



[World War One Centenary : Continuations and Beginnings \(University of Oxford / JISC\)](#)

## Michael Morpurgo again (cross-post)

by Kate Lindsay

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Below is a cross-post from [George Simmers Research Blog](#), on Michael Morpurgo's recent article for [the Guardian](#). It raises questions around the ethics of being flexible with historical accuracy to weave a good story, and opens again the old [Literature v History](#) debate. Just one of many debates which we'll see plenty of as the [History Wars](#) hot up for the Centenary.

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## Michael Morpurgo again

Michael Morpurgo's article in Wednesday's Guardian ([?First world war centenary is a year to honour the dead but not to glorify.?](#)) contains some odd assertions. He writes of his play War Horse (which has, he modestly reminds us, been called 'the greatest anthem to peace' ever seen on stage, and which [has now opened at Der Theater des Westens in Berlin](#).)

This autumn, the National Theatre's iconic production of War Horse opened in Berlin. It is, I am told, the first play about the first world war to be put on there since the first world war began.

I am no expert on German theatre, but I wonder who told him that. Clearly someone who had never heard of Piscator's famous 1927 production of *The Good Soldier Schweyk* (which starred Peter Lorre, and had Bertold Brecht and George Grosz on the creative team). The informant had also never heard, obviously, of the scandal surrounding Fritz Kortner's production of *The Silver Tassie* at the Berlin Schiller-Theater in 1953.

I bet there have been more German plays to add to this list (Did none of Toller's ever reach Berlin?) but I can also inform him that an [English-language production of Journey's End was shown in Berlin in the late twenties](#) (and drew praise even from the right-wing press) and that Joan Littlewood took *Oh What a Lovely War* to Berlin in the late sixties. (She tries to release balloons to fly symbolically over the newly-constructed Berlin Wall, but unfortunately the wind was going in the wrong direction. I wonder if this gave her a momentary sympathy with the British officers who messed up the first gas attacks?). So Mr Morpurgo is misinformed. But then he never was one for letting the facts get in the way of a good story?

In this article, he implies that he was moved to write War Horse by meeting with Great War veterans. This time, though, he does not mention that inspiring picture of a horse in the village hall, [which he recently admitted, never actually existed](#)

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