“Cruelties Incomprehensible”:
The Alienated Gaze at War in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* Trilogy

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Abstract

Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy, comprising *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995), is a work of historical fiction that re-examines various aspects of World War I. The central contention of this thesis is that the trilogy is a transgressive narrative which aims to subvert traditional or normative views of the war. The trilogy’s author and its major characters occupy an alienated status that predisposes them to respond to and understand the war within non-traditional parameters. Chapter One examines the significance of the author’s position as a historical fictionalist writing about war and several noted people involved in the war and its consequences. The chapter refutes criticisms that have been levelled at the trilogy’s historicity, suggesting that such criticism indicates a failure to understand the nature and intent of historical fiction, which exists only partially in the discipline of history, and as such is alienated from strict historical parameters. The chapter discusses what history is and how history and its relationship with fiction is understood by historians and by writers. The following four chapters of the thesis focus on aspects of the trilogy that suggest its narrative position is alienated in specific ways that engender a transgressive approach to war. Chapter Two focuses on alienation brought about by witnessing grotesque imagery on the battlefield. Men who witness the horror of gross bodily mutilation, going on to suffer what was generally deemed to be “shell-shock,” become initiated into a special knowledge, or “gnosis,” of the inhumanity of war. The chapter also explores the relationship between grotesque injury sustained in battle and ideas of the literary grotesque, arguing that the mutilated body in the context of the war novel has become a special sub-category of the classical grotesque. Chapter Three examines the homosexual gaze of several of the trilogy’s main characters, suggesting that
Britain’s homophobia and its criminalisation of homosexuality are significant determining factors in the anti-war and anti-heroic stance expressed and adopted by the trilogy’s alienated homosexuals. The chapter contends that the homosexual orientation of several of the trilogy’s protagonists, which necessitates their habitation of Foucauldian heterotopic spaces, or “counter sites,” is critical in the adoption of their transgressive attitudes to war. Chapter Four suggests that Pat Barker’s gender, as well as the presence of defiant female characters in the narrative, challenge ocularcentric and androcentric views of war. Occupying an “ex-centric” locus that is alienated from masculinist mythology, the trilogy’s women are better positioned than men to recognise the unsoundness of war’s rationales. Chapter Five relies upon Jacques Derrida’s notion of hauntology and examines the final transcendent stance of the trilogy’s most alienated character, a revenant that not only inhabits an indeterminable narrative locus, but is also unable to be contained within any particular character taxonomy. By ending with an enigma, the narrative suggests that a solution to war is unlikely to be found.
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Declaration of Originality

This thesis is my own work and does not contain information that has been generated by persons other than myself, except where due acknowledgement has been made. The thesis has been completed during the course of enrolment in a PhD degree at The University of Western Australia and has not been used previously for a degree or diploma at any other institution.

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INTRODUCTION

Wilfred Owen’s observation in a preface to his war poems that “[a]ll a poet can do today is warn”\(^2\) seems to imply that the poet’s voice of warning will go unheard. Foremost among the poets of World War I, Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were masters in capturing repugnant images of bodily injury based upon experiences at the front. Sassoon aptly dubs such episodes of slaughter “cruelties incomprehensible,” unconscionable acts that men only learned to perfect via the example of their own “tyrannous” god. A novelist writing long after the slaughter is unlikely to be any more successful than the poets in warning readers against war and slaughter. Nevertheless, the story told by the novelist is capable of commanding new insight into the war’s events, as modern eyes are sometimes necessary for a degree of objectivity only possible with the advantage of distance from the original context of the war experience.

The volumes of Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy: *Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door* and *The Ghost Road*, were published in 1991, 1993 and 1995 respectively.\(^3\) Sharon Monteith correctly notes that the work “provides the most sustained and challenging late twentieth century perspective on the First World War in literature.”\(^4\) Its characters include several noted historical figures and others that are

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\(^1\) ‘Asking For It,’ in *Siegfried Sassoon: The War Poems*, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 146. Published in *Time and Tide*, 10 November, 1934.

\(^2\) A fragment of Owen’s preface to the collection of his war poems he had hoped to publish in 1919 states “All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the Poets must be truthful”: Stallworthy, Jon, ed., *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), 192.

\(^3\) References throughout this thesis are to the Penguin edition: *The Regeneration Trilogy* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1999).

entirely fictional, such as Billy Prior. The characters exist and function at a certain remove from society, as they are mentally and emotionally distanced from what are considered to be normative roles, experiences and attitudes. It is the loci of alienation experienced by these characters that engenders their transgressive responses to the war and empowers the trilogy’s anti-war intent.

As a work of historical fiction, the *Regeneration* trilogy respects various historical records, but uses an imaginative representation of history in order to engage discursively with its major concentrations of interest; namely, World War I, the poets Sassoon and Owen, and Dr William Halse Rivers (1864-1922). Ruben Borg notes that there exists in the world “a geometry of relations between fact, fiction and truth”; it is by exploiting this strange geometry that Barker opens her narrative to fertile fields of inquiry into the Great War’s influence upon its protagonists. Though the war ruins lives and youthful ideals in the trilogy, war is not, as it cannot be, defeated. What is defeated in the narrative is the notion that war is a noble enterprise: the facts of combat to some extent speak for themselves, for the many details of atrocity can only horrify. Both history and fiction assist Barker in her representation of what occurred, and what may have occurred, in the war, but the gaze of a historical novelist exceeds the boundaries that both strict notions of history and strict notions of fiction might impose. The trilogy’s fictive-historical examination of the war is especially sympathetic to the position of alienated characters for whom the usual myths and rationales upholding war as a worthwhile course to pursue have been sorely tested by experience.

Chapter One discusses how the gaze of the historical novelist enables Barker to incorporate the historical past into her fictional world without necessarily

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5 It is possible that Prior is a literary device utilised by the author in part so as to represent a version of Owen’s undocumented sexual life. Mark Rawlinson notes that Prior is “a device for getting close to Owen [and] in some senses converges on the historical figure as if they have literally come to occupy the same space”: Mark Rawlinson, *Pat Barker* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2010), 99.


compromising what is traditionally understood to be “actual” history. The historical novel alienates itself from some of the strictures of history by inventing what is unknown, whilst working to ensure concordance with what is known. Several critics have attacked the Regeneration trilogy on the basis of historical inauthenticity in its representation of trench life, the Great War, and contemporary Britain; these claims can only be satisfactorily addressed by carefully considering the nature and purposes of the trilogy’s narrative, as well as the nature of history itself. There are substantive historical bases to the events and to many of the characters of the trilogy’s narrative, all of which Barker has researched extensively; it is reasonable, therefore, to expect a fairly high degree of historical verisimilitude in the text, and to be critical if that high standard is not met. My close examination of several history-based criticisms of the trilogy reveals that they are generally unsupportable. In order to refute history-based criticism of the trilogy, the chapter considers what history is, how it has been defined or understood, as well as various perceptions of what we consider “the past” to be. The chapter also examines Linda Hutcheon’s concept of historiographic fiction, or historiographic meta-fiction in order to understand the degrees of freedom from strict historical accuracy (if indeed there is such a thing) that are open to a historical novelist.

Alienation was an experience many soldiers were very suddenly initiated into after horrendous experiences in battle. The extreme horrors of bodies blown apart sometimes endowed witnesses with an unwelcome but profound knowledge, or gnosis, about the nature of war that set such men apart from others, or lifted them onto a plane of understanding that only came from the closeness of the horror. Chapter Two explores the trilogy’s abundant images of grotesque horror sustained on the battlefield and suggests that these images owe a debt to the rich history of grotesque imagery in literature. The literary grotesque originally comprised elements of carnivalesque humour melded with horror, exciting an unsettling response of fascinated revulsion. The classical idea of the literary grotesque, never strictly defined, has broadened out in various fictional realms over time, and in the realm of the war novel, depictions of gross bodily mutilation constitute a particular category of the grotesque that I suggest may be termed the “war-novel grotesque.”

The trilogy’s descriptions of war injury include numerous instances of bodily mutilation, including the splattering of brain matter, one singularly nauseating depiction of involuntary cannibalism, and an explosion in which a soldier’s entire body is blasted out of existence with the exception of one eyeball; these amount to tropes of grotesquery that evoke a repugnance towards the atrocities of war.

Chapter Three explores the significance of the homosexual and bisexual orientations of several protagonists. The trilogy commandeers the homosexual gaze of these characters as a powerful and hitherto largely underexploited position from which to re-examine the Great War, its tragedies and its horrors; this alienated vantage point reveals a gnosis of the war that is particular to homosexual combatants. The chapter examines the ways in which the narrative of the trilogy constantly centres itself in spaces defined by Foucault as “heterotopias,” or spaces detached from normative life, in order to represent such normally unreported and lesser known responses to the War. As Craiglockhart’s two most famous shell-shocked patients, the war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, were homosexuals, the relationships between sexual orientation and attitudes to war warrant very close consideration. I do not suggest there is one view of war common to all homosexual men; simply, that the heterotopia of homosexuality in the trilogy operates as one of several strong narrative aporias in a context of pro-war hegemony, enabling or empowering the homosexuals’ transgressive attitudes to war.

Although the primary protagonists of the trilogy are men, the gaze attributed to those male characters is constructed by a female author. Chapter Four examines the power of the female gaze provided by the trilogy, suggesting that as a woman Barker is situated in a position of alienation from many of the male war writers who subscribe to the mythologies of the Great War. The author quite self-consciously circumvents traditional narrative patriarchy and male mythologies that characterise most war writing by men. As my argument establishes, the narratives of male war writers that aim to expose appalling brutalities or the seeming pointlessness of war nevertheless express an impassioned reverence for particular instances of courage and heroism in the course of battle, and thus inspire a sense of idolatry for the warrior. The chapter compares Barker’s gaze at war in the trilogy with some of the outstanding contemporary female writers on the war, including Vernon Lee,
Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Edith Wharton. Such women evince varying degrees of freedom from hegemonic, war-glorifying attitudes in their writing, questioning the generally accepted idea, even amongst those who are opposed to war, that giving one’s life in battle is an act of heroism. Barker foregrounds several brash and defiant women who reject such culturally programmed roles as the compliant, quiet spouse who is supporter of the war ethic, as well as the supposedly generic family-woman of the propaganda poster commanding her husband or son to go to war. The chapter also notes that although in one recent male-authored war story the female gaze is accorded validation, the normative androcentric view of war in narratives remains dominant, as a male-directed film version of *Regeneration* demonstrates in its removal of homosexuals and its diminution of female roles.

Chapter Five draws upon Derrida’s notion of hauntology to interpret the meaning of the several ghosts that feature in the narrative, and in particular the ghost of Njiru which utters the final spoken words of the trilogy. Ironically, the ghostly gaze at war represents the most unexplainable, and yet perhaps the most humanly pertinent and meaningful, of the several loci of gaze within the narrative. A “revenant,” in the sense of a spirit of a deceased person returning to the living world, cannot actually be; hauntological discourse nevertheless affirms that revenants in the world of literature are rich vectors of meaning. Just as the trilogy approaches completion, the appearance of an unghostly revenant introduces a further plot complication that thwarts narrative closure.

The ghost poses a spectro-poetic narrative enigma that is analogous to the problems posed by war, for spectres, as formless forms, or essences without essence, cannot be understood ontologically; they are as beyond our reach as the solutions to war seem to be. Characters in fictive works exist only as constructs of imagination, but spectral “characters” occupy a less clearly defined narrative paradigm that is situated at some degrees beyond flesh-and-blood characterisation. While the narrative affirms the chieftain Njiru’s physicality in a hospital ward at the end of the trilogy, it also nebulises him, thereby underwriting this important spectre’s ontological precariousness. It is the very precariousness of the spectre’s existence that cements its extreme alienated status; since alienation throughout the trilogy acts
as a catalyst to insight, the peculiarly extreme alienation of the spectre guarantees its authority as an apotheosis of insight into the human problem of war.

The Regeneration trilogy’s reimagining of World War I through the alienated vision of its various protagonists is unique in its foregrounding of characters whose homosexual orientations are not shied away from, or casually mentioned, but instead have a narrative function. Many other novelists, such as Hemingway, Remarque, Barbusse and Aldington, also wrote novels featuring soldiers who become disillusioned with and bitter about the war, but very few other novelists have so unambiguously and sympathetically allowed homosexual soldiers in the First World War to be the major protagonists in an extended narrative.\(^9\)

Originality and uniqueness of vision do not, however, ensure there is a final word on the Great War to be found in the trilogy, for any approach to the ever-perplexing subject of war is bound to end in a place of indeterminacy. No matter how ghastly, tragic and pointless the fighting of war proves itself to be many times over, history suggests that war is inevitable in human society. The task of the war novelist is not to solve the problem of war, but to tell a story. My analysis comprises a close reading of the trilogy in the traditional sense, but also relies extensively on the deconstructionist approaches of post-modern literary theorists, notably Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. I agree with Jane Gallop that “[d]econstructionism did not challenge the centrality of close reading to English; on the contrary, it infused it with new zeal.”\(^10\) Close reading and deconstructive analysis together fortify against obsolete notions that there are “timeless universals”\(^11\) in works of literature.

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\(^9\) Though there is a dearth of sympathetically portrayed homosexual soldiers or homosexual activity between soldiers in the war novel, footnote 469 in Chapter Three of this thesis alludes to a wholly fictional gay character in the World War II setting of Captain Corelli’s Mandolin by Louis de Bernières (London: Vintage, 1998). In James Jones’s From Here to Eternity, also set in World War II, soldiers engage in oral sex with civilian men in exchange for drinks: “To hell with it. I’ll take me fifty cents and go to town and pick me up a queer. At least I’ll get a few drinks and get my gun off”: James Jones, From Here to Eternity: The Complete Uncensored Edition (New York: Dial Press Trade Paperbacks, 2012), 144. Since the sexual engagement as described is in the nature of a commercial transaction, the possibility of the soldier’s homosexual orientation is impliedly negated. See also my reference in note 460 to a homoerotic episode in C. S. Forester’s World War I novel, Brown on Resolution.


The *Regeneration* trilogy represents a society at war refracted by the author’s fictional artistry, as is the remit of any war novelist. By weaving into its exposition of the war the seminal but tragically brief friendship between two extraordinarily gifted homosexual soldier poets, the tribulations of the wounded under the healing work of W. H. R. Rivers, and the somewhat picaresque life of a traumatised patient, the narrative becomes a multi-faceted exploration of Edwardian societal malaise. It seems unlikely that a world so afflicted by a wealth of seriously unresolved problems will ever be entirely free of war, unless perhaps the insistence, at the end of *The Ghost Road*, that something truly *is* which actually *cannot* be, suggests that the idea of a warless world ought never to be abandoned, even if its realisation seems impossible.
CHAPTER ONE

Regenerating War in the Historical Novel

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton, Four Quartets*¹²

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it.

Hans-George Gadamer¹³

Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy is a work of historical fiction reflecting a seemingly indefatigable public interest in World War I. Ingrid Gunby maintains that books about World War I “function in the public mind as fetishes through which a conservative Englishness denies its present” and represent “not so much … ‘active historicity’ … as unhealthy atavism,”¹⁴ or a yearning for what is often thought of as a simpler time. In fact, readers with war writing fetishes may be yearning not for imagined simplicity but rather for one more attempt to explain the war, even if that explanation is certain to be questioned or challenged by subsequent writers. Fredric Jameson describes war as one of the “collective realities, which exceed representation fully as much as they do conceptualization and yet which ceaselessly tempt and exasperate narrative ambitions.”¹⁵ In fact it is precisely because war can never be entirely satisfactorily represented that it presents itself as an endlessly appealing challenge to writers.

Barker’s trilogy focuses on shell-shocked men treated at Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh in 1918 by renowned psychologist, neurologist and anthropologist Dr W.

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¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, “War and Representation,” *PMLA* 124, no. 5 (2009), 1547.
H. R. Rivers. As Sassoon and Owen are key characters in the novels of the trilogy, Barker has attempted to reflect factual information about their treatment at Craiglockhart as faithfully as possible, appending notes to each volume of the trilogy which detail the medical and biographical data consulted, and which aim to “help the reader to know what is historical and what is not.”\textsuperscript{16} Niall Ferguson, referring to the \textit{Regeneration} trilogy and several other war novels, asserts that “it is not from historians that the majority of modern readers gain their impressions of the First World War, but from books like these.”\textsuperscript{17} If this is true, it suggests readers place high levels of trust in the historicity of writers who confess to some fictional overlay, as though that admission absolves the writer from actual deceptiveness or factual inaccuracy. Thus, incidents in the trilogy which purport to be re-presented “historical” events may amount to a surrogate form of historical knowledge for readers who are unfamiliar with historical sources. Martin Löschnigg considers that official war writing drops back to second place in the public mind after the masses of unofficial war literature:

\begin{quote}
[T]he prominence of literary documents in some historiographical works on the war … bears witness to how memoirs, novels, and even poems by combatants have succeeded in replacing “official” histories of the war with their own representations.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The implication of Löschnigg’s statement is that fictional writers such as Barker usurp the historians’ rightful place as official recorders of World War I, and that published works within the separate disciplines of literature and history compete with one another in their representations of historical events such as the World Wars. The three criticisms levelled at the trilogy addressed in turn in the first part of this chapter are that it is historically inaccurate, that aspects of it are anachronistic, and that it is guilty of mythologising aspects of World War I. My analysis of the trilogy explores contentious issues raised by suggestions of historical accuracy within historical novels and concludes that the trilogy’s post-modernist approach to history implies recognition of the contingent and uncertain nature of much historical knowledge. I argue also that the trilogy does not mythologise the war; on the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Author’s Note, \textit{Regeneration}, 220.
\end{footnotes}
contrary, heroic myths and nationalist ideas which promoted the war as a just or worthwhile exercise are directly challenged by the trilogy.

