

Analytical Essay #2

Orange Man

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Imagine yourself in ancient Greece, standing in the front of the mediterranean sea, trying to reflect the sunlight through the tip of your spear on the far waters. You look down the shore and see the crowd of barbaric invaders from Persia. They came today to conquer your lands, to burn your home and defile the sanctuaries of your gods. Your commander, Miltiades, told you to hold the line, let Persian troops come closer to you. Pierce their bodies with your spear in the name of Ares! You hear the battle horn and so it begins, look left and right to check on your brothers in arms, find the comfort in their confident eyes. Before the enemy moves, you hear someone scream arrows, the same instance you raise your shield above your head. Another shield of your brother is mounted upon your shield. You don't see the shore anymore behind an impeccable wall of bronze shields, hearing only the sound of thousand metal arrowheads deflecting against the shields.

With your shield still up, you hear the trampling of horses and the shout— “spears”! Quickly you lower your shield and mount the spear against the ground, a wave of cavalry coming so close, swallowing once more such a welcoming seashore you've been playing with a moment before. Now their standards are blinding your view, you can only feel them coming through the vibration of the land from their stampede. You are ready to lose your life, what can you do against so many armed people on horses that tenfolds heavier than you. In a couple moments, you will be smeared into the ground. But before you flinch, two more rows of spears lower from the soldiers behind you. You and your brothers are united, ready to smash the invading forces.

The cavalry charges your lines in a horrible scene of running through your spears, flesh is torn apart. The dust is flying to your face, a sprinkle of blood lands on your lips. You can't think, you

only hear a horse screaming in pain and fear of flickering life. Before you even come back together, another shout “arrows!”, you look around, this time your brother is laying down in a puddle of blood. You need to raise your shield, but it suddenly becomes so heavy, you can no longer raise it. Your brothers step from behind, squeezing you behind their shoulders and raise their shields. You are saved from another volley of death, now you need to survive until the end of this battle...

“You'll take my life, but I'll take yours too
You'll fire your musket, but I'll run you through
So when you're waiting for the next attack
You'd better stand, there's no turning back”
(Song by Iron Maiden, The Trooper)

Described above is an illustration of Ancient Greek Hoplitēs in fight near the Marathon against invading Persian forces. The importance of the hoplitēs to our topic is in their discipline. Hoplitēs' key feature that made them so successful in all the Grecian wars — their organization. Steel discipline and unity. There is no you in the phalanx, you are the part of the phalanx that is proven to be superior against any less organized formation. Forfeiting your individual mind for the phalanx is a detrimental factor for its success, phalanx as any chain is as strong as its weakest unit. If you or any other soldier will fail, your entire unit will collapse and the battle will be lost. Greek leaders were quite aware of the phalanx being limited by morale. Leaders cultivated unity in various ways: patriotism, fear, greed, glory; through different mediums: training, painting and most importantly for us, literature.

Under the scope of literature being a tool to forge national unity, we will analyze Lord Tennyson poem “Charge Of The Light Brigade”. In particular, his boldest lines: “Theirs not to make reply / Theirs not to reason why / Theirs to do and die”. Written by a Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. Tennyson is glorifying the tragedy that occurred to inspire soldiers, to solder some unity. Poet Laureate doesn’t write for mere entertainment, his writing must fulfil his obligation to the British Empire. Even if he is not the author, nor personally believes in the idea of soldier obedience, his voice is the loudest. Those lines are very sensitive and cannot be easily dismissed. Tennyson’s poem became a historical beacon to otherwise dull tragedy for various interpretations. Inspect the legitimacy of Tennyson saying such the brutal truth of military life. Speaking of such a sensitive topic and so exposed to bias or siding, naturally we must critically evaluate his words about military life through the actual relations between soldiers, leaders and the noble cause. Eventually we will gauge the legitimacy of Tennyson or any other leader who shall speak loudly about human sacrifice by comparing him to other people who claimed the right to speak such brutal, truth.

In this essay we will reflect on Lord Tennyson poem, Charge of the Light Brigade. Readers familiar with Tennyson and the context of the poem may skip the following two paragraphs. For those who are less familiar with the matter, let me introduce you to Lord Tennyson and the context of the poem.

