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"Glamorous Melancholy": R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*

The impact of R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* on English audiences in 1928 and 1929 is difficult to exaggerate. No other drama devoted to the Great War came close to its success, and no other work—with the exception of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*—played a greater role in prompting the sudden outpouring of English war literature in the late 1920s and early '30s, an outpouring that included such important works as Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929), Frederic Manning's *Her Privates, We* (1929), and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930). Vera Brittain, for one, later recalled that the play had helped to inspire *Testament of Youth* (1933). In her essay, "War Service in Perspective" (1968), Brittain wrote,

> The idea of [writing] a war book . . . must have come into my mind soon after the first performance of R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*—that famous swallow that was to make a summer—which I saw with Winifred Holtby, the author of *South Riding*, when we realized that an electric atmosphere of reminiscent emotion had replaced the mere *succès d'estime* which we had both expected. (368)

Like many writers discouraged by the lack of public interest in war books during the first post-war decade, Richard Aldington found a far more economic inspiration in Sherriff's work. While finishing *Death of a Hero* in Paris in 1929, Aldington wired his American agent: "[The] great success [of] *Journey's End* and German war novels urge earliest fall publication [of] *Death of a Hero*. Large scale English war novel might go big now" (Ridgway N. pag.).

As a result of the popularity of Sherriff's play, and its position at the forefront of the sudden boom in literature dealing with the Great War, critics have tended to group *Journey's End* together with anti-heroic German war books such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, an international best seller in 1929 and, ultimately, the most popular and influential war novel of the century.[1] Yet the differences between Sherriff's vision of the Great War and Remarque's are pronounced. In the following discussion, I maintain that *Journey's End* offered a deeply conflicted interpretation of war experience, tentatively exploring the anti-heroic themes that soon became fashionable during the late 1920s while also celebrating wartime devotion to duty and comradeship. It was the former dimension, I think, that attracted audiences to the play and that made it a smash hit. Thus, Sherriff's drama, and its reception, suggest something of the equivocal and contradictory nature of war experience itself. Although Sherriff ostensibly exposed the horrors of the Western Front through his suffering hero, Denis Stanhope, the play evaded the anti-heroic conclusions implicit in Stanhope's tragic story and betrayed a nostalgic longing for life in the "old front line," a longing apparently shared by Sherriff's audience, and, I argue, by many other war-veteran writers. The play reminds us that horror and revulsion, the two central emotions in the war literature of the late 1920s and early '30s, were only part of the complex and often contradictory reactions of British veterans to their service in the Great War.

First, some background. The tremendous popularity of *Journey's End* astonished its author partly because nothing during the first post-war decade suggested that a drama—or any literary work, for that matter—dealing with the Great War would be so enthusiastically received.[2] Then there was Sherriff's astonishingly modest theatrical background: a claims adjuster for the Sun Insurance Company, he wrote the play in

1927 for his Kingston-on-Thames rowing-club, which annually staged one of his amateur dramas.

Inspired by Sherriff's experiences as a junior officer, *Journey's End* stood out immediately from his earlier apprentice works, none of which had dealt with the war. Encouraged by his fellow rowers, Sherriff hesitantly began his career as a professional playwright by sending the work to a London theatrical agent, who rejected it, then to Geoffrey Dearmer of the Stage Society. Surprisingly, Dearmer agreed to produce the drama, but only after consulting George Bernard Shaw, who wrote to Sherriff that it should "be produced by all means, even at the disadvantage of being the newspaper of the day before yesterday" (Hill 150). Dearmer selected David Whale, also a former officer, to direct.

The Stage Society production opened in December 1928, significantly just a few weeks after the tenth anniversary of the Armistice. The critical reaction was favorable; however, the play did not "take off" until its transferral in January to the Savoy, where it became "one of the greatest commercial successes of British interwar theatre," running for a total of 594 consecutive performances (Onions 92). By the summer, *Journey's End* had been translated into several languages and performed throughout Europe and the United States. A German version, *Die andere Seite*, opened in Berlin in August. Sherriff attended the premiere and, according to the report in the *New York Times*, was "repeatedly called before the curtain" by the cheering audience.[3] In a gesture of forgiveness and friendship typical of cultural encounters between England and Germany during the late 1920s, German war veterans played Sherriff's English soldiers.

