

Regeneration and journey's end essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Barker and Sherriff use “ Regeneration” and “ Journey’s End” respectively, in order to convey similar views on idolatry. In both texts this form of adoration and reverence is depicted as flawed and the view is conveyed that other forms of relationship are more constructive. This is achieved by portraying characters in idolatrous relationships which are not conducive to coping with war- namely, the relationships between Raleigh and Stanhope, and between Owen and Sassoon – in parallel to those mutually respectful relationships based on understanding and empathy such as Sassoon and Rivers’ and the friendship between Osborne and Stanhope. In “ Journey’s End” the dramatic form allows for a much starker contrast and consequently the message, and particularly the condemnation of idolatry, is more believable.

In both texts the motivations behind the characters’ idolatry are explored. When Raleigh first enters the trench he is oblivious to the realities of war, as is demonstrated when he comments, “ I thought there would be an awful row here – all the time” when, in fact, it is the constant waiting that is most torturous to men such as Osborne and Stanhope. Sherriff uses the dramatic form in order to contrast [IS1]Raleigh’s unblemished youth with Stanhope’s troubled persona. Raleigh’s “ healthy good looks” and new uniform are held in stark contrast with Stanhope’s “ pallor” and “ war-stained” uniform. The similarities between Stanhope, who was a “ skipper of rugger” at Raleigh’s school, and Raleigh himself, seemingly foreshadow [IS2]Raleigh’s eventual fate. Stanhope’s significance in Raleigh’s life and the extent to which his idolatry of him extends is demonstrated when it is revealed that Raleigh was prompted to sign up to the army because of Stanhope, after seeing him

home on leave and observing that “ he looked splendid” in his military uniform.

Following the same model of blind and largely unfounded admiration is the character of Wilfred Owen in “ Regeneration”, who intensely admires Siegfried Sassoon, whom he meets at Craiglockhart. When the two first meet Owen is evidently greatly in awe of Sassoon, which is clear in his nervousness during their meeting, which manifests itself as a stammer that Owen “ would have given anything” to prevent . Moreover, Owen’s overly zealous admission that he has “ brought five copies” of Sassoon’s book reveals his deep admiration of Sassoon’s work. Barker uses the biographical fact of the shared interest in poetry of the two men to demonstrate the motivation for Owen’s idolatry of the established poet. It seems that Raleigh’s idolatry is more believable as Sherriff gives a clearer explanation as to why Raleigh’s youthful feelings have evolved in this way and particularly the aspects of his character that allow this to continue.

Owen and Raleigh have both chosen flawed heroes to worship. Osborne is aware of Raleigh’s idolatry and makes an attempt to warn Raleigh that he “ mustn’t expect to find [Stanhope] quite the same”. Raleigh, however, knows little at this point about the “ limit to what a man can bear” which is discovered in times of war and which severely changes the personality of those involved. Just as Raleigh is clueless as to the realities of war, he is oblivious as to how the war must have altered Stanhope’s character. It is clear throughout the play that Stanhope is deeply flawed, and he is described by Hardy as a “ sort of freak” who has turned to alcohol to escape the war and now “ drink[s] like a fish”.

Sherriff's decision to introduce Stanhope only after he has been the subject of much discussion amongst other characters serves to demonstrate the Stanhope that Raleigh has come to idolize, in contrast to the man he has become. Stanhope's changing moods and his explosive temper throughout the play demonstrates his volatile nature and consequently his unsuitability as a figure of worship. When Raleigh is offered a drink of whisky upon entering the trench for the first time, his journey from innocent young boy to tortured soldier – in the image of Stanhope – is symbolically begun, as he first accepts the substance that has caused so much harm to his idol, and begins to follow in his footsteps. Sassoon is also arguably a questionable choice of role model for Owen in "Regeneration". This is demonstrated in Sassoon's Declaration, which is a historical document written by Sassoon during the war, in which he states that he intends to act in "willful defiance of military authority" in opposing the continuation of the war and hence shows his adversity to the current accepted value system of a war-torn society. Barker's decision to open the novel with this document serves both to set the context of the novel and to explain the motivations and feelings of her character.