Lord Alfred Tennyson was born in the year of 1809 in a middle-class clergy family. A man who was raised on the works of a legendary poet, Lord Byron. Alfred studied at Cambridge University and was a member of a secret society called Cambridge Apostles, with other notable

members of that society were famous poet Bertrand Russell and a revolutionary economist, John Keynes. His poetry is considered very vivid and his talent is widely recognised. That he became a Poet Laureate of The United Kingdom. Succeeding the absolute flagship of British poetry, William Wordsworth.

The poem, “Charge of The Light Brigade” was written by Tennyson in 1854 in the face of the Crimean war where the British had sustained high casualties. The reason for war was a conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Russians appeared to be winning the war, which was against French and British interests, it could harm the existing status quo of power. After the initial invasion of Crimea, allied forces tried to besiege the city of Sevastopol to gain control over the peninsula. While advancing to Sevastopol, Russians had prepared a defensive position behind the river near the city of Balaklava.

On 25th of October 1854 the infamous charge of the Light Brigade happened, a military disaster. Charge of the light cavalry brigade of 600 horsemen, right on the well defended battery and lots of infantry. Apart from such a charge being highly ineffective, it occurred by poor communication and consequential blind following of the order. Resulting in one third of the brigade being dead without any meaningful result. The Charge of The Light Brigade is perhaps the most spectacular example of the most useless sacrifice of human life. Whether useless or not, this poem is thought to appeal to the sense of patriotism to regain the lost unity.

It is the most noble how beautifully Tennyson describes the charge in his poem. The charge “into the jaws of Death, into the mouth of hell”. There is nothing more heroic than to die for your

country. *Aut cum scuto aut in scuto* would say Spartan mother to her child. It is noble self-sacrifice to ride to the “mouth of hell” that implies the acceptance of death. Bravery, loyalty, self-sacrifice, what is more virtuous than that? Soldiers of light brigaded saw the mouth of hell and marched into the “volley of death”, “half a league, half a league”... Tennyson is a great poet, his ability to bring shivers to the reader by portraying people who are death-sentenced. They are not guilty, the six hundred is noble, they went for death on their own will.

Noble six hundred doesn't reason why, they do and die. Their choice is to play up and play the game (Newbolt, *Vitaī Lampada*). This is their duty as soldiers to execute the order. Nature of the army. Officers are designed to be superior to the soldiers. Carlyle in his past and present says that: “Man obeys those whom he esteems better than himself, wiser, braver; and will forever obey such; and even be ready and delighted to do it”(Carlyle, *From Past and Present*). This is the definition: of military order, of a strong phalanx; command under a strong leader. Tennyson is right to say that theirs is not to reason why, it is the duty of the officers. Tennyson suggests that soldiers didn't suspect an order to be “blundering”. This is the beauty of the poem, soldiers being led by their officers as a shepherd and sheep.

Their act is on the borderline of sheep stupidity and heroic bravery. For that, Lord Tennyson with power bestowed to him by the royal apparatus, with a swing of his pen had put the noble six hundred in the class of heroes. “Honour the charge they made”(Tennyson, *Charge of The Light Brigade*)! We honour, the amount of references to this poem is incredible. We see music, literature and movies being dedicated to the brave six hundred. It is impossible to deny Tennyson's accomplishment of inserting the noble six hundred to the British Legend.

The soldiers deserve it. Tennyson and Six Hundred are codependent. However, if there is no noble warrior to hold the light of the British Empire, how could Tennyson write about British glory? Consider if Tennyson didn't exist, the sacrifice would be forgotten once again. If the Light Brigade did not exist, then the poem would not exist. This perfect match of poet and material produced the great work. Poem that meant to reinforce the British nobility, the British right to rule, "noble loyalty in return for noble guidance"(Carlyle, Captains of Industry). "They had fought so well, came through the jaws of Death"(Tennyson); noble soldiers of a noble Empire.