The play owed much of its success in England and the United States to the strength of its various casts. In the Stage Society production, a young Laurence Olivier starred as Denis Stanhope, while Maurice Evans played Lieutenant Raleigh. The New York production, presented in March at the Henry Miller Theatre, featured Jack Hawkins (who would play General Allenby thirty-three years later in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*) as Lieutenant Hibbert. Commenting on the success of

Colin Clive, who replaced Olivier in the Savoy production, *Variety* magazine described the entire play as a remarkable confluence of good fortune and fresh talent:

> And the breaks in show business! Clive, a chorus boy on the London stage, picked for the role because he looked it. And then he made it. [It is] just as freaky as the entire story of [*Journey's End*] and how it reached the stage, after its author, R. C. Sherriff, had saved up penciled data and kept it in a trunk, while the man [Dearmer?] who finally dug that stuff out of the trunk and secured amateur production in London on a Sunday night, later to take it to the London stage, has since bought three theatres out of his profit so far, while Sherriff probably long since grew tired of counting royalties.[4]

Fanciful in details (was the play really "dug out" of a trunk?), these remarks typify the contemporary reaction. Critics were astonished to see a "womanless" play become such a success, let alone a work focused entirely on the war and written by such an inexperienced playwright. The whole thing was "freaky." Sherriff himself felt that he had been swept up in an inexplicable phenomenon and remarked, "It just happened that *Journey's End* was plastered with luck from the day it was born" (Hill 131).

Had Sherriff's story been confined to the stage, its influence might have been less strongly felt. Like many successful twentieth-century dramas, however, it was quickly transferred to other media. The play became a novel in 1929, co-written by Sherriff and Vernon Bartlett, and, inevitably, a film, one of the first motion pictures with sound. David Whale—once again—directed the movie version, after working as an apprentice on Howard Hughes's *Hell's Angels*. Whale's own production eschewed the Hollywood hype. A faithful and intimate adaptation of Sherriff's play, the film retained Colin Clive in the lead role and added only a few extra battle scenes and exterior shots.

The simplicity of *Journey's End* accounted for much of its appeal. Yet it is hardly a minimalist or neo-realistic drama; Sherriff employed considerable melodrama, suspense, and conventional theatrics. Set in "a dugout in the British trenches before St. Quentin," the play follows a company commander, Denis Stanhope, and his subordinates from the evening of March 18, 1918, to the dawn of March 21, the opening day of the German Spring Offensive. At the beginning, Stanhope's band of junior officers welcomes a youthful replacement, James Raleigh, who has worshipped—loved?—the slightly-older Stanhope ever since their days together in public school and whose sister has become Stanhope's fiancée. Without notifying his friend, Raleigh has used family connections in order to join Stanhope's company, intending his arrival as a surprise.

And a surprise it is—for both men. To his horror, Raleigh discovers that Stanhope, once the most gifted athlete and student at their public school, has become a dipsomaniac, still competent and admired by his men, but hopelessly alcoholic. Raleigh's sudden appearance, and the embarrassment that it creates, only increases Stanhope's reliance upon whiskey. After a particularly severe drinking bout in Act One, Stanhope is sent to bed and "tucked up" like a child by the fatherly second-in-command, Lieutenant Osborne.

The play works best, I think, when focused on Stanhope's alcoholism, the grim revelation waiting at the "end" of Raleigh's "journey," and the tension that results between these two young men—one, callow and still untested, the other, prematurely aged and deeply ashamed. Fearful that Raleigh will report his deterioration to his fiancée, Stanhope badgers his admirer, seizes his letters (which never mention Stanhope's drinking) and refuses to renew their friendship. When Osborne dies during a trench raid, Raleigh worsens the situation by failing to understand that Stanhope's subsequent dissipation is an attempt "to forget" (181). Only at the end of the play, when Raleigh is mortally wounded and the entire company faces annihilation, does Stanhope soften.

Sherriff's conception of Stanhope does not, however, stop here. Despite his unflattering treatment of Raleigh, Stanhope retains his heroic stature. While other officers have collapsed from the strain and gone home, Stanhope "goes on sticking it, month in, month out" without relief, having served a total of three years in France. As Osborne attests: "I've seen him on his back all day with trench fever—then on duty all night" (12). Stanhope also stands out from the two other officers under his command: Lieutenant Trotter, a garrulous cockney promoted from the ranks, good-natured but too shallow to be touched by the horrors of war, and Lieutenant Hibbert, the archetypal "shirker."

