

Journey's End: An Account of the Changing Responses Towards the First World War's Representation

Amanda Phipps*

This article examines newspaper reviews which highlight changing responses to R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* in three of the play's major runs in 1928-1930, 1972 and 2011. These three productions followed Sherriff's original script surprisingly closely, observing an officers' dugout in the days before a major German attack in 1918. The productions also proved highly successful in attracting large audiences. Yet success was accompanied by different controversies in each period over its portrayal of war, class and leadership. Consequently an examination of the social, cultural and political environments in which the productions were performed is essential to understanding the varied receptions. It will be shown that proximity from the First World War and contemporary events and beliefs caused continuous changes in cultural memory of the conflict that significantly affected audiences' approach to *Journey's End*.

British society's remembrance of and response to the First World War has changed considerably since its conclusion. Dan Todman believes personal distance is essential in explaining how different generations have reacted to the war. He claims in 1918 'the British response' was 'multi-vocal'.¹ However, negative responses that saw the war as futile and misconducted 'were much more difficult to make when they were seen to strike at the hearts of grieving fathers and mothers', and thus public criticism of the conflict was largely avoided. It was not until

*Amanda Phipps is a PhD candidate at the University of Exeter (AHRC funded). She can be contacted at adp214@exeter.ac.uk.

¹ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon & London, 2005), p. 221.

the 1960s and 1970s when these parents began to pass away that the war could be criticised with a guilt-free conscience. A ‘powerful limiting factor’ had been removed, meaning a ‘violently critical assessment’ of the conflict was no longer taboo.² By contrast, Brian Bond believes that perceiving the First World War as a ‘pointless waste of young lives’ was ‘largely shaped in the 1960s’ due to events and concerns in that ‘turbulent decade’.³ Rather than proximity being central, conflict in Vietnam and the Cold War made British society re-interpret the past from an anti-war perspective. Bond also argues reappraisal of class and individuals’ rights during the 1960s made the class-based ranking of soldiers during the First World War seem retrospectively unjust.⁴ Unlike Todman, Bond argues responses to the war were not heavily reliant on the passing of time and people, but had their nucleus in contemporary concerns.

A middle-ground between Todman’s and Bond’s arguments appears most convincing. Definitely, sensitivity weakened as the First World War moved from personal experience to historical memory. However, distance also increases the ability of current concerns to influence responses. With no first-hand experience, individuals would employ their own society’s beliefs to judge the First World War. Arguably, even Todman’s and Bond’s historical perspectives of the war are shaped by twenty-first century attitudes. For example, both believe many criticisms levelled against the war during the 1960s are inaccurate. Todman labels them as ‘myths’, whilst Bond claims the war should be viewed as an ‘unprecedented achievement of the British “nation in arms”’.⁵ As will be shown, these historical evaluations link to recent trends in which the war and the early 1900s are being remembered less harshly than in the 1960s and 1970s. As Jay Winter notes, there has been a ‘consumer boom’ around the period with ‘heritage trades’ presenting it as a bygone era when the nation united in defence of a truly Great Britain.⁶ It will be argued that with the forthcoming centenary of the First World War certain elements of the

² Todman, p. 224.

³ Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain’s Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 51.

⁴ Bond, p. 54.

⁵ Todman, p. 223. Bond, p. 93.

⁶ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 39.

conflict are being forgotten and the scathingly negative attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s are beginning to soften.

A study of newspaper reviews on R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* demonstrates these changing responses to the First World War. The play is set in 1918 and revolves around the occupants of an officers' dugout who are preparing for an expected German attack on their inadequately occupied trenches. The audience gain an insight into the characters' fears, hopes and longings for home as well as the damaging effect of trench warfare on their psyches. The play has been produced numerous times, but only three of its major runs in 1928-1930, 1972 and 2011 will be focused upon in this study.⁷ All three productions have followed Sherriff's original script surprisingly closely. They have also proved highly successful in attracting large audiences.⁸ Yet this success has not been without varying controversies in each period over its portrayal of war, class and leadership which will be explored in detail throughout this article. Reviews of *Journey's End* offer a valuable lens through which responses to its subject-matter have changed over time. The ability of these sources to shed light on cultural memory of the conflict demonstrates that theatrical productions and their reviews deserve more scholarly attention than they have previously been afforded by historians. The play's reviews illustrate the influence contemporary events have had on attitudes towards the conflict and the impact historical distance has had on individuals' ability, and even desire, to judge the First World War.

Approaches to War

Paul Fussell believes 'the British' have a 'tendency towards heroic grandiosity about all their wars'.⁹ This extreme generalisation ignores

⁷ *Journey's End*, dir. James Whale (Incorporated Stage Society, 1928). The play moved to the Savoy Theatre in 1929 where it was presented by Maurice Browne. *Journey's End*, dir. Eric Thompson (69 Theatre Company, 1972). *Journey's End*, dir. David Grindley (Act Productions and Shaftesbury Theatre, 2011). David Grindley first directed the play in 2004, but only the 2011 revival will be focused on in this article.