The latter part of the chapter situates the *Regeneration* trilogy within the canon of influential novels of the twentieth century whose focus is on World War I. The trilogy belongs to the genre of war novels begun by Henri Barbusse and continued by Erich Remarque and others, novels that draw upon actual experiences of war but include fictionalised content in order to convey war’s ultimate, horrible absurdity.

**A competition for authority**

Brian Bond, in a pessimistic tone, cites Modris Ekstein\(^{19}\) as exposing “the ascendancy of the literary over historical interpretations of the war.”\(^{20}\) Bond suggests we are living in an “anti-historical age of disintegration,” for it is artists and writers, and not historians, who provide us with the meaning of war; this situation, he claims, is “dismal.”\(^{21}\) Bond suggests further that between historians and historical novelists there is a “competition for authority”\(^{22}\) on the Great War.

Caroline Finander contends that there exists “an exclusionary strategy” on the part of historians antagonistic to historical novelists:

> [T]he sites of similarity between literature and history have increasingly taken on the appearance of battlefields where historians construct ever higher barricades to defend the identity and distinctiveness of their besieged discipline. History continues to distinguish itself from literature by appeals to the existence of the past as real, to evidence as a source of limitation and verification, and to the discipline as a collective enterprise.\(^{23}\)

The perception that writers of historical fiction misrepresent history is propounded by literary critic Bernard Bergonzi, who advances a conservative historian’s argument in attacking Barker for adopting what he deems is a “mythic, … fixed,

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22 Rawlinson, *Pat Barker*, 80.
static and ahistorical” perspective on World War I. Mark Rawlinson, however, interprets the trilogy’s understanding of the history surrounding World War I quite differently:

Barker has created a narrative representation which simultaneously draws on the historical archive and makes a virtue of refracting it through the preoccupations of later generations … Barker comes closer to constellating the elements which make up the war of our understanding, the perennially repeated, and revised, symbol of an event that can never be assimilated enough.

Thus Rawlinson suggests that the Great War is remembered and re-presented in a refracted form in literature as writers are driven by the need to re-assimilate it into an ever-changing present. As Barker’s protagonist Billy Prior observes, “[t]he past is a palimpsest … Early memories are always obscured by accumulations of later knowledge” (264). The trilogy consciously resists any “fixed” notions of historical memory, just as it forges its own place against, rather than in alignment with, other fictive accounts of the Great War. Ingrid Gunby contends that Barker’s texts “disrupt, or collaps[e] ‘fiction’ into ‘history.’” While Gunby considers that Barker is “unforthcoming about, even seemingly unaware of, her texts’ relationship with literary representations of war,” in fact the “seeming” unawareness of war in literature that Gunby alludes to is the result of Barker’s conscious attempt to forge an original literary approach to re-presenting traumatic consequences of the Great War.

Bergonzi contends that Barker’s trilogy presents life at the Front as

25 Stuart Robson takes an opposing view – “[R]ecent novels that rest on a thorough knowledge of the history of the war include the [Regeneration] trilogy by Pat Barker”: Stuart Robson, The First World War (New York: Routledge, 2013), 156.
26 Rawlinson, Pat Barker, 94.
27 Gunby, “Post-war Englishness,” 176; emphasis in original.
an unbroken sequence of violent episodes, involving death, ghastly wounds, mutilation, dismemberment, madness [whereas] for many soldiers the trenches could be quiet for long periods of time, when the biggest danger was boredom.  

Tedious, uneventful stints at the front would not make interesting novel content; such uneventful periods are, nevertheless, acknowledged in the text: for instance, Rivers alludes to the irony that shell-shock symptoms result mostly from the “prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness” (196) experienced by what are called “mobilized” men waiting in “holes in the ground so constricted they c[an] hardly move” (98, emphasis in original). Inactivity is also suggested when Rivers’s patients recall that No Man’s Land is a “landscape apparently devoid of life that actually contain[s] millions of men” (197). Barker has not overlooked periods of lesser horror and extended inaction in the trenches, but has relegated them to a place of lesser prominence in a narrative that is about men damaged by the action of war.

**What is history?**

The concerns expressed by Bond and Ekstein that novels do not represent actual historical truth imply that the “truths” history proffers are clear and verifiable. In fact, “[t]here is an inexpungeable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena.”

Historiography is inevitably a pluralist exercise, but one which does not imply that we have to accept as legitimate … all versions of the past which are thereby generated. Rather, we can evaluate them according to a wide range of criteria (aesthetic, ideological and empirical) and choose to accept or reject them.

Ernst Troeltsch’s pluralist approach to any historical period led him to the understanding that

any concept of the unity of history was impossible to maintain. Instead of a single history there was a variety of history. [Troeltsch] then … came to a striking conclusion: these various histories would not necessarily understand each other.

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Some historians, nevertheless, believe that history must be contained within a scientific paradigm: Garry Sheffield claims that many literary representations of the Great War are “based on empathy and emotion [and collide] head on with the archive-based, ‘scientific’ approach to the writing of history.”\(^{33}\) Sheffield attributes the notion of a “scientific approach to history” to John McManners. However, Sheffield omits to mention that McManners defines “scientific history” in the following fashion:

\[
[T]he \text{modern \ way \ of \ writing \ history} \text{ (which may be called ‘scientific’ if we remember how science works by hypotheses, inspired guess, and selective concentration, as well as by amassing and classifying facts, and does not exclude sympathy) is a product, essentially, of the thought of Western Europe, of Christendom.}^{34}
\]

McManners qualifies his notion of scientific detachment by adding that historians rely upon “sympathy of some kind … to break through to understanding: ‘nemo nisi per amicitiam cognoscit [no-one learns except by friendship].’”\(^{35}\) McManners admits that human passions do come into play – the secret is “knowing when to hold them in check, when to give free rein.”\(^{36}\) Thus the “scientific” approach to history is fatally compromised by its own definition; a more compelling view is to be found in Hayden White’s statement that “history is not a science, or is at best a protoscience with specifically determinable nonscientific elements in its constitution.”\(^{37}\) E. H. Carr suggests that denying history the insignia of science “is an eccentricity of the English language. In every other European language, the equivalent word to ‘science’ includes history without hesitation.”\(^{38}\) In the light of this linguistic eccentricity, it is useful to regard history as a sub-science, or as White suggests, a “protoscience,” in which careful historical methodology entails high degrees of scientific rigour. However, even a rigorous approach to representing the


\(^{33}\) Gary Sheffield, Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities (London: Headline, 2001), xiv; xv.


\(^{35}\) McManners, History of Christianity, 5.

\(^{36}\) McManners, History of Christianity, 5; emphasis added.


past, in any form or genre, first requires careful predetermination of what is meant by “the past.”

Martin Löschnigg, endorsing Ben Shephard’s challenge to Barker’s historical authenticity,\(^{39}\) claims that Barker “‘fails to recreate the past in its own terms,’ and the trilogy thereby raise[s] issues about the novelist’s responsibility to the past and her relationship to the historian,”\(^{40}\) which is surprising considering that Löschnigg also quotes Henry James’s definition of history as comprising “never, in any rich sense, the immediate crudity of what ‘happens,’ but the much finer complexity of what we read into it and think of in connection with it.”\(^{41}\) Shephard is also suspicious of Barker’s historical verisimilitude when he claims that her characters are not “solid historical originals”;\(^{42}\) he admires Leo Tolstoy’s “solid digging in the primary historical sources”\(^{43}\) in order to write *War and Peace*. Tolstoy’s epic novel painstakingly recreates the much-documented military engagement of the French and Russian armies during the Napoleonic wars, directly critiquing the respective strategies of the two military forces. As Paul Romney argues in his examination of the characters and the relationships in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy’s novel also contains elements of a traditional quest romance and a *Bildungsroman* whose significant characters are all of the Russian aristocracy.\(^{44}\) The transgressive, and provocative, aspects of the trilogy, exemplified most of all by Prior’s lusty homosexual adventures, distance it very markedly from any of the romantic traditions of literature that Tolstoy emulated. The trilogy’s books are entirely different types of historical novels that explore what happens to the human body and mind in war by rhetorically engaging with individual experiences of trauma from the complex

\(^{39}\) Löschnigg “the novelist’s responsibility,” 222. Löschnigg resorts to paralipsis, or the practice of purporting *not* to bring up a subject while actually alluding to it – “Here is not the place … to be concerned primarily with questions of historical authenticity or the reliability of Barker’s sources”; a footnote in fact refers to Shephard’s “informed review” challenging Barker’s historical authenticity: Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 222. See Ben Shephard, “Digging Up the Past,” *The Times Literary Supplement* Friday, March 22 (1996), 12.

\(^{40}\) Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 222.

\(^{41}\) Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 215. The notion that the past may only be understood on its own terms originated with Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century and was adopted by reconstructionist historian Geoffrey Elton, who asserted that we must “[u]nderstand the past in its own terms and convey it in terms designed to be comprehended”: Keith Jenkins, *On ‘What is History’: From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73.

\(^{42}\) Shephard, “Digging,” 12; emphasis added.

\(^{43}\) Shephard, “Digging,” 12; emphasis added.

perspectives of a multi-disciplinary doctor whose analyses of his patients are filtered through the three different lenses of Rivers. Much of the narrative also unfolds from the perspective of his patient Billy Prior, who, psychically, operates as two distinct personalities. As Peter Hitchcock points out in his Marxist analysis of class masculinity in the trilogy, Barker is not “interested in faithfully reproducing history,” for she is writing about the unreliability of memory after traumatic experience. The emergent narrative captures how troubling and elusive the details of the lived experiences of shell-shocked soldiers are to the soldiers themselves, but also how much more elusive and experientially unknowable those details are to the generations that followed.

The wording used by Shephard in his attack on Barker for conjuring up an inauthentic past and what amounts to an unreliable history strongly suggests that Shephard is influenced by the “truth-based” empiricist historical approach pioneered by positivist historian Leopold von Ranke in the 19th century, an approach in which, as L. J. Butler notes,

the critical examination of documents (Quellenkritik) [is] intended to enable the historian to reach into the past, to understand the past in its own terms through the perceptions of contemporary witnesses … An assumption inherent in this approach is that through careful research and the interpretation of documentary evidence, the ‘past’ is recoverable, that is, that the past consists of a single ‘reality’ which can be recovered.

Roberta Jackson dismisses the claim that Barker “fails to re-create the past in its own terms” by suggesting it may be impossible to identify “what the terms of the past are.” Even an assumed, or arrogated, historically solidified past may be legitimately unsettled by novelists, whose art confers upon them the licence to

45 Rivers is a neurologist, a psychologist and an anthropologist.
47 The descriptor “attack” is not too strong a term here: Roberta Jackson has described Shephard’s comments about Barker’s approach to history in the trilogy as “hostile”: Roberta Joan Jackson, “Narratives of Trauma and the Production of Traumatized Narratives as Contexts for Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* Trilogy” (PhD diss., The University of Leeds, 2003), 203. Shephard’s review also accuses Barker of inadequate engagement with “authentic masculinities of war,” which suggests that Shephard also has very fixed ideas about what constitutes “masculinity”: Shephard, “Digging,” 12.
48 1795–1886.
50 Jackson, “Narratives of Trauma,” 209; emphasis added.
invent. Bruno Schultze points out that

[i]n recent years, critical interest in World War I literature has lost its former fixation with the question of whether authors were truthtellers or liars. Instead of this, one tends to stress the fact that all writing from memory implies of necessity a fictionalizing process.\(^5\)

Ulrich Broich’s thesis is that in the 1920s, authors such as Graves, Blunden, Aldington, Sassoon, Manning, Glaeser, Renn and Remarque created a new and hybrid form of writing as an alternative to modernist fiction, thus collapsing many perceived divides between the actual and the invented: this hybrid form “crossed the traditional borderline between fiction and history and autobiography, a form which was at the same time semi-fictional, semi-historical and semi-autobiographical.”\(^5\)

Barker typically supplements historical and biographical records with fictional content that does not jar with recorded data; a few examples are the trilogy’s account of Rivers’s recollected anthropological expeditions, a collaborative exercise between Sassoon and Owen over the writing of Owen’s ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth,’ and a vignette of the famous Pemberton Billing Affair, which is discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. The resulting narrative becomes, to some extent, a “feigning” of history,\(^5\) but without any desire to deceive or to pass itself off as being more than it is, an imaginative elaboration of the historical record that achieves the aims of a novelist. As Finander points out, artists “recognise the constructed nature of their worlds,” unlike historians, who often “exist in a state of referential delusion.”\(^5\)

If White is correct, a strange chiasmus may be observed, in which the historian (perhaps unconsciously) occludes his/her fiction-within-fact, while the novelist deliberately feigns his/her fact-within-fiction. History, after all,

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\(^5\) Finander, Fantasy, Imagination, 15.

confirms and debunks, supports and erodes, creates and queries, tries to understand what is not yet understood, yet it also calls into question what is understood too well.  

This is not to say the two disciplines of writing should become indistinguishable, but rather that each is in debt to the other.

Even the notion that fiction is able to “feign” history is predicated on the supposition of a stable historical reality whose accuracy is determinable and constant. Historical accuracy as a concept or an assumption is highly challengeable and, therefore, warrants further discussion. My discussion extends further than what Ruben Borg dubs “the rather dull insight that all facts are in some way fictions, or that, because history is ultimately a collection of texts, a written archive, it is always already involved in the play of language and textuality.” For history proves itself to be notoriously difficult to identify, even by historians; when history is incorporated into the realms of fictional writing, or, viewed from the opposite perspective, when fiction self-consciously enters the historical realm, some consideration must be given to the various conceptions of what history is, or is not, if the notion of historical accuracy is to have any meaning at all.

**History and historical accuracy**

White cites a handful of famous historiographers including Alexis de Tocqueville, Jacob Burckhardt, Johan Huizinga and Fernand Braudel who

refused narrative in … their historiographic works, presumably on the assumption that the meaning of the events … did not lend itself to representation in the narrative mode. They refused to tell a story about the past.

But White points out that even narrative-resistant historians such as de Tocqueville, who represented the French Revolution as a large ironic tragedy, inevitably practised the art of emplotment; historical narratives cannot avoid becoming “literary artifacts” for they are “manifestly … verbal fictions, the contents of which

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are as much *invented as found.*” Peter Gay contends that there is a mutually dependent relationship between history and story-narration; White agrees that “[h]istorical narration without analysis is trivial, [and] historical analysis without narration is incomplete.” Bond, criticising a host of literary interpretations of the Great War for their inadequate attention to the dynamics of the war, “which alone can give meaning to the human experiences so glumly harped on” by their authors, seems not to appreciate that even those historical dynamics and the “meaning” they convey are not facts that can simply be unearthed by research, and that, as Simon Schama explains,

even in the most austere scholarly report from the archives, the inventive faculty – selecting, pruning, editing, commenting, interpreting, delivering judgements – is in full play.

Those who criticise Barker for misrepresenting history seem to be subscribing to an idea of the past that Patrick Wright claims “derives from antiquarianism and archaeology,” a past that “is there both to be dug up and also to be visited.” The assumption of such an approach is that history “‘tells it as it actually was’” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*), and that the ‘past’ consists of a single ‘reality’ which can be recovered.” This reconstructionist approach to history, favoured by Geoffrey Elton, maintains that history should not be “contaminated by cognate discourses.”

In the cognate context of historical fiction, history is protected from Elton’s feared contamination by the honest overlay of the fictional hand; furthermore, the horizons

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61 Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain’s Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81. Bond alludes to Correlli Barnett, who “deplored the emphasis on casualties, grief and hardship at the expense of patriotic enthusiasm, belief in the cause and popular resilience and humour”: Bond, *The Unquiet*, 81. Barnett believes that “many of the rank-and-file were in fact better off in the trenches than at home,” a contentious point that is challenged later in this chapter; see Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 432.
63 Wright, *On Living*, 74. Wright’s archaeological analogy may upset schools of archaeology which do not necessarily conceive of unearthed artefacts as providing the present with an instant portal into an unequivocal past; Laurent Olivier notes that when objects are unearthed, “we add new strata of information and interpretation to object (sic) themselves characterized by considerable stratifications of meaning over time”: Laurent Olivier, “The Archaeology of the Contemporary Past” trans. Verene Grieshaber, in *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, ed. by Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (London: Routledge, 2001), 180.
64 Butler, “History,” 16
of both history and fiction have acquired more elasticity in the age of deconstruction.

In the mid twentieth century it came to be recognised, notably by French historian Roger Chartier, that all historical texts

are best viewed as the result of a constructed production and reading by the historian. They are a representation of the past rather than the objective access to the reality of the past. As the historian consumes the evidence of the past, he/she also produces a meaning. How we organise/emplot the evidence creates the past for us and our readers.\textsuperscript{66}

The constructionist approach still implies that the subjective dimensions of a historian-determined past play an active part in evaluating that constructed past’s meaning; the deconstructionist school of literary interpretation that began with the appearance of Jacques Derrida’s \textit{Of Grammatology}\textsuperscript{67} in 1967 subverts this idea. Although, as Baert, Weinberg and Mottier point out, Derrida refused to provide a clear definition of the term deconstructionism, “deconstructionist analyses refer to the myriad processes whereby readings of a text undercut authors’ intentions and thereby defy authorial control.”\textsuperscript{68} Deconstructionism made everything outside the text itself irrelevant; Gertrude Himmelfarb explains how

\[\text{[t]he deconstructionist also liberates the text from the tyranny of what is called “context” – the context of events, ideas, conventions, which informed the text not only for the author but for contemporary readers.}\textsuperscript{69}\]

However, Himmelfarb objects to the migration of deconstruction from literature into history, which has the effect of removing the authority that had customarily grounded the discipline of history: “Himmelfarb resents that a deconstructive hermeneutics of suspicion has in effect discovered the word “lie” residing in the word “belief,” thus jeopardizing any practical historical exegesis, let alone

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authoritative history.” If this is the case, it simply demands a circumspect, critical approach to all self-proclaimed “historical” texts.

