

Dramatic Representation of Trench Space as an 'Experiential Ruin' in R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* and Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie*

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ABSTRACT

Physical forms of ruin and psychological forms of ruination is an area within spatial theory that will enhance literary studies, especially literature of the First World War. The literary representation of the trench as a ruined space is a predominant feature of literature that emerges from the Great War. Among the different genres, it is drama that is ideally poised to offer a critique of the way both physical and psychological ruin can be depicted on the stage. Both R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* and Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* consciously depict trench space as a site of embodied trauma for soldiers who experienced trench warfare and, consequently, trench space functions as an 'experiential ruin.' This 'embodied exchange' emphasizes the relationship between the battlefield (or cite of trauma) and the actual war-related trauma itself. Both Sherriff and O'Casey have created plays that show the decaying landscape and decaying psyche as inseparable victims to the devastation of the First World War.

Keywords: Spatial theory, ruins, embodiment, ecology

When soldiers from Britain confronted the Western Front, they encountered an apocalyptic landscape: destroyed buildings, collapsed churches and steeples, bombed-out villages, and forests decimated by relentless shelling. Nearly all the natural topographical features of this war-generated ruinscape were underscored and grotesquely outlined by earth gutted and scarred with thousands of miles trenches and dugouts. Gone were the pastoral images that in years before might have prompted feelings of tranquility. This denuded scene now fiercely rejected any semblance of the Edenic or the sublime that may have traditionally been associated with nature. In fact, soldiers of the First World War did not witness the



awe of the sublime, they experienced only the traumatic. Similarly, they did not merely observe ruin and devastation; they experienced the ruin as a ruin. Since a ruin is fundamentally defined by the very process of decay or ruination, either through “classical” ruination in which something decays over an extended period of time or through “new ruins” that occur quickly as a result of natural or manmade devastation, it is clear that trenches of the First World War should be defined as a ruined space and analyzed for how they functioned as an “experiential ruin” where an “embodied exchange” occurred between the soldiers who occupied and inhabited said trenches and, by extension, the ruin’s own history (DeSilvey, 2013: 472). By understanding the trench as an experiential ruin, we can acquire a greater understanding of what attracted authors, poets, and playwrights to revisit these physical places as a way of inspiring ideas for narratives with the goal of articulating to the world the physical and emotional conditions they had to endure. This was particularly true for playwrights of the First World War. Consequently, it is drama that can, through staging and production, visualize the trench space and the ruin on stage to illustrate what Georg Simmel calls the “balanced tension between two forces: Nature and the human Spirit” (371). Caught in the middle of this veritable “no-man’s-land” of tension wherein the embodied exchange occurs, are the soldiers struggling with incomparable traumas of war while entrenched in a state of psychological decay.

Within the cannon of what Paul Fussell calls the “literary war” of the Great War, the genre given the least amount of attention from literary critics and historians of the First World War is drama. The real issue with this frequent omission is the failure for scholars to see theatre as the ideal, privileged place to address trauma, particularly the large-scale trauma of the First World War. For example, trauma can be performed on stage, theatre has non-verbal ways of expressing trauma, the audience becomes a secondary witness without being a victim or survivor of warfare, and plays also allow for a process of working through traumatic experiences while arousing awareness to traumatic events as its dramatic duty. Two of the best examples of the dramatic representation of life in the trenches are Sean O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie* and R.C. Sherriff’s *Journey’s End*. Both Sherriff and O’Casey rely on experiences within the trenches to propel their respective storyline. The spatial relations that emerge from soldiers occupying trench space contribute to the individual soldier’s trauma. Additionally, while O’Casey is often included in texts about Ireland’s response to the Great War and Sherriff’s play is heralded as a primary example of a Great War play, neither play has been analyzed together or for the way they uniquely illustrate the spatial representation of ruins. Both plays are unique in the way they explicitly depict trench space as an experiential ruin. In both plays, the trenches are not simply for the purpose of set design or historical authenticity, but the uniqueness stems from the trenches taking on the qualities of an additional character that shapes the narrative.

