

**THE DYNASTS: A DRAMA OF THE
NAPOLEONIC WARS IN THREE
PARTS,
NINETEEN ACTS & ONE HUNDRED
AND THIRTY SCENES; PART FIRST**

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The dynasts: a drama of the Napoleonic wars in three parts, nineteen acts & one hundred and thirty scenes; Part First by Thomas Hardy

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THOMAS HARDY

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THE DYNASTS

A DRAMA

OF THE NAPOLEONIC WARS,
IN THREE PARTS, NINETEEN
ACTS, & ONE HUNDRED AND
THIRTY SCENES

BY

THOMAS HARDY

PART FIRST

*And I heard sounds of insult, shame, and wrong,
And trumpets blown for war.*

London

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PREFACE

THE Drama here presented is concerned with the Great Historical Calamity, or Clash of Peoples, artificially brought about some hundred years ago.

The choice of such a subject was mainly due to three accidents of locality. It chanced that the writer was familiar with a part of England that lay within hail of the watering-place in which King George the Third had his favourite summer residence during the war with the first Napoléon, and where he was visited by ministers and others who bore the weight of English affairs on their more or less competent shoulders at that stressful time. Secondly, this district, being also near the coast which had echoed with rumours of invasion in their intensest form while the descent threatened, was formerly animated by memories and traditions of the

desperate military preparations for that contingency. Thirdly, the same countryside happened to include the village which was the birthplace of Nelson's flag-captain at Trafalgar.

When, as the first published result of these accidents, *The Trumpet-Major* was printed, more than twenty years ago, I found myself in the tantalizing position of having touched the fringe of a vast international tragedy without being able, through limits of plan, knowledge, and opportunity, to enter further into its events; a restriction that prevailed for many years. But the provokingly slight regard paid to English influence and action throughout the struggle by those Continental writers who had dealt imaginatively with Napoléon's career, seemed always to leave room for a new handling of the theme which should re-embody the features of this influence in their true proportion; and accordingly, on a belated day about six years back, the following play was outlined, to be taken up now and then at wide intervals ever since.

It may, I think, claim at least a tolerable fidelity to the facts of its date as they are

given in ordinary records. Whenever any evidence of the words really spoken or written by the characters in their various situations was attainable, as close a paraphrase has been aimed at as was compatible with the form chosen. And in all cases outside oral tradition, accessible scenery, and existing relics, my indebtedness for detail to the abundant pages of the historian, the biographer, and the journalist, English and foreign, has been, of course, continuous.¹

It was thought proper to introduce, as supernatural spectators of the terrestrial drama, certain impersonated abstractions, or Intelligences, called Spirits. They are intended to be taken by the reader for what they may be worth as contrivances of the fancy merely. Their doctrines are but tentative, and are advanced with little eye to a systematized philosophy warranted to lift "the burthen of the mystery" of this unintelligible world. The chief thing hoped for them is that they and their utterances may have dramatic plausibility enough to procure for them, in the words of Coleridge, "that

¹ It is intended to give a list of the chief authorities at the end of the Third Part.

willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith." The wide prevalence of the Monistic theory of the Universe forbade, in this twentieth century, the importation of Divine personages from any antique Mythology as ready-made sources or channels of Causation, even in verse, and excluded the celestial machinery of, say, *Paradise Lost*, as peremptorily as that of the *Iliad* or the *Eddas*. And the abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusions to the First or Fundamental Energy seemed a necessary and logical consequence of the long abandonment by thinkers of the anthropomorphic conception of the same.

These phantasmal Intelligences are divided into groups, of which one only—that of the Pities—approximates to "the Universal Sympathy of human nature—the spectator idealized"¹ of the Greek Chorus, the remainder being eclectically chosen auxiliaries whose signification may be readily discerned. In point of literary form, the scheme of contrasted Choruses and other conventions of this external feature was shaped with a single view to the modern expression of a

¹ Schlegel.

modern outlook, and in frank divergence from classical and other dramatic precedent which ruled the ancient voicings of ancient themes.

It may hardly be necessary to inform readers that in devising this chronicle-piece no attempt has been made to create that completely organic structure of action, and closely-webbed development of character and motive, which are demanded in a drama strictly self-contained. A panoramic show like the present is a series of historical "ordinates" (to use a term in geometry): the subject is familiar to all; and foreknowledge is assumed to fill in the curves required to combine the whole gaunt framework into an artistic unity. The spectator, in thought, becomes a performer whenever called upon, and cheerfully makes himself the utility-man of the gaps. Should he refuse to do this, a historical presentment on an intermittent plan, in which the *dramatis personæ* number some hundreds, exclusive of crowds and armies, becomes in his individual case unsuitable.

In this assumption of a completion of the story by those to whom the drama is addressed, it is interesting, if unnecessary, to name an exemplar as old as Aeschylus, whose