The Noble Empire wants people like the Six Hundred in Tennyson poem, heroes like Travis who will exclaim "To the People of Britain & All British in the world. To the Fellow Citizens & compatriots"("The Travis Letter"). Rally the nation, allure people with the sense of patriotism, call to arms. Leaders, who "have men round him who in heart loved him; whose life he watched over with rigour yet with love; who were prepared to give their life for him, if need came"(Carlyle, Captains of Industry). Leaders who are on the borderline of bravery and stupidity, answer "to the demands of surrender with a cannon shot" ("The Travis Letter"). Leaders who don't command with fear, leaders who are contagious in their zeal "Victory or Death"(ibid.). They are the legendary material, not for Mammonism, but for the future of strangers. Six hundred are the noble leaders of the British Empire.

We had proven so far Tennyson served his country effectively. Soldering the unity. His pen had created a masterpiece that is hitherto honoured, 200 years later.



The poem deserves to be studied in every British military academy as an example of soldier valor. An altar must be erected in the most public room at the academy, put the Richard Caton Woodville painting on the wall and write alongside: “Dulce et Decorum est, pro patria mori”, (Horaces, The Complete Odes and Epodes).

Death of many is a heroic deed, and death of one is a tragedy. But before we erect that altar, we must ask an uncomfortable question about the man who would stand before it. How a man who wrote so many lines about grief, suffered from depression of loss, can so epicly write about death on a scale. Arthur Henly Hallam, where are you? Your friend had become so famous writing about you, he grieved and healed, he built a monument for you. You, who was created and you don't know why, you who didn't know you were designed to die (Tennyson, In Memoriam A.H.H). Do you agree to lay down along the people who just did and die? Do you play up? (Newbolt) Sit with us and “let us go to the man who writes the things on Balaclava the kiddies at school recites” (Kipling, “The Last of the Light Brigade”). Ask him, why does he grieve for the death of one and glorify the death of many?

There is no problem with your friend's skill, no doubt he is a master of his craft. But poetry like this is dangerous. It is susceptible to the wicked interpretation. How many officers would read about the noble Six Hundred and expect from their subjects to follow blindly. Put even more disregard on their responsibility as leaders. As much as the poem is empowering the strong leaders to lead heroes, as much it can dehumanize the soldiers in the eyes of their leader. There are no lines in the poem to quote Tennyson's personal stance and denouncement of the commandment. There is no need to remind soldiers of their duty — to do and die. But when

officers swear only to the Crown and not to the men they lead, poetry that glorifies blind obedience becomes a license for negligence. Then it is the duty of the poetry to remind the officers of being responsible for the life they take charge of. Does Tennyson criticize officers enough?

Let's join Owen behind his wagon, listen to the blood, "gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs" of the fallen soldier(Owen). Glory had left this wagon. War is an ultimate escalation of the conflict, the killing of the precious human life. Full of pain and sorrows, war only desires to unleash more pain on another man. It is a dog with rabies who can hardly distinguish a friend from an enemy, frantically biting whoever it can reach. Enemy lines are the Mouth of hell, there is no noble path to it, but a marathon through the Devil's finest art. Art of disease, wounds, tortures, captivity and famine. Victory or death they say. Neither Owen or many other soldiers didn't live up to experience it. Dead people don't celebrate, their bodies never leave the marshes of war, they rot. "The old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est, pro patria mori" (Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est.")

"And as I lay there gazing at the sky
My body's numb and my throat is dry
And as I lay forgotten and alone
Without a tear, I draw my parting groan"
(Song by Iron Maiden, *The Trooper*)

Furthermore, enduring all those pains and suffering is not enough. War leaves its deepest scars on one who is “lucky” to survive it. Kipling invites us further to the “to be continued”, to “see next page”(Kipling). One must be expecting to see Noble Six hundred being rewarded for their heroic deeds. But even at present, with all the human rights that they didn’t have, how many homeless people surround us? How many of them are broken veterans, who have seen too much? Who had lost too much? Who has no place in our noble society? Too many. Kipling wrote specifically about the Balaclava veterans in his *The Last of The Light Brigade*, to address injustice their country served them. “O thirty millions English that babble of England’s might, Behold there are twenty heroes who lack their food to-night; Our children’s children are lisping to ‘honour the charge they made—’ and we leave to the streets and the workhouse the charge of the Light Brigade!”(Kipling).