It should also be noted that both playwrights had difficulty getting their plays into production. As will be discussed, the resistance to, if not distaste for representing modern warfare on the stage, speaks to society’s lack of desire for allowing culturally traumatic events, particularly the Great War, play out on the stage. However, it is of critical importance for production companies to move beyond their initial resistance to viewing

these war plays in order to try to understand, at least in some small way, how these works allow for a much needed witness to both the lived-experience of Sherriff's play and the anti-war rhetoric of O'Casey's play and how they both encourage and allow audiences to work through their trauma in a way more productive than ignoring the often unstable conditions of post-war British life. Within the context of this argument, however, is the important connection between O'Casey and Sherriff and their representation of the trench as a ruined space and as a primary contributor to spatial disorientation and its link to issues of post-traumatic stress disorder and physiological deterioration. Both playwrights compare trench space to ruins in order to illustrate that their soldiers now physically inhabit a ruined space. Consequently, both playwrights allow for and encourage a comparison between the ruins of battle and the "slow ruination" soldiers experience. The spatial relations of the trench and the ruin are coterminous agents in how they contribute to the ruination of the traumatized subject. Understanding the soldiers as traumatized is an important link to Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as a "latent" experience "fully evident only in connection with another time, another place" (2011: 8). *The Silver Tassie* and *Journey's End* can be understood as an attempt to illustrate how spatial and temporal displacement is represented by tangible ruins—a representation communicated best by their respective stage adaptations.

Almost immediately after returning home from the front, Sherriff began writing stories based on his war experience. The difficulty, however, occurred when one story began to bleed into another story and, after several months of writing, Sherriff had only fragments of two potential plays. The frustration he felt producing only partial, incoherent narratives in two competing works was interrupted when Sherriff contracted scarlet fever. In a later interview, Sherriff attributed this particular illness after the war as the "turning point" in his writing. He explained, "For some weeks I lay in bed with nothing to do. In a cupboard nearby were my old war letters, and I began to sort them into chronological order" (Wales, 2016: 111). One might identify this as the type of ordering of experiences necessary for a narrative to crystallize. In fact, becoming reacquainted with his letters produced a palpable nostalgia that began to engulf the playwright. The byproduct of these feelings of remembrance and desire to reimage and experience the battlefield was a collection of volumes Sherriff would title *Memories of Active Service*. A further condensing of these experiences, woven around a coherent storyline, would become what we now know as *Journey's End*.

With the tangible representation of his *Memories of Active Service* neatly compiled beside his bed, Sherriff felt, at the time, that he had everything he needed to write a play that would both accurately represent his own personal experiences on the front and be true to the horrors of trench warfare as experienced by all who had endured it. The narrative itself seemed to be set, the autobiographical underpinnings were subtly infused, but something was missing. Sherriff toiled over the uneasy feeling that a seemingly integral piece had not yet been realized, which prohibited the play from being completed. In the midst of this internal, authorial struggle, Sherriff got the idea that he should revisit the areas of the battlefields in both France and Belgium. It was in May of 1921 that he, being accompanied by his father, participated in a bicycle tour and set about revisiting the

landscape that still bore the fresh scars of the Great War. It is noteworthy, that when Sherriff returned to those traumatic spaces, he did so with the intent of confronting, or reconfronting, the frontline. However, it was not the trench space that sustained his attention, but the ruins that now punctuated a landscape desperately struggling to be reclaimed and rebuilt in the wake of previously untold devastation.