⁸ Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence: Berg, 1993), p. 151, p. 186. *Journey's End* 2011 Tour Website, (2011) <<http://journeysendtheplay.com/about/>> [accessed 16 December 2012].

⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 175.

the complex changes that have taken place in society's responses to the First World War. In the 1920s personal grievances meant people avoided judging the war, whereas the strong anti-war sentiment of the 1960s and 1970s meant most reacted negatively towards it. Even as this anger dampens in the twenty-first century the term 'heroic grandiosity' still seems highly inappropriate to describe Britain's attitude. As a study of *Journey's End's* reception will show, responses to its subject matter have been in a constant state of flux as personal proximity and cultural events influence society's outlook towards warfare.

In the decade immediately after the First World War emotions still ran high and many did not want to hear the conflict openly derided. The early 1920s were largely marked by silence in the arts over the war as the nation privately came to terms with its losses.¹⁰ This meant Sherriff had great difficulty in finding a company to produce his play. He explained that the public 'had shown no interest' in the subject, with every previous war play 'without exception' being a 'failure'.¹¹ For Gary Sheffield the performance of *Journey's End* in December 1928 signalled that 'the dam finally burst' on a decade of silent grief.¹² In the late 1920s there was a flood of literature on the subject such as Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* and Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*.¹³ Adrian Gregory argues these texts created an image of the First World War as 'stupid, tragic and futile' in 'popular culture'.¹⁴ Gregory's conjecture misrepresents both the literature and the period's mood. Certainly, memoirs like *Goodbye to All That* discussed war's horror and bloodshed, yet Graves begrudged his work being labelled anti-war and remained extremely proud of his regiment and service.¹⁵ Additionally the publication of this literature did not mean that society instantly consumed and converted their

¹⁰ Ann-Louise Shapiro, 'The Fog of War: Writing the War Story Then and Now', *History and Theory* 44.1 (2005), 91-101 (p. 92) <DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2303.2005.00310.x> [accessed 7 December 2011].

¹¹ R. C. Sherriff, *No Leading Lady: An Autobiography* (London: Gollancz, 1968), p. 42.

¹² Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2002), p. 8.

¹³ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000). Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).

¹⁴ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁵ Bond, p. 33.

opinions about a war they had lived through.¹⁶ This is reflected by the fact that it was Rupert Brooke's patriotic poetry, not Wilfred Owen's sombre verses, which the nation still bought.¹⁷ Thus, whilst some did begin to question certain aspects of the conflict in the late 1920s, there was no overriding resentment to the First World War. Many still wanted to feel that loved ones had been sacrificed for a worthwhile cause and were too personally connected to the conflict to accept its failings.

Sherriff wished to portray Captain Stanhope and his officers as experiencing what many soldiers had during the war. The play shows an immensely strained and alcoholic Stanhope interacting with his officers such as the wise and calm Lieutenant Osborne on whom Stanhope heavily relies and the young 2nd Lieutenant Raleigh who hero-worships his captain. The play includes a mix of mundane events and moments of great tension to show the unstable situation many lived through in the trenches. At moments the characters complain about the food provided and try to pass the time through idle chitchat and camaraderie which helps them 'stick it out'.¹⁸ This is juxtaposed with scenes of great anticipation and fear such as the ordered raid Lieutenant Osborne and 2nd Lieutenant Raleigh must carry out; which results in the death of the former. Amongst the turmoil produced by Osborne's death, the play reaches its climax as the much anticipated moment of the German attack arrives. Raleigh is wounded and brought back into the dugout to die poignantly in the arms of Stanhope. The captain then exits the collapsing dugout leaving the audience alone with the dead Raleigh and the noises of the battle taking place outside. *Journey's End* reveals the hardships soldiers suffered in the trenches and how they helped each other to continue performing their roles.

It is possible that *Journey's End*, which sold 500,000 tickets in its first year, would not have reached such success if interpreted as staunchly anti-war.¹⁹ Sherriff himself asserted 'he did not write it with

¹⁶ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), p. 449.

¹⁷ Alisa Miller, 'Rupert Brooke and the Growth of Commercial Patriotism in Great Britain, 1914–1918', *Twentieth Century British History* 21.2 (2010), 141-162 (p. 160) <DOI: 10.1093/tcbh/hwq001> [accessed 14 December 2011].

¹⁸ R. C. Sherriff, *Journey's End* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), I. 1. p. 31.