Serious reservations remain about how conclusive any exegesis and any historical study is able to be. As Alun Munslow maintains, “there is no ultimate knowable historical truth … our knowledge of the past is social and perspectival, and … written history exists within culturally determined power structures.” Foucault also claims that the contextual power structures preclude “the possibility of a truth not relative to a ‘history’ or a ‘regime of truth,’ whether an epistemè or a discourse formation.” Bradley considers that when history is sought, what is found is merely “the divergent accounts of a host of jarring witnesses, a chaos of disjoined and discrepant narrations.” Although this remark on its surface suggests a refreshing openness to diversity in historical writings, Bradley was in fact adamant that versions of history not based on what he termed “critical presuppositions” must be discounted. Robert Holton notes that Bradley claimed the historical accounts of “Orthodox Catholics, the uneducated … children, and savages” were so unacceptable that legal means should be used to prohibit them:

Bradley's sense of the vulnerability of his position is, perhaps, registered in his repeated appeal to the coercive force of law and the need to disallow such illegitimate transgressive history as can be ruled out of order, to silence jarring witnesses whose narrative testimony can be stricken from the official record and whose agents can be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

The modern era is more closely aligned with Robert Berkhofer’s view concerning the absence, objectively, of particular and knowable historical truths: “No longer

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71 Munslow, Deconstructing History, 25.
72 Stephen Schwartz, “The Exceptional Subject of Michel Foucault,” in Subject Matters: Subject and Self in French Literature from Descartes to the Present, ed. Paul Gifford and Johnnie Gratton (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 188. Note that Schwartz questions Foucault’s presumption that he alone is capable of relating truths not affected or precluded by the prevailing systems in which he relates them – “In the end, Foucault’s theoretical claim is belied by the very fact and circumstances of his making it. If what Foucault says about the subject and the regimes of truth is true, it can only be expressed from outside those (mere) regimes of truth; and to be able to do that, Foucault himself would have to be the only subject: one whose existence is precisely excluded by the theory”: Schwartz, “The Exceptional Subject,” 189.
can any single master interpretive code be privileged over another as if one were somehow more correspondent to the (a?) ‘real’ past than another.” Both Munslow and Berkhofer assume a safe position of historical scepticism; such a position does not necessarily deny that there may be degrees of authoritativeness within historical writing, but does acknowledge that history as it is presented is never beyond question.  

Virginie Renard notes that historians must “turn into amateur detectives who look for the traces of a past that is increasingly difficult to access.” Renard concedes there are limits to such detective approaches, for “we cannot uncover ‘the’ past, but can only access ‘a version of’ the past, often caught up in memory politics.” In 1990 when the Imperial War Museum attempted to recreate authentic facsimiles of the Loos trench experience for tourists, it strove for the highest possible degrees of verisimilitude by adding special effects involving lighting, audio tracks and permeated odours. As Richard Epsley notes, actual re-entry into “a vanished circumstance,” was never going to be possible. However, the wider concern was that the historical moment was being subtly reinterpreted, abducted from the realm of history to be bastardised and abandoned to popular culture motivated not by academic rigour but entertainment.  

Horrors were elided, presentations made “picturesque,” and the representations of dead and the dying easily became ludicrous. Epsley concludes that the “heavily mythologized and reinterpreted” World War I trench experience “is well beyond the

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75 Berkhofer, Beyond the Great Story, 72.
76 Hans Kellner suggests that “[c]rooked readings of historical writing are beginning to abound; these studies unfocus the texts they examine in order to put into the foreground the constructed, rhetorical, nature of our knowledge of the past, and to bring out the purposes, often hidden and unrecognized, of our retrospective creations”: Hans Kellner, Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 7. Kellner notes that “F. R. Ankersmit, Stephen Bann, Roland Barthes, Lionel Gossman, Dominick La Capra, Linda Orr, Nancy Partner, Paul Ricoeur, and Hayden White are only a few of the many scholars involved in unfocusing historical and other forms of realistic nonfictional texts”: Kellner, Language and Historical Representation, 7; n. 6.
reach of any curator, visitor, or even museum critic.”

Searching for lost times and experiences ought not aim for a supposed, absolute truth, but merely “an endlessly reworked popular understanding of the Great War.” Thus does re-creating a piece of history inevitably betray itself as a version of the past contaminated by too much present.

The *Regeneration* trilogy approaches World War I, or “the past,” in an anti-curatorial manner, recognising that not only is the World War I trench experience beyond the definitive or unambiguous reach of those who imaginatively re-approach it, but also that its re-imagining cannot even be contained by its own time: inevitably, the past’s future, up to and including the writer’s present, plays an active role in the representation of the past. Barker deploys in her writing a flexible notion of the thought-shaping practices of time as conceived by David Carr:

> [t]he past figures for us in a temporal configuration (or better, configurations) that includes present and future. … [T]ime surrounds us like space, and like space, it is inhabited by shapes and forms. The shapes of time are determined by our ongoing experiences and actions in which we project or pretend the future and retain the past.

Moreover, the “past,” when considered conceptually distinct from “history,” itself rests upon the shifting pylons of memory, as noted by Sande Cohen:

> “History” must be radically severed from “past”: the former is always calibrated with cultural contradictions, whereas the latter is much more fluid a notion. “Past” is involved with both active and involuntary memory, but “history” can only project the simulation of the remembered.

Barker allows the cognitive consciousness of her aptly named *Prior* of 1918 to emigrate into the author’s present and to thus endows Prior with a privileged

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82 As noted by Michelle Baillif, “[t]he ‘past’ is already a phantasm, conjured from the future. As an ‘effect’ of the present, which is an ‘effect of an effect,’ the ‘past’ is, therefore, only ever known insofar as it has been historicized after the fact, après coup, and hence comes from the future”: Michelle Baillif, “Historiography as Hauntology: Paranormal Investigations into the History of Rhetoric,” in *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, ed. Michelle Baillif (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 148.
retrospectivity-from-the-future in understanding his own epoch, just as she allows us, the readers of the present, to migrate back into her imagined past, which is Prior’s present. The trilogy thus subtly arrogates into its narrative a poetic, T. S. Eliot-like understanding of times present, past and future, which are, on conceptual levels, contained within one another.85

The trouble with anachronism

Bergonzi admits to being much irritated by what he identifies as anachronisms in the trilogy, even when he concedes them to be minor, such as candy-floss (which had come into existence prior to 1900, but was unlikely to have arrived in England until decades after the Great War) at a seaside resort. He is also irritated by the allegedly anachronistic character of Billy Prior,86 a man with an avowedly versatile sexual orientation and so astute an insight into class hierarchy that he appears to reflect much more the zeitgeist of the post-1960s twentieth century than that of 1918: “The point is not that people could not have been bisexual or bitterly class-conscious eighty years ago, but that they could not have thought or spoken about these things in the terms that Barker gives to Billy.”87 Bergonzi takes issue with Billy’s “frequent falsity of tone” such as when he says it felt “sexy” to be under fire at the front or when Billy uses the term “Marxist analysis”88 which Bergonzi, with some wit, dubs “the intellectual small change of 1968 rather than of 1918.”89 Bergonzi does have a valid case to make about Billy’s peculiarly anachronistic qualities, but the integrity of the Regeneration trilogy is only jeopardised or diminished by the oddly modern-day and yet “curiously dominant figure of Billy Prior”90 if there are no narratological or artistic reasons for its anachronisms. It is my contention that Barker’s anachronisms, albeit minor, are purposeful in the narrative.

85 “Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past.” T. S. Eliot, Burnt Norton, 3.
86 Rawlinson also claims Prior is “anachronistic”: Rawlinson, Pat Barker, 75.
87 Bergonzi, War Poets, 8.
88 Prior uses this term in a conversation with jailed pacifist Beattie Roper: “I don’t see how you can derive that from a Marxist analysis” (249).
89 Bergonzi, War Poets, 9.
90 Bergonzi, War Poets, 6.
It is possible to see Prior as a 1918 man haunted by the (then) future, or alternatively, as a visitor to 1918 from a time yet to come; as Bergonzi observes: “Billy [Prior] dominates the trilogy, but he does so like a visitant from the future in some work of science fiction or magic realism.”\textsuperscript{91} This is not necessarily a flaw in the narrative; Karen Knutsen and Maria Holmgren Troy both recognise that Vonnegut’s Billy Pilgrim (from \textit{Slaughterhouse Five}), a man “unstuck in time,” resonates in Billy Prior, a man of “uncanny, hybrid nature” who “constantly jumps from past to future scenes in his life, never knowing which timeframe will be activated next.”\textsuperscript{92} Billy Prior is, like Billy Pilgrim, somewhat “spastic in time.”\textsuperscript{93} Historical novelists attempt to revisit times past not in any literal sense, but within the literary conceit of time spasticity such as Billy is conceived as having.

Anachronisms need not present a problem if, as John Brannigan suggests, the \textit{Regeneration} trilogy is viewed as “a contemporary revisionist fiction of the war, which uses the story of the war as an index of contemporary social, cultural, sexual and political debates.”\textsuperscript{94} Brannigan sees it as a sign of authorial “confidence and ambition” that “Barker the historian and Barker the novelist are thoroughly interfused,” and

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\textit{it is the seamless blending of historical fact with the literary vitality of fictional characters like Prior and fictionally expanded dialogue, thoughts and dreams of Rivers and his patients that accounts for the popularity and acclaim of the trilogy.}\textsuperscript{95}
\end{quote}

Brannigan has called the trilogy an “experimental work of historical fiction”\textsuperscript{96} which tells the story of the war from unfamiliar perspectives, such as the psychoanalyst’s, the anthropologist’s, or the pacifist’s; Barker’s vision of the war becomes “an analogy for wider trends in modern history and culture.”\textsuperscript{97} Brannigan embraces what Bergonzi resists: that Prior is “a device to mark the social, sexual

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\textsuperscript{91} Bergonzi, \textit{War Poets}, 8.
\textsuperscript{93} Kurt Vonnegut Jr. \textit{Slaughterhouse 5} (Frogmore: Triad, 1979), 23. “Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time…. Billy is spastic in time, has no control over where he is going next, and the trips aren’t necessarily fun.”
\textsuperscript{94} Brannigan, \textit{Pat Barker}, 94
\textsuperscript{95} Brannigan, \textit{Pat Barker}, 95.
\textsuperscript{96} Brannigan, \textit{Pat Barker}, 96.
\textsuperscript{97} Brannigan, \textit{Pat Barker}, 96.
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and cultural boundaries of Edwardian England.”\textsuperscript{98} What results from Barker’s intrepid challenge to all the boundaries is a “kind of ideological chiasmus, at least in terms of gender ideologies, in which the masculine is feminized, and the feminine masculinized.”\textsuperscript{99} Chiasma, or criss-crossings are manifest in the trilogy, in which “the possibilities of transgression … of sex, class or gender, are shown to be temporarily intensified by the war.”\textsuperscript{100} Prior’s sexual progressiveness, his apparently advanced insight, vocabulary and behaviour, then, give deeper resonance to the trilogy, set in a time whose dystopic features (most notably, the world at war with itself) require a few snatched glimpses of future man’s sociological development in order that restrictive templates for framing an unquestioned past be broken. Prior’s 1960s character-blush casts Britain’s social, sexual and political pathologies of stricture into sharper relief; as an omni-chronistic, omni-sexual, picaresque, anti-hero\textsuperscript{101} who can slip about the murky societal and battleground landscapes of the trilogy with an impossible brand of wisdom, he enables the pervasive societal illnesses of 1918 to impress themselves upon us in ways that a less experimental approach to the war could not have done.

Prior’s extraordinary knowingness is nevertheless selective, for initially it is utterly denied in-sight, or inward sight, when it comes to knowing or seeing the half of his psyche that has split off to become a second Prior. This fits the general nature of the narrative, in which opposites constantly circle about and antagonise one another, but never achieve a happy synthesis or a satisfactory truce. Even at the end of The Ghost Road, the formerly divided Prior, at last fully integrated insofar as we can tell (in the sense that he is now aware of his fugue states, and the things he does (or used to do) in his “Mr Hyde” persona\textsuperscript{102}, now has no future. The traumatic symptoms of “time traveller” Billy Prior have been explained and processed, making him one of “Craiglockhart’s success stories,” but the success stories of Craiglockhart are men who “don’t remember, … don’t feel, … don’t think … [they]

\textsuperscript{98} Brannigan, Pat Barker, 96.
\textsuperscript{99} Brannigan, Pat Barker, 99.
\textsuperscript{100} Brannigan, Pat Barker, 100.
\textsuperscript{102} See note 517 in Chapter Three of this thesis regarding the trilogy’s intertextual link with Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde.
are objects of horror” (545). Up until the point of their cure, the “success stories” had been merely the subjects, or victims, of horror. The “curing” of Billy Prior therefore, which brings about the fusing of the two Priors, achieves both a restoration of memories lost in shell-shock and an erasure of feelings and thoughts that would interfere with “what’s needed to do the job” (545). Prior, cured of his neurosis and memory loss, is sufficiently resigned to the inevitability of fighting once more: the treatment he receives, therefore, amounts to a form of reprogramming for battle. Craiglockhart’s success stories are men homogenised into conservative moulds established in the Victorian era, especially men such as Prior, an active bisexual whose indulgence in sodomy with other men threatens the re-emergence of what Victorians had so sensationally suppressed in Oscar Wilde’s trial; Prior is, in the end, safely removed from the environs of homophobic Britain to the exile of No Man’s Land, a place promising to hasten his death more speedily than imprisonment and exile hastened Wilde’s tragic end in 1900.

The Regeneration trilogy as historiography

The term “historiography” testifies to the relative nature of truth or falsity in stories about the past, as Paul Cartledge notes:

> Whence the coinage of ‘historiography,’ struck in order to distinguish the study of and writing about some past facts from the facts themselves. But, since the distinction of facts from the writing about or of them is actually not at all clearcut – indeed is eminently contestable – a further meaning has been accorded to historiography, as meta-history or the study, from various standpoints, of the writing of history by others than the historiographer.103

Barker, a literary historiographer within Cartledge’s definition, aims for factual adequacy in her novelist’s exploration of the entropic consequences of several actual realms of human conflict. She does not forfeit her connection to truth concerning the subjects about which she is writing. Linda Hutcheon refers to postmodernist examples of fictional narrative, which she calls “historiographic metafiction,” defined as “novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages: The French

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*Lieutenant’s Woman, Midnight’s Children, Ragtime.* Such novels refuse

the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that

claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are
discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major

claim to truth from that identity.105

Aside from its Author’s Notes, in which the author speaks of the contents of her

narrative from an extra-narrative position, the trilogy refrains from “metafictional

moments of self-consciousness”106 that would justify including it per se within the

realm of “historiographic metafiction.”107 Nor does it quite become a work of

what might be called a new(meta)realism. Such new(meta)realist fiction …

remains resolutely silent on its own fictionality, presenting itself as paradoxically

more real than the thing it imitates.108

The extra-narrative Notes of the trilogy outlining aspects of the narrative that are

based on historical research do not suggest any authorial desire to make the text’s

events “more real” than the real. Marie-Luise Kohlke’s description of the aims of

feminist historiographical fiction best encapsulates the apparent aims of the trilogy’s

narrative:

As the temporal malleability of myth intersects with a specific juncture of ‘real’
time in a community’s past, ‘not quite real’ characters and contexts vie with actual
historical persons and events for prominence, disturbing the presumed objective
bases of historical knowledge.109

In the trilogy there is, to some extent, a “commingling of myth and history [which]
renders history more open-ended and manoeuvrable.”110 Prior’s observation in the

trilogy that the past as a palimpsest (264) acts to disestablish ideas of history’s


105 Hutcheon, *A Poetics*, 93.

106 Demelza Morgana Hall, “Space and Sexuality in the Post-Victorian Fiction of Sarah Waters”


107 Barker’s Author Notes, though apparently detached from the classic story elements of the

trilogy’s narrative, inhabit, as paratexts, “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s


(Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1987), 2. The control such notes exert over the reader’s

experience with the narrative is paramount. As the notes are moments of authorial self-

consciousness, they also lean the trilogy towards the realm of historiographic metafiction.