Sherriff quickly developed what his father notes as a distracting fixation on sites of ruin and trenches slowly becoming reclaimed by nature (Wales, 2016: 122). Both Rose Macaulay and Chris Woodward have observed how ruins become a key site for self-reflection; an act in which Sherriff is clearly engaged (*Pleasure in Ruins*, 2011: 23). His father comments further that throughout the tour, Sherriff's camera moved away from panoramic images of his previously occupied battlefields, and focused only on the details of the desolate fields: shards of splintered metal, weaponized relics choked by wild grass, caved in trenches partially reclaimed by nature, seemingly endless piles of rusted ammunition boxes, and "everywhere, buildings in ruins" (*Letters*, 2018: 432). Although most of the trip was spent revisiting and meticulously documenting the exact places listed in *Memories of Active Service*, the observations extended beyond his noted geographical reference points and onto the surrounding ruins of villages, collapsed churches, and burnt out barns. Near the end of the trip, Sherriff even began to philosophize over the land for what it is now and what it once was; and, with it, came the captivation of seeing a landscape being slowly reclaimed by nature. He began to imagine, perhaps in a future date, generations of Britain's youth would visit these same foreign fields, observe the ruins, and dig the dirt for its relics—hidden remembrances of times past. Thus, it was in and among the ruins and fragments of war that Sherriff found his missing link; and once this journey, both literal and metaphorical, was complete, so was his play—replete with ruins and relics of its own.

In a letter to his mother dated 28 September 1916, Sherriff describes his introduction to the front: "My first impression ... was that of blackness and rain: innumerable huts with shining wet roofs and thousands of glimmering trench lights" (*Letters*, 1975: 22). It was if "[t]housands of men lived in this giant wooden city" waiting to be sent to the Somme or the Ypres Salient (22). One of his first tasks was to expand the trenches by digging into muddy no-man's-land. It was here that Sherriff acquired what he referred to as a "frantic desire to live," but also the desire to avoid the work of an infantryman on the front, if he could in anyway avoid it (71). Sherriff's terse introduction to the gloomy physical and psychological conditions, as well as the disparate war experiences of officers and infantryman, become two of the three essential components of *Journey's End*. The third component is his desire to accurately link the psychological conditions of warfare with where these conditions were lived and experienced: in ruins and trenches.

During the author's post-war trip to the battlefield, the ruins of the trenches represented a transcendent place in which the past trauma, present condition, and future potential existed simultaneously. This experience gave Sherriff the inspiration to write a play that uses the setting to create a ruined state that anticipates the soldiers doom, as the trench they are occupying will one day be collapsed and, eventually, reclaimed. Thus, the play itself

deals with time to a similar end as it utilizes its spatial dimensions. Both are working in unison to forecast a countdown to the play's final act—the trench as a ruin becomes a powerful *memento mori* that Sherriff is fully aware and one in which characters are painfully unaware. Additionally, what has been overlooked is how Sherriff uses the ruin to reinforce the play's circular narrative. I understand the play functioning as a circular narrative because it is early in Act I that the characters, officers of an infantry company, enter the trench called Lancer's Alley via ruins. Raleigh, who is one of the officers, says:

It's funny the way it begins—in that ruined village, a few steps down into the ruined cellar of a house—then right under the house and through a little garden—and then under the garden wall—then alongside an enormous ruined factory place—then miles and miles of plains, with those green lights bobbing up and down ahead—all along the front as far as you can see. (2016: 21)

