

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

32 *Valenciennes*

(1793)

By Corp'l Tullidge, in "*The Trumpet Major*"
In Memory of S. C. (Pensioner). Died 184-

We trenched, we trumpeted and drummed,
And from our mortars tons of iron hummed
Ath'art the ditch, the month we bombed
The Town o' Valencieën.

'Twas in the June o' Ninety-dree 5
(The Duke o' Yark our then Commander been)
The German Legion, Guards, and we
Laid siege to Valencieën.

This was the first time in the war 10
That French and English spilled each other's gore;
— Few dreamt how far would roll the roar
Begun at Valencieën!

'Twas said that we'd no business there
A-topperèn the French for disagreeën;
However, that's not my affair — 15
We were at Valencieën.

Such snocks and slats, since war began
Never knew raw recruit or veteràn:
Stone-deaf therence went many a man
Who served at Valencieën. 20

Into the streets, ath'art the sky,
A hundred thousand balls and bombs were fleën;
And harmless townsfolk fell to die
Each hour at Valencieën!

And, sweatèn wi' the bombardiers, 25
A shell was slent to shards anighst my ears:
— 'Twas nigh the end of hopes and fears

For me at Valencieën!

They bore my wovnded frame to camp,
And shut my gapèn skull, and washed en cleän, 30
And jined en wi' a zilver clamp
Thik night at Valencieën.

“We’ve fetched en back to quick from dead;
But never more on earth while rose is red
Will drum rouse Corpel!” Doctor said 35
O’ me at Valencieën.

’Twer true. No voice o’ friend or foe
Can reach me now, or any livèn beën;
And little have I power to know
Since then at Valencieën! 40

I never hear the zummer hums
O’ bees; and don’ know when the cuckoo comes;
But night and day I hear the bombs
We threw at Valencieën. . . .

As for the Duke o’ Yark in war, 45
There may be volk whose judgment o’ en is meän;
But this I say — he was not far
From great at Valencieën.

O’ wild wet nights, when all seems sad,
My wovnds come back, as though new wovnds I’d had; 50
But yet — at times I’m sort o’ glad
I fout at Valencieën.

Well: Heaven wi’ its jasper halls
Is now the on’y Town I care to be in. . . .
Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls 55
As we did Valencieën!

1878-97

(From *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*. London: Macmillan,
1930)