108 Marie-Luise Kohlke, “Into History Through the Back Door: The ‘past historic’ in *Nights at the


fixedness by suggesting the human construct that is history alters with its every reimagining; by implication, this includes the trilogy’s own reimagining.\textsuperscript{111}

In the trilogy, moreover, it is not only “the past” itself, but even acts of thinking about the past that operate like a palimpsest; John Brannigan notes that in Barker’s fiction, there is an end of history:

History is over … according to Barker’s fiction, which is a hyperbolic way of saying that the twentieth century has witnessed a profound shift in our sense of historical consciousness and belonging, that the means and forms of our connections with the past have altered radically.\textsuperscript{112}

For as long as existence persists, it is impossible for history ever to be “over,” and that in fact the anxiety caused by the trilogy for some historians actually indicates how alive history is,\textsuperscript{113} and how excitingly tentative is the nature of supposedly “known” history within the novels. Brannigan refers to the way Foucault would “analyse the past from the present without pretending that he [had] discovered the absolute real conditions of the past and without conceding that we are trapped entirely in the self-image of the present.”\textsuperscript{114} Barker’s representation of the past in the \textit{Regeneration} trilogy avoids entrapment in the unequivocal pasts of some historians, thus realising a primary objective of postmodern fiction, which, as Linda Hutcheon notes, is “to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological.”\textsuperscript{115} Prior’s insight into the palimpsestic nature of the past (an insight that is actually a little too acute for his time) suggests the impossibility of historical conclusiveness. The observation gains further resonance from the fact that it is made by a character within a work of historical fiction, for it is almost as though Barker is fortifying her narrative against historical purists. As Moseley notes,

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\item \textsuperscript{111} Damon Marcel Decoste notes that Graham Swift’s fiction “remains committed to the exploration of, and exhortation to, historia as inquiry and not just narrative. … Waterland both insists that history is, ultimately, only story, and champions the humbler claims of the petit reçit, over the pretensions of self-styled, ‘objective’ History”: Damon Marcel Decoste, “‘A frank expression of personality’? Sentimentality, Silence and Early Modernist Aesthetics in The Good Soldier,” \textit{Journal of Modern Literature} 31, no. 1 (2007): 378.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Brannigan, \textit{Pat Barker}, 118–19.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Brannigan believes “the trilogy shows the war and its social contexts to remain alive with troubling questions about the relationships between reality and representation, language and silence, science and ethics, and history and haunting”: Brannigan, \textit{Pat Barker}, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Brannigan, \textit{New Historicism and Cultural Materialism} (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998), 215.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Hutcheon, \textit{A Poetics}, 110.
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[h]istorical fiction is after all fiction, and a strong interpretation by someone who clearly understands that could unclutter discussion of her use of the war from picayune objections which seem to arise from a misunderstanding of the nature and freedoms of the novel.\textsuperscript{116}

This is not, however, to impute to the author a deliberate falsification or distortion of the many historically verified incidents that form the core of the narrative. Barker’s declared aim with respect to key events is to be faithful to the documentary record: “I always try to stick to historical facts.”\textsuperscript{117} But as fictional writing often includes wholly imagined conversations and interactions between characters who have been imported from history, such imagined content cannot be thought of as being, or even as purporting to be, “actual.” The fictional realm tacitly accepts what Mas’ud Zavarzadeh dubs “the entropy – of the actual.”\textsuperscript{118} The entropic tendency of actual systems suggests that minor variations of historical detail in the fictional “actual” will not matter, or will not threaten to destroy what is destroying itself independently of how it is represented.

**Myth-making and the *Regeneration* trilogy**

Barker has been taken to task by some commentators for the ways the war’s myths are confronted in the narrative; the myth-related criticisms of the trilogy, upon analysis, are not soundly based. Bruno Schultze alleges that by the late 1920s, writers of war novels had canonised a mythical notion that World War I was an “utterly senseless, unheroic, and unadulterated catastrophe,” and argues that this “memory, with its inexhaustible fund of images of destruction and horror has become a myth … influential even now.”\textsuperscript{119} Martin Löschnigg accuses Barker of

\textsuperscript{116} Moseley, *The Fiction of Pat Barker*, 132.
\textsuperscript{118} Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Non-fiction Novel* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 66. “Entropy,” denoting the quantitative measure of disorder in a system, seems an apt enough term for countries at war, given the profound disorder war wreaks upon systems which are designed to function most effectively in orderly peacetime.
\textsuperscript{119} Schultze, “Fiction and Truth,” 298. Schultze makes no reference to Barker’s *Regeneration*, first published in 1991. Ian F. W. Beckett contends, at the close of his book, that although the Great War had become mainly the province of myth in “cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s,” it has recently resumed its rightful place in history: “[A]cademe’s image of the war has been transformed in the past fifteen years or so and a broad historical consensus has emerged, taking the war out of myth and returning it to history. Historians have most probably almost arrived at that point looked forward to by Brian Bond when the war would be studied ‘simply as history without polemic intent or apologies’”: Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Great War*, (Great Britain: Pearson Longman, 2007), 648.
perpetuating mythical ideas of the unrelatable nature of the front line horrors: “When the narrative means of relegating experience to the past seem to fail … experience becomes enshrouded in myth.”\textsuperscript{120} Supporting this argument, Löschnigg refers to Prior’s statement that “Language ran out on you, in the end, the names were left to say it all: Mons, Loos, Ypres, the Somme, Arras” (83). Prior eschews the traditionally heroic words of “patriotism honour courage” and instead finds meaning only in “[t]hose words that trip through sentences unregarded: us, them, we, they, here, there. These are the words of power” (579). Löschnigg contends that “[t]he system of oppositions established by these words clearly proved instrumental in the development of myths about the war: it emphasized the chasm separating friend and foe, combatants and civilians, the young and the old and men and women.” Barker, he believes, continues the myth of the assumedly insurmountable barriers separating those who have experience of the front line from those who have not. Her emphasis on the reduced functioning of language in the face of the war experience perpetuates a process of mythification which has contributed to shaping our ideas about World War I …War, it seems, has become a kind of mythical reality for those who are actively involved in it as well as for those who are immediately confronted with its effects.\textsuperscript{121}

There is a non sequitur in Löschnigg’s argument: if Barker perpetuates mythification by reiterating in narrative form the types of (allegedly unrelatable) experiences that Barbusse, Graves, Remarque, Manning, Dos Passos, and others in fact succeeded in narrating, this requires us to accept that those writers, via their respective acts of narration, were fashioning their repulsive and ideal-shattering experiences into myth. In practice, the reverse is true: extant myths about honour, glory and heroism that had been imparted to soldiers by those urging them to fight honourably disintegrated (both in reality and in their novelistic re-creation) as surely as did the bodies of men when shredded and mangled into grotesque anatomical parodies. Shultze maintains that Sassoon and Owen, in spite of their condemnations of the war, remained committed to active service, and “made sense enough of the

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\item Beckett does not offer evidence in support of his view that there has been a “historical consensus” of the kind he alleges regarding the Great War. And, in line with my arguments regarding the nature of history, I am dubious about his suggestion that history can be purely objective, or entirely “without polemic intent or apologies.” Beckett seems to share Bond’s contempt for the Regeneration trilogy, noting that the filmed version of Regeneration “reinforced all the clichés”: Beckett, The Great War, 642. The “clichés” he alludes to are views that the war was pointless and poorly managed.
\item Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 225.
\item Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 226.
\end{itemize}
war to stick it till the end.”\textsuperscript{122} This acid comment does an injustice to the complex intellectual position of the poets; both Sassoon and Owen continued fighting, despite ideological torments, more for love of their men than because they decided the war “made sense.”\textsuperscript{123}

Further advancing his argument that the trilogy perpetuates a mythology about the front, Löschnigg claims the front-line experience “assumed the status of a hyper-reality that made the relevance of all other experience dwindle.”\textsuperscript{124} It is this “assumed … status of a hyper-reality” that Löschnigg conflates with myth: “Within the mythical reality of the front, the narrative act has gained a mythical quality too.”\textsuperscript{125} Löschnigg’s application of the term “myth” to both reality and reality’s narration here is somewhat questionable, and a definition of hyper-reality is needed for the sake of clarity. The Greek prefix “hyper,” meaning “over,” connotes deliberate exaggeration or hyperbole, and within representational contexts of narration, the establishment of \textit{hyper real} imagery involves progressive distancing of the initial reflection of the real \textit{from} the real. Baudrillard outlined the successive phases of an image which establish its hyper-real status; the image moves from reflecting a basic reality, to masking or perverting a basic reality, then to masking the absence of a basic reality, and finally bearing no relation at all to any reality whatsoever: in the end, “it is its own pure simulacrum.”\textsuperscript{126} To characterise an extreme experience of a soldier at the front as acquiring “hyper real” status in narration as Löschnigg does is to suggest it is removed from reality into Baudrillard’s fourth state of unreality, and now aligns more with the nature of the mythical. Experiences so extreme as to seem unreal need to be respected as having happened, rather than discounted as myths simply because they are so extraordinarily repugnant or sensational as to be almost beyond belief.

The extraordinarily striking experiences of the kind Barbusse records so often in \textit{Le}

\textsuperscript{122} Schultze, \textit{Fiction and Truth}, 298.
\textsuperscript{123} This idea is developed further in Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{124} Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 226.
\textsuperscript{125} Löschnigg, “the novelist’s responsibility,” 227.
Feu: Journal d’une Escouade (Under Fire: The Story of a Squad),\(^{127}\) with their extremes of sound and light, as well as intense emotional and intellectual assault upon the men at the front line, already contain within themselves qualities that may be deemed hyperbolic-but-real.\(^{128}\) Baudrillard conceives of the Vietnam War as being an event that “was like a film before it was even filmed,”\(^{129}\) the filmic special effects no more special or effect-ive than the war’s own (literal and figurative) explosiveness. Extreme assaults upon body and mind, unimaginable until actualised, merely appear to soar above the objectively real and to have an invented aspect. This is the conclusion Löschnigg seems to be heading toward when he explains how the mechanism that would normally deflect the full impact of crisis “by ‘subjunctivising reality,’ by exploring the indeterminacy of reality”\(^{130}\) failed those who recounted “assumed hyper-real” experiences, since those men could only relate them (if at all) in the hyper-real or hyperbolic fashion in which they were experienced. Löschnigg is of the view that such recounting is tantamount to mythologising, when in fact imagery as viscerally intense as that used so frequently by Barbusse in Le Feu is the only appropriate mode of recalling frontline extremes of horror. The recorded real gives the impression of hyperbole when the real is manifestly a gross magnification of the norms of human experience.

Tobin Jones is of the view that an author’s didactic intent means that the war’s extremes acquire mythical dimensions in their passage from experience to narrative: Jones describes Barbusse’s Le Feu as “an interesting example of how an author transforms his immediate experience of new and unfamiliar realities into mythic form.”\(^{131}\) Jones contends that even despite “Barbusse’s first person narration and documentable origin of many of the incidents” in Le Feu, “the work is first and foremost an ideologically didactic novel with almost no value as an accurate

\(^{127}\) The edition of Under Fire: The Story of a Squad referred to throughout this thesis as Under Fire, or Le Feu, is a compendium of Barbusse’s two works Under Fire: The Story of a Squad, and Light, translated from the French by Fitzwater Wray (London; Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1929).


\(^{129}\) Richard J. Lane, Jean Baudrillard (New York: Routledge, 2000), 91.


historical portrayal of the war." Jones considers that Barbusse’s representations of the war resonate with “Zola’s metaphorical vision of the mine [in *Germinal*] as a monstrous matrix of future revolt,” and indeed it is impossible not to be aware of *Le Feu*’s metaphorical power: the death of Poterloo, who flies through the air with a ball of flame in place of his head, has an apocalyptic character that is in keeping with Barbusse’s overarching vision of his poor soldiers as abandoned, wretched, hell-bound souls: a Red Cross sergeant speaks to the men “in all possible tones, commanding or pitiful, sometimes like a prophet and anon like one shipwrecked; he metrifies with his cry the chorus of choking and plaintive voices that try so terribly to exalt their suffering.”

Dante’s *Inferno* is almost unavoidably evoked by trench imagery in war novels like *Le Feu*; Martin Hurcombe contends that writers’ recourse to the image of the inferno, with its concomitant sense of perdition, exile, and both physical and metaphysical torment, is more broadly suggestive of the omnipresence of death in the modern world … The viscosity of the trenches extends beyond the physical state of the landscape and decaying corpses to the point of becoming an existential discovery on the part of characters and authors.

This is the realm often considered to be ineffable, or unrepresentable. Mimetic trauma theory accommodates the idea of representational ineffability by recognising the aspects of the experience that resist representation in memory and require mental theatricalisation of the forgotten trauma; anti-mimetic trauma theory, though, resigns itself more to the persistence of ineffability, or an unassimilable event that is dissociated from memory. Ruth Leys explains how

[*trauma* is seen, on the one hand, as hyper-representational, richly mediated by words and images that “haunt” the victim and require something like hypnotic staging and working through to effect a cure. On the other hand, contemporary

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134 Barbusse, *Le Feu*, 166.
“brain-centered” trauma theory regards it, by contrast, as a radically unrepresentable “Real” that cannot be told or displayed.\textsuperscript{138}

Löschnigg is wrong, therefore, in his claim that war novelists mythologise war’s horrors when they commit them to narrative form. Barbusse, who does not recount having suffered from any memory loss or neurosis after his extreme experiences, and literary soldiers who, as their medical history documents, were overtly traumatised, managed to achieve linguistic mimesis of their experiences in therapy and in their writing, rather than mythologise experiences that are ineffable because they are dissociated from, or by implication hyper-realised, by memory. Both the mimetic and the anti-mimetic paradigms of trauma theory are discussed by Leys in terms of the patient’s loss of sovereignty over the psychic processes, such as memory. Barker depicts her patients as ultimately restoring their sense of sovereignty by working through their amnesia or their physical symptoms via the “talking cure,” recovering and dealing with their memories of the traumatic experiences, rather than establishing mythological, and anti-mimetic dimensions to vivify those experiences.

**Myth and body trauma**

Evocations of bodily trauma in anti-war novels like the trilogy are alleged by critics such as Bruno Schultze to maintain or perpetuate myths of war horror:

> It has been argued that the late 1920s canonized the ‘memory’ of war as trench warfare on the Western Front, an utterly senseless, unheroic, and unadulterated catastrophe. This memory with its inexhaustible fund of images of destruction and horror has become a myth, a myth influential even now.\textsuperscript{139}

Jeremy Black, also, believes that

> [t]he lost generation and the futility of the First World War are myths so deeply imbedded in popular consciousness that they have become irrefutable facts, as well

\textsuperscript{138}Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 298. According to Leys, “from the moment of its invention in the late nineteenth century the concept of trauma has been fundamentally unstable, balancing uneasily — indeed veering uncontrollably — between two ideas, theories or paradigms”: Leys, *Trauma*, 298.

\textsuperscript{139}Schultze, “Fiction and Truth,” 298.
as folk memory passed down through families, and any attempt to disabuse believers is treated with hostility.¹⁴⁰

Novels which represent extreme war carnage in such a way as to question the ultimate value of the carnage itself are less engaged in a mythological exercise than in actively challenging military rationalisations of war, often based on heroic myths or closely aligned to pro-war propaganda. Military historian Corelli Barnett refers to trench memoirs and novels of the 1920s (six in 1926, fifteen in 1927, twenty-one in 1928, and thirty-nine in 1929)¹⁴¹ as “vituperative” in their attitude to war, claiming (without supporting evidence) that the works “served as powerful ammunition for pacifists and appeasers of Hitler in the 1930s.”¹⁴² The authors, he adds,

tell much the same story, and draw much the same moral. Their cumulative effect was – and is – a generalized picture of idealism turning into sour disillusion, of the futility of the fighting on the Western Front, of the squalor of trench life, of the obscenity of death and mutilation on a modern battlefield, of the terrors of a great battle.¹⁴³

Barnett claims that the war writers were generally of the upper social strata and that trench life was a shock to their sensibilities while “[t]he rank and file,” on the other hand, showed “cheerful stoicism” and “a matter-of-fact acceptance of reality at its bleakest,”¹⁴⁴ suggesting that many of the rank and file stoics “were better off in the army than in peacetime life.”¹⁴⁵ Using contemporary descriptions of English slums, Barnett purports to establish that the stinking, wet, rat-infested trenches were similar to the squalor the poorer soldiers knew at home. Mean living conditions at home may well have inured such men to the discomforts of dampness, dirt and odour, but could hardly have prepared them for the experiences of mutilation, the blowing

apart of comrades in arms, or the pervasive stink of rotting corpses.\textsuperscript{146} Furthermore, Barnett does not address the point that the reason officers recorded their horror more passionately than the rank and file men is that the latter were unlikely to be as deft at articulating their horrific experiences as the more highly educated and literate men.

Henry Barbusse’s \textit{Le Feu} and Erich Maria Remarque’s \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front}\textsuperscript{147} were more relentlessly horror-laden than any other war books published in their times; Fussell speaks of \textit{All Quiet} as a “Gothic fantasia,”\textsuperscript{148} a term which does indeed seem apt to describe Remarque’s Grand Guignol episode of a shelled cemetery with exploded cadavers flying into the air and live soldiers crawling into empty coffins for safety. The \textit{Regeneration} trilogy, with its “unusual and powerful evocations of the damaged and dead bodies produced by the war”\textsuperscript{149} belongs also to the category of war novels that resist\textsuperscript{150} the simplicity of war myths, but which are cognisant also of the ways culture controls the very meanings of the words used to describe war’s results. Jeremy Black observes that

[w]ar, and responses to it, are culturally constructed, both in terms of societies as a whole and with regard to particular militaries, or indeed, even units. The meanings of victory, defeat, loss, and suffering vary considerably, and so, with that, does the willingness to accept casualties.\textsuperscript{151}

Military historians who think of World War I as irrefutably noble and purposeful have a lesser appreciation of the sudden sense of irony forced upon the world by war, and upon its modernist representation in the arts. Jessica Meyer claims that

[t]he experience of the trenches fundamentally altered the way in which British poets and novelists used the English language to represent the world in which they

\textsuperscript{146} Ferguson cites Corelli Barnett in support of the view that it was only the university educated, upper class gentleman who complained of trench horrors on the basis that “little of the discomfort they complained about was new to the ‘other ranks’”: Ferguson, \textit{The Pity of War}, 451–2.
\textsuperscript{147} Originally published in Germany 1929 as \textit{Im Westen nichts Neues}, and first translated into English by A. W. Wheen in the same year. A new English translation was published in 1994: Erich Maria Remarque, \textit{All Quiet on the Western Front}, trans. Brian Murdoch (London; Cape, 1994).
\textsuperscript{150} In an interview with Mark Rawlinson, Barker referred to the poets of World War I who “had there (sic) own myth. So you were writing the legend, and having to write against it”: Rawlinson, “Author Interview” in Rawlinson, “\textit{Pat Barker},” 174.
found themselves. The meanings of words changed so that nothing in high culture could ever again be described without a level of irony, thus forming Modernity, a term that has become firmly attached to cultural analyses of the war.\footnote{152}

Words that had had unquestioned meanings were no longer used without an enhanced awareness of irony. The abundance of images of atrocity in the trilogy\footnote{153} serve to amplify the enormous cost of the war, and to question the worth of politically orchestrated violence: a sort of supra-cognitive cost–benefit evaluation. The atrocities remind us, as Elaine Scarry notes, that “[t]he main purpose of war is injuring.”\footnote{154} Many strategies and high-sounding words like honour and sacrifice tend to conceal this purpose from us, as do carefully edited reports of what happens to men in the front line of fire, but always in war

the purpose of the event … is to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue, as well as to alter the surface, shape, and deep entirety of the objects that human beings recognize as extensions of themselves.\footnote{155}

As Rivers tells Billy Prior, “[i]n the end, moral and political truths have to be proved on the body, because this mass of nerve and muscle and blood is what we are” (305; emphasis in original). The unspeakable and the forgotten become nameless, powerfully resistant to verbal signifiers: “words [don’t] mean anything any more” (579); even the one-eyed, Lieutenant Hallet’s final verdict on what war does to fighting men is a non-word. “Shotvarfet,” for Hallet, is speakable only in strangled English through the medium of a mangled tongue lolling about in a se-anemone mouth. Hallet’s fellow patients reprise his freshly minted expression and not its translation, because, unlike “It’s not worth it,” Shotvarfet is the very voice of mutilation speaking a language that cannot be contradicted. The canvas of the war novel, upon which are painted the grossest, deliberate cleavings of human tissue, seems to vindicate Scarry’s claims about the normally occluded, primary purpose of war.