¹⁹ Bracco, p. 151.

a view to peace propaganda'.²⁰ Instead he simply wanted to 'express' the life of 'some of those men' by putting into art what he had witnessed at the front.²¹ The play was fortunately accepted as such by many reviewers. The *Daily Mail* stated 'every detail of the play rings true of infantry life', whilst the *Daily Chronicle* claimed it presented 'the war as the real fighting man knew it'.²² As many of the male audience members and cast had seen service, the play seemed a site of remembrance rather than grand philosophising about warfare. Perhaps the play provided a cathartic outlet or communicated what many war veterans had been struggling to express since 1918. The play was conceivably a focal point for the strong emotions many still held about the conflict. This is demonstrated by one veteran in the *Daily Telegraph* whose review explained that 'not merely my emotions but my memories were being stirred'.²³ As a result non-combatants also felt they were finally witnessing what friends and family had experienced abroad. The *Daily News and Westminster Gazette* praised the play for 'mak[ing] us understand their minds' and 'the common lot of our soldiers'.²⁴ Such comments provide evidence for why the play was so popular. Veterans felt their experiences were being honestly presented which made the play a source of remembrance for them and knowledge for others. Rather than viewing *Journey's End* as anti-war, reviewers respected Sherriff's work for its truthfulness.

When *Journey's End* was revived in 1972 British attitudes towards the First World War had changed significantly. Firstly, the Second World War had destroyed the compensatory belief, which was held by many, that the 'Great War' would be the war to end all wars.²⁵ Time had proved many initial beliefs about the war were untrue. Secondly, in this period British society was living through the Cold War with its threat of nuclear annihilation and was also witnessing America's conduct in the Vietnam War. The result was mass outrage in Britain with 25,000 anti-war protestors gathering in Grosvenor

²⁰ *The Times*, 25 November 1929.

²¹ *Daily Telegraph*, 23 January 1929.

²² *Daily Mail*, 11 December 1928. *Daily Chronicle*, 22 January 1929.

²³ *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1929.

²⁴ *Daily News and Westminster Gazette*, 22 January 1929.

²⁵ Belinda Davis, 'Experience, Identity, and Memory: The Legacy of World War One', *Journal of Modern History* 75.1 (2003), 111-131 (p. 112) <DOI: 10.1086/377750> [accessed 18 December 2011].

Square on just one occasion in 1968.²⁶ Tony Howard and John Stokes claim ‘Vietnam transformed’ how many British people ‘regarded wars past and present’.²⁷ A re-evaluation of the First World War appears to have taken place because of these concerns and is reflected in the art and media that gained attention. Wilfred Owen’s despairing war poetry became very popular and was introduced as a standard text on school curriculums.²⁸ The 1963 play (and later film) *Oh What a Lovely War* achieved significant recognition for its scathing depiction of the war as pointlessly begun and disastrously led.²⁹ These popular portrayals helped to formalise and cement a view of the war as the first in a succession of twentieth century conflicts that caused mass slaughter and were ultimately futile. The anti-war sentiment created by the Cold War and Vietnam was being used to retrospectively judge the past.

The anti-war atmosphere of the 1970s led to a distinct change in responses to Eric Thompson’s production of *Journey’s End*. Whereas the play was seen as a painfully truthful depiction of the conflict in the 1920s, many in the 1970s viewed it as a naïve depiction of the realities of warfare and also found its language jingoistic. The play’s dialogue in particular gained the attention of reviewers, especially claims by Captain Stanhope that ‘sticking it’ as a soldier was ‘the only thing a decent man can do’.³⁰ The *Guardian* remarked that it ‘barely questions the necessity of the whole doomed and futile enterprise’, whilst *What’s On* argued there was ‘no suggestion that the barbarism is not justified’.³¹ Rather than being seen as a saddening but truthful portrayal, the play was viewed as not judgemental enough. Society’s negativity towards all warfare meant anything short of complete condemnation drew attention.

²⁶ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 635.

²⁷ Tony Howard and John Stokes, ‘Introduction’, in *Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television since 1945*, ed. by Tony Howard and John Stokes (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 1-26 (p. 21).

²⁸ Barbara Korte, ‘The Grandfathers’ War: Re-imagining World War One in British Novels and Films of the 1990s’, in *Retrospectives: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*, ed. by Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan (London: Pluto Press, 2001), pp. 120-134 (p. 122).

²⁹ *Oh What a Lovely War*, dir. Joan Littlewood (Theatre Workshop, 1963).

³⁰ *Journey’s End*, II. 2. p. 58.

³¹ *Guardian*, 19 May 1972. *What’s On*, 26 May 1972.

Audiences in 1972 did not automatically dislike *Journey's End* because it did not correlate with the anti-war sentiment of society. Instead it was seen as something of a historical document that provided evidence of society's mentality during the 1920s. Sherriff by shrouding the conflict in language of national honour and the 'disgrace' of not fighting seemed to represent archaic attitudes.³² Distance meant that not only the subject matter, but the play itself was historicised. This is demonstrated by the *Spectator's* review which claimed Sherriff clearly remembered his war service 'romantically' leading him to present the original audience with a play that 'told it as those who were there wanted to believe it was'.³³ Rather than being viewed as a 'real' portrayal, reviewers saw Sherriff's play as an artefact from a time when people could not accept the 'truth' about warfare. Here it is perhaps useful to see the play as part of the wider theatrical scene of the period. Audience's felt that *Oh What a Lovely War* showed the true horror and futility of 1914-1918 which had been hidden from the public for so long. It is arguably the case that *Journey's End* supplemented this view. It shed light on how previous social attitudes allowed the war to happen and even prevented Britons from condemning it in the 1920s. Although the war appeared undoubtedly wrong to many during the 1960s and 1970s, the play showed how the British convinced themselves to keep fighting and supporting the war.

