

# Journey's end report essay



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Theatre managers and producers hesitated to stage Journey's End for many reasons. Journey's End, written by R. C Sherriff is about ten young men in the trenches on the Western Front in the spring of 1918 awaiting a huge German attack. It was rejected by most of theatre managers in London, on the grounds that the public wouldn't find it interesting to watch a play about war and a play excluding women, wouldn't be popular.

The play consisting of an all male cast containing no actresses could mean that the play would attract fewer males to watch the play as many might be interested in the actresses, rather than the storyline itself. This would lead to problems for the producers as the total number of tickets sold would be low. Theatre managers were also worried about the audiences' interests. Not many people would be interested in a war play as many people consider war stories to be dull and boring.

Many people might find it distressing to think about the memories of war and the havoc it caused. The play also has only one scene; a small, dark, depressing dugout which wouldn't sound too appealing to the audience. If the audiences wished to view a war story they could be expected lots of fighting and warfare but the action takes place purely in the rat-infested trench. However, as Stanhope and his officers sit in their dugout passing their time with death the full horror and futility of trench warfare is revealed by Sherriff. Journey's End is set in the rat-infested trenches just outside of St Quentin in March 1918. It is a compelling account of warfare, based upon Sherriff's own experience as a Captain in the East Surrey Regiment.

He describes war as meaningless and destructive. His play " Journey's End" reconstructs some of his memories. Although Sherriff also wrote other plays such as " The Dam Busters", he is best remembered for " Journey's End as he devotes his drama to present a realistic picture of life in the trenches as he had known it and a portrayal of the horrors of warfare. Sherriff provides us with an in-depth account of the wasteful, nature of war and the appalling conditions endured by troops engaged in trench warfare. We are introduced to the play with Hardy, a red-faced, cheerful looking man drying his sock over a candle.

Sheriff instantly introduces the humour from the start as Hardy excuses his sock which " guarantees to keep the dry". We realise Hardy's sense of humour during Osborne's conversation concerning Minnies. The opening scene describes the dugout to the audience. If I were to produce Journey's End in a theatre I would make sure the dugout gave the audience the feel of the trenches and design it to be small, dark and dirty to make sure the audience was aware of how the Stanhope and his men felt enclosed in the dugout. I would also make the dugout itself a realistic construction that combines all of the characters together. Anyone who sees this play would be convinced by the battle that blazes through the dugout door, and the lingering odours of smoke Mason's bacon.

This would draw the audience in even more. I would also use faint lighting and candles to light the stage. Faint traces of radiating sunshine give a confused sense of time and strengthen the appeal of the disillusioned characters. Sherriff's play consists of Stanhope, Osborne, Trotter, Hibbert, Raleigh, the colonel, Sergeant Major, Mason, Hardy and a German soldier.

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The audience is taken into the Officers' dugout along with the enthusiastic, vivacious newcomer Raleigh, and instantly becomes a part of the team. He already knew Stanhope from his school and he was keen to be in Stanhope's battalion.

We know of his determination to do when he confesses to Osborne about the conversation with his uncle. Little does he know that the war has changed Stanhope from being the strict, non-smoking prefect. Raleigh, the boy with everything to live for, knew Stanhope from his school rugby team. We know they were originally quite close as Raleigh sometimes refers to Stanhope as "Dennis". An ideal actor to play Raleigh would be someone young and respectful.

There are also scenes which prove he is quite naïve which proves to the audience he isn't as experienced as his fellow officers. He was also looking forward to doing his task despite the odds of coming out alive. He thought he was privileged to be chosen for the mission. The young Second Lieutenant Raleigh still worships Stanhope from childhood and within days; Raleigh is killed after a heroic participation in two risky offensives. If I staged Journey's End the actor playing Stanhope would be a handsome and courageous hero, respected by his fellow officers and men and would be a decent and kind man by nature.

Hardy informs us at the start of the play that responsibility has made him tired with the war and the past three years making him increasingly dependent on alcohol to survive the traumas of war. He depends on whisky to forget anything but the present. Raleigh, his girlfriend's brother, upsets

Stanhope's nature: a mature, responsible leader and that of a schoolboy subjected to the war, making the best of the bad orders from his Colonel. The company is anticipating a German attack that could be disastrous if mishandled. In charge is the brilliant young Captain Stanhope, an apparent superman with the capacity to endlessly with little sleep. Subject to unpredictable and frightening mood swings, he still has the support of his battalion and close friend Osborne.

Stanhope's ego is shattered when the younger brother of his girlfriend back home is assigned to his company. He fears the boy will report his deterioration to the girl, Stanhope becomes unhinged and decides to censor his letter. He then realises that Raleigh promotes his reputation further. We also realise he likes things tidy and organised; at the beginning of the play Hardy quickly makes an escape prior to seeing Stanhope. Osborne acts as Stanhope's close friend throughout his hard times and unpredictable mood swings and as I read the play I assume he has done a thousand times in the past.

