

Journey's end and strange meeting essay sample



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Written by R. C Sherriff in 1928, ' Journey's End' was the cause of controversy when the play was first produced in 1929, as the play's subject matter, the War itself, was still considered a raw period in history. ' Strange Meeting', written by Susan Hill in 1971, shared this subject matter yet, as Hill wrote of the War several decades later, she presented it from a differing perspective. Both authors however, present an extremely anti-war stance through their texts. Sherriff presents a microcosm of the War; setting all of the action within one dugout due to the restrictions of the stage, focussing on one small group of men.

This enables Sherriff to present a detailed account of the events of the play, depicting a vivid image of life in the front line trenches, and the effect it had on the men involved. Similarly, Hill uses claustrophobic settings for her novel, although these settings vary unlike those in Sherriff's play. The limitations of a stage production consequently allow Sherriff to emphasise the strength and nature of the relationships between the men, due to the close proximity in which they live, through stage directions and set.

Focussing on a small group of protagonists, Sherriff is able to present several stereotypes of soldiers throughout the War. Similarly, Hill bases the action of her novel around two central protagonists and several supporting characters, which enables her to present details of the formation of close relationships between men living in such close proximity, under such stress, through utilising different literary techniques, such as switching from the third person perspective to first person in Barton's letters. Sherriff similarly presents a believable representation of relationships formed between certain stereotypes conveyed.

Sherriff's strong anti-war attitude in ' Journey's End' is obvious through his detailed descriptions of the psychological effects that the War had on his characters. Sherriff served in the First World War and is likely to have based the events of the play on his experiences. Hill depicts a believable portrayal of the effect that conditions had on the men involved, due to the meticulous research she carried out prior to constructing the novel. Utilising dramatic irony to introduce one of the central protagonists, Sherriff enables the audience to form an image of Stanhope within the first few moments of dialogue.

Through this exchange between Osborne, another central character, and Hardy, it's revealed that ' his [Stanhope's] nerves have got battered to bits' and that due to the extreme conditions of the war he has experienced, he is often referred to as a ' drunkard'. Sherriff also immediately stresses the bond between Osborne and Stanhope. Osborne is quick to defend, protect and praise Stanhope when Hardy suggests that Osborne would be best doing Stanhope's job, defensively stating that ' His [Stanhope's] experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me'.

Osborne's declaration of love for Stanhope; ' I love that fellow', reinforces for the audience the extremely close bond between these characters.

Immediately here, Sherriff depicts the psychological effects that serving in the War can have on a man, Stanhope is portrayed as a broken man struggling to hold onto his sanity, prior to even seeing him. Similarly, in beginning her novel by revealing the thoughts and feelings of one of the central protagonists, Hilliard, Hill manages to immediately show evidence of

the psychological effects of war on soldiers, in the first couple of lines of the novel; ' He was afraid to go to sleep.

For three weeks he had been afraid of going to sleep. ' Hill also explains that ' he hadn't told any of them about the nightmares' he'd been having since being back at home; the War has caused him to isolate himself and his feelings from those at home whom he used to feel close to, namely his sister, Beth. Contrary to Sherriff, Hill initially introduces Hilliard as a man who, despite engaging in conversation with other men, does not confide in anyone as Stanhope does in Osborne: Hilliard ' did not make close friends', which would possibly be an expected effect of serving in the War, since men could die at any moment.

Ironically, the War also had the opposite effect of causing men to form closer relationships with each other than they ever would have done under different circumstances, due to the extremely close proximity in which they lived with each other in the dugouts, and the need for some men to seek emotional comfort. This is clearly conveyed by the immediately apparent close relationship of Stanhope and Osborne in ' Journey's End', as Osborne expresses of Stanhope, ' His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me' and the eventual dependence of Hilliard on Barton; He loved him, as he had loved no other person in his life'.

