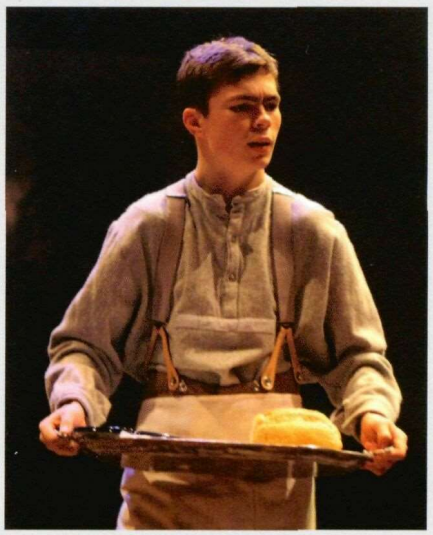
DRAMA REVIEW

JOURNEY'S END

The commencement of First World War centenary commemorations lent a marked poignancy to 2014. This reminder of historical bloodshed coincided with the last British troops leaving the notoriously dangerous Helmand province, in a sad reminder of the seemingly unchangeable habit of human conflict. *Journey's End's* relevance to a modern audience, therefore, is evident. Its' brutally compact narrative — the play's events take place over four days — highlights the horror of the sacrifice made to safeguard the future we enjoy today; and eulogises the remarkable, inscrutable stoicism of a band of too-young men, whose innocence and optimism are contaminated by a world of melancholy, mud, and whisky.

The most immediately striking aspect of this production was its set. The audience stepped onto the PAC stage to take their seats amongst burlap and barbed wire, enclosed in a powerfully atmospheric recreation of a WWI dug-out. Smoke climbed the mud-caked walls, guiding the eye to admire the astounding attention to detail which crafted a tangible sense of place. The set was not simply a visual delight — no lifeless facsimile — but rather a magnificent vessel for the cast's outstanding performances. The nature of the set positioned the audience within feet of the actors, thereby creating a near-voyeuristic proximity to the action. Within the confines of the dug-out, the audience shared in both the delightful camaraderie of this band of brothers, along with the deeply moving calamities which befell them.





The ensemble was, quite simply, excellent. Tom Dickson beautifully captured both the force and frailty of Captain Stanhope, a figure of authoritarian leadership and alcoholic inclinations — he is a courageous leader of men, yet even he cannot bear to be "conscious" in this hellish landscape. Osbourne, an ex-schoolmaster, was portrayed with warmth and subtlety by the reliably fantastic Alistair Henfrey. Jonny Ball's studied portrayal of Raleigh was perhaps the most touching performance of the play. Raleigh enters the war guided by hope and naïvety, and the way in which he is quietly transformed by his experiences was remarkably captured, conveyed with powerful understatement. Furthermore, Jamie Sword's hilarious animation of Trotter and Timmy Welsh's stair-descending skills (which hint at a nascent career as a stuntman) deserve commendation, as does the dedication and talent of the entire cast.

I have no hesitation in terming the production one of the very greatest the school has ever put on. The potent combination of R.C. Sheriff's moving naturalism and the cast's astounding performances resulted in a theatrical experience of the highest calibre and the utmost intensity: one left the theatre with a pounding heart, ears recalling the echoes of shellfire, eyes calling back tears.

Jamie P Robson, U6ASWD