The soldiers now physically inhabit a ruined space. The spatial relations of the trench and the ruin are coterminous agents in how they contribute to the ruination of the traumatized subject. Sherriff's play can be understood as an attempt to illustrate how spatial and temporal displacement is represented by tangible ruins. In the beginning of Act III, Scene I, Raleigh becomes afflicted with *ruinenlust*, which Robert Ginsberg describes as an "aestheticization" whereby the viewer sees the ruin in a Romantic sensibility in an attempt to understand the conditions of the present (14). But Raleigh is also a manifestation of Sherriff's romantization of the ruins from his post-war bicycle tour in which he imagined the day one might discover some hidden relic of a war that exists only as a distant memory, if it is remembered at all. Raleigh tells Osborne, "I can show you places in the forest that nobody knows about [...]. It gets thicker and darker and cooler" (71). Osborne responds, "They say there are ruins, somewhere in the forest, of villages that William the Conqueror pulled down to let the forest grow" (71). Raleigh then laments, "I know. We often used to look for them, but haven't found one yet. [Pause]. You must come and help look one day" (71). The conditions of the present are so traumatizing that the aestheticization of the ruin becomes a form of mental escapism. This conversation is similar to many that were had in the trenches: the idea of psychologically escaping entrenchment by describing an actual, familiar place that existed before the war in order to alleviate the symptoms of their trauma. The play ends with the image of the far point of Lancer's Alley being heavily shelled contributing to the collapse of their dugout. Once the soldiers in Sherriff's play enter into the ruinous space of the trenches, they are incapable of leaving. Both their fixation with ruins and the stage directions that have them constantly touching and staring at the mud walls of the dugout point to their entombed physical condition. This suggests the trench is an embodied space to which human consciousness becomes inseparably linked by traumatic experience.

The link between physical ruins and psychological forms of "ruination" is a relatively new concept of spatial theory that has yet to be used in the study of literary forms, particularly those used in response to the First World War. Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor, in their 2013 article "Reckoning with Ruins," argue that ruins can be used to examine the way human behavior is influenced by our external environments. They, and

many other scholars, do this in response to the fairly recent resurgence in scholarly interest regarding ruins. In so doing, DeSilvey and Edensor introduce the concept of “fast and slow forms of ruination.” Slow ruins “slip into ruination more gradually” often as a result of social or economic collapse (467). Fast ruins are typically the result of war and natural disaster (467). What is unique about the First World War is that the literature, especially memoirs, poetry, and drama written by combatants and noncombatants, both implicitly and explicitly compare the feeling of physical and emotional ruin to the architectural and environmental ruin around them. While the scholarly response to the Great War has resulted in numerous volumes from both historians and literary scholars, the connection between spatial theory of the ruin and literary forms has been overlooked. The literature of the Great War often captured this relationship between fast and slow ruination, and this is particularly true with Sean O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie*. O’Casey’s play is an ideal text to use in linking this theory in human geography with literary studies.

Scholars who have brought ruins to the forefront of the debate on space/place theory are Tim Edensor (2013), Robert Ginsberg (2004), Andreas Huyssen (2006), Dylan Trigg (2013) and Leo Mellor (2014). Dylan Trigg agrees with Mellor in that “ruins designate location of memory, in which trauma took place and continues to be inextricably bound with that location in both an affective and evidential manner” (262). These traumatic sites marked by the ruin, according to Andreas Huyssen, “can be read as a palimpsest of multiple historical events and representations” (2006: 17). Making places into a palimpsest is an essential function of the ruin. For Ginsberg, as with Huyssen, the ruin represents to the cultural consciousness that the collective has survived something (2006: 363). Ginsberg extends Huyssen’s concern by observing, “[i]n a world of scientific mastery over nature, the ruin remains a bastion of mystery and a lesson of nature’s mastery over humanity” (2004: 319). Ginsberg emphasizes the relationship between the ruin and environmental decay over historical trauma because he sees nature as that which will outlive human histories (405). But this begs the question of if there can be a true, or authentic, ruin. Huyssen classifies an authentic ruin as having “an undisputed origin” that happens over a lengthy period of time (as in slow ruination) and not “quick ruination due to war or demolition” (468). Opposed to “authentic ruins,” argue Edensor and DeSilvey, are “new ruins,” which, by Rose Macaulay’s definition “still smell of fire and mortality” (2013: 467). Ruins also challenge temporality by taking on a state of pluritemporality in that “ruins serve as emblematic sites at which to re-examine and recast our relationship with the past and our understanding of the temporal” (471). But the symbolism of the ruin is not just limited to spatially or temporally, but experientially.