Todman believes the anti-war spirit that dominated the 1960s and 1970s created 'modern myths' about the First World War which continue to hold sway in the twenty-first century.³⁴ Although Britons still have strong anti-war feelings, shown by the Iraq war demonstrations, Todman is wrong to present opinions as stabilised. Arguably, anger over modern conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan is changing modern perspectives on the First World War. A journalist writing in the *New Statesman* believes disquiet over the war in Afghanistan is based around the military tactics of 'firing missiles and dropping explosives from a safe distance' which risks civilian lives 'rather than those of their own professional soldiers'.³⁵ Instead of being heroically fought for a cause the country believes in, the war in

³² *Journey's End*, II. 2. p. 56.

³³ *Spectator*, 27 May 1972.

³⁴ Todman, p. 221.

³⁵ *New Statesman*, 15 November 2001.

Afghanistan is at times perceived as being carried out in distant lands for dubious reasons with lethal modern technology.³⁶ Thus archaic wars, in which men voluntarily served their country for a national cause, may face less criticism by comparison. This is reinforced by popular media such as *Downton Abbey* that presents the early 1900s as a quaint time of old-fashioned British morals and behaviour. The show depicts men eager to fight for their country with only the villainous Thomas character trying to get a 'blighty'.³⁷ This storyline in itself connotes that only 'baddies' did not defend their country and stand by their fellow men in combat. Modern warfare can be seen as one of the key factors in changing cultural and social beliefs about the First World War and those who fought in and supported it.

Remembrance of the First World War has also assumed a high level of importance in society. Arguably, it is the very passing of time that is increasing concern with the war. Winter claims that when it comes to warfare 'Remembrance is an act of symbolic exchange between those who remain and those who suffered and died'. Furthermore the nature of the First World War in which men died in terrible conditions and in extraordinary numbers means society still feels a need to show 'acknowledgement' for what they endured.³⁸ In recent years this acknowledgement has been more reverent than in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance Armistice Day greatly declined in national significance during the 1960s and 1970s because of resentment towards the war, but in recent decades it has been growing in status.³⁹ Now large remembrance ceremonies are held on November 11th rather than the nearest Sunday. The centenary will also focus attention on the war and the British government has shrouded the event in a solemn and respectful atmosphere with Prime Minister David Cameron claiming it is the country's 'duty' to 'honour those

³⁶ Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate, 'The Soldier as Victim: Peering through the Looking Glass', *British Journal of Criminology* 51.6 (2011), 900-917 (p. 900) <DOI: 10.1093/bjc/azr057> [accessed 25 November 2012].

³⁷ *Downton Abbey*, dir. Brian Percival (Carnival Films, 2010-2011).

³⁸ Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 279.

³⁹ Matthew Richardson, 'A Changing Meaning for Armistice Day', in *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918*, ed. by Peter Liddle and Hugh Cecil (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), pp. 347-364 (pp. 356-360).

who served'.⁴⁰ It seems greater distance from the First World War and the unpopularity of recent conflicts is making some sections of society reflect less critically and more solemnly than before. Although Todman is right that Britain is not a pro-war nation, it is naïve to believe responses to the war have not changed since the anti-war spirit of the 1960s and 1970s.

Modern changes in attitudes towards the First World War are noticeable in reviews of *Journey's End's* recent tour and West End run. The play largely followed Sherriff's original script until a few moments from the end when the actors stood frozen in front of a memorial wall after a huge barrage of gunfire. This suggests all the characters died during the attack whereas Sherriff left it slightly more open-ended as to their survival. The presence of the characters created a bodily representation of the memorial which was undoubtedly meant to increase the emotional intensity of the play's closing moments. However, such an ending did not lead to reviewers claiming the play had an anti-war message. The *Birmingham Post* praised the play for being 'neither screechy nor preachy' and the *Guardian* claimed it was 'all the more powerful... because it comes with no agenda'.⁴¹ These comments suggest not 'preaching' against the war was desirable as such an 'agenda' would be unwelcome in 2011. If anything reviewers saw *Journey's End* as a positive portrayal of the British spirit. The *Mail on Sunday* described it as 'an eloquent celebration of heroism' and the *Guardian* reported it is 'a terrific old-fashioned treat'.⁴² Much like *Downton Abbey*, reviewers saw the play as presenting a bygone British character that no longer exists. The certain death of the characters did not lead to a discussion about the play being anti-war; instead reviewers focused on the bravery and heroism of the British soldiers.