\footnote{153} These images are discussed in Chapter Two.
\footnote{154} Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 63.
The Regeneration trilogy and the war novel canon

Bond refers to the scene in The Ghost Road where Craiglockhart’s wounded soldiers and Dr Rivers together echo the dying Hallet’s “not worth it” verdict on the war (588). Bond deems this “sentimentality” to represent “the authentic whingeing note of the 1990s transposed unconvincingly to 1918,” a time when (according to an opinion Bond attributes to Hugh Brogan), “different values prevailed.”

The war years, however, and the decade following the war, were far from devoid of anti-war sentiments or critics of war who found the whole event to be pointless or absurd: Henri Barbusse’s Le Feu (1916), was “a harrowing indictment of the suffering of soldiers at the front.” Frank Field refers to Louis-Ferdinand Céline, “certainly a pacifist and an anarchist,” author of Voyage au bout de la nuit, (1932) as someone who presented the world since 1914 in Pascalian terms as tragic and grotesque. The harrowing but ordered world of the Naturalists is no longer sufficient. Life now can only be depicted in terms of nightmare.

All Quiet on the Western Front was regarded by many as “pacifist war propaganda”; Karl Hugo Schlutius however, thought it was not anti-war at all, but simply a novel that aimed to tell the “truth” about the front-line theatre of war; Stefan Zweig called the novel Remarque’s Frontroman. Hans-Harald Müller believes All Quiet on the Western Front is best viewed as a Bewältigung-Roman or a Vermächtnis-Roman (Coping Novel, or Legacy Novel), a novel which, by seeking to come to terms with the experience of war and deal with its legacy for the future, highlights the war’s significance for the present.

156 Bond, The Unquiet, 77.
160 Schlutius, ‘Pazifistische Kriegspropaganda’ 520; cited in Müller, “Politics,” 116. Müller notes that although several authors such as Bruno Frank, Leonhard Frank, Bernhard Kellermann, Ernst Toller, Carl Zuckmayer and Stefan Zweig declared All Quiet on the Western Front to tell the ‘truth’ about the war, “the meaning, and the political significance of the adjective ‘true’ were hardly ever analysed”: Müller, “Politics,” 113.
161 Müller, “Politics,” 112.
Müller identifies the “innovative feature” of Remarque’s novel: “its use of fiction to depict the war experience of the ordinary soldier.” Brian Murdoch contends that “Remarque’s novels clearly justify his designation as a chronicler” rather than merely a fictionalist. The *Regeneration* trilogy’s many images of trench death and injury may well have been influenced by Remarque’s imagery, but the trilogy’s reach transcends its Remarquean roots. Lidia Yuknavitch notes that modern war novels challenge us “to ask what would happen if we understood war as discursive”; the trilogy is a discursive novel, digressing as it does into many aspects of wartime Britain, while holding the war itself at the centre of the narrative.

War in the trilogy, as in the novels Yuknavitch discusses, may be “read as a trope, a figure of thought on which meaning turns.” I am unable to agree with Yuknavitch, however, that “[t]he novels of war written between 1914 and 1940 teach us how to value war as *a necessary evil* in the growth and defense of nations and how to grieve for the soldier male.” As Jennifer Haytock notes, the large body of war literature generally evinces far less resigned or positive attitudes to war: “In most, if not all World War I novels, characters proceed along an arc from idealism to disillusionment”; Haytock cites characters such as Hicks in Thomas Boyd’s *Through the Wheat*, who comes to reject patriotism, and instead “memorializes the dead while rejecting the rhetoric of war for which that friend died.” The iconoclastic, or disenchanted, approach to war inspired what William Dow refers to as “a flood” of American novels which “can all be called anti-war novels, permeated with a strong sense of disillusionment and protest.”

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162 Müller, “Politics,” 111.
164 Both Remarque and Barker convey the ghastly, visceral nature of mutilation at the front. Burns’s experience of falling into an open belly (19) is a close parallel to Paul Baumer’s: “I fall into a belly that has been ripped open”: Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, translated by Brian Murdoch (Vintage Books, 1996), 81. Despite this parallel, however, Burns’s experience, further discussed in Chapter Two, is more directly based upon the documented ordeal of one of Rivers’s patients.
167 Yuknavitch, *Allegories*, 123; emphasis added.
169 William Dow, “A Farewell to Arms and Hemingway’s Protest Stance: To Tell the Truth Without Screaming” *Hemingway Review* 15, no. 1 (1995): 121. Dow includes E. E. Cummings’s *The Enormous Room* (1922), Thomas Boyd’s *Through the Wheat* (1923), Elliot Paul’s *Impromptu* (1923), Lawrence Stallings’s *Plumes* (1924), Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A
of war literature is large, and its novels cover a plethora of sometimes conflicting emotional responses to war, which means that generalised observations about it are often dubious.

Despite admirable scholarship, Yuknavitch more than once oversimplifies or misrepresents the war canon, asserting that the “bodies, meat, letters, metal, bones, shit and puke” in Larry Heinemann’s Vietnam war novel *Paco’s Story* (1986) marks a radical difference from the past war novel in terms of the narrative forms used to describe the experience of the soldier. Gone is the moral accounting of older forms of war storytelling, the paradigms of innocence lost and regained through battle, the wounded soldier as an allegory for the sacrifices necessary in a just war.¹⁷⁰

Novels of the 1970s were certainly freer to publish more of the grittiness and earthy expletives of the time, but this does not amount to an alteration of narrative “form.” Filth, excrement and other bodily emanations, corpses, and other details that excite reactions of disgust have been present in modern war novels since Barbusse’s *Under Fire*, a work dense with death, excrement and horror. T. E. Lawrence’s “severely chiselled picture of barrack life”¹⁷¹ in *The Mint* fearlessly includes expressions such as “shit-cart” (used as a chapter title) and “jammy cunts,” although these words were censored in some early editions.¹⁷² Language deployed by authors of course reflects contemporary idiolects, but form *per se* has not changed radically as newer war experiences are shaped into novels.

Perhaps more importantly, it is inaccurate to say that paradigms of innocence lost or regained in war novels held up the wounded soldier “as an allegory for the sacrifices necessary in a just war.”¹⁷³ Yuknavitch too cursorily dismisses a body of literature when she contends that “Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* … did what all war novels of World War I did, in particular, it gave us a hero who fought for moral

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¹⁷³ Yuknavitch, *Allegories*, 27.
reasons, and who was wounded and challenged to recover those reasons.” This statement about World War I novels is so broad it is astonishing, as it entirely overlooks *Le Feu* (not even mentioned by Yuknavitch) in which the soldiers seem to be “thirty million slaves, hurled upon one another in the mud of war by guilt and error,” and the iconic *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which is acknowledged as an important novel by Yuknavitch. As Andrew Rutherford claims, books like *All Quiet* and *Under Fire*, each with its emphasis on degradation, demoralization and futility, and the repudiation of any conception of the heroic, were immensely influential, establishing in effect a new norm of war literature.

*A Farewell to Arms* is also unable to be reduced to a moral tale of challenged and reclaimed ideals; James Dawes believes that Lieutenant Frederic Henry’s final verdict on the war, that “[i]t wasn’t any good,” encapsulates “Hemingway’s allegorical denial of the existence of good.” Douglas Jerrold, who sees Frederic Henry as “an unspeakable cad” for deserting at the height of battle, and for aiding and abetting the desertion of a nurse, is incensed that Hemingway felt himself able “to write this story without conveying or even hinting of any trace of weakness in his character, or any trace of wrong thinking in his philosophy, [which] is … to write a lie, to sin against the Holy Ghost.” *A Farewell to Arms*, however, signposts its own ideological position on war in its very title; and indeed, it is hardly

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174 Yuknavitch, *Allegories*, 17 (emphasis added).
176 Yuknavitch claims “I know World War I because I know Dr. Strangelove (1964), *Slaughterhouse Five*, (1969), and *All Quiet on the Western Front*”: Yuknavitch, “Preface: War, The Serial,” in *Yuknavitch, Allegories*, vii. *All Quiet on the Western Front* is again mentioned by Yuknavitch as part of “a literary outpouring of World War I literature”: Yuknavitch, *Allegories*, 5.
178 James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War Through World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 129; emphasis added. Despite Henry’s seemingly existential awareness of war’s absurdity, however, Dawes does detect a desperate, underlying hopefulness within that very moral absence: “the book never fully renounces the search for a sustainable moral form, the necessity of both violence and instrumentalization, or the possibility of individual freedom … [T]he narrative points beyond … Crane’s absurdism forward to the dialectic of ambiguity articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, who takes existence’s groundlessness itself as a grounding through radical freedom”: Dawes, *The Language of War*, 129–30.
179 Douglas Jerrold, *The Lie About the War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), 34. Akim Aminur Rashid, by way of contrast, suggests that Hemingway’s purpose is to draw attention to Henry’s “need to impose upon all things a reductionist, military notion of right or wrong, whether or not he is dealing with military concerns. The result of such one-sided vision, the authorial voice behind *A Farewell to Arms* knows, is ruinous”: Akim Aminur Rashid, “When Frederic Henry Is Disillusioned about His Identity: Alienation in *A Farewell to Arms*: A Critical Analysis,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 16, No. 4 (2013): 124.
unusual to find a soldier in a war novel who retreats to some degree from his initial zeal for war after experiencing the horrors of battle.

Gary Sheffield, not convinced that there was, in fact, a disillusionment school of thought about the war, claims “[l]iterary specialists and cultural historians are apt to make sweeping statements about this particular phenomenon, often based on the experiences of a small handful of officer-poets.” Sheffield, seemingly mindful of Sassoon, Graves and Owen, believes we cannot generalise “from a tiny group of atypical officers with literary inclinations.” At what point expressed disillusionment qualifies as a “school” of thought about the war is debatable, but that there were many who felt disillusioned as their early conceptions of the war were shattered is undeniable; C. E. Montague’s *Disenchantment*, published in 1922, describes how badly man has been shaken by the war:

Every disease which victory was to cure he sees raging worse than before: more poverty, less liberty, more likelihood of other wars, more spite between master and man, less national comradeship.

Peter Buitenhuis calls Montague’s book perhaps the bleakest expression of disillusionment: for him the whole war had been a ghastly and costly mistake, a spectacle of useless bravery, endless lies, and profitless sacrifice.

Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* is described by Andrew Rutherford as “one of the most virulently anti-war books in the language,” depicting the “gigantic wreck” of war to be “Europe’s decennial picnic of corpses.” Barbusse reflects a similar sort of anti-war stand in *Under Fire*, described by Hemingway as

[t]he only good war book to come out during [World War I]. Henri Barbusse … was the first one to show … the gigantic useless slaughter and lack of even elemental intelligence in generalship that characterized the Allied conduct of that

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181 Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 130.
war from 1915 through 1917. His whole book was a protest and an attitude. The attitude was that he hated it.  

Eksteins contends that Remarque’s first-person account of Paul Bäumer, who is an everyman Frontsoldat, reflected disillusionment that broadened out from the Great War to the sentiment of the whole epoch: it “seemed to encapsulate … the whole modern impulse: the amalgamation of prayer and desperation, dream and chaos, wish and desperation.” One German commentator thought “[t]he effect of the book [sprang] … from the terrible disillusionment of the German people from the state in which they [found] themselves.” Eksteins considers that All Quiet on the Western Front’s retrospective focus on the absurdity and horror of war and its humanising of the German soldier accomplished “much more than all the revisionist historians in America and Europe put together.” Remarque’s work is not exactly a revisionist historical novel but rather, represents an unexpected reiteration from the German perspective of ideas already contained in Barbusse’s Le Feu and the poems of Owen, Sassoon, and others, that a soldier, even an enemy soldier, is simply a soldier and a human being.

Yukanavitch’s view that war novels always presented war as a necessary evil and an ultimately edifying challenge for the soldier may be supported if selective attention is given to American writers such as Edith Wharton (A Son at the Front, 1923), (1923), Ralph Connor (The Major, 1917), and Beckles Wilson (Redemption, 1924), for whom, as Peter Buitenhuis observes, “the trenches of Flanders were the baptismal font of the new nation”: in the Adamic or messianic vision of these new-world writers, the Great European War could be seen as part of a larger drama in which the bitter experience and loss of war would yet lead to a paradise partly regained.

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187 Modris Eksteins “All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War,” Journal of Contemporary History 15, no. 2 (1980): 358.
188 Eksteins, Rites, 296.
189 Barbusse’s soldiers do not regard themselves as heroes: “Heroes? Some sort of extraordinary being? Rot! We’ve been murderers”: Barbusse, Under Fire, 342.
190 Buitenhuis. The Great War of Words, 155; 151
Very different attitudes to the war inhere in the works of other American and Canadian novelists, such as Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*:

Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names or rivers, the numbers of regiments and dates.  

Dos Passos declared that “no excuse of pragmatic expediency justified the war”, in *The Three Soldiers*, Coningsby Dawson observes, army life fosters only “contented moral rottenness.” Charles Yale Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed* (1930), whose central theme is “the brutalizing effect of war” on soldiers, is described by Pierre Berton as “the most cynical novel of the era.” The poignancy of such war novels is greatly diminished if they are understood to represent war as a necessary (as opposed to a sadly inevitable) evil.

**Barker and Remarque**

Rawlinson distinguishes *All Quiet on the Western Front* from the *Regeneration* trilogy, arguing that for Remarque, “the theatre of atrocity is played out only before those who are party to the killing; families know nothing of what has become of their sons.” As Rawlinson notes, Barker mostly presents the front’s atrocities as they are recounted in therapy, rather than as they occur at the front. Ladan Amir

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191 Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 161. Billy Prior writes an entry in his journal that resonates with Hemingway’s: “Loos, she said. I remember standing by the bar and thinking that words didn’t mean anything any more. Patriotism honour courage vomit vomit vomit. Only the names meant anything. Mons, Loos, the Somme, Arras, Verdun, Ypres” (579). Bergonzzi accuses Barker of “half-remembering or simply lifting [this] well known passage from Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*”: Bergonzzi, *War Poets and Other Subjects*, 12. I believe that Barker consciously evokes Hemingway’s phrase here in order to convey the parity between Prior’s disillusionment in the *Regeneration* trilogy, and Henry’s disillusionment in *A Farewell to Arms*.


196 Rawlinson, *Pat Barker*, 64.

197 I disagree with Rawlinson’s statement that “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder represents a literal return of the repressed”: Rawlinson, *Pat Barker*, 65, my emphasis. The stress that arises from trauma
Safaei observes that *Regeneration* includes “no direct war scene.”\(^{198}\) Safaei only examines the *Regeneration* volume of Barker’s trilogy in his article on traumatized soldiers, and his comment is less apposite if *Ghost Road* is considered, for there, in the present tense, we are given a few of Prior’s diary accounts of direct war scenes, inviting immediate comparisons with *All Quiet on the Western Front*, in which the narration, for the great majority of the novel, is written in the present tense and through the persona of Paul Bäumer. Nonetheless, Barker’s trilogy concerns itself primarily with the successes and failures of medical treatment administered to men damaged at the front, allowing the damage sustained by bodies and minds to convey to us manifestly the idea that what war represents is a failure of humanity, or a failure of men to behave humanely.

Rawlinson’s view that the trilogy “both appropriates and seems to go beyond” the genre of “the anti-heroic literature of disillusionment and protest” represented by Remarque is apt, although he sees the trilogy as determining “ways in which the war can be made culturally meaningful.”\(^{199}\) I suggest Barker is less interested in establishing how war may be culturally meaningful than in *stripping* the First World War of much of its supposed meaningfulness. What emerges dominant in the trilogy is a modernist style of meaning/lessness in which futility, absurdity, paradox, and irony abound and nothing more ultimately meaningful regarding the Great War emerges than Prior’s last thoughts: “*Balls up. Bloody mad. Oh Christ*” (588; emphasis in original).

can never be a *literal* return of the repressed experience; the disorder is caused by the emotive overlay of a difficult memory of an experience and is more accurately thought of as the somatic shock waves triggered by that memory or the revisiting or re-activation of that memory. This psychic ‘return’ can never be a literal going back, but only an imagined revisiting of a once real experience. In a study of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in civilians, examined against the context of PTSD in Vietnam veterans, (the affliction is also called “post-Vietnam syndrome”), the hallmarks of PTSD in soldiers are described as including “hyper-alertness, sleep problems, and nightmares” as well as “guilt, a belief that the traumatic experience is recurring, and emotional numbing”: John E. Helzer, Lee N. Robins, and Larry McEvoy, “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the General Population: Findings of the Epidemiologic Catchment Area Survey,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 317, no. 26 (1987): 1633, emphasis added. Rawlinson similarly misuses the concept of literalness when he maintains that the hospital in *All Quiet on the Western Front* was “literally a stage on which to produce the spectacle of the war’s experience”: Rawlinson, *Pat Barker*, p 64. The hospital represented by the novelist may be a figurative, but not a literal, “stage.”