The Silver Tassie is unique in the way O’Casey explicitly connects ruins to the trenches as a way of understanding both spatial history and post-war cultural disillusionment. O’Casey’s play begins in the Heegan household. There is then a sharp juxtaposition with the second act, as it begins “[i]n the war zone: a scene of jagged and lacerated ruin of what was once a monastery” (1928: 41). The next transition leaves the trenches and moves to a hospital before returning home to a dance hall for the last act. The different settings intentionally parallel and contribute to Harry Heegan’s symptoms of slow ruination. It is in

the ruins of war's devastation that Heegan first becomes disillusioned and disoriented before struggling to come to terms with his injury in Act III where he is forced to work through his symptoms and struggles with memories of the trenches and the broken promises of his future while hospitalized. The purpose of Act IV is to show that the Harry who was present in Act I is not the same Harry the audience witnesses at play's end. Much of what can be traced in each of these acts is how the hospital and trenches function similar to Foucault's heterotopias of deviation. Though Foucault's theory of heterotopology has been applied to a myriad of spaces—both real and imagined—it has not yet been fully applied to trench space. An analysis of O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* makes that link apparent. For Foucault, a heterotopia is a place contrasted with utopias and is "in a sense a placeless place" separated from the actual or the real ("Of Other Spaces"). Related to this is the way the trenches are an embodied space to which human consciousness becomes inseparably linked by traumatic experience. O'Casey's Harry Heegan suffers the same symptoms of "ruination" and, even though he survives the war to return home, he is nevertheless ruined by his experience within the trenches, which is compounded by theme of betrayal the play strongly conveys in each of its four acts.

The play itself generated mixed reviews to say the least. Even before its production, it was well-known that Yeats thought the play was "too abstract" and, in a letter to O'Casey, said, "I am sad and discouraged" to have read it; even going so far as to claim, "you are not interested in the Great War; you never stood on its battle fields or walked in its hospitals, and so [you] write out of your opinions. You illustrate those opinions by a series of almost unrelated scenes [...] there is no dominating character, no dominating action, neither psychological unity nor unity of action; and your great power of the past has been the creation of some unique character who dominated all about him and was himself a main impulse in some action that filled the play from beginning to end" (1928: 113). O'Casey's response was a sharp one. He defends both himself and the play by saying, "Now, how do you know I am not interested in the Great War? Your statement is to me an impudently ignorant one to make, for it happens that I was and am passionately interested in the Great War" (115). He continues, "Do you really mean that no one should or could write about or speak about a war because one has not stood on its battle-fields?" (115). O'Casey then asks a poignant question, "Does a war consist only of battle-fields?" (115). The *Silver Tassie* is arguably O'Casey's attempt at answering this question. Thus, Yeats's initial dismissal of the play is not entirely fair. Perhaps this is due to a combination of Yeats's own distaste in representing modern warfare on the stage, but it could also speak to the society's hesitance, if not resistance, to allowing war, particularly the Great War, play out on the stage. Even noted playwrights like R.C. Sherriff had a difficult time getting his plays into production because people largely wanted to move on from the war's devastating cultural impact. However, *The Silver Tassie* does have a "dominating character" in Harry Heegan and certainly has a "dominating action," the slow disillusionment and disenchantment Heegan struggles with when returning home.

Act I, set in the eating, sitting, and part sleeping room of the Heegan family home, establishes much of the religious debate about which the later acts elaborate including: the "sacredness of life," the nature of sacrifice, communication with God, and the meaning of

