

ARTS & CULTURE

## Trailer: ‘Benediction’ Recalls the Troubled Life of Gay British Poet Siegfried Sassoon

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As the trailer opens for the poignant new biopic *Benediction*, we see a British soldier answering a sequence of questions:

“Name?”

“Sassoon, Siegfried.”

“Rank?”

“Second lieutenant.”

“Disease?”

“I’ve had some sort of breakdown.”

The now genuinely exalted WWI poet Sassoon, closeted his entire life, would eventually pass away some five decades later, just one month after the United Kingdom passed the Sexual Offences Act in July of 1967, which at last decriminalized homosexuality. He was just shy of his 81st birthday.

### Benediction | Official Trailer | In Theaters June 3



The “breakdown” he was referring to had to do with the terrible horrors of the Great War, during which he had become a decorated hero. His poignant poetry documented all he had seen and been through.

The film is by Terence Davies, who has previously directed Gillian Anderson in *The House of Mirth*, Rachel Weisz in *The Deep Blue Sea*, and most recently Cynthia Nixon in *A Quiet Passion*. So yes, he has the proper sensitivity for visceral period dramas – and *Benediction* is remarkable for its strikingly evocative cinematography, especially as we see Siegfried – played with an anxious intensity by Jack Lowden – ambling through the lavish salons of a postwar England, his writing having afforded him a certain level of notoriety. (There are also black & white flashbacks to scenes of warfare, to remind us of the savagery that shaped him as a young man).



Despite the seriousness of the subject matter, the legendary British wit is nevertheless on full display. When he tells a publisher, “I’ll try to write something light and amusing,” the reply comes, “There’s no need to go *that* far.” And when his partner Calam (Stephen Tennant) asks him, “What should I do about my hair,” he responds bitingly, “Have you considered topiary?”

Sassoon eventually married heiress Hester Gatty in 1933, but the marriage unsurprisingly collapsed in 1945. And one line in the film piercingly sums up what it was like to live with the secrets of being a gay man in Britain during that time: “All my life I feel as though I have been waiting for a catastrophe to happen.”

*Benediction* arrives in theaters June 3 via Roadside Attractions.



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