In the more cynical and sophisticated hands of Richard Aldington or Siegfried Sassoon, Denis Stanhope might have become the perfect symbol of exploited youth, an embodiment of his generation's finest qualities who demonstrates, through his inadequacy, the falsity of heroic ideals. Sherriff, as we will see, did not go quite so far. To examine the conflicted nature of Sherriff's play, I will first discuss its tentative development of anti-heroic themes, then shift to its emphasis on duty and comradeship, an emphasis that often works at cross purposes with the harrowing depiction of dipsomania. We can see, I think, that *Journey's End* hesitantly exposes the madness and waste of the Great War while simultaneously celebrating the nobility of sacrifice and the "romance" of the Western Front. Thus, although the play perhaps fails as a work of art because of its muddled blend of irony, anger, romance, and sentimentality, this mixture of themes and emotions arguably tells us more about the attitudes of the British war generation than the more cohesive and artful narratives of Sassoon, Graves, or Aldington. Through its many contradictions, *Journey's End* takes us to the very heart of the moral code that kept war poets like Sassoon and Owen committed to remaining in the trenches—even as they denounced the horror of the Great War—and the ambivalence that prompted many veterans to yearn nostalgically for the war years.

Act One, easily the strongest of the three, promises anti-heroic conclusions worthy of Aldington or Sassoon at their bitterest. A series of sinister conversations establishes Stanhope's disgrace long before his entrance. When Osborne first meets Raleigh, for example, he reacts to the younger man's enthusiasm with ominous equivocation: "You mustn't expect to find [Stanhope] quite the same," he warns him—a considerable understatement (27). We first learn of Stanhope's decline at the very beginning, in the conversation between Osborne and Captain Hardy, the commander of the unit whom Stanhope has been ordered to relieve. To Osborne's chagrin, Hardy insensitively jokes about Stanhope's reputation as a "hard drinker" whose "nerves have gone all to blazes" and suggests that Raleigh's idol has become a sideshow attraction:

> Well, damn it, it's pretty dull without *something* to liven people up. I mean, after all—Stanhope really is a sort of freak; I mean it is jolly fascinating to see a fellow drink like he does—glass after glass. He didn't go home on his last leave, did he? (11)

Sherriff makes this suspenseful build-up all the more disturbing by suggesting that the "freak," like Joseph Conrad's similarly defective Lord Jim, is actually "one of us," a man whose weakness cannot be regarded as exceptional or abnormal. On the contrary, Stanhope's credentials as the embodiment of middle-class "Englishness" are impeccable: his father (like Jim's) is "vicar of a country village" (11); at Barford, the public school also attended by Raleigh, Stanhope achieved fame as the "skipper of football" and as an outstanding cricket player (23). Prior to losing his nerves, Stanhope established an equally impressive reputation in the Army, winning the Military Cross and assuming command of a company before the age of twenty.

In both his background and actions, then, Stanhope exemplifies the public-school boy turned officer, a type—or rather class—of English soldier whom Sherriff, who did not attend a public school himself, particularly admired. In a later essay, "The English Public Schools in the War" (1968), Sherriff explained that because of his own grammar-school education, he had been barred initially from officer training; however, he did not resent the British Army's policy of drawing its volunteer officers exclusively from the public schools, a policy that gave way only after the appalling casualty rate among subalterns necessitated a wider pool of candidates. At a time when "class distinctions were widely recognized and accepted without resentment as long as they were not abused," the public-school boy was ideally equipped—through his consciousness, "without snobbery or conceit," of a "personal superiority that placed on [his] shoulders an obligation toward those less privileged"—to win the respect of the soldiers under his command (153-54). Part of the value of *Journey's End* as a historical document is its frank and accurate depiction of how junior officers with public-school backgrounds like Stanhope's had been virtually wiped out by 1918, a slaughter confirmed in the war books of Blunden, Graves, and Sassoon. Stanhope himself feels more kinship with the dead than the living, and urges the potential-deserter Hibbert to remember better men who have already "gone west":

> Suppose the worst happened—supposing we were knocked right out. Think of the chaps who've gone already. It can't be very lonely there—with all of those fellows. Sometimes I think it's lonelier here. (115)