The changing responses to the First World War and *Journey's End* demonstrate the need to combine Todman's and Bond's arguments about the influence of distance and surrounding cultural events. In the 1920s the war was so fresh in people's minds that reactions were often overshadowed by personal connection. By the

⁴⁰ *Gov.uk*, (28 November 2012) <<http://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-government-plans-to-mark-first-world-war-centenary>> [accessed 21 February 2014].

⁴¹ *Birmingham Post*, 28 October 2011. *Guardian*, 16 March 2011.

⁴² *Mail on Sunday*, 10 April 2011. *Guardian*, 16 March 2011.

1960s people knew the ‘Great’ War would not be the last which led to disenchantment and anger. And recently, resentment has subsided as current events have caused further re-assessment of the past. Such alterations have been reflected in the arts and media which have often represented the nation’s fluctuating responses towards the First World War.

The Officer Class and Captain Stanhope

Jay Winter and Antoine Prost believe literature created after the First World War formed ‘a history of the war... without trench soldiers’.⁴³ *Journey’s End’s* dugout setting and concern with the officer’s perspective provides good evidence for this claim. Originally reviewers did not find this problematic as their main concern was how the officers and especially Captain Stanhope reflected on the British army. However, as the war moved from living to historical memory, Britons realised the incomplete history that was being left behind. Throughout the twentieth century public attention was drawn towards the ‘common’ soldier. This changing focus directly impacted how reviewers approached *Journey’s End’s* characters and whether they were seen to truly portray the soldiers’ experience.

During the war and into the 1920s class was largely seen as a set determiner of a soldier’s rank. Some veterans such as Siegfried Sassoon bemoaned the inadequacy of upper-class generals, claiming in his memoir that ‘they must be cleverer than they looked’ because ‘they’d all got plenty of medal ribbons’.⁴⁴ Yet, Todman claims this was not the general consensus and to say in the 1920s that the war was ‘incompetently run’ could get you ‘chased from the street’.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Sassoon fails to mention that he only became an officer because of class privileges. Men with public school backgrounds were deemed more equipped to lead soldiers and therefore automatically became officers. Sherriff also received such an upgrade and as late as 1968 believed this class promotion was just because ‘without conceit or

⁴³ Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 83.

⁴⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Todman, p. 222.

snobbery, they were conscious of a personal superiority that placed on their shoulders an obligation towards those less privileged'.⁴⁶ Arguably Sassoon's and Sherriff's privileged background also helped them publish their war accounts in the 1920s.⁴⁷ As a result it was the officers' viewpoint which dominated literature and meant their perspective influenced many non-combatants' understanding of the trenches. Class bias not only influenced how the war was fought, but how it was remembered in this period.

The normalcy of class distinctions in the 1920s meant reviews of *Journey's End* did not question the play being set in a dugout. Nor was attention raised by the fact that privates were only represented in the minor role of Mason the cook. The *Daily Mirror* saw it as an all-encompassing portrayal of the British army in France, the reviewer simply claiming 'It shows life at the front'.⁴⁸ Even the *Manchester Guardian*, one of the more liberal newspapers of the period, described them as 'a handful of ordinary men' who lived 'forty-eight hours as millions lived during the war'.⁴⁹ This was despite the fact 'millions' did not enjoy a dugout's relative safety or have champagne available after a raid as the officers do in the play. Such reviews demonstrate how engrained the class system was in the period. It is likely that these reviewers knew a private's experience would be very different. Indeed, many reviewers were themselves veterans. It must therefore be concluded that the private's experience of war was never expected to be placed on stage or to gain the attention of a mass audience. In the 1920s the officers' world had come to stand for the whole.

The original production did spark mass controversy for portraying officers as having weaknesses. At a time when the army and its leaders received deep public respect it was deemed problematic for *Journey's End* to show officers struggling with the realities of warfare. For example, the character of 2nd Lieutenant Hibbert attempts to 'wriggle off before the attack' by claiming he is ill, although Captain Stanhope soon puts a stop to this behaviour.⁵⁰ In particular, concerns were raised over the unstable character of Captain Stanhope

⁴⁶ R. C. Sherriff, 'The English Public Schools in the War', in *Promise of Greatness: The War of 1914-1918*, ed. by George Panichas (London: Cassell, 1968), pp. 133-154 (p. 137).

⁴⁷ Sheffield, p. 9.

⁴⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 23 January 1929.

⁴⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1928.

⁵⁰ *Journey's End*, I. 1. p. 29.

who relied on whisky to cope as a company's commander. R. V. Dawson of the *English Review* was appalled at the character's portrayal. He claimed the British army was at 'the centre of the greatest empire' so to present it as having such a captain was 'the worst exhibition of bad taste that this century has ever seen'.⁵¹ Similarly when the play toured in Singapore the actor playing Stanhope was publically confronted by a woman accusing him of being 'a vile libel' on the British army.⁵² In the 1920s audiences were not only shocked by the presentation of an alcoholic captain, but also perceived the character as highly damaging to the military's image. Thus *Journey's End*, although praised in parts for its 'realism', was rebuked by some for presenting members of the British army as struggling under the pressure of war.