Writing in the third person, Hill has the freedom to express the innermost thoughts and feelings of her characters; ' Hilliard wanted to cry out, so helpless he had felt for the past week, in the face of this blankness. ' However, Sherriff can only relay information to the audience through the

dialogue of his characters, as well as stage direction. Upon the initial appearance of Stanhope in 'Journey's End', Sherriff utilizes Stanhope's dialogue to confirm the audience's perceptions of Stanhope to be a heavy drinker; 'Damn the soup! Bring some whisky.'

Osborne performs a paternal role of Osborne for Stanhope, as Osborne suggests to Stanhope that he should 'turn in and get some sleep after supper', illustrating his nurturing nature. Hill and Sherriff approach Hilliard and Stanhope in contrasting manners: Sherriff depicts a broken man in Stanhope, dependent on alcohol and the emotional support of a friend to sustain his sanity and mask his shame when the character of Raleigh is introduced. In contrast, in Hilliard, Hill conveys a man hardened by War, isolated and emotionally detached from others, yet sober and seemingly clearheaded and independent.

These contrasting effects may be due to the different locations within the War that each text depicts: Sherriff having displayed all of the action within one intimate setting due to the restrictions of the set, and Hill having conveyed Hilliard's emotional state in a variety of locations, which she was free to do as a novelist using the third person. Barton in 'Strange Meeting' parallels Raleigh in 'Journey's End', as both are young, relatively naive and inexperienced soldiers, and furthermore, both mark a pivotal point in the development of the corresponding characters in the texts; Barton for Hilliard, and Raleigh for Stanhope.

Hill writes of Hilliard's feelings about meeting Barton, 'He had never felt it before, this irrational disinclination to come face to face with someone.'

Directly stating to the reader Hilliard's ominous feelings about first facing Barton, Hill offers an objective, unequivocal insight into his character. This insight is developed as Hilliard confronts Barton, and Hill communicates, ' At once, Hilliard felt a wave of relief, coupled with instinctive suspicion'... ' He realized now that he had been quite wrong. '

Again, the reader is given an objective insight into Hilliard's feelings towards Barton, which evidently contradict those he had before meeting him.

Hilliard's change of view upon meeting Barton could be for several reasons. It's understandable to the reader that Hilliard feels the initial ' disinclination' to meet Barton, as Hill writes that ' he did not make close friends' and perhaps was worried about meeting someone who wished to be a close companion. The reader knows Hilliard to be quite an isolated character; '... he could talk to no one, nobody knew... e could not join in, only sit there, staring at them... ' He would view the prospect of meeting someone with whom he'll be sharing a room, with pessimism.

Hill's choice of language when stating, ' he had found his way easily enough in the army, from the beginning', implies the introduction of anyone else into Hilliard's life may disturb his coping strategy. Contrary to this objective insight given by Hill, the limitations of the play as a genre mean that Sherriff uses stage directions to show Stanhope's feelings of dismay towards Raleigh upon first meeting him. Stage directions state that; he [Stanhope] stops at the sight of Raleigh. There is silence. '

Sherriff then demonstrates Stanhope only talking to Raleigh in short, simple sentences, enabling the audience to recognise Stanhope's discomfort at

Raleigh's presence; ' How did you - get here? ' or avoiding speaking to Raleigh whenever possible. Raleigh and Stanhope are acquainted with each other since their schooldays, it would be expected that Stanhope would be more open and inviting towards Raleigh. Instead, Sherriff depicts a man emotionally withdrawn and guarded, using blunt remarks such as ' Oh. I see. '

Hill's portrayal of the meeting between Hilliard and Barton parallels Sherriff's depiction of the meeting between Stanhope and Raleigh, however there are differences due to the different circumstances of the meetings; Stanhope meets someone from his past whereas Hilliard meets someone new. While Hilliard, despite fearing meeting Barton, discovers that he's surprisingly drawn to him, Stanhope is pleasant towards the ' new officer'; ' Oh, sorry... I didn't see you in this miserable light', until the realisation of who this officer is, causing his manner to change. Stanhope withdraws and becomes fairly guarded.