\(^{199}\) Rawlinson, *Pat Barker*, 65.
The trilogy illustrates the tragic irony of the human condition that, despite an apparently quite profound post-Freudian ability to self-analyse, men continue to engage in homicidal savagery. War novels illustrate that the psychic damage to the foot-soldier caused by war and its horrors, regardless of who is deemed to have “won” or “lost” the war, can be utterly overwhelming, and denotes the failure of civilisation to actually civilise man in any meaningful sense of that word. The words of the tribal chieftain Njiru at the very end of The Ghost Road convey the despair of a lost civilisation of tribesmen but serve also to show that no matter how much further advanced Rivers’s culture may think itself to be, it is unable to undo the damage it has done: “Do not yearn for us, the fingerless, the crippled, the broken. Go down and depart, oh, oh, oh” (590; emphasis in original). Europe’s fingerless, crippled and broken, to say nothing of its dead, far exceed those of Melanesia. Differences of scale are less important than the underappreciated value of the unravished body. Only a now-disembodied voice lamenting its loss is able to carry such a message meaningfully to the soulless world of the corporeal.

Njiru’s short exhortation at the end of the trilogy, which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five of this thesis, underscores the value of anthropological detachment in the examination of bellicosity. Anthropologists are divided as to whether war signifies civilisation or represents a pathological interruption to civilisational progress. Carol Greenhouse adopts the latter view, and I suggest it is this view of war that the Regeneration trilogy best mirrors:

Anthropological contributions to the study of war tend to share a fundamental premise that war is a form of social pathology ... a sign that something is seriously amiss in the social, cultural, or ecological order. The topic is largely limited to what has been called “primitive warfare,” that is, armed conflicts between groups whose recourse to nonviolent, verbal modes of conflict resolution has failed. Thus, anthropological investigations of warfare are studies of sociocultural failure.

200 An obituary for Rivers notes that “[t]he turning point in his career came when, in 1898, as the head of the psychological section of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, he was first brought into contact with natives not far removed from savagery”: A. C. Haddon, F. C. Bartlett and Ethel S. Fegan, “Obituary: William Halse Rivers Rivers,”Man 22 (1922): 97-8. I doubt if this attempted displacement of “savagery” onto the islanders he had studied would have been at all acceptable to Rivers, especially after the horrors of Europe’s bloody war.

Roger Cooter and Steve Sturdy note that “[a]s Richard Titmuss observed in the aftermath of the Second World War, we must consciously abandon the presumption that war is an abnormal situation, [and] that peace is … the normal lot of mankind.”\footnote{Roger Cooter and Steve Sturdy, “Of War, Medicine and Modernity: Introduction,” in \textit{War, Medicine and Modernity}, eds. Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison and Steve Sturdy (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 7. Robert Laufer notes that “[t]oday, no matter how prominent its presence on the world scene, war is regarded as an aberration precisely because it raises the specter of a nuclear holocaust. In the nuclear age, the idea of war as aberrant has become central to survival of the species and quite possibly to the ability of political leaders and ordinary citizens to function in the world of everyday life”: Robert S. Laufer, “The Serial Self: War, Trauma, Identity, and Adult Development” in \textit{Human Adaptation to Extreme Stress From the Holocaust to Vietnam}, eds. John P. Wilson, Zev Harel and Boaz Kahana (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 35.}

This in no way suggests that the normative incidence of wars, born out of societal confusion and neuroses, is at all desirable; it simply points out the sad ubiquity of our troubled human condition. The \textit{Regeneration} trilogy is a historical novelist’s study of sociocultural failure in early twentieth century Britain and Europe. Its representations of British society include not one happy family; most of the characters in the narrative, including those who have suffered war injury, have also experienced domestic abuse, dysfunction, persecution or discrimination of some kind. In a narrative that deals with bellicose nations, psychoanalysis and seriously wounded soldiers, such content is to be expected, but it is the societal context of Britain that is the real, overarching patient in analysis, the actual men comprising mere synecdoches of the nation.

Barker incorporates two notorious public trials into her narrative in order to illustrate the depth of British society’s malaise: the trial of pacifist and anti-war campaigner Alice Wheeldon for conspiracy to murder Lloyd George (Wheeldon is represented by Beattie Roper in the trilogy) and the Pemberton Billing trial, at the base of which was an allegation that there existed a list of 47,000 upper class British homosexuals in London who were colluding with a German espionage network. Roberta Joan Jackson notes that these two trials are only presented by Barker in fragments of conversation, that the actual narrative is, on the subject of the trials, and their conduct, itself “incomplete … full of gaps and disconnections,” so that the reader is made to “reconstruct the history, and re-externalize the event that is missing.”\footnote{Jackson, “Narratives of Trauma,” 190.} British society is thus made the subject of a therapeutic process and as
is the case with many a patient in therapy, struggles to arrive at full and complete disclosure.

Karen Knutsen notes that when Barker was writing the trilogy during the early 1990s, historians such as Jay Winter and Antoine Prost\(^204\) had begun to re-orientate their historical thinking about war in general to a historical anthropologization of war, and to “cultures of war” which are cognisant of avoiding “centres of power and grand narratives.”\(^205\) Knutsen contends the *Regeneration* trilogy is “concerned with and in dialogue with all of these successive ways of thinking about the war.”\(^206\) This less time-bound approach directly contradicts Hew Strachan’s view, which is that present-day writers need to think “as they did then” when analysing the First World War, and not “from the perspective of a new century and possessed of values that have themselves been shaped by the experience both of the First World War and of later wars.”\(^207\) The trilogy does exactly what Strachan objects to by allowing perspectives and values that evolved in the later decades of the twentieth century to impinge upon and tease out some understanding of the imaginatively resuscitated bodies, traumas, people, and events of the past.

The *Regeneration* trilogy, as a novelist’s representation of World War I, situates itself both within and outside of the war’s historical realities, weaving fictional narrative in and around its researched and putatively factual narrative content. Not only does the novelist’s artistic licence lend its measures of re-creative freedom to the author, but the subjective, and often indeterminate nature of history and its “facts” contribute even more licence that acts as a defence against accusations of historical inaccuracy or inauthenticity in Barker’s narrative. The trilogy to some extent aligns itself with a canon of World War I novels in its exploration of war’s general egregiousness; however, as this thesis argues, its particular gaze at the war breaks much new ground in the realm of the historical war novel. The gaze is alienated from what may be thought of as strictly history and also from what is regarded as strictly fiction, in order to transcend the limitations of both disciplines.

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CHAPTER TWO
The Body at War

Odysseus, sitting full in the firelight, suddenly swerved round to the dark, gripped by a quick misgiving – soon as she touched him she might spot the scar! The truth would all come out.

Homer208

There is not a sign of life on the horizon and a thousand signs of death.

Wilfred Owen209

The Regeneration trilogy was inspired, in part, by Barker’s childhood memories of the “horrific scar” her grandfather bore as the result of a bayonet injury inflicted by a German soldier.210 Barker’s allusion to the scar captures not only the paradoxical attraction that the scar inspires, but also the importance of the response of the witness. Historian Laurinda Stryker, noting that “[a]t the front, men saw things that human beings should not see,”211 she makes an important distinction between the men’s responses of horror and fear: the former “can lead to a reappraisal of war itself, for horror is qualitatively different from fear”;212 it leads not to a sense of personal alarm, but to sympathy for the suffering of others. Most writers and case histories overlook horror as an independent factor in shell-shock: “the relation of a sense of military duty to pity and sympathy [is] not examined, for horror [is] almost

212 Stryker, “Mental Cases,” 164; emphasis in original.
universally treated as a subspecies of fear in shellshock theory.”

This chapter’s focus is upon the many ghastly injuries of the battlefield depicted in the *Regeneration* trilogy, and contends that the visceral nature of the soldiers’ intimate relationship with horror is an alienating experience that leads to a special understanding of war.

There are two strands in my exploration of Barker’s war horror: the first is that the trilogy’s many grim or shocking descriptions of critical injury to the body sustained by war violence rest upon a familiar aesthetics of horror that resonates with the tradition of the grotesque in literature. Irena Kurzová notes that “Montaigne was probably the first to transfer the term grotesque from art [i.e., the Italian ornamental style found in the *grotta*, or cave] to literature.”

The literary grotesque, a “quasi-genre” whose definition is “hazy,” generally features gruesome distortions and degradations of the human body in lurid detail. The body thus transformed becomes a fertile “vehicle of meaning”, when bodies are mutilated in war, it is inevitable that the attempts to represent such mutilation and its meaning will resonate with the purposes of the extreme bodily malformations of the grotesque genre.

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213 Stryker, “Mental Cases,” 164.
218 “When Kayser analyses Victor Hugo’s conception of the grotesque, he formulates … his own structural position: ‘only in context, as a part of a larger structure or as a vehicle of meaning, does the individual form become expressive and starts to belong to the grotesque’”: Kurzová, “Priests,” 54. Kurzová quotes Wolfgang Kayser, *Das Groteske: Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2004): 60. Philip Thomson also notes that “Hugo associates the grotesque not with the fantastic but with the realistic, making it clear that the grotesque is not just an artistic mode or category but exists in nature and in the world around us”: Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972), 17.
219 Barker casts a close eye on the war’s atrocity again in her *Life Class* trilogy in which artists at the Slade School who are Red Cross volunteers capture in their paintings the grotesque mutilations of soldiers which they had witnessed at the front. The trilogy consists of *Life Class* (2007), *Toby’s Room* (2012) and *Noonday* (2015).
The second strand in my scrutiny of the trilogy’s horror suggests that the personal experience of grotesque, or gruesome, wounding acts as a stimulus for deep insight into the fundamental nature of war. James Campbell calls this special knowledge “combat gnosis,” and although Campbell himself has reservations about how far the concept may be stretched, it is clear that in the Regeneration trilogy the soldiers’ combat gnosis, or the special knowledge that is conveyed by such powerful intrusions of the utterly ghastly powerfully undermines heroic notions of war. It is as though now they are privy to, and burdened by secret information that comes from an extraordinarily close, even intimate, proximity to mutilation and the prevalence of death on the battlefield. The poets are amply skilled in communicating the ways in which their close encounters with horror bring about their changes of heart. The trilogy acknowledges the ambivalence both men evinced regarding fighting in the war, and suggests that their return to the front is driven by love for their men more than support for war. My contention is that war gnosis engendered by grotesque horror is so powerful a trope in the trilogy’s narrative that confusion or inconsistency of attitude in Owen and Sassoon do not detract from the effectiveness of battle gnosis in challenging war rationales.

This chapter also addresses an argument advanced by Evelyn Cobley concerning the anti-war stance of such literary men as Owen and Sassoon. Cobley argues that by relying upon standard literary conventions to frame their objections to war, such writers become complicit in the ideologies they purport to oppose. My counter argument draws attention to the flaws in Cobley’s thesis, as well as her inadequate engagement with the texts she examines. Chapters three to five continue to explore the idea that normative ideas about war and heroism are undermined by particularised perspectives of war: in turn, those chapters discuss the perspective of the homosexual gaze, the female gaze, and the ghostly gaze.

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War and the grotesque

Encounters with violent death and injury are understandably common in war literature; the trilogy contains, on my reckoning, seventy-one individual allusions to grim or gruesome incidents. Although Yuknavitch suggests that it was Vietnam, rather than earlier wars, that “produced stories featuring bodies and reasons blown to bits,”\(^{221}\) in fact, bodies (and reasons) have long been “blown to bits” in literature documenting war. Few World War I novelists included quite so much graphic detail of grotesque human horror of the front as Henri Barbusse or Erich Maria Remarque. However, horror was a standard feature of war writing long before the Great War; Émile Zola, known for documentary realism in his writing\(^{222}\) and considered to have inspired Barbusse,\(^{223}\) describes a man walking on the field of battle “uttering frightful shrieks, and pressing his hands upon his protruding entrails.”\(^{224}\) The poet Robert Southey, in *Horrors of War*, recounts in prose form seeing a French soldier laid upon a little Hillock groaning with agony: A grape shot had cut across the upper part of his belly, and he was keeping in his bowels with a handkerchief and hat. He begged me to end his misery!\(^{225}\)

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\(^{221}\) Yuknavitch, * Allegories*, 17.

\(^{222}\) Phillip Walker notes that Zola in his writing utilised a technique he called his *mensonge*, or his *lie*: that is, his ability to combine “a convincing documentary realism with strongly symbolic and suggestive representation of reality”: Phillip Walker, “Zola’s Use of Color Imagery in *Germinal*,” *PMLA* 77, no. 4 (1962): 442.


\(^{225}\) Pearl K. Bell notes that the scene in *The Thin Red Line* in which a soldier whose belly has been ripped open drives the company mad with his piercing yells while trying to keep his intestines from falling out is as horribly ineradicable from the mind as the much quoted description in *Catch 22* of the wounded gunner whose ‘insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out’: Pearl K. Bell, “The Wars of James Jones” *Commentary* 65 (1978): 90. Norman Mailer employs a similar image to describe a disemboweled Japanese soldier – “A wide stain of blood was spreading out from his body, and his stomach, ripped open, gaped like the swollen entrails of a fowl”: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (New York: Picador, 1998), 154. First published 1948.
Shigehisa Kuriyama notes that “the disgust provoked by the stench of feces, urine, and putrid vomit is visceral and immediate”; anxieties about human “wastes festering inside the body” are frequently expressed in literary tropes linking waste with human baseness. David Hillman, discussing Hamlet’s repeated references to human entrails contends that

[a]ll … that one can ever know of the living interior of the human body is that it is destined for death and decay; and, Hamlet discovers, mortality stinks … Real entrails (for all our fantasies about them) have, as Nietzsche repeatedly points out, a rather unsavoury reality: “What offends aesthetic meaning in inner man – beneath the skin: bloody masses, full intestines, viscera, all those sucking, pumping monsters – formless or ugly or grotesque, and unpleasant to smell on top of that!”

The viscera, the site of fecal matter, connects the grotesque to degradation, for in the realm of the grotesque, as Mikhail Bakhtin notes, “[t]o degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs.”

David Jarraway observes that battlefields comprise a zero level of rectitude [in which] war becomes the equivalent of human waste – ‘a goddamn shit field’ – in which an entire platoon must immerse itself in order to register most completely the nauseous vacuity and repulsive futility of their lives at war.

In literature of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Melinda Rabb finds “rather frequent and vivid” examples of violent dismemberment of the male body in visions of classical carnage:

John Milton’s Adam … views an “ensanguin’d field” that is “scatter’d with carcasses.” Aphra Behn’s mutilated Oronoko dies after his nose, ears, limbs, and

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genitals have been “hack’d off” and burnt by fire, while the remainder of his “mangled” body is cut in quarters and dispersed across Surinam.\footnote{230}

Rabb provides many examples of dashed out brains and ripped body parts in works by Smollett, Defoe, Goldsmith, Pope, Sterne, and others. She employs the shattering of the corporeal body in literature as a metaphor for the “divided organism”\footnote{231} of the nation that that had suffered the blows of its civil wars, conflicts Defoe refers to as the “bloody intestine wars”\footnote{232} that occurred between 1640 and 1656. Rabb’s contention is that civil war violence engenders literary fantasies of dismemberment unlike the violence of other wars:

The seventeenth-century world-turned-upside-down by revolution could not simply be righted at the Restoration. Parts had gone missing. The task of reassembling these dislocated parts—ultimately an impossible task … generate[d] many corporeal fantasies of the male physique.\footnote{233}

David McNeil notes how

\[t\]he modern theory of the grotesque has tended to coalesce around John Ruskin’s identification of two features: one, the ambivalence of the ludicrous and the fearful, and two, the element of play.\footnote{234}

Modern critics, McNeil observes, disagree with Ruskin’s assertion that either the fearful or the ludicrous must dominate in grotesque representation, and in fact the two elements may be equally powerful if the ambiguous nature of the experience is to be fully exploited.

The attention to bodies mutilated by war in Barker’s trilogy resonates with similar mutilations notably present in Barbusse and Remarque; McNeil notes how “a grim,
sarcasm in literary treatments of war and militarism occurs in various texts at least as far back as the comedy of Aristophanes.” There is a great deal of what may be termed “grotesque” description of dead and injured bodies in the trilogy, if the idea of something grotesque is understood not as humorous, but merely as fantastically ugly, bizarre, and frightful.

Vita Fortunati, in her discussion of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* and Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, notes that

> Both novels are … characterized by their use of irony and paradox, by their sense of grotesque and expressionist exaggeration, especially in the descriptions of the terrible mutilation of bodies; a grotesqueness which is emphasized by their consistent use of understatement.

Fortunati’s statement seems to contradict itself by suggesting that a style characterised by consistent understatement employs grotesque, expressionist exaggeration; the only way to explain away the contradiction is to assume her meaning is that the two novels consistently use understatement in description *not* involving mutilation. “Gruesome” would probably suffice as a term to describe the hideous human damage in war novels and in the trilogy, but although this would have avoided problems arising from the use of the loaded literary term, the rich history of the literary grotesque is actually a powerful influence on the realist depictions of bodily damage in war novels. The details of extreme fleshy damage in serious modern war novels are often very similar to such descriptions in the earlier satires of Swift, Sterne and others, but generally have few comic overtones, indicating that the grotesque trope has developed a more versatile utility.