By 1972 many believed that class boundaries should be broken. It was a period in which individual rights on numerous issues were being hotly discussed and fought for.⁵³ Furthermore Arthur Marwick believes the Cold War's ideological battle between Capitalism and Communism meant Britain's class system was under heavy attack. He claims in Britain arguments over 'existing social structures' had gained the 'familiarity and comfort of a battered old armchair'.⁵⁴ This led to a re-evaluation of the army's class privileges during the First World War. Popular history books were published such as Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* and A. J. P. Taylor's *The First World War: An Illustrated History*. These books heavily criticised upper class generals for avoiding the trenches and blamed their incompetence for the heavy number of casualties.⁵⁵ With many of the generals now deceased such literature was rarely contradicted. From the vantage point of the 1960s, class privileges were seen as unjust and disastrous during the First World War.

Re-evaluation of the war in the second half of the twentieth century also caused many to become interested in the 'common'

⁵¹ D. V. Dawson, 'Journey's End: A Supplementary Estimate', *English Review* (Nov. 1929), p. 621.

⁵² Robert Gore-Langton, 'R. C. Sherriff and *Journey's End*', in *The Lowry's Journey's End Programme* (Salford, 2011).

⁵³ Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 94-95.

⁵⁴ Marwick, p. 634.

⁵⁵ Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), p. 183. A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 148.

soldier's experience. The lack of published personal testimonies from privates was seen as another example of unfair class discrimination. Additionally, the passing away of many veterans meant their experiences could be lost forever. Consequently media which portrayed their stories became extremely popular. This is exemplified by the 1964 BBC Two series *The Great War*, which had an average of eight million viewers per programme.⁵⁶ *The Great War* included extensive footage of the trenches, photographs of the conditions privates lived in and letters written by them for family and loved ones. Emma Hanna believes the series 'cemented' the public's anger over the ordinary soldier's treatment.⁵⁷ It was now the working class and those who had endured the worst that captured society's imagination. A desire to know what the working man had suffered overshadowed previous focus on the officer's experience.

Attitudes towards class in the 1960s and 1970s influenced responses to *Journey's End's* characters. Unlike recent literature and programmes that presented rancid trenches occupied by privates, the play was seen to focus unfairly on privileged officers. The *Guardian* saw the play as showing 'trench life [for] the officer class' was primarily concerned with 'complaints over porridge and cutlets'.⁵⁸ For the *Spectator* the play's public school language of 'topping' and 'ripping' created 'a touch of unreality about it'.⁵⁹ This review suggests that portrayals of the war in 1972 were seen as untruthful unless they revealed the suffering of the working-class in their own language. It was also felt that Private Mason was not taken seriously enough. The *Evening Standard* accused Sherriff of presenting 'caricatures' in which Mason was simply 'the lovable comic relief cockney'.⁶⁰ And dialogue such as 'Osborne: What kind of soup is this, Mason? / Mason: It's yellow soup, sir' does place Mason as the comic interlude to the officers' grave drama.⁶¹ Thus *The Times* seems justified in highlighting that 'in 1928, it was still the job of the lower orders to

⁵⁶ *The Great War*, pro. Tony Essex (BBC, 1964). Bond, p. 68.

⁵⁷ Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 32.

⁵⁸ *Guardian*, 21 December 1972.

⁵⁹ *Spectator*, 27 May 1972.

⁶⁰ *Evening Standard*, 24 October 1972.

⁶¹ *Journey's End*, I. 1. p. 24.

provide the laughs in a serious play'.⁶² The class-consciousness of the period meant Sherriff's stereotyping was seen as another example of officer favouritism. The recent exposure of the private's story meant audiences were no longer satisfied with such a narrow perspective of the First World War.

Unhappiness about the exclusivity of *Journey's End's* dugout did not prevent audiences sympathising with the characters altogether. In contrast to earlier reactions to Stanhope, reviewers now saw him as suffering from 'shattered nerves'.⁶³ It appears that by the 1970s society had a greater appreciation for the psychological effects of warfare. For example, Ross McGarry and Sandra Walklate argue that the Vietnam War was a fundamental 'turning point' in 'the recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder'.⁶⁴ As a result reviewers often adopted a diagnostic approach to Stanhope and felt the character deserved pity and help. Rather than being seen as a slur on the British army, *Punch* described the 'war-tortured Stanhope' as having 'schizophrenia hallucinations'.⁶⁵ The *Spectator* theorised that he was 'anaesthetising his fear in whisky'.⁶⁶ Furthermore some reviewers blamed Stanhope's superiors for placing him under such immense pressure. Benedict Nightingale from the *New Statesman* believed Stanhope created 'the real pathos of the evening' because his 'decency... was exploited and abused by the smug, crassly incompetent Kitcheners and Haigs'.⁶⁷ This statement highlights that the period reserved its most scathing resentment for generals not captains. At least Stanhope was in a dugout supporting his men and not in a château. Although reviewers did resent Sherriff's exclusive portrayal of officers, Stanhope did receive sympathy for suffering whilst supporting his men.