To be continued reveals who the audience is for all this fiction of the glory. Fresh meat. To establish better authority, to keep the phalanx standing. Recruits are told that they will fight for the noble cause. Fight for Liberty, Freedom, Pursuit of Happiness etc. No one tells them of the blundered orders, or how they’ll limp back home from the mouth of hell to the silence of abandonment. Unneeded and unwanted, to the “Liberty to die by starvation’ [and it] is not so divine!”(Carlyle, Chapter 13)

Being fair, all the criticism and Owen’s: “old Lie: Dulce et Decorum est, pro patria mori”. Is not inherently true either, Horace's version was sincere and held true to many heroes. Poems are tools for leaders. The difference — is in the leaders who invoke those heavy lines. Lines such as “theirs is not to make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die” (Tennyson). Lines

like these are instruments to invoke unity, to protect order. Leaders under noble causes have the moral grounds to demand sacrifices, but they must be accountable for the maximum extent. With the great power comes the great responsibility. Leaders who are unaware of the price of human life or don't follow the Carlyle principle "I will heal it, or behold I will die foremost in it"(Carlyle, Chapter 8) have no right to demand sacrifices.

The leaders who demand blind obedience and quote Tennyson will only scale the harm they do to the society. They will rally millions in zeal under false cause. They will betray their own people. They ask for everything one has and offer nothing in return. They will sate their hunger, make people worship their lies. Leaving only the scourged grounds. Countless leaders had led their people to the ruins, in their ignorance and vices they put themselves in-front and above the people they are in charge of. They cast their power against their own peers, they are the shame and filth. They desecrate the generational efforts by appropriating other people's achievements. They take the credit for all the good, but never take the credit for mistakes. They don't care about us. They leave your body in the marshes and ask to worship the false gods. Those lines for them are tools to usurp the power. They don't want you to reason why, it will break their legitimacy. They don't want you to reply, don't question the authority. Play up, do and die.

On the other hand a noble and humble leader would not use such a dangerous tool unless of dire necessity. Knowing the price and consequence, how can one dare to take such a risk? For a noble leader his peers are equal, the noble brotherhood, equal demands and equal price. They live and die for us: "If not for self, a better life. Then for their children, in the strife." (Ivan Franko, The Spirit of Revolt). Those are who invoke those lines only to dispel the curse of ignorance and

show the righteous way. Those who need the praise the least, those who don't want you to die. Their leadership comes not from strong lines, but from the hardness of the task only they can carry on (Carlyle). Their task is to see the way out of the darkness, to serve and protect their peers. The marsh remains the same in both cases, but a noble leader serves a righteous beacon.

After all, Tennyson as any other person is guided by something, some sort of purpose. Tennyson can shine only when Hallam is guiding him, driven by the limitless devotion to honour the fallen friend. We argued that Tennyson's work can be viewed in many ways, patriotic, cynical, abusive or noble. It is a vessel. This work is different from his usual works about life and sorrows, there is no devotion to Six Hundred. But faint Hallam's spirit can be found in the Charge of The Light Brigade within the reader himself.

... and so the battle ends. You stand. In the marsh of blood, sand, arrows and human bodies. The enemy had been defeated, you see a wall of enemy ships on fire. The enemy commander had left the battlefield quite a while ago. He burned the remaining ships so they wouldn't fall into your hands. Remaining soldiers run around the shore not knowing what to do. They are abandoned, alone in the foreign lands, left for your mercy.

You care a little about them, what matters more is how few of your brothers left standing. You are trying to focus on faint squeezes of death to find the wounded. You run to a young boy wheezing behind you. The arrow had pierced his lungs. You fall on your knees unable to help him much. All you can do is to tell, looking in his slowly closing eyes, the battle had finally

ended, victory. Joke last time. “At least you cannot smell those bastards sweat and blood!” He starts to laugh but immediately chokes on blood.

His life slowly parts to the mouth of hell, you look again on the water, the sunset glares blind you again. You turn away from the sun and see your commander, Miltiades. The man doesn't smile, he's not happy, he sits on his knees as you and prays. You won, Athens is safe, your wife and children can breathe with ease. There is no ease for Miltiades. You look around, countless bodies of your compatriots are lying still and cold. The price of victory may be acceptable, but it is still too high. No prayer will ever bring them back to life. You gather the remains of your strength and stroll back home.

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