
 All my own!
It is he—O my love!
 So bold!
It is I—all thy love
 Foretold!
It is I. O love! what bliss!
Dost thou answer to my kiss?
O sweetheart! what is this
 Lieth there so cold?

This is a very unusual poem about war: it initially looks like a tragic love poem.

1. Who is the speaker?
2. What do you think it is about?
3. What do you think of it?

The Boer War

The Boer Wars was the name given to the South African Wars of 1880-1 and 1899-1902, that were fought between the British and the descendants of the Dutch settlers (Boers) in Africa. After the first Boer War William Gladstone granted the Boers self-government in the Transvaal.

The Boers, under the leadership of Paul Kruger, resented the colonial policy of Joseph Chamberlain and Alfred Milner which they feared would deprive the Transvaal of its independence. After receiving military equipment from Germany, the Boers had a series of successes on the borders of Cape Colony and Natal between October 1899 and January 1900. Although the Boers only had 88,000 soldiers, led by the outstanding soldiers such as Louis Botha, and Jan Smuts, the Boers were able to successfully besiege the British garrisons at Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley.

Army reinforcements arrived in South Africa in 1900 and counter-offences relieved the garrisons and enabled the British to take control of the Boer capital, Pretoria, on 5th June. For the next two years groups of Boer commandos raided isolated British units in South Africa. Lord Kitchener, the Chief of Staff in South Africa, reacted to this by destroying Boer farms and moving civilians into concentration camps.

The British action in South Africa was strongly opposed by many leading Liberal politicians and most of the Independent Labour Party as an example of the worst excesses of imperialism. The Boer War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging in May 1902. The peace settlement brought to an end the Transvaal and the Orange Free State as Boer republics. However, the British granted the Boers £3 million for restocking and repairing farm lands and promised eventual self-government (granted in 1907).

From: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/WARboer.htm>

The Poetry of the Boer War

Henry Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada* was typical of the war poem of the 1890's, aping the heroic images of Tennyson: "The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead/ And the regiment blind with dust and smoke;/ The river of death has brimmed his banks,/ And England's far, and Honour a name;/ But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:/ 'Play up! play up! and play the game!'" The intention of this kind of poetry was to stir the heart of the reader with pride and fill the head with awe at the magnificent bravery that separated the Englishman from his rivals on the battlefield. It allowed people from any social class to feel that they were part of something precious. Certainly, *Vitai Lampada* was hugely popular with soldiers and public alike upon its publication in 1898, but by this time a new kind of war poem was coming to prominence, one whose roots lay in the growth of radical thought and humanitarian opposition to war. From: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~www_se/personal/pvm/HardyBWar/poetry.html

Vitai Lampada by Henry Newbolt

THERE'S a breathless hush in the Close to-night -
Ten to make and the match to win -
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

The sand of the desert is sodden red, -
Red with the wreck of a square* that broke; -
The Gatling's* jammed and the colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of schoolboy rallies the ranks,
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

This is the word that year by year
While in her place the School is set
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with a joyful mind
Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And falling fling to the host behind -
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

* square: military formation

* Gatling: machine gun

1. The first stanza begins with boys playing cricket at public school (this is usually an expensive and prestigious type of private school in UK). How does the poet build the tension of the game?
2. Why do you think he does this?
3. At what point in the first stanza does the scene change?
4. What is the symbolism of the soldier having a hand on his shoulder?
5. In the second stanza which words and phrases show you how desperate the situation is?
6. Which thing is personified in the second stanza and why do you think it is?
7. What sort of impression does the repetition of 'Play up! ... the game!' have at the end of the second stanza?
8. Where does the scene shift to in the third stanza?
9. What is personified in the third stanza and what is the effect?
10. There is a simile in the third stanza: 'Beat through life like a torch in flame'. What is being compared to the 'torch in flame'?
11. What is effective about the penultimate (next to last) line of the poem?
12. What sort of rhyme and rhythm do you notice here? What effect does it have?
13. How is the upbeat nature of the last line created?
14. What do you think is the speaker's view of war?
15. What is your opinion of this poem?

Drummer Hodge by Thomas Hardy

I

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest

Uncoffined - just as found:

His landmark is a kopje-crest*

That breaks the veldt* around;

And foreign constellations west

Each night above his mound.

II

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew -

Fresh from his Wessex home -

The meaning of the broad Karoo*,

The Bush, the dusty loam,

And why uprose to nightly view

Strange stars amid the gloam*.

III

Yet portion of that unknown plain

Will Hodge forever be;

His homely Northern breast and brain

Grow to some Southern tree,

And strange-eyed constellations reign

His stars eternally.

* kopje-crest: small hill

* open grassland

* dry uplands

* evening

First Thoughts

On a first reading of *Drummer Hodge* there are some questions that spring to mind:

Who are "they" and what is their attitude to Hodge?

The poem begins ambiguously. "They" could refer to either friend or foe. Their identity is not as important as their attitude to their discovery. None of the funeral traditions are observed: Hodge is "thrown" into a pit "just as found", without a coffin and presumably without a service. Hodge is representative of the thousands of casualties of the battle, just one more unremarkable victim.

How did Hodge react to South Africa?

There is some mortal irony that Hodge gave his life for a country and cause of which he was largely ignorant. The poem makes constant reference to Hodge's lack of knowledge - the name Hodge is synonymous with country yokels. His "homely Northern breast and brain" suggests Hodge was a simple, unpretentious sort, but a valuable human nonetheless. While alive Hodge never felt comfortable with the new and unfamiliar night sky, or had the time to learn the names of his new surroundings, yet this alien landscape becomes his permanent home. The constellations that were foreign to him become "His stars eternally."

What is the landscape's attitude to Hodge?

Nature's attitude to Hodge contrasts with that of his fellow men. He is welcomed and coveted as something precious by his new surroundings. Hodge becomes an important, integrated part of the landscape: "His homely Northern breast and brain/ Grow to some Southern tree," and in death he achieves a worthiness he never received in life.

What is the poem's form?

The poem is very structured, never deviating from its metre or *abab* form. The Roman numerals at the head of each stanza provide a classical feel to the poem. It is as if Hardy is paying his own tribute to the otherwise unlamented Hodge, treating him as with the deference that was lacking from his burial.

What is the poem about?

The poem is an existentialist paradox - Hodge was an unimportant figure in a major war, but becomes a vital part of something that will last far longer than any human conflict.

The opening lines concentrate on the waste of Hodge's death, the lack of mourning contrasting with the traditional glorification of the war dead. Hodge will never be a hero among men, but he is elevated to a divine level through the Southern landscape that harbours him as something precious.

All from:

http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~www_se/personal/pvm/HardyBWar/pracrit.html

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.