The differing attitudes of Hilliard and Stanhope towards Barton and Raleigh can be justified by scrutinising the characters' respective situations. Having become isolated and hardened by the War, Hilliard may have been drawn to Barton's innocence and naivety; a boy not yet ruined by the brutality of war. It's also possible that Hilliard saw an element of himself as a younger soldier, in Barton, and so warmed to him. Stanhope's negative reaction to Raleigh however, is justified by the extent to which the War has had an effect on him psychologically, and his fear of revealing himself to Raleigh as a fraud rather than a hero.

Stanhope states that the idolising of a hero can go on 'as long as the hero's a hero', thus exposing his worry that Raleigh will see the effects that the War has had on him, in terms of his drinking and the fact that 'his nerves have got battered to bits', and therefore question his former admiration: Stanhope fears that Raleigh will realise that he's not worthy of being his hero anymore, and will report back to his family the drastic effects that the War has had on his idol. Therefore, Sherriff creates Stanhope's character as being guarded, as he speaks to Raleigh as little as possible.

Throughout these passages, in which the main protagonists meet in the two texts, the freedom of a novel, and restrictions of a dramatic construct become apparent, as Hill is free to directly communicate to the reader Hilliard's feelings about Barton and therefore the justification of his behaviour towards him. Sherriff however, is unable to reveal directly Stanhope's reasons for his behaviour, and cleverly uses dialogue between characters to explain Stanhope's reasons for his reaction to Raleigh.

Hence the audience learn of Stanhope's fear about Raleigh's perception of him in the setting of the War, contrasted with school. The introductions of Raleigh and Barton in the texts mark pivotal points in the character development of Stanhope and Hilliard. Sherriff and Hill also write of events that are pivotal to the development of Raleigh and Barton themselves, as young, innocent soldiers. These events differ inevitably, due to the differing genres of the texts. Hill writes of Barton's first experience at the front, when he's detailed 'to make a map'.

Hill conveys Barton's naivety in his idea of the War: ' Barton felt excitement churning in the pits of his stomach' Yet these feelings of ' excitement' are ill-founded. Hilliard's fear for Barton's life at this point and his extremely strong feelings of love towards him are stressed; ' he loved him, as he had loved no other person in his life'... ' If Barton were killed what would he do? What would he do? ' Hill's use of repetition here effectively reinforces Hilliard's worry for Barton for the reader.

Juxtaposing the statement of Hilliard's feelings for Barton with Barton's innocent expectations of the war, causes the reader to fear more for Barton and empathise with Hilliard, as Hilliard's years of experience within the War mean he's painfully aware of what Barton is heading into, how his friend will become corrupted by active warfare. Similarly, Sherriff writes of Raleigh's first experience of trench warfare, as Osborne and Raleigh prepare to lead a raid against the enemy.

As does Hill in ' Strange Meeting', Sherriff effectively portrays Raleigh's innocence through his anxiety and eagerness in expressing, ' I wish we could go now', as well as his expressions of excitement at the situation; ' I say- it's most frightfully exciting! ' Hilliard's trepidation regarding Barton's visit to the front line is stressed through Hill's statement ' Hilliard forced himself to take a breath, to relax'. Sherriff depicts Stanhope's anxiety about Raleigh's task through stage directions at the beginning of Act 3. He writes, ' Stanhope is alone, wandering to and fro across the dugout...