As a result of his carefully delineated social credentials, and alignment with a specific type of English volunteer officer, Stanhope was, for audiences of veterans in 1928 and '29, a tremendously compelling figure, made all the more so by the particularly cruel way in which his talents and dignity are slowly destroyed. At its bitterest, the play suggests that Stanhope's drinking is not only an inevitable response to the strain of trench warfare, but a measure of his exploitation at the hands of the Army. In a seemingly irrelevant exchange at the beginning of Act One, Hardy explains to Osborne the "rules" of cockroach racing, a popular pastime in his unit:

> Oh, you take a cockroach, and start 'em in a line. On the word "Go" you dig your cockroach in the ribs

> and steer him with a match across the table. I won ten francs last night—had a splendid cockroach. (17)

Hardy then gives Osborne a "tip": "If you want to get the best pace out of a cockroach, dip it in whiskey—makes 'em go like hell!" (17). Hardy has, of course, unknowingly described Stanhope's predicament: driven beyond human endurance, Stanhope must now be periodically "[dipped] in whiskey."

When "the Colonel"—Sherriff suggests the inflexibility and aloofness of Stanhope's superiors through this impersonal title—arrives in Act Two and orders that Stanhope send several officers on a suicidal trench raid, we see that their relationship mirrors that of the "splendid cockroach" and its "owner." After Stanhope refuses to send the newly-arrived Raleigh, the Colonel "steers" him by means of an appeal to *esprit de corps*: "I could send an officer from another company," he craftily suggests, to which Stanhope "quickly" responds, "Oh, Lord, no. We'll do it" (106).

In addition to attacking the selfishness and insensitivity of commanders such as the Colonel, Sherriff also points to the meaninglessness of the war itself. Like their bewildered counterparts in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Stanhope and his comrades no longer recognize a sane purpose behind the war effort. They have ceased to believe in "The Great War for Civilization." One conversation between Osborne and Raleigh, in particular, emphasizes the absurdity of the war. Osborne recounts how a German officer "up at Wipers" once declared a cease-fire so that the British could rescue a wounded man in no man's land. The "next day," Osborne recalls, "we blew each other's trenches to blazes." Both men sense the implications of the story and agree that "[i]t all seems rather—*silly*" (80).

The absurdity of the war also contributes to Stanhope's deterioration. He sees it too clearly. "It's a habit that's grown on me lately," he tells Osborne, "to look right through things, and on and on—till I get frightened and stop" (86). As if to save Raleigh from such an end, Osborne urges him to ignore the truth. When the younger man comments on the "romantic" aura of the front lines at night, Osborne tells him ". . . you must always think of it like that if you can. Think of it all as—as romantic. It helps" (32).

Sherriff's controversial—but, as we will see, hesitant and equivocal—portrait of an exceptional youth destroyed by the psychological strain of modern warfare, as well as his intimations of the nonsensicality of the Great War in general, both suggest that *Journey's End* is an ironic attack upon conventional martial heroism in the tradition of Siegfried Sassoon's wartime poetry, Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* (1917), and John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1923). Yet the fascinating contradiction in *Journey's End* is that while emphasizing the absurdity and horror of the Great War, Sherriff also presents the war as "romantic," ultimately accepting the very heroic ideals that he calls into question. Indeed, we sense that, like his tortured protagonist, Sherriff has "look[ed] right through things," only to become "frightened and stop."

This contradiction can be explained, first of all, by Sherriff's inability to accept the conclusions to which his drama logically points. Like many writers, Sherriff could not abandon a purposeful version of the war; the alternative was simply too terrifying.[5] Thus, in order to counteract the nihilistic conclusions implicit in Stanhope's story, Sherriff advocates a vague code of loyalty and duty that justifies his characters' sacrifices, even their deaths. When Hibbert tries to desert, Stanhope wins back his loyalty—after first threatening him with a revolver—in a speech that is central to the play's moral conception of the war:

> If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life? . . . You may be wounded. Then you can go home and feel proud—and if you're killed you—you won't have to stand this hell any more. . . . But you're still alive—with a straight chance of coming through. Take the chance, old chap, and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. Don't you think it worth standing in with men like

> that?—when you know they all feel as you do—in their hearts—and just go on sticking it because they know it's—it's the only thing a decent man can do? (115-16)