Osborne, who is referred to all the other characters lightly as 'Uncle', seems to be a respectful and loyal to friends. On page 11 he describes Stanhope as a "splendid chap". He instantly becomes close friends with Raleigh and seems to be the perfect listener and friend. They even arranged to meet each other once the war is over despite the fact they had only just met. Sadly, as he expected, he dies in a dangerous mission while crossing no-mans land.

His loyalty is proved when Hardy disgraces Stanhope as an alcoholic and suggests Osborne should become the first in command of the battalion; he also proves he is modest by disagreeing with the suggestion. The two characters that are rather down to earth are Trotter and Mason. Together they introduce some light comic relief into the play. Trotter seems almost unaffected by the war, concentrating upon his daily routine of eating, standing on duty and writing dreaming up vain attempts to pass his time. The innocent Mason in the meantime endeavours against all the odds to prepare liveable quarters for the Officers, complete with imaginative cooking. Trotter, my favourite character, makes the play worthwhile watching and brings most of the humour to the play.

Mason also helps lighten the play up with his witty excuses for his poor cooking and his disorganisation when ordering the rations (He loses the pepper and make a mistake with the apricots). Mason is the source of most of the humour. We laugh with him rather than at him as he shrewd and always manages to make the best of an impossible situation. In comparison to Raleigh, he seems less educated and slow to understand jokes. When Osborne wishes to know what sort of soup is being served he answers, "yellow soup sir". An example of a joke he failed to understand was shown on page 21 Trotter: Sort of cutlet, is it? You know Mason, there's cutlets and cutlets.

Mason: I know, sir; that ones a cutlet Trotter: Well it won't let me cut it  
Mason: No sir. Juxtaposed with Stanhope is the character Hibbert, the most reluctant of men, also described as the 'worm' by his officer Stanhope. All plays have characters which are hated by the audience and in Journey's End

we come across Hibbert. Hibbert is introduced as the most reprehensible of characters, someone who betrays his fellow officers by wishing to be sent 'down the line' when he pretends to be ill with neuralgia, which is undetectable to doctors. Stanhope sees straight through this and tension rises as Hibbert continues to play ill.

An Officer must be brave and able to push forward against all odds. In my production of Journey's End I would have him lurking around the darkness of the stage to give a negative view of him to the audience. In my opinion he is a coward and I was disappointed Osborne died instead of Hibbert. Hardy, who is only in the beginning of the play, annoys me immensely. It angers me to come across a character that is so disorganized and lazy.

When Osborne asks him for the map, something vital that should be kept safe, " he gropes across the papers on the table and finds a tattered map". When Osborne asks about the attack he answers, " I should think you should get it- right in the neck". Others find him funny when competing in ear wig races but I believe he is one of the characters that isn't pulling his weight. Stanhope must feel the same way as when he arrives he mentions to Osborne, " you never saw the blasted mess those fellows left the trench in".

I found Hardy irritating however, the character who I disliked the most was the sergeant major. He made no attempt to make the Osborne's mission safer. He made excuses about making more holes in the wire and when he could have found a way to plan the mission for after dark, he complained about it getting in the way of dinner. What angered me most was when he had to be asked to speak to the men rather than going on his own accord. As

"Journey's End" is a play there is very little description and dialogue is depended on to tell the story. However the dialogue changes from character to character and from this we are enabled to see what sort of background the characters come from.

Raleigh, who had previously left school, speaks in short sentence rather than using a lot of slang like Trotter. He also uses words such as "frightful" and "topping" also plays skipper. There is also a lot of vocabulary used that isn't used in the present day such as, minnies, boche, jerry, funk, plate (false teeth), sambridges and blighty ones (a wound which soldiers prayed for which would qualify for returning to England. Apart from these minor exeptions the dialogue is easily understood. The factors of Journey's End that made it such a hit is the conflict and tension between the characters in the dug-out, and the use of dramatic irony during the play.

I believe Sheriff had extraordinary talent in this. We first get a sense of unease and tension when Hardy and Osborne are discussing who should be in command. When Hardy describes the damage done by minnies he replies. "a dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea, they were frightfully annoyed". This is an example of hardy underst.

The audience loves dramatic irony and we first come across it when Raleigh "hero-worships" Stanhope. He then describes when Stanhope caught people with whiskey and he hit the roof. The audience knows Stanhope's drinking problem although Raleigh is unaware of it. Just before Stanhope finally meets Raleigh he orders a bottle of whisky from Mason. Stanhope sees Raleigh and there is a silence and in a low voice Stanhope says "how did you - get here?"



Tensions also rise when Hibbert pretends to be ill. When Stanhope refuses to let him go he strikes Stanhope which could be a serious crime.

Hibbert's cowardice is dealt with when Stanhope offers his own problems as a comparison.