

Which of the dramatic  
technique used by r c  
sheriff in journey's  
end



'Journey's End' is set in the front line trenches of World War I. The play begins on the evening of Monday, 18th March 1918. The war is nearing an end (the First World War started in 1914 and finished in 1918). Hardy, an officer in another company, is preparing to hand over the dug out to the infantry company taking over.

Hardy jokes with Osborne, one of the new officers, about the conditions of the trenches saying; "Hardy: "... A dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea. They were frightfully annoyed".

"Osborne: "I know. There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea". The men tell jokes through out the play so they can hide their fear of war. Sheriff is showing that war isn't glamorous, it's a terrible event where people die. Hardy gives us our first picture of the commander of the new infantry company taking over the dug out.

He describes Stanhope's drinking and the effect it has on his behaviour. Osborne quickly defends Stanhope. Before Hardy leaves, he describes how he and his men pass their time by racing earwigs, and reminds Osborne about the big attack. We're reminded of the tedious nature of war as much of the time, nothing happens. Hardy has left and Mason, the cook, describes the cutlets, They:".

...Smells like liver, sir, but it 'asn't got the smooth, wet look that liver's got.

..” This again points out that the men use humour to get rid of their fear of war. Soon their tension builds up.

A new officer has joined Stanhope's company. The officer already knows Stanhope as they went to the same school and they were good friends. The new officer's name is Raleigh and he tells Osborne how Stanhope was before the war he also, tells Osborne how angry Stanhope got when he found boys drinking whisky: " Lord! The roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump" This is ironic because now Stanhope is an alcoholic due to the pressure of war.

Sheriff uses the fresh-faced Raleigh to represent what Stanhope used to be like before the war. Humour is used again when Mason is worried about how Stanhope will react to the news that he's going to have to eat apricots instead of pineapple chunks because of a mistake in the canteen. This reminds us of the importance of trivial things to keep the men sane; in the play the smallest things are the only way in which the men can keep out the horrors of war. Stanhope enters the dug out with his 2nd Lieutenant, Trotter.

They sit down around the table and wait for their dinner. Stanhope meets Raleigh and remembers him from the past. There is awkwardness in the dug out but Osborne circumvents it. Bleak humour takes over as they discuss the lack of pepper to disinfect Mason's " yellow soup".

They start to eat their meal and to talk about a ruin in No Man's land that will have to be investigated. Bleak humour again protects them from the terrifying reality as Trotter says: " I expect a nasty German'll ' op out of it and say ' Ock der Kaiser'....".

Later on Trotter has to take Raleigh on his first watch but complains saying:"

I never knew anything like a war for upsetting meals. I'm always down for  
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dooty in the middle of one.” Humour is again used to show how the men faced their fear. As they go another officer in the company, “ Hibbert”, complains to Stanhope that he’s sick and asks permission to leave to seek medical attention, Stanhope doesn’t sympathise with him so Hibbert has to stay. This shows that even officers can be scared of war an I think R.

C Sheriff uses Hibbert to show that not everyone can be heroic in war. Later on we find out that Stanhope isn’t pleased by Raleigh’s appearance because he’s scared that Raleigh will paint a bad picture of him when he writes home. He’s particularly concerned about Raleigh’s sister (whose picture he carries around with him). He says:”..

.. She doesn’t know that if I went up those steps into the front line- without being doped with whisky- I’d go mad with fright.” Sheriff uses this to tell the audience that war can change anyone, even a man as brave as Stanhope. Later on Stanhope again admits that without alcohol he’d go mad. As the Act comes to an end, he falls asleep.

“.... Dear old uncle. Tuck me up.

...” Stanhope is reverting to boyhood, trying to drift away from the horror of war in tired, drunken sleep. In Act 2, Scene 1, it’s early in the morning of the 2nd day. Sheriff uses bitter humour to remind us of how desperate the men are; they cling to trivial things to avoid the horror of war.

Trotter talks about his garden to Osborne. We’re reminded that the war has destroyed the ordinary but pleasant lives that the men once knew. This

supports the fact that war is futile. Now Trotter tells Osborne of a strange smell he'd experienced recently:"..