By 2011 Stanhope was not only seen as a character deserving sympathy, but a hero. The *Telegraph* described him as a 'brilliant leader of men' and a representation of 'old-fashioned English decency'.⁶⁸ This change in response from the 1920s is even more interesting when considering how the different actors played Stanhope. Colin Clive who played Stanhope in 1929 was rather

⁶² *The Times*, 21 July 1972.

⁶³ *Daily Express*, 21 July 1972.

⁶⁴ McGarry and Walklate, p. 903.

⁶⁵ *Punch*, 31 May 1972.

⁶⁶ *Spectator*, 27 May 1972.

⁶⁷ *New Statesman*, 26 May 1972.

⁶⁸ *Telegraph*, 25 July 2011.

reserved throughout the play and only became climatically uncontrollable when he discussed the death of his friend Lieutenant Osborne.⁶⁹ By comparison James Norton and Nick Hendrix who played the part in 2011 continuously shouted and paced the dugout. This did make 2011 reviewers like Julie Carpenter of the *Express* highlight Stanhope's 'nerve-shredded' state, yet unlike previous reviewers she emphasised that he was a very 'capable leader'.⁷⁰ And this line was followed by the *Mail on Sunday* reviewer who concluded 'his company adores and respects him'.⁷¹ Of course it must be appreciated that theatrical styles have changed over time. Nevertheless, it is still notable that the 2011 actors' volatile behaviour did not hinder modern reviewers seeing Stanhope as a heroic leader. Modern attitudes prevented other factors overshadowing Stanhope's 'decency' and commitment to his men.

This appraisal of Stanhope's 'decency' in 2011 seems inextricably linked to concerns over the modern soldier. In recent years public responses to soldiers have been complex. McGarry and Walklate believe they are seen simultaneously as 'victims' and 'criminals'.⁷² Certainly charities like 'Help for Heroes' and popular television shows such as *Harry's Artic Heroes* present soldiers as victims of war's brutality who pay a high price for bravely protecting Britain.⁷³ Yet, whilst this image creates respect and sympathy it is juxtaposed with revelations of the less than 'decent' conduct of some soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, Noel Whitty claims the 'vividness' of footage depicting Iraqi Baha Mousa being tortured by British soldiers has made the military face 'scrutiny' in Britain.⁷⁴ Viewed against this backdrop an alcoholic Stanhope who was worshipped by his men and followed orders to the letter seems much less of a disgrace to the British army. Stanhope's constant emphasis on doing the 'decent' thing has gained increasing importance in recent

⁶⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1929.

⁷⁰ *Express*, 27 July 2011.

⁷¹ *Mail on Sunday*, 10 April 2011.

⁷² McGarry and Walklate, p. 900.

⁷³ *Help for Heroes*, (2011) <<http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>> [accessed 1 December 2011]. *Harry's Artic Heroes*, dir. Alexis Girardet (BBC, 2011).

⁷⁴ Noel Whitty, 'Soldier Photography of Detainee Abuse in Iraq: Digital Technology, Human Rights and the Death of Baha Mousa', *Human Rights Law Review* 10.4 (2010), 689-714 (pp. 695-696) <DOI:10.1093/hrlr/ngq041> [accessed 11 January 2012].

years.⁷⁵ His ‘old-fashioned English decency’ appears reassuring in light of some recent soldierly conduct and places him securely in the role of hero-victim.

Another reason why Stanhope’s likability may have grown is that the issue of class has become less controversial in recent decades. This is not to suggest class distinctions are no longer a problem in Britain, but as Derek Paget explains, ‘the oppositional moment’ of the 1960s and 1970s ‘has gone’.⁷⁶ It seems Todman’s emphasis on distance is not just applicable between the war and a given period, but also between the 1960s and now. The previous outcry over class and subsequent resentment of the First World War’s military hierarchy is no longer radical. In fact programmes like *Blackadder Goes Forth* have made the subject humorous, turning serious denouncement of military leaders into laughter over their buffoonery.⁷⁷ In addition presenting the ‘common’ soldier’s perspective has lost the novel edge it once had in *Oh What a Lovely War* and the BBC’s *The Great War*. It is now commonplace for First World War accounts to include privates. For example *Regeneration* and *Birdsong* use working-class soldiers to focalise their war stories.⁷⁸ *Downton Abbey* divides attention between the upper-class worlds of the Crawley family and their servants with men from both realms going to France together. Thus in the twenty-first century it is difficult to appreciate fully that the war was once predominately told from the perspective of officers. The arts and media have corrected this unfair bias by almost inventing ‘common’ soldiers’ stories which has caused the anger felt in the 1960s and 1970s to dampen.