eternity and eternal reward. Most of the conversations in the Heegan household are had without Harry present but serve as an introduction to the concepts Harry will struggle with post-war when he is dealing with the injury of being paralyzed from the waist down. It is important to note that Harry is not setting out for the war for the first time but is returning to the trenches. Mrs. Heegan comments, “you’d imagine now, the trenches would have given him some idea of the sacredness of life” (21). Before we are introduced to Harry, the stage directions read, “Harry is wearing khaki trousers, a military cap stained with trench mud” (28) and “has gone to the trenches as unthinkingly as he would go to the polling booth (28); thus, the twenty-three year old has seemingly not been disenchanted by his initial experiences on the front. The Harry in Act I is more like a young, successful footballer than a traumatized soldier. When Harry notices the Silver Tassie in Act I, it is a powerful talisman that reminds him of his past accomplishments—scoring the winning goal to win the Silver Tassie trophy for the Avondale club—and, by extension, it is a symbol for the kind of success he expects to have in life after the war. It could be argued that Harry, like many of the young men headed to war, felt a certain sense of invincibility. But the end of Act I foreshadows Harry’s ruin, as it concludes with Mrs. Foran remarking, “Every little bit of china I had in the house is lyin’ above in a mad an’ muddled heap like the flotsam an’ jetsum of the seashore” (39). This seems to be a clear allusion to T.S. Eliot’s “heap of broken images” from *The Waste Land*, but it also foreshadows the muddled psychological heap of Harry Heegan when he returns from the trenches as broken as the ruined structures encountered in his service on the front lines.

As previously stated, the setting of Act II is sharply juxtaposed with that of the first act. The scene is set within the ruins of a monastery. The walls are mostly caved in, the windows are shattered, the arches broken. But, “between [...] two lacerated fingers of stone can be seen the country stretching to the horizon where the front trenches are” (40). “Here and there,” the stage directions continue, “heaps of rubbish mark where houses once stood. The ground is dotted with rayed and shattered shell wholes [and] across the horizon in the red glare can be seen the criss-cross patterns of the barbed wire bordering the trenches” (40). What is unique about this scene with respect to ruins is that ruins are typically romanticized from the perspective of the ruin-gazer standing outside of the ruin gazing into the derelict structure and idealizing the present through the physical remnants of the past. Conversely, O’Casey deliberately places his soldiers from within the ruin whose perspective on the outside world is shaped by the lacerated walls of a ruined monastery gazing onto not a pastoral, or idealized landscape, but onto shattered forests, and land scarred by trenches. The monastery is a victim of a “fast form or ruination,” but the soldiers occupying this ruined space are subject to the slow decay of their surroundings. For Christopher Murray, “it is this ‘distortion’ of setting—to suggest the point of view of a consciousness enduring a nightmare—which stamps the design as expressionistic” (193). According to Murray, “[t]o say more on this subject would be tedious [but] [i]t is labored so far only to counteract O’Casey’s later denial of any knowledge of expressionism. The point is important because in forsaking realism O’Casey was committing himself to the unpopular theatre, the theatre of art. [This] new play was to be an off-key love story blasted apart by war and rendered

nightmarish by betrayals of many kinds" (193). Additionally, I agree with Ronan McDonald, who says, "The broken shell of [the] monastery in Act II not only evokes the persistent religious theme, but also provides a view of the 'country stretching to the horizon where the front trenches are' (ST 41). Nowhere in O'Casey's work is private life and human subjectivity more thoroughly compromise by cold instrumentalism and publicly sanctioned barbarism. The [setting of Act III], then, "is fitting for this conduit between public and private, as traumatized and wounded soldiers are brought onstage" (McDonald, 2002: 120).