He looks anxiously at his watch... ' Stanhope's anxiety here is justified by the possibility that he sees his former pre-war self in Raleigh, knowing how a

soldier of such innocence and enthusiasm, imminently and inevitably will be psychologically corrupted by what he experiences. Sherriff effectively conveys the officialdom of War, which is not stressed so much by Hill in 'Strange Meeting'. Although the Colonel is aware of Stanhope's worry for Raleigh's and Osborne's safety, he 'can't disobey orders' and must remain as emotionally detached as possible from all officers and soldiers; Look here, Stanhope, I've done all I can, but my report's got to be at headquarters by seven this evening. '

Where Sherriff juxtaposes the professional manner of the colonel against Stanhope's struggle with his worry for his men, Hill effectively magnifies Raleigh's vulnerability, by contrasting his reactions to events with those of Grosse, an experienced soldier who's become hardened to the events of the War as a survival mechanism: Whereas Barton is reluctant to 'leave the man on the ground' whilst his 'body was warm' after being shot dead, Grosse is cynical and shows no sign of sympathy for the dead soldier; Stuck his head up to far I suppose.

Daft thing to do. ' Contrastingly, Barton wishes ' to take up the body of the man called Price and dig a grave and bury him himself', thereby emphasising his innocence and vulnerability. Here, the psychological change in Barton is revealed. He is no longer full of ' excitement' at being involved in the War, but ' sickened' by what he's encountered. Barton begins to see the futility of his allocated task; ' Why was he to spend the afternoon making a map, playing a game, spying and reporting about a few square yards of country.

Sherriff conveys the raid through stage directions on a stage devoid of actors. Hill states that the noise was 'deafening when the shells came over', and uses emotive phrases to describe the setting, such as 'sudden roar' and 'escape was impossible'. Hill provides a strong contrast to Barton's innocence and naive 'excitement' at being trusted with this task independently. The strong adjectives here; 'deafening', and use of the senses, also depict a vivid image of Barton's surroundings.

Hill has the freedom, using third person, to allow the reader to share Barton's experience. However, the audience cannot experience what Raleigh sees during the raid, only his subsequent reaction. Sherriff provides a paragraph of stage directions written in meticulous detail about what should be seen and heard through the door of the dugout; 'The red and green glow of German alarm rockets comes faintly through the dugout door... Quicker and quicker they come, till the noise mingles together in confused turmoil. Yet the noise is deadened by the earth walls of the tiny dugout'.

For the audience, unable to witness what is taking place outside the dugout off stage, the noises in the stage directions are crucial. Upon Raleigh's re-entry to the dugout, the audience realise the effect that his first experience of trench warfare has had on him; Sherriff's stage directions state '... Raleigh, who sits with lowered head, looking at the palms of his hands... ' The strength and closeness of Stanhope's relationship with Osborne is reflected in Stanhope's reaction, as he satirises the point of the raid manoeuvre, adopting an extremely sarcastic tone; How awfully nice- if the brigadier's pleased. '

He does this due to the realisation that his best friend and father-figure has just lost his life for no justifiable reason. The audience also witness Stanhope's despair at the loss of Osborne through the resentful tone he adopts towards Raleigh, who recognises this, stating ' You resent my being here'. Stanhope's ' voice is still, expressionless and dead' when speaking to him.

Conversely, in ' Strange Meeting' Hill describes every aspect of Barton's experience as it happens, pinpointing the moment when Barton realises the complete futility of his actions; He thought, I shall stay here, I shall wait and warm my face in the sun and if they fire, they will fire... For it seemed not to matter, nobody's life mattered... He was here to make a map. ' Through Barton admitting the futility of his assigned task, Hill is expressing her own view that the War, in macrocosm, was futile. This can also be said of Sherriff, perhaps through Stanhope's sarcastic comments, ' Still it'll be awfully nice if the brigadier's pleased',

Despite the contrasting genres of Sherriff's and Hill's texts, they both effectively convey the psychological effects of war, caused by the physical demands. Through stage directions and dialogue, Sherriff is able to depict the behaviour of soldiers and the formation of close relationships that bind them. Similarly, Hill vividly describes the psychological progress of her characters, utilising the first and third person perspectives, enabling the reader to empathise with her characters.