.. All of a sudden we smelt that funny, sweet smell, and a fellow shouted ' GAS!'-and we put on our masks." Tragically, they had been frightened by what turned out to be the scent of a may tree. This reminds us that the war has taken the goodness out of nature; the men are too traumatised to enjoy Natures simple pleasures.

Osborne tells Raleigh about his sporting past but tells Raleigh not to tell the others because: " it doesn't make much difference out here!" The war has taken all he achieved away from him and the same has been done to Stanhope. Osborne tells Raleigh about a moment when men went to get a wounded man. He says:"..

.. When our man began dragging the wounded man back over the rough ground, a big German officer stood up in their trenches and called out: ' Carry him! - and our fellows stood up and carried the man back..

.." The next day, Osborne recalls," We blew each others trenches to blazes". This points out the terrible futility of war. Stanhope finds out about Raleigh's letter that he's written home.

He demands that Raleigh gives it to him and so he does but Stanhope regrets it as he's betrayed Raleigh. Even though Stanhope knew Raleigh very well before the war, the war has made his trust in Raleigh disappear (This is another effect of war). He keeps on thinking that Raleigh will write the truth

about him to his family. In Scene 2 Stanhope makes a desperate attempt at humour as he says what will happen when the unit is surrounded:"..

.. Then we advance and win the war." The audience is fully aware of the inevitability of his fate. Colonel arrives and orders a raid on the German trench, in front of Stanhope's trench. Osborne and Raleigh and ten other men are picked for the raid.

Osborne is told about the raid; Stanhope apologises and Osborne replies:".... That's alright, old chap." This shows that Osborne accepts that he's been chosen even though he knows that the chances of survival are virtually none.

Raleigh is also informed but he's very enthusiastic and he shows it saying:" I say, -it's most frightfully exciting!" Raleigh is naive; he represents the millions on both sides that were led into the " gently smiling jaws" of war. There are eight minutes left to the raid and Osborne and Raleigh go through their plan. They talk of trivial things. As the time for the raid gets nearer, they find it easy to talk. The raid takes place off stage.

At the end we hear Stanhope's voice. Only one prisoner is captured whom the Colonel and Sergeant Major interrogate. The German prisoner is younger than Raleigh and is the last piece of R. C Sheriff's jigsaw. There's a youth (German boy), young manhood (Raleigh), responsible manhood (Stanhope) and middle aged (Osborne) represented in the play. Stanhope finds out that Osborne and six other men are dead and Raleigh and only four men came back alive.

In Act 3 Scene 2 the officers are having a 'feast' but Raleigh is too depressed so he doesn't join them, instead he decides to stay on duty. He's finally witnessed the horror of war. The scene ends with Stanhope shouting at Raleigh. In Act 3 Scene 3, the men prepare for the German push.

They find consolation in little things. Trotter appears to be only concerned about his cup of tea: "Ah! That's what I want. A decent cup of tea." Instead of preparing food for the officers, Mason is told to rejoin his platoon but still finds time to make sandwiches for them. These trivial things are the last symbols of the normal ordinary life that war has taken away from these men. Hibbert tries to waste time but Stanhope tells Mason to escort Hibbert out of the dug out.

Mason understands and makes his final joke, saying: "I'd like to come along with you if you don't mind, sir. I ain't bin up in this part of the front line. Don't want to get lost." His words remind us the bravery of the ordinary soldiers; he represents them in the play.

The shells have now started to fall. Raleigh is hit and is ordered by Stanhope to be put in the officer's dug out. His last words are: "Could we have light? It's- it's so frightfully dark and cold." He dies before Stanhope can bring a lighted candle. Stanhope chooses to stay with his school friend rather than join the men. The chaos has brought the schoolmates together at the end; war becomes irrelevant to Stanhope, whose basic humanity leads him to stay with Raleigh.

Trotter sends down a desperate message for Stanhope to join the men but he never makes it as the dug out is blown up.

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