Sassoon faces great inner conflict and admits that at times he deliberately acted so as to "give [the Germans] plenty of opportunities" to kill him, which reveals the fragility of his character and the reality that he has undergone periods of mental instability which call into question his objectivity as a war poet (the aspect of his persona that Owen first came to admire). It is perhaps not advisable for Owen, who is also suffering from shell shock, to align himself with Sassoon, as such a friendship could possibly impede his own

recovery. Alongside these disadvantageous relationships based on little more than misguided hero-worship, Sherriff and Barker present more constructive alternatives. The relationship between Stanhope and Osborne in “Journey's End” is an illustration of the way in which honest, equitable relationships between men serving in the trenches can serve as an aid for survival.

Stanhope refers to Osborne as “Uncle,” which suggests a warm, fatherly relationship. Throughout the play, Osborne is the only person to whom Stanhope talks openly, and the only person in whom he confides his fear. After Stanhope hears of Osborne's death, the dramatic form allows Sherriff to highlight his importance to Stanhope as his behavior becomes noticeably more erratic[IS3]. He first laughs and tells crude jokes about women, and seems in high spirits when he cheerfully makes a “toast to legs”. However, soon afterwards, in the same scene, he loses his temper with various characters in quick succession, including Raleigh.

Without Osborne defusing the situation, as he was able to do when Stanhope grew distressed about Raleigh's presence, it seems that Stanhope now has no way of managing his emotions and grows evermore agitated. Stanhope tells Raleigh that Osborne was “the one man I could trust – my best friend”, demonstrating that Stanhope does not idolize Osborne or hold him up as a perfect example of a man and, despite their difference in status and Stanhope's admirable courage, [IS4]Osborne does not idolize his younger colleague. Instead, their relationship is one of two equals who “under[stand] everything” about each other's experiences and are able to support each other. Similarly in “Regeneration”, Sassoon's relationship with Rivers is

presented as considerably more useful and fulfilling than Owen's idolatry. Sassoon comes to see Rivers as a "male mother" who is able to care for his emotional needs whilst engaging in the important emotional and intellectual discussions that Sassoon requires in order to come to a decision [IS5] about whether or not to return to war.

He tells Rivers that he "can't talk to anybody" about his feelings and experiences apart from Rivers himself. It is arguably this emotional outlet that eventually allows Sassoon to come to the decision to return to the war. However, this representation of a relationship outside of idolatry is perhaps less believable as that presented by Sherriff in "Journey's End," as Sassoon and Rivers' relationship may not be based on equality. Rivers' status as an army psychiatrist affords him a measure of control over Sassoon's life.

[IS6] For example, Rivers tells Sassoon that he must treat him with the aim of sending him back to war as it is his "duty".

Therefore, he can never be truly honest with Sassoon and cannot enjoy with him a fully mutually beneficial relationship. Both texts make convincing cases for the value of mutual respect rather than hero-worship as the basis of a wartime relationship. However, "Journey's End" presents a more believable depiction of the complexities of idolatrous interactions, as the audience is able to see the effect of idolatry on both individuals concerned. We see both Stanhope struggle with his fear of the nature of Raleigh's fascination with him and the effect it may have on his relationship with Raleigh's sister, and we see Raleigh deal with the fact that the object of his idolatry is drastically changed.

However, when Stanhope confiscates Raleigh's letter home he sees that Raleigh still sees him as "the finest officer in the battalion" and makes no mention of his flaws, despite the fact that Stanhope is still scathing of him and refers to him as "boy"; suggesting that he views Raleigh as childishly naive and not worth his attention. In "Regeneration" however, Owen's idolatry of Sassoon has little effect on Sassoon, but more so on Owen, who is "afraid to measure his loss" when the two part. Therefore both sides of the relationship are not explored and the extent of Owen's idolatry is not as explicit. Both texts raise the important question of who, if anyone, should be idolized and held up as a hero. Is it people like Stanhope, who face the many horrors of war yet who still go on "sticking it, month in, month out"? Or is it people like Sassoon, who are willing to transgress social norms and be seen as mentally unstable in order to profess their unpopular beliefs?