Neither Stanhope nor Sherriff, it would seem, could free himself from the moral code that so effectively kept British soldiers resigned to the trenches, and that indirectly perpetuated the Great War. Though Stanhope sees "through things," knowing only too well the grim realities hidden from civilians, he cannot conceive of ethics that allow a "decent man" to refuse to fight. All that matters to Stanhope is that a soldier share the same risk of mutilation or death as his comrades—that he "stick it," regardless of his awareness that the war is a tragic mistake. And, in this regard, Stanhope's moral response to his participation in the Great War—a response that I take to be Sherriff's own—is essentially the same as Robert Graves's or even Siegfried Sassoon's. As we see in *Good-bye to All That*, Graves reacted to Sassoon's famous letter, "A Soldier's Declaration," by warning that Sassoon's companions in the Royal Welch Fusiliers would think the letter "bad form" (275). A sense of loyalty to his comrades and regiment discouraged Graves from making any outward protest against the war effort, even during the disastrous battle of Passchendaele, by which time, Graves later claimed, every young writer in uniform had come to loathe staff officers, munitions workers, patriotic young women, and the older generation—everyone, in short, but the Germans. Though more openly rebellious—and inconsistent—than Graves, Sassoon ultimately adopted a similar position. At Craiglockhart, Sassoon could not overcome his guilt over having escaped from the war while the men in his battalion continued to suffer. As a result, he inevitably ended his act of protest and returned to France.

This same moral impasse is reflected in *Journey's End* by Sherriff's refusal to allow his characters to break sympathetically from convention.[6] Although many sections of the play—such as the Colonel's selfish visit or the discussions of German generosity and shared humanity—might suggest to some readers that a "decent man" could, ethically, refuse to fight, it is only Hibbert, weak and unmanly, whom we see violating the code. As a result, we tend to discredit Hibbert's opinions, even when he articulates the emptiness at the heart of the war: "What does it matter? It's all so—so beastly—nothing matters" (115). Platitudes about "decency" and "sticking it" hardly fill such a void.

The pressure of military *esprit de corps*, the very force behind Stanhope's disastrous compliance with the Colonel's demand for a trench raid, may also have prompted Sherriff to undermine his own anti-heroic themes. Perhaps the most telling indication of this pressure is his equivocation on the crucial subject of Stanhope's alcoholism. Although Sherriff's focus on dipsomania produced an angry reaction among many former officers, the play actually softens Stanhope's addiction, unrealistically separating his nervous deterioration from his competence as a commander.[7] Improbably, Stanhope's drinking never interferes with his command, unlike the more typical "two bottle commander" recalled by Robert Graves "who, in three shows running, got his company needlessly destroyed because he was no longer capable of making clear decisions" (172). In fact, we are asked to believe that Stanhope's soldierly abilities have been virtually unaffected by his dissipation. Osborne loyally describes him as "the best company commander we've got" (10).

Signs of Stanhope's assiduous—and sober—attention to duty are everywhere. At the opening of the play, he is absent from the command dugout, busily "looking after the men coming in," a task that he need not undertake himself (5). Osborne tells Hardy that Stanhope "always likes a word with the company commander he's relieving," another indication of Stanhope's efficiency and sense of responsibility (10). In contrast, Hardy cannot account for the contents of the "trench stores," having failed to "check [them] when [he] took over" (9). As the anticipated date of the German attack draws closer, Stanhope rallies his subordinates through humor and feigned imperturbability. When briefing the sergeant major, practically the only enlisted man in the entire play, Stanhope sardonically quips that if abandoned on both flanks the company "will advance and win the war" (100).

One exchange between Osborne and Hardy in Act One further reflects Sherriff's discomfort with the subject of alcoholism. When Osborne claims that other officers have labeled Stanhope a "drunkard," Hardy corrects him: "Not a drunkard; just a—just a hard drinker" (13). Such equivocation suggests that Sherriff was almost as blinded by *esprit de corps* as his critics.

Sherriff dulls the impact of his play by failing to offer a truly realistic portrait of either shell shock or wartime alcohol abuse. We are told that Stanhope has served too long in the trenches and that he must now be "dipped in whiskey" in order to command, but the play never fully dramatizes Stanhope's dissolution or confronts the logical results of such a condition—namely, poor judgement and incompetence, faults that were, of course, endemic to alcoholic commanders.

Significantly, Stanhope's two drinking bouts in the play—in Act One, shortly after Raleigh's arrival, and in Act Three, following Osborne's death—have nothing to do with combat stress. In both instances, Stanhope reacts to a private crisis—respectively, the threat posed by Raleigh to Stanhope's engagement to Raleigh's sister, and the loss of Stanhope's closest friend, Lieutenant Osborne. Thus, Sherriff only obliquely develops the connection between alcoholism and the strain of command or the absurdity of the war. By discreetly cleaning up Stanhope's drunkenness—even denying it that title—Sherriff betrays his own inability to break completely free from comforting fictions.

