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Commenting on structure, character and dramatic effects, explain how R.C.Sherriff recreates the horrors of war for his audience in Journey's End

During the First World War, censorship played a huge role in shielding the British public from the horrors of war. It was not until ten years after the armistice that a flood of literature and art accounting soldiers' experiences entered British society such as Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Perhaps it had taken veterans time to digest some of the indescribable events they had witnessed but they were now ready to share them. The public were introduced to the hell of trench warfare: the squalor, the rats, the waiting and the helpless clinging on to the hope that sheer luck would hinder the otherwise inevitable death. The realisation of the loss of almost an entire generation of men led to a building anti-war feeling, with examples such as the new-founded Youth Anti-War Council and the League to Abolish War. R.C. Sherriff survived the terror of Paschendale, going on to write the dramatisation *Journey's End*. The play is set in a dug out on the Western Front – a British line of trenches reaching from the Swiss mountains to the Channel coast in Belgium and across a short stretch of no man's land was the face of the German onslaught. It is debatable to whether *Journey's End* is intended to be an anti-war piece of literature however the effect of Sherriff's portrayal of the horrors of war cannot be challenged.

From the first dialogue of the play – between Osbourne and Hardy – the character of Stanhope is built. The prominent issue that arises is Stanhope's drinking; where Hardy's anecdotes prove rather critical: 'last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes'. It is Osbourne's sympathetic explanation of Stanhope's behaviour and Raleigh's nostalgic memories of Stanhope that reveal the effect war has had on Stanhope before the audience is even introduced to the character, creating an expectation and dramatic irony. Furthermore, it is this change in Stanhope which ignites the conflict of his and Raleigh's relationship as Stanhope experiences the personal horror of his present life being exposed to his past. During the first meeting of Stanhope and Raleigh in the dugout, their movements get slower and become increasingly disjointed as the scene progresses. For example Raleigh 'half raises his hand'. The lax nature of their physical actions shows the utter disappointment felt in the scene. Furthermore, the fragmented movements could be an example of how the horrors of war decay once strong and sentimental relationships. Another example could be the lack of trust on Stanhope's part as he reads Raleigh's letter. During the scene, Sherriff uses exclamatory sentences to present Stanhope's anger: 'Stanhope is my name!' Fundamentally, this highlights the higher status of Stanhope; however, an alternative interpretation could be the idea of two identities. As war destroys your original, grounded life, out of the pieces it builds a new, hard and tainted one as one has to deal with the atrocious conditions forced upon you. What I find so moving about this is that Raleigh is volunteering to join this life; signing up for condemnation.

Sherriff's clever portrayal of the minor characters within the play is of vital importance when discussing his demonstration of the monstrosities of war. In particular, the outlining of the youth shared by both German and British and the parallels between the enemies is very effective in Act Three where the company captures a German soldier. Sherriff describes the German as 'bare-headed'. This could be an implication of his vulnerability as he is surrounded by his enemies. In addition, Sherriff emphasizes the German's age by referring to him as 'the boy' in the stage directions and this is further developed by the German's possession of chocolate and fruit drops having connotations of childhood. Sherriff could be describing the difficulty of victimising someone when you know things about them, their interests; when the face of your enemy is given a name and demonstrating the pain of killing someone so similar to yourself. Alternatively, when the German's pocket knife is found, Sherriff could be describing how aggression and hatred can be found anywhere, even in a boy who carries fruit drops. Sherriff asks the question: friend or foe?

Many of Sherriff's descriptions of the lighting begin positively. The 'yellow candle light' has connotations with warmth and reassurance. Furthermore, candles have a religious significance of hope. Many soldiers turned away from Christianity during the war. However, others turned towards it as a means of comfort. Another example is the mention of 'moonlight' giving a pale, calm atmosphere. Moreover, the moon has been associated with feminine qualities throughout history. For example, the Roman goddess of the moon, Diana, was associated with fertility and child birth. However, pale moonlight could alternatively be linked to the pallor of death. Diana was also known as the goddess of hunting and this link between moonlight and killing is particularly powerful in its relevance in this context. Flares were shot into the air to witness any advancing troops in the dark of No Man's Land. Sherriff's mention of these 'Very lights' marks a reversal or inversion of the connotations of light as it no longer represents life but advancing death or danger.

During the first half of the play the atmosphere could be described as quite superficial and emotional moments are few. For me, Sherriff's idea of Osbourne leaving his ring and a letter for his wife is the first shattering moment in the play. It signifies the removal of Osbourne's controlled façade as he realises the danger of his task. Furthermore, it displays his experience compared to Raleigh whose first reactions to the raid are ones of excitement. Considering the magnitude of death during the war, the ring could also symbolise the wiping of identity, experienced by the thousands of men who were never found. In the last scene, Raleigh's body is left on stage as a piece to create a final image; a prop: 'Raleigh lies in the shadows'. The fact that I am even considering a body to be an object sums up the fundamental horrors of war: the loss of humanity, freedom and the right to life.

Lastly, in my opinion, within the simple feature of entrances and exits, we find the most important moment of the piece. As Stanhope leaves Raleigh, he 'lightly runs his fingers over Raleigh's tousled hair'. It is only in this last scene where the audience truly witnesses the tight bonds of friendship and even brotherhood between the lead characters. It is Sherriff's idea of self preservation that is so overwhelmingly moving: Stanhope only reveals his true self as Raleigh dies and therefore it stays unshared, beyond reach of the living; life and war must go on. Stanhope walks 'stiffly' up the stairs almost as if, terrifyingly, he is experiencing

rigour mortis before he has even been killed. The script of the play is left as a cliff hanger and different productions have closed the performances in many ways for example, with all of the company dying. Therefore, in such a production this physical stance of Stanhope's could be a final, last-minute proleptic marker.

The relevance of this play in society today is huge. The fact that the meticulous characters Sherriff produced are so believable yet still in contrast with one another means that an audience can find someone to empathise and relate to, even find parallels between the characters' and their lives or the life of a friend. It is of timeless importance that we honour the sacrifices made for us whether as part of our country's history, its present or its future. Through the medium of drama, 'Journey's End' not only draws our attention to the atrocious conditions and horrors soldiers experienced as they fought to defeat Prussian militarism but it is a way for us to pay tribute. As Laurence Binyon states in his poem: 'We will remember them.'