In 2011 reviewers of *Journey’s End* rarely criticised the social backgrounds and military positions of the characters. Indeed the theatre company created the tag line ‘ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances’ for the play.⁷⁹ Arguably this promotional language was an attempt to make the play fit with contemporary representations of the war. Such a tag line minimises the social status of officers, perhaps as the theatre company knew audiences would expect the portrayal of

⁷⁵ *Journey’s End*, II. 2. p. 58.

⁷⁶ Derek Paget, ‘Remembrance Play: *Oh What a Lovely War* and History’, in *Acts of War*, ed. by Tony Howard and John Stokes, p. 87.

⁷⁷ *Blackadder Goes Forth*, dir. Richard Boden (BBC, 1989).

⁷⁸ Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (London: Vintage, 1994).

⁷⁹ *Journey’s End* 2011 Tour Website.

‘ordinary’ men. Some newspapers like the *Herald Scotland* did suggest the dugout ‘resembles an extension of a public school dormitory’, but this response was in the minority.⁸⁰ Most reviewers, rather than being irritated by officer favouritism, searched for the ‘common soldiers’ in the play as they assumed some must be there. The *Hounslow Chronicle* emphasised that ‘the appalling death toll of the previous four years’ meant in 1918 ‘officers were no longer exclusively public school-educated’. The newspaper highlighted characters like 2nd Lieutenant Trotter who was only an officer through promotion and so in reality was ‘a private made good’.⁸¹ Reviewers appear so used to finding diversity in representations of the First World War that they sought out examples of ‘ordinariness’ in the play.

Sheffield claims ‘Upper class ex-public schoolboys have come to symbolise the British army in the First World War’.⁸² Sheffield’s statement ignores the dramatic changes in public focus over the last century. Certainly, in the decade following the war a narrow perspective prevailed due to the prevalence of officers’ literary accounts. Yet the changing concerns of society and distance from the conflict revealed gaps in First World War historical records. Consequently, focus was re-directed onto the ‘common’ soldier in the second half of the twentieth century. By the twenty-first century an all-inclusive approach to the war had become extremely normal. Responses to *Journey’s End* clearly chart these developments in class-consciousness and the changing attitudes towards soldiers of the First World War.

Concluding Remarks

Sherriff saw *Journey’s End* as a time-capsule, stating ‘I wanted to perpetuate the memory of some of those men’.⁸³ This study has shown that ‘those men’ have been remembered and interpreted in numerous ways. One of the reasons for varying responses has been the passing of time. For example, the original controversy sparked by Captain Stanhope’s portrayal suggests that society had refused to recognise there were weaknesses in an army that their family and friends had

⁸⁰ *Harold Scotland*, 17 March 2011.

⁸¹ *Hounslow Chronicle*, 09 March 2011.

⁸² Sheffield, p. 147.

⁸³ *Daily Express*, 23 January 1929.

served in. Distance has also permitted aspects like old-fashioned English decency to gain greater admiration and has endeared reviewers to Stanhope in 2011. This gives weight to Todman's claim that the 'deeper-lying' reason for changing responses to the First World War is personal proximity.⁸⁴ Clearly reception of the play has changed as the characters and events of *Journey's End* have moved from living to historical memory.

The impact of distance is inextricably linked to the influence of contemporary events and beliefs on remembrance of the war. This is best demonstrated by responses to *Journey's End* during the 1970s. As Bond notes interpretations of the war underwent a 'revolutionary inversion' in the 1960s with popular responses to the conflict 'reflecting the very different concerns and political issues of that turbulent decade'.⁸⁵ These concerns would not have been publically voiced in the 1920s, however, distance made criticising the war less of a personal grievance and more socially acceptable in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, reviewers of *Journey's End* in 1972 openly questioned the play's failure to denounce war's barbarism. The passing of time had stopped personal memories of the conflict influencing reviewers, whilst simultaneously making them more receptive to current beliefs about warfare. It is therefore essential to combine Todman's and Bond's arguments to gain a complete understanding of why attitudes towards the First World War and *Journey's End* have changed.

The above examination has also shown that the arts and media have played a significant role in influencing reviewers' responses to *Journey's End*. As Deborah Cartmell and I. Q. Hunter explain 'representation in film and fiction' is vital for 'the understanding of the past by non-historians- "ordinary people" if you like'.⁸⁶ Consequently productions of the play have been continuously measured against and re-interpreted to fit with other popular depictions of the war. Reviewers either assumed the play's message was similar to current representations of the conflict or were astonished that it was not. This reveals the importance of the arts and media in the formation of cultural memory about the First World War. Without these artistic forms to encapsulate

⁸⁴ Todman, p. 222.

⁸⁵ Bond, p. 65, p. 51.

⁸⁶ Deborah Cartmell and I. Q. Hunter, 'Introduction: Retrovisions: Historical Makeovers in Film and Literature', in *Retrovisions*, ed. by Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter and Imelda Whelehan, pp. 1-7 (p. 1).

changing attitudes, it is unlikely that there would have been such divergent responses to *Journey's End*.