According to eighteenth century writer Christoph Martin Wieland, the artist of the grotesque caricatured and distorted nature into monstrous forms “with the sole intention of provoking laughter, disgust, and surprise about the daring of his

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236 Nahid Shahbazi Moghadam notes that the comic may or may not be present in the literary grotesque: “In grotesque stories, mainly those leaning toward tragedy, death is generally depicted in ways that are either horrific or bizarre or both”: Nahid Shahbazi Moghadam, “The Grotesque in ‘Dance Macabre,’” *Peake Studies* 13, no. 4 (2014): 19.
monstrous creations by the unnatural and absurd products of his imagination.”

Wolfgang Kayser notes that

[t]he grotesque world is – and is not – our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence.

Over the centuries the grotesque has come to occupy a place in realism, “even though its scope is considerably narrowed by the increasingly strong rejection of the supernatural and the greater emphasis which is placed on its humorous side.” The human body is still the central motif as the concept of the grotesque develops: Gogol’s story The Nose is about a barber who discovers a human nose in his breakfast roll one morning and seeks to restore it to its owner. Kayser contends that “[t]his is genuine grotesque.” But in his final chapter, “An Attempt to Define the Nature of the Grotesque,” Kayser accentuates the importance of terror in the grotesque tableau, as if to suggest that comic overtones may be entirely absent:

The grotesque is the estranged world … it is our world which has to be transformed. Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque … In literature the grotesque appears in a scene or an animated tableau … a situation that is filled with ominous tension … We are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable … The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death.

Philip Thomson observes that “the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and eras marked by strife, radical change or disorientation.” In times of chaos, grotesque- ing the body exposes the fearfulness of life, even to the point of suggesting life’s “backdrop of cosmic pointlessness.” During one battle

239 Kayser, The Grotesque in Art, 37.
240 Kayser, The Grotesque in Art, 123.
241 Kayser, The Grotesque in Art, 125.
244 William Van O’Connor, The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), 13. R. J. Wyatt, highly critical of literature’s largely vituperative attitude to World War I, notes acidly that in most of the war books, “if a man is killed or wounded, his brains or his entrails always protrude from his body.” Wyatt contends that such writers pander to “a lust for horror, brutality, and filth, which in itself disquieting and dangerous”: R. J. Wyatt, Preface to War Books: An Annotated Bibliography of Books about the Great War (London: Greenhill, 1989), xvii; xviii. Less emotively, James Hammond, discussing Burns’s “incessant vomiting and the rupturing distended belly of the German corpse [in Regeneration]” suggests that the
at the front, Prior finds “a gob of Hallet’s brain between [his] fingertips” (543). For two days he walks around with “slaughterhouse” bits of blood and brain on his uniform (544); these horrors induce states of “stupefaction,” (544) numbed disbelief and tired resignation in Prior.

The trope of splattered brain matter is fairly common in classical works of satire. David McNeil refers to Christopher Marlowe’s Tamburlaine the Great, in which Tamburlaine envisages a field “sprinkled with the brains of slaughtered men.” Smollett’s Roderick Random includes an incident during which “the head of the officer of Marines … being shot off, bounced from the deck athwart my face, leaving me well-nigh blinned with brains.” McNeil notes that the image is “one of the commonest and most grotesque epic motifs,” and finds examples in Virgil’s Iliad and Aeneid, as well as Ovid’s Metamorphoses. The continuing popularity of the motif is reflected even in the diary of Samuel Pepys:

The Earl of Falmouth, Muskey and Mr. Rd. Boyle killed on board the Duke’s ship, the Royall Charles, with one shot. Their blood and brains flying in the Duke’s face – and the head of Mr Boyle striking down the Duke, as some say.

The motif, which had by this time become “a literary commonplace,” was used to create humour. But as McNeil notes, the point of the grotesque is not just to be humorous:

Smollett touches a primitive nerve by bringing together the grotesque horror of human carnage and the more mundane, yet delirious, feeling of not being able to wipe a foul substance from one’s face...Roderick’s screams express what every man should feel who does not turn away from the horror of war. It is precisely because soldiers can lose the themselves in mechanical functions and distance themselves from death that so much blood could be shed.

liquidity of the images indicates that “structure and order have been assailed”: James Todd Hammond, “Eyes in The Text: Surveying the Ocular Aesthetic in Pat Barker’s War Trilogy,” (MA Thesis, Florida State University, 1998), 68.


McNeil, Grotesque Depiction, 93.


McNeil, Grotesque Depiction, 94.

As Joanne Lewis Lynn argues, Roderick’s response to the mess of body parts that covers him “is both realistic and a grisly comic symbol of the human condition in a comic grotesque world.” The gruesome or the grisly exemplifies a “repulsion-fascination paradox.” Ambivalence is endemic to the grotesque in literature, for the grotesque is often intended at one and the same time to horrify and amuse, comprising a “perfect ambiguity” of meaning. Confrontations with incidents of amusing horror create a disturbing emotional ambiguity and a grave, underlying sense of unsettlement, which helps to explain the unsettled place the grotesque occupies in literature.

Geoffrey Harpham, who contends that the three necessary responses to the grotesque are “laughter, and astonishment … [and] … either disgust or horror,” nevertheless acknowledges that the grotesque is “an aesthetic orphan, wandering from form to form, era to era”; it has become “the slipperiest of aesthetic categories,” owing to its profound reshaping in art and literature over the decades:

Each age redefines the grotesque in terms of what threatens its sense of essential humanity… no longer is the grotesque a method of portraying only the distorted inner landscapes of the diseased or neurotic imagination; we all know there is still plenty of that, but there are reasons: in a bomb-dominated, anxious time, objective reality, revealed to man by his most reliably “realistic” methods of observation, provides the stimulation for the grotesque.

Harpham notes that the “critical stretching” of the grotesque now enables it to be used as a vehicle to reflect “the higher truths,” but even in the “inner landscape of the diseased or neurotic imagination,” certain higher truths about humanity are also an inevitable aim of the genre.

Sarah Gleeson-White’s study of the “Southern grotesque” in the writing of Carson McCullers notes how, in Rabelais and his World,

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253 McNeil, Grotesque Depiction, 19.
254 Geoffrey Harpham, “The Grotesque: First Principles,” Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism 34, no. 4 (1976): 467; 463. Harpham asks “why … we gasp with laughter” when looking at Goya’s graphic depictions of war horror in his Désastres De La Guerre. His answer is “to make the nightmare seem more bearable”: Harpham, “The Grotesque,” 464. I question Harpham’s assertion that everyone’s response is to laugh at the pictures; immediate revulsion seems to me a more likely reaction.
Bakhtin’s reading of Gargantua and Pantagruel contains a revolutionary conceptualization of the grotesque that … can free not just McCuller’s fiction but much southern writing from the almost paralysing burden of more traditional accounts of the grotesque.  

Jennifer Higgins also acknowledges changing notions of the grotesque over time:

The motifs and representations of the grotesque alter and evolve with society’s taboos and fears. Its imagery depicts and exaggerates fears of the unruly, the marginal, and the threatening. The essential properties of the grotesque, then, lie in its workings and effects, rather than its vocabulary of images. It has disharmony at its heart, manifested both within the work and in the reaction it provokes.

It seems appropriate that a literary convention which utilises extreme distortion of the human body, and whose aim is to challenge and shed light on society, should itself be open to quite a versatile reshaping over time, as societies reshape themselves, and face ever new manifestations of horror and the unknown.

Higgins analyses the deformed, exaggerated and caricatured figures in Aubrey Beardsley’s work, as well as “the juxtaposition of incompatible elements such as the comic and the horrific, the normal and the abnormal, within the work.”

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. notes that

the grotesque is a projection of fascinated repulsion/attraction out into objects that consciousness cannot accommodate, because the object disturbs the sense of rational, natural categorization … the reader/perceiver is shocked by a sudden estrangement from habitual perception, and … the response is to suspend one’s confidence in knowledge about the world, and to attempt to redefine the real in thought’s relation to nature.

Barker’s images of atrocity on the field of battle shock their witnesses because the bodies of men are distorted into real life caricatures of their original forms. Harpham argues that


we need at least two major divisions of the grotesque, based on whether the comic or the terrible predominates. This is not news: Ruskin discriminated between the ludicrous and the terrible grotesque.\footnote{Harpham, “The Grotesque,” 464.}

The instantaneous transformation on a battle site of a man into something that looks more like a caricature or a parody of human features suddenly introduces surviving witnesses to the realm of the terrible grotesque. Splattered brains images in modern war literature reflect little, if any, of the ambivalence or the humour that was intended by earlier writers of the grotesque. Isaac Rosenberg coldly records “A man’s brains splattered on/ A stretcher-bearer’s face” in ‘Dead Man’s Dump.’\footnote{Isaac Rosenberg, ‘Dead Man’s Dump,’ in The Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg, eds. Gordon Bottomley and Denys Harding (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), 81–4.} In David Malouf’s short novel \textit{Fly Away Peter}, set in World War I, Peter’s friend Clancy is

blasted out of existence. It was Clancy’s blood that covered him, and the strange slime that was all over him … was what had been scattered when Clancy was turned inside out.\footnote{David Malouf, \textit{Fly Away Peter} (Ringwood: Penguin, 1982), 84.}

The literal externalisation of Clancy’s interior body explicitly evokes the idea of inversion common to much grotesque transformation: the carnivalesque world of Rabelais taps into “the peculiar logic of the ‘inside out’ (à l’envers), of the ‘turnabout,’ of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, … a world ‘inside out.’”\footnote{Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World}, 11.} Bakhtin states that “the aesthetics of the grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous.”\footnote{Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World}, 43.} Barker very skilfully executes the “aesthetics of the monstrous” as Lieutenant Hallet’s dire fate is presaged when he bathes in naked innocence at Craiglockhart:

He was going to lie down in the overgrown goldfish pool with its white lilies and golden insects fumbling the pale flowers. His toes curled round the mossy edge as he gingerly lowered himself, gasping as the water hit his balls.

They strolled across the tall grass towards him and stood looking down. Legs bloated-looking under water, silver bubbles trapped in his hair, cock slumped on his thigh like a seal hauled out on to the rocks. He looked up at them lazily, fingers straying through his bush, freeing the bubbles.

‘Enjoying yourself?’ Prior asked, nodding at the hand.
Hallet laughed, shielding his eyes with his other hand, but didn’t move.

‘I’d be careful if I were you,’ Owen said, in a tight voice. ‘I expect those fish are ravenous.’

And not just the fish, Prior thought (515).

Hallet’s seemingly bloated legs and seal-like penis hint at bodily disfigurement more sinister than ravenous goldfish (or Prior’s sexually predatory eyes): after being shelled, Hallet’s “gargoyled,” one-eyed face and pulsating “hernia cerebri … [look] like some strange submarine form of life, the mouth of a sea anemone perhaps” (582). Hallet on his hospital bed presents as shocking a sight to his relatives as Gregor Samsa,264 except that there is no mystery as to the actual causes of Hallet’s grotesque transformation.

Motifs of slaughter harking back to the heroic contexts of Ovid and Virgil reached an apex during the Restoration in the province of the humorous-grotesque, and were later commandeered by realist war novelists and war poets. Barbusse alludes to shell-damage that includes a headless body “oozing a currant jam of brains all over the chest and back”265 and a “bursting and bespattering [of] liquefied eyes.”266 A. M. Burrage describes

\[\text{a fellow with a hole in his forehead and some stuff like phlegm smeared across his temple. Because he was breathing and groaning it did not occur to me that this phlegm-stuff was part of the poor fellow’s brains.}\]

War novelists continue to exploit the emotive power contained within such details of the ways men at war carve up the body’s tenderest organs: Kevin Powers’s The Yellow Birds (2012) provides a harrowing account of John Bartle, who discovered the mutilated body of his beloved army buddy during his tour of duty in Iraq. The dead man’s eyes were gouged out, his throat cut, his “ears were cut off. His nose was cut off too. He had been imprecisely castrated.”268 War novels such as this, based on their author’s war experience, confirm, as Elaine Scarry contends, that the

264 In Kafka’s Metamorphosis (1915).
265 Barbusse, Under Fire, 213.
266 Barbusse, Under Fire, 218.
268 Kevin Powers, The Yellow Birds (Great Britain: Sceptre, 2012), 205–6. A cover blurb by Tom Wolfe on Powers’s novel describes the book as an “All Quiet on the Western Front for America’s Arab Wars.”
primary purpose of war, a purpose frequently glossed over or avoided altogether, is
the deliberate cleaving of human tissue.

Other motifs of the grotesque that are prevalent in a war context include headless bodies, or, as Sir Philip Sidney called them, “disinherited heads.”269 A famous incident in All Quiet on the Western Front involves “a lance corporal [who] has his head torn off. He runs a few steps more while the blood spurts from his neck like a fountain.” 270 Eksteins points out that Jean Norton Cru and others “protested vehemently” that a headless man would not be able to continue running,271 but as Remarque’s account of the beheaded runner would be hardly less shocking had the beheaded body dropped more immediately, Cru may be protesting too much. Margot Norris suggests

[i]t does not matter that the image of the headless running soldier … might be a fiction with no physical basis in reality… Remarque invented in All Quiet on the Western Front a necrological poetics capable of illuminating not only the phenomenology of the “death world,” but also its profound ontological effect on the subject steeped in killing and dying.272

Decapitation in the trilogy is linked to John the Baptist in Oscar Wilde’s Salome. Manning, who is in the audience as Iokanaan’s head is brought in on a charger, feels

an unexpected spasm of revulsion, not because the head [is] horrifying, but because it [isn’t]. Another thing Wilde couldn’t have foreseen: people in the

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270 Remarque, All Quiet, 79.
271 Modris Eksteins, “All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War” Journal of Contemporary History, 15, no. 2 (1980): 351. Brian Rowley also notes that Remarque was challenged for writing that the men at the front were being driven mad by the “screaming” of wounded horses (in Chapter IV of All Quiet on the Western Front). The charge was that horses do not scream. However, a veterinary surgeon has since “confirmed that horses do indeed scream when in pain”: Brian A. Rowley, “Journalism Into Fiction: Im Westen nichts Neues” in The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Holger Klein (London, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976), 106. A. M. Burrage casts aspersions on the creative content of Remarque’s horrors in All Quiet in his own novel War is War when he remarks: “I have been reading an account of the war written by one of those fellows in the opposite trenches, and I am appalled at the dullness of my own narrative. We were never barraged in a cemetery and constrained to yank the corpses out of coffins and climb into them for cover. Strange how these coffins came out of the ground nice and whole, having been uprooted by shells. Had I found a shell-crater deep enough to blow out a coffin I should have been into that better ‘ole – never mind about the coffin – and felt safer than I now feel in crossing the Strand”: Burrage, War is War, 83; emphasis in original.
audience for whom severed heads were not necessarily made of papier mâché. (280)

Manning’s revulsion is at the flimsy stage representation of decapitation’s far more revolting reality at the front. Representations of decapitated heads have a long history in art and literature; one of the most well known is Judith holding the head of Holofernes in works by Caravaggio, Allori, Rubens and many others. The story of the beheading that originates with the bible, acts as a reminder of “the importance of the head as a wellspring of inspired expression…. of eloquence silenced.”

Godfrey examines the dichotomy in Icelandic literature between mythologised concepts of the head and its structures as sources of intellection, and a codified poetic vision of the head as a mere medium for the divine gift of poetry.

Losing one’s head is arguably a primal fear, and the confrontation with a headless man an archetypal trope of horror; Harrington dreams at night of “the severed head, torso and limbs of a dismembered body hurtling towards him” (562). Beheadings such as those Harrington recalls were not specifically intended decapitations, but occurred during attacks whose general objective was to conquer and destroy enemy troops. The wars of the Melanesian tribesmen Rivers studied had a very specific head-related purpose: the heads of enemies, fetishised and highly coveted by the tribesmen, were brought back and preserved as totems. The chieftain Njiru, whose ghostly incarnation stares into Rivers’s eyes at the end of the trilogy (590) may be understood as a moral agent that questions why simple acts of beheading on a small scale are outlawed by a nation that practises a far more wholesale slaughter and the loss of many thousands of heads.

Barker does not share the overtly satirical aim of the Restoration writers, and rarely is there anything humorous in her depictions of graphic corporeal horror. The exception is when Prior picks up a human eye from under a duckboard and asks “[w]hat am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?” (93-4) Alistair Duckworth explains that

275 The significance of Njiru’s stare will be discussed further in the final chapter of this thesis.
[a] gob-stopper was (and is) a sweet with the size, color, and shape of a boy’s marble (or an eyeball). Barker’s grim humor is nicely calculated. Prior’s mutism has been caused by a gob-stopper; his gob (or mouth) has been stopped.276

Duckworth also claims the incident was unconsciously borrowed by Barker from a similar eyeball incident in Edmund Blunden’s Undertones of War.277 There is arguably an outlandish quality to the traumatic experience of Burns, who had “been thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell and had landed, head first, on a German corpse, whose gas filled belly had ruptured on impact” (19; emphasis added). Later, Burns is alluded to as the man “who’d got his head stuck in the belly of a German soldier” (154; emphasis added). The head-in-the-belly incident itself is horrendous and yet its overt intimations of slapstick and cartoon-like action allow us to imagine its extra-contextual, grisly-comic absurdity. None of the other traumas described in the trilogy have any such connotations of the comic; rather than the detachment that McNeil notes is “a standard perspective of the grotesque view of war,” Barker’s is a consciously involved and sympathetic perspective, aimed at emphasising the bizarre and the repugnant human outcomes of warfare.