The enthusiastic reception of *Journey's End* points to a final explanation for Sherriff's half-hearted development of anti-heroic themes: his nostalgia for the comradeship and emotional intensity of wartime. For most critics, the play represented a breakthrough in realism and a theatrical triumph. Harren Swaffer of the *Daily Express*, regarded as "London's most scathing critic" (Morsberger 1786), spoke for the majority: "*Journey's End* is the greatest of all war plays . . . this is English theatre at its best" (Hill 149). More revealing are the reactions of veterans—by far the largest contingent of the Savoy audiences—who "felt they were reliving their experiences" when attending the play (Hill 151). For them, *Journey's End* was, as Samuel Hynes puts it, "an experience of reality itself" (442).

Sixty years later, it is somewhat difficult to understand this reaction, particularly when the very fact that Sherriff cast his story as a play works against its scope. As in much of the literature of the Great War, Sherriff rigidly focuses on the concerns of middle-class officers; "the men," who live in the trenches outside Stanhope's dugout, exist—partly because of the limitations of the stage—as little more than abstractions. Thus, Sherriff denies us the opportunity to witness firsthand Stanhope's interaction with the ranks, to measure fully his abilities as a commander. Yet few, if any, of the former soldiers who flocked to the 594 performances of *Journey's End* at the Savoy objected to Sherriff's focus on a particular class. In the late 1920s, when acceptance of the social hierarchy in England was still—as during the Great War—much in evidence, Sherriff's veneration for the public-school boy, and lack of interest in his enlisted characters, seemed only appropriate. Nor did former soldiers in 1928 and '29 resent touches that today seem maudlin—the school-boy banter between Stanhope and Raleigh as the younger man lies dying, Osborne's gentle "tucking up" of his C.O., or Stanhope's melodramatic confrontation with Hibbert. Instead, veterans insisted that all this seemed real, and that the play invoked memories and emotions long forgotten.

The reason for such cathartic reaction is, I think, that Sherriff had less interest in interpreting the war as a whole than in portraying the emotional lives of Englishmen forced by circumstances into an intimacy surpassing any civilian norm. Samuel Hynes refers to "the hovering note of homosexuality" in the play, and, whether homoerotic or not, there is a surprising amount of physicality (442). When Stanhope dissuades Hibbert from deserting, for example, he "places his hands on Hibbert's shoulders" and promises to accompany him during his turn above ground: "We'll go up together and hold each other's hands—and jump every time a rat squeaks" (116). After being sent to bed by Osborne, Stanhope jokingly asks to be kissed (60-61).

In this respect, Sherriff's vision of the dugout reminds us of D. H. Lawrence's conception of the coal pit, another subterranean environment associated with male physicality, intimacy, and solidarity. Like Lawrence's colliers, Sherriff's officers rely on a buddy system to achieve a common goal—in this case, adherence to the ethic of "sticking it." Significantly, all of the big scenes in *Journey's End* portray officers turning to one another for support: Osborne sustains Stanhope during his despair; Stanhope, in turn, rallies Hibbert's failing courage and comforts the dying Raleigh.

Seen in this light, *Journey's End* emerges as a nostalgic evocation of the comradeship that enabled junior officers—the most mythologized segment of the British Army—to carry on despite their misgivings, crushed nerves, and even dipsomania. Thus, the play vacillates between two conflicting areas of emphasis: through Stanhope's deterioration, Sherriff raises disturbing and prophetic questions concerning the true nature of the "Great War for Civilization"; at the same time, however, he focuses on the moral code, and comradeship, that made the war at least partly attractive—even glamorous. The boom in war literature that *Journey's End* helped to trigger contained few works so openly divided on the issues of the attractiveness or the value of war. And, rather than Denis Stanhope, characters like Remarque's Paul Baumer, Aldington's George Winterbourne, or Williamson's John Bullock—all miserable pawns in a senseless conflict—came to be held up as spokesmen for the so-called "lost generation." Yet, we should not discount the role of nostalgia, as opposed to indignation and anger, in the sudden eagerness to read and write about the Great War that swept across England in the late 1920s and early '30s.

Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* went far beyond Sherriff's timid presentation of wartime dipsomania and triggered an avalanche of English works in what Cyril Falls dubbed the "brutal naturalistic school," works with little faith in abstractions or rhetoric. Yet even here one often finds an ambivalent attitude toward war experience, the assertion that the Great War had been a senseless crime coupled with a wistful regret over the loss of wartime comradeship and intensity. In *Testament of Youth* (1933), Vera Brittain warned that "the heightened consciousness of wartime" posed the greatest challenge to pacifism:

> The causes of war are always falsely represented; its honour is dishonest and its glory meretricious, but the challenge to spiritual endurance, the intense sharpening of all the senses, the vitalizing consciousness of common peril for a common end, remain to allure those . . . who have just reached the age when love and friendship and adventure call more persistently than at any other time. (291-92)

Once a war ends, Brittain argued, this "glamour" fades and appears as "the will-o'-the-wisp that it is" (292).

For many veterans of the Great War, however, at least some of the "glamour" remained, transformed over the years into a bittersweet nostalgia. In his 1966 preface to *A Passionate Prodigality*, Guy Chapman confessed that his ambivalence toward the war—his feelings of simultaneous "repulsion and attraction"—had persisted throughout his entire life. Like Teilhard de Chardin, he discovered that "in spite of everything, one loves the front and regrets it" (iii). Even Henry Williamson, one of the harshest critics of the war, continued to feel its allure long after 1918 and, in *The Wet Flanders Plain* (1929), described his mixed emotions upon returning to the old battlefields:

> The old soldier . . . sees many things by which he may recall, with a sort of quiet glamorous melancholy, those days of the War that are almost romantic, because of their comradeships, activities, immense fears, turmoils, miseries, light-thralling barrages—dwelt on in the dimness of memory, now that he is safe, free, and happy. Romantic! Yes, sometimes, late at night, the War

> is recalled with an indescribable feeling of immense haunting regret. (23)

"A sort of quiet glamorous melancholy," "[r]omantic!," "an indescribable feeling of immense haunting regret"—these phrases describe *Journey's End* perfectly. The popularity of Sherriff's play reminds us that wide-spread revulsion over the official version of the Great War only partly explains the surge of war literature at the end of the 1920s. Other forces were at work, including the desire on the part of many veterans to re-experience the Great War, to come to terms with events that inspired simultaneous "repulsion and attraction." □

Notes

1. In their social history of England from 1918 to 1939, *The Long Week-End* (1940), Robert Graves and Alan Hodges state that *Journey's End* offers "the same sort of story" as Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* or Zweig's *The Case of Sergeant Grischa* (216). For more information on the popularity of *All Quiet on the Western Front* , see Brian A. Rowley's "Journalism into Fiction: Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*," *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Holgar Michael Klein, (London: Macmillan, 1978).

2. Herbert Read complained that "between 1918 and 1928 it was virtually impossible to publish anything realistic about war" (73). See "The Failure of the War Books," *A Coat of Many Colors*, (London: Routledge, 1945). Notable works that were published during this period include R. H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* (completed in 1927) and Ford Madox Ford's Tietjens novels (published between 1924 and 1928).

3. *New York Times*, 15 Sept. 1929: ix:2.

4. "*Journey's End*," Variety 16 Apr. 1930: N. pag.

5. A similar struggle can be detected throughout R. H. Mottram's *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* (London: Chatto, 1927), Basil Liddell Hart's *The Real War 1914-1918* (Boston: Little, 1930), and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). All three writers rejected the official version of the war, but could not believe that all had been for naught.

6. John Onions offers an astute discussion of this aspect of the play in his *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War, 1918-39* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), pp. 94-95.

7. The recurrence of drunken officers in English plays, novels, and memoirs about the War attracted a flurry of angry responses in the London *Times*. Letters and editorials denouncing *Journey's End*, and other portraits of front-line alcoholism, appeared almost daily during April 1930. Indignant former officers wrote most of these, arguing that Sherriff and his successors had presented the exception as the rule. Cyril Falls offers a similar argument in his preface to *War Books: An Annotated Bibliography of Books about the Great War* (London: Davies, 1930), as does Douglas Jerrold in his pamphlet *The Lie About the War* (London: Faber, 1930). However, surviving diaries tell a different story. For a particularly frank description of wartime drinking habits, see Edwin Campion Vaughan's diary, published as *Some Desperate Glory* (New York: Simon, 1989).

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