The ruin as an antithetical image to the pastoral plays a significant role in developing Harry's state of ruination. For example, Act III is similar to Act II in that its primary setting, "the upper end of a hospital ward," is complimented by its exterior: the tranquil grounds of the hospital's estate. Harry first impulse when he enters into the main room is to move past the fireplace and to face the window onto the grounds. Throughout the third act, Harry frequently "looks out into the ground," typically whenever someone tries to engage in conversation with him. What's interesting is that, if following the stage directions, Harry never breaks his gaze from the window onto the grounds, even when being spoken to directly; thus, transforming the window into a kind of mirror space that reflects a vestigial image of his broken self. This is especially true when Surgeon Maxwell attempts to speak to Harry while Harry is "looking intently out into the grounds" (84). As Harry leaves to rest for his operation in the hopes of regenerating feeling and mobility in his legs, "half-way out he turns his head and stretches to look out into the grounds" before going on (85). Harry's constant fixation on the pastoral grounds can be understood as a way of counteracting the state of ruination he is struggling against as well as a stabilizer to the heterotopia of deviation the hospital signifies. Of course any hope of physical or emotional reclamation from his ruined state is destroyed when his family visits him only to discover he has been abandoned by Jessie, his love interest before the war, and his mother, whose worries seem to be more towards his war pension than concern over his actual health. So much so that Harry remarks to Susie, "If I could mingle my breath with the breeze that blows from every sea, and over every land, they wouldn't widen me into anything more than the shrivell'd thing I am" (95). Harry is reduced in such a way that he mimics the setting of Act II where "every feature [seemed] a little distorted from its original appearance" (42).

The purpose of Act IV, set in the dance hall of the Avondale Football Club, is to take the the downtrodden state of Harry developed in Act III and link it to the new signification of the Silver Tassie trophy. Christopher Murray explains the influence the tune "the Silver Tassie" had on O'Casey, writing, "Around the same time he got started on *The Silver Tassie*. Something sparked when he heard his new friend Billy McElroy, a coal merchant, sing the Burns song, 'Go fetch to me a pint o' wine / And fill it in a silver tassie.' The song is a farewell to a loved one as a young man leaves for war. In O'Casey's imagination the young man was a footballer from East Wall, the silver tassie at first the trophy he wins and then the priest's chalice at Mass, and the Great War. He knew there was a play in it when he had a tune to sing" (190). Slowly over the course of the play, Harry becomes a ruined subject, a process which is demarcated by the changing meaning of the silver tassie. At the beginning of the play, the silver tassie is a trophy symbolizing the hope Harry has for his

future. In Acts II and III, the idea of the silver tassie has a greater connection to a priest administering the sacrament than it does a trophy. By the end of Act 4, however, the silver tassie acquires metonymic qualities in that it becomes more of a representation of hope potential that befell not only Harry but an entire generation who fought in or experienced loss because of the First World War. Harry, looking at the condition of the cup, which has been flattened under his wheelchair, laments that the cup is now “[m]angled and bruised as I am bruised and mangled” before throwing his once cherished cup onto the floor (129).

Both Sherriff and O’Casey rely on the graphic images and experiences of soldiers within the trenches to propel their respective storyline. The spatial relations that emerge from soldiers occupying trench space contribute to the individual soldier’s trauma. A study of Sean O’Casey’s *Harry Heegan* and Sherriff’s *Osborne and Raleigh* provides needed insights into not only the embodied exchange between soldiers of the trenches and subsequent cultural disenchantment but also how drama, as a literary form, was and is uniquely positioned to illustrate the “dominating action” of the first half of the 20th century. Their plays confirm the need to study trench space, not only as an embodied space, but as an experiential ruin, meaning the trench is the link between the soldier as individual-in-context and the history of war trauma. It also suggests that trauma theory should conduct more research to present a definitive connection between traumatized people and traumatized landscapes. The poets and authors discussed here have all provided evidence that their traumatic experience could be seen as an extension of the large-scale traumas witnessed against nature. It is also clear that there is still much to say about war’s ability to disrupt the spatial histories of the places in which the conflict occurs as well as how the Great War—and wars in general—contribute to both ecological decay and the ruination of individuals affected by conflict. As soldiers and anti-war activist playwrights turn to literary forms to articulate their experiences, scholars from within literary studies will only benefit from continuing to link concepts in spatial theory to address these issues. The intent is not only to suggest how formidable the ugliness of this world can be but to suggest that we can still have the hope of redemption from our ruins; and that these shattered landscapes need not equate to the ruined collective or individual.

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