Flesh wounds also resonate with deeply embedded religious and cultural ideas concerning blood and body. Prior’s friend Mac believes that “[i]n the end moral and political truths have to be proved on the body, because this mass of nerve and muscle and blood is what we are” (305, emphasis in original). The idea that the wounded flesh speaks is embedded in Christian belief:

For Jews, God manifested himself principally in a text, the Torah, but for Christians God’s flesh was itself a text written upon with universal characters, inscribed with a language that all men could understand since it was a language in and of the body itself, independent of any particular forms of speech.279

Patricia Johnson states that the Regeneration trilogy’s “unusual and powerful evocations of the damaged and dead bodies produced by war have been largely ignored.”280 Johnson’s argument is that military language in war writing replaces

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277 Edmund Blunden, Undertones of War (Richard Cobden-Sanderson, 1928).
278 McNeil, Grotesque Depiction, 30.
280 Johnson “Embodying Losses,” 308.
the war-damaged body with abstract concepts and depersonalising monuments of marble and metal. It succeeds in “remembering war by dismembering it. It strips away disembodied abstractions to reveal an eyeball, a head, pieces of flesh, reconnecting language and material substance.”\footnote{Johnson, “Embodying Losses,” 317.} There is no suggestion in the trilogy that war wounds sustained by soldiers in battle exalt or enoble the wounded. Greenblatt notes that Pauline Christianity saw the physical marks on Jesus’ body, from his scourging, piercing, and crucifixion, as the signs of an exalted sanctity, the salvific manifestations of a divine love that willingly embraces mortal vulnerability … a literalizing insistence on the meaningfulness of sacrificial wounds.\footnote{Greenblatt, “Mutilation,” 223.}

The trilogy, by way of contrast, re-acquaints us with “horrors that involve direct contact with eviscerated human flesh.”\footnote{Johnson, “Embodying Losses,” 309.} Johnson has a cogent point to make: the traumatised men at the front see, feel, carry on them, dream of (and even, in the case of Burns, swallow) mangled, ripped, broken, burned and rotting flesh. Craiglockhart aims to restore both physical and mental functionality to the patients traumatised by such viscerally experienced horrors, men who have wounds that are generated by wounds; in his talking cure Rivers reacquaints men with particular events (now recalled) while Barker acquaints her readers with war’s oft-suppressed horrors.

The visceral wound and its psychic overlay thus expose the inadequate value attributed to individuals, and in particular to sons, in Britain at the time of the war. The fleshy wounds of injured soldiers act, during the course of those wounds’ treatment, as a challenge to depersonalising concepts of war that centre upon the idea of conflict in which army units, rather than individuals, engage in military exchanges with the enemy. “In war, the individual may be entirely obliterated for the higher cause, made nameless as well as dead.”\footnote{Barbara Ehrenreich, Blood Rites: The Origins and History of the Passions of War (London: Granta, 2011), 17.} In the trilogy, however, the bodies of the men shot, beheaded, burned, or gassed demand and attain respect as the bodies of the men as persons rather than simply elements of fighting units. The injuries of the Craiglockhart soldier have forced him to reconfigure himself out of the plurality of army and into the singularity of named patient who, perhaps for the
first time in his life in a personal capacity, receives intensive scrutiny, medical attention, compassion and understanding from people who are not his family or his friends; the care received by the injured in fact exceeded the care many of the men had had even from their families. Peter Barham notes that the extreme conditions of war

engendered a reciprocal attentiveness to human needs that formed a stark contrast with the inequalities of the home society … Human frailty under these desperate circumstances [also] engendered strong feelings about the rights of all men, without discrimination, to be clothed in a thick and psychologically perspicuous conception of need. 285

Filial love, especially between fathers and their sons, had been, if not absent, at least notably deficient in the lives of major characters in the story. A thematic link is made between men denied fatherly devotion and the biblical parable of Abraham and Isaac. Rivers recalled the story of Abraham’s preparedness to sacrifice his son to God as it was depicted in a stained glass window of his father’s church (489) and although it discomforts him, Rivers links this memory to the custom on Vao in which a man would lavish fatherly affection and extravagant gifts upon an illegitimate boy of the community until the boy attained puberty. Then, in the course of an ostensibly joyous ceremony, the adoptive father would suddenly bash the boy’s brains out. Owen, in ‘The Parable of the Old Man and the Young’ (1918), 286 suggests that fathers sending their sons to die in war has a similar blush of insidious sacrifice. 287

Prior’s father, Rivers’s father, and Hallet’s father have all, to differing degrees, raised their sons either cruelly or with a brand of stoicism in the face of brutality, which may simply reflect a stereotypical view of Victorian fathers. Family historian John Tosh maintains there were, in fact, “as many tender and tolerant fathers as there [were] killjoy authoritarians.” 288 However, Tosh acknowledges that “[m]en looked for an offspring who would … transmit the attributes of masculinity to posterity … Some fathers appeared almost pathologically unable to see familial

286 Stallworthy, ed., The Poems, 151.
287 The implications of sacrifice in war are discussed further in Chapter Three.
288 John Tosh, A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England (Great Britain: St Edmundsbury Press, 2007), xii.
relations in anything but terms of authority. Harshness and inflexibility were the result.”  

The stereotype suits Barker’s sympathetic stance toward the victim son; thus Rivers is reminded by his sister that as a youngster had been held up by his father and compelled to look at a fearful painting of his uncle William having his leg cut off. When the young Rivers howled in horror, his father slapped him hard for being cowardly. “‘He didn’t cry,’ his father had said, holding him up. ‘He didn’t make a sound”’ (483; emphasis in original). Rivers conjectures that the experience may have generated his lifelong stutter and his impaired powers of visualisation.  

Prior’s father is an overtly callous man showing little affection for his son even in the latter’s adult years: “There was no question, as in the majority of households there would have been, of father and son going for a drink together” (289). Nor had he shown affection when the boy was young – Prior recalls twenty-eight years of “violent scenes” at home (288-9). When a young Prior had been caught with some unsavoury mutton he had only half chewed then relegated to his pockets for secret disposal, his father had announced, “in tones of ringing disgust, ‘That bairn’s too fussy to live.’ Too fussy to live, Prior thought. There you are, nowhere near France and an epitaph already” (433).  

Major Hallet is not an unloving father but, watching his son’s gaping mortal wounds, he contradicts the young man’s tortured cry of shotvarfet, protesting that, oh no, the war “is worth it, it is.” Michele Barrett suggests that “this father is not consciously endorsing the sacrifice; for he is, the narrative informs us, ‘in agony’ and ‘hardly [knows] what he [is] saying.” However, it is Rivers who translates the dying Hallet’s shotvarfet cry as not worth it for Hallet’s family, and the whole chapter in which this incident occurs is, quite clearly, written from Rivers’s perspective. Alternating fluidly between the “brown fog” of the hospital (580) and Rivers’s phantom-like recollections of Melanesia, it appears to be Rivers – who is not a father, but is certainly the most benignly paternal character in the trilogy – who decides that the Major cannot be taken seriously in effectively belittling his son’s mortal torture as compared with the aims of the war. It is, in fact, entirely

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289 Tosh, A Man’s Place, 80; 95.
possible to believe that Major Hallet, who, after all, wears his old army uniform every day to announce his support for the war (582), does value his boy’s sacrifice as much as he values his boy’s life. And Rivers, very soon after the Major’s assertion, seems to disapprove of Hallet’s fiancée’s response when the mortally ill man breathes his last:

He raised the sheet as far as Hallet’s chin, arranged his arms by his sides and withdrew silently, leaving the family alone with their grief, wishing, as he pulled the screens more closely together, that he had not seen the young girl turn aside to hide her expression of relief. (589)

Rivers thus demonstrates a confused attitude to Hallet’s sacrifice.  

By presenting the many instances of soldierly mutilation in her narrative, Barker lays open the shocking wastefulness of war that James Dawes alludes to when he claims that Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* is

centrally concerned with the representation of violent experience through trauma recall and moral evaluation, and with the problem of how such representations can be made to function in a violent world … The end point of the World War I protest novel is waste.

As “cultures sacrifice blood and treasure in ever increasing volume,” the bodies of young men become war’s waste product. Bergonzi reaches his conclusion that what is remembered most about the war is its “waste and dumb heroism” that led to “whole populations, down to the smallest child [being] regarded as appropriate victims for destruction.” In the trilogy, the body of the soldier protests against the acts of war that damage and waste it, accentuating the unnecessary loss of the humanity of the individual, evaluated more highly here as an individual than in the collective-oriented thinking that prevailed during the war. The trilogy denies any possibility of heroic sacrifice: Prior resigns himself to an ignominious death in a “[bloody mad” (588) war, (emphasis in original), and Owen makes it clear in his

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291 David Waterman calls Major Hallet “an agent of the dominant power,” noting also that “Burns’s father … is in favor of the war, even as his son is dying of anorexia” brought on by that war: David Waterman, *Pat Barker and the Mediation of Social Reality* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 76.
292 Chapter Five explores further the nature of River’s final orientation to his patients’ fates.
293 Dawes, *The Language of War*, 91; 93
“gas poem,”$^{296}$ ‘Dulce et Decorum Est,$^{297}$’ that death by poison is anything but sweet and decorous.$^{298}$ Susan Puissant notes the way its horrors reveal that ‘[m]odern trench warfare has nothing to do with dying in battle during the ancient times of Horace.$^{299}$’ Dominic Hibberd notes that for a poet to take a position of certainty on this point was highly unusual. Owen knew beyond doubt that death in war was not glorious, and if other poets said it was they were either ignorant or dishonest. To later generations, trained by Wilfred’s poems among other things, that may not seem an original insight, but in early 1917 it was at odds with nearly all the poetry that was being published.$^{300}$

Sadly, none of the war literature laying bare the extremes of human agony and mutilation succeeded in dissolving the powerful heroic myths that brought them about: only a dozen years after the war, Douglas Jerrold complained that authors such as Remarque and Barbusse attempted to ‘deny the dignity of tragic drama to the war in the interests of propaganda.’$^{301}$ It is reasonable to argue that the literary men, appalled by their violent experiences, merely shifted the locus of human dignity and heroism away from miserable acts of human slaughter and onto the act of rethinking war and processing its profound damage.

The real stage for heroism in the trilogy has been almost entirely shifted from battlefields to hospitals which become not only theatres of healing (and dying) but

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$^{296}$ Owen’s Letter 552, addressed to his mother, thought to be written about October 16, 1917 at Craiglockhart, states: “Here is a gas poem, done yesterday… The famous Latin tag means of course It is sweet and meet to die for one’s country. Sweet! And decorous!” In Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters, 553; underscoring in original.

$^{297}$ In Stallworthy ed., The Poems of Wilfred Owen, 117.

$^{298}$ John Brannigan notes that Barker’s allusion to “the chlorinated water, and description of the ‘green, silent world’ into which Sassoon dives explicitly invoke ‘Dulce et decorum est’, Owen’s well-known poem about a poison gas attack”: Brannigan, Pat Barker, 79.

$^{299}$ Susanne Christine Puissant, Irony and the Poetry of the First World War (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 68.

$^{300}$ Dominic Hibberd, Wilfred Owen: A New Biography (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 222.

$^{301}$ Ferguson, The Pity of War, 451. Jerrold, in the course of a diatribe against 1930s war novels that alleges them to be merely works of anti-war propaganda, somewhat disconcertingly expresses his personal view that in recalling the war, the “quality of the slaughter, the mere intensity of the suffering, is an irrelevancy”: Jerrold, “The Lie About the War,” 44. It is fascinating to note the elements of battle that some war writers proffer as evidence that all is not bad in warfare; Bond, for example, cites Drieu la Rochelle’s “sense of mystical exaltation that he had experienced in a bayonet charge at the very beginning of the war”: Bond, Facing Armageddon, 833. Transforming a bayonet charge into something beautiful is an instance of reverse bathos, or Freudian sublimation. Michael Duffy recalls the banal, brutal details of bayonet instructions: “Soldiers were instructed to direct the bayonet at the vulnerable points of the enemy’s body: the throat, left or right breast and left or right groin”: Michael Duffy, “Weapons of War: Bayonets,” firstworldwar.com. Accessed November 3, 2015. http://www.firstworldwar.com/weaponry/bayonets.htm
also places for the exegesis of military mutilation,\textsuperscript{302} a task performed by both staff and patients. The poets Sassoon and Owen constantly work at re-creating their experience into poetic form in order to make the unintelligible intelligible. Rivers is a catalyst for the process of assimilating repressed memory of trauma into some sort of conscious form that its victims can accept. If there are heroes of the exegeses of war, the exegetical heroes of the narrative are Sassoon, Owen, Rivers and Prior, as well as Hallet and Burns, all of them, in their different voices, catalysts in the exposure of the pointlessness of war violence. The men of the trilogy are heroes of iconoclasm: it is heroic to be anti-heroic, and to protest against war, as Sassoon does in his \textit{Soldier’s Declaration} comprising the first page of \textit{Regeneration}, and as both Sassoon and Owen do in most of their war poetry. Owen and Prior are blasted out of existence only a moment after Prior’s denunciation of the whole affair as a ‘[b]alls up’ (588).

The exigencies of trench warfare and the machinery that manages men in the trenches in fact preclude the possibility of very much heroism at the site of battle, where men must act strictly to orders, as infants might, rather than on their own initiative. Weiss notes that an army

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becomes the institutionalized version of both the protective and the punishing parents. In exchange for giving up his independence the soldier entrusts his life and well-being to his superiors, fashioning the relationship out of its analogy with his earlier dependence.\textsuperscript{303}
\end{quote}

By infantilising their individual soldiers, armies can depend on orders being followed; moreover, the idea underpinning an army “unit” is that several men act as one man, but the idea behind the concept of such a unit is actually to stifle the unity of each man. While the one-ness of each man is thus suppressed in the act of battle, the battle itself is aimed at the vanquishment of duality and the attainment of a larger one-ness. Elaine Scarry observes the two sides at war

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{302} At Craiglockhart, Owen is acutely aware of how his poetry seeks to establish meaning in suffering and healing. When he discusses with Sassoon his choice of Antaeus as the subject of a poem he explains that his treating doctor, Brock, “thinks we – the patients – are \textit{like} Antaeus, in the sense that we’ve been undergrounded by the war. And the way back to health is to re-establish the link between oneself and the earth” (110, emphasis in original).
\end{quote}
enter into a formal duality, but one understood by all to be temporary and intolerable, a formal duality that, by the very force of its relentless insistence on doubleness, provides the means for eliminating and replacing itself by the condition of singularity (since it will have legitimized one side’s right to determine the nature of certain issues). 304

The notion of engorgement is deeply embedded in the paradigmatic conflict of war. Paul Fussell believes “the versus habit” in war necessarily results in the swallowing up or absorption of one side by the other: there can be no synthesis between the two poles of conflict, for “one of the poles embodies so wicked a deficiency or flaw or perversion that its total submission is called for.” 305

Dr Rivers’s patients, however, have been temporarily inactivated and separated from the site at which two sides ruthlessly strive to attain the singularity Scarry describes. The transient healing sanctuary permits the men to fully consider themselves as individuals as they work on their own private, personal pain, but there is a certain speciousness of motive in this ostensibly tenderhearted moratorium: the army needs to allow the men to reclaim their personhood only so that it may shut down their individuality once more by re-integrating them into army-think. There is a good chance, however, that the whole process will be inadequate to overpower the epiphanic knowledge acquired by merciless exposure to war’s realities, a privileged type of knowledge that is at once enlightening and loathsome.

Burns’s disgusting experience, based upon one of Rivers’s documented case studies, 306 is one of the strongest evocations of war horror in the trilogy, inflicting

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304 Scarry, The Body in Pain, 87. In his anthropological study of war, Robert Carneiro notes that “[t]here is no secret as to how, in the past, political sovereignties were established and augmented. Beginning in the late Neolithic, warfare started mankind on the inexorable march toward larger and larger political units.” Carneiro suggests, however, that future wars of nuclear capability would be “much likelier to result in shattering the world than in uniting it”: Robert L. Carneiro, “War and Peace: Alternating Realities in Human History,” in Studying War: Anthropological Perspectives, eds. S. P. Reyna and R. E. Downs (USA: Gordon and Breach, 1994), 24.

305 Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 77. “Such is the case of a young officer who was flung down by the explosion of a shell so that his face struck the distended abdomen of a German several days dead, the impact of his fall rupturing the swollen corpse. Before he lost consciousness the patient had clearly realised his situation and knew that the substance which filled his mouth and produced the most horrible sensations of taste and smell was derived from the decomposed entrails of an enemy. When he came to himself he vomited profusely and was much shaken, but carried on for several days, vomiting frequently and haunted by persistent images of taste and smell”: See Dr W. H. R. Rivers, “An Address on The Repression of War Experience,” accessed March 2, 2014. http://www.gwpda.org/comment/rivers.htm Originally published in The Lancet, 1918. Gristwood relates that “[i]t was peculiarly horrible to fall face downwards on a dead man”: Gristwood, The Somme, 37.
upon him a horror that therapy cannot expunge. Rivers has to force himself not to be complicit in Burns’s understandable and rational repression of the memory of it by asking himself whether “Burns’s experience [was] really worse than that of the others? Worse than Jenkins’s, crawling between the dismembered pieces of his friend’s body to collect personal belongings to send back to his family,” for example (154). Rivers in fact wonders if he has himself turned it into “some kind of myth” (154), and indeed he conjures the tales of “Jonah in the belly of the whale” and “Christ in the belly of the earth” (154). Burns’s experience of getting his “head stuck in the belly of a German soldier” (154) and of eating the soldier’s insides, suggests a macabre phenomenon of mutual cannibalisation which allows for no easy assimilation into the normality of life. The idea that war is a metaphoric swallower of men is not new: Samuel Butler describes war as “a Monster in a Labyrinth, that feeds upon man’s flesh, For when it is once engagd, it is a matter of exceeding difficulty to get out of it agen.”307 Owen’s ‘The Show’ conceives of armies in battle as strings of caterpillars eating and being eaten by one another.308 A soldier in The Red Badge of Courage, moments before entering the fray, exclaims “[w]e’ll git swallowed.”309 Daniel Weiss finds this expression to be “perfectly descriptive of the oral level of fixation that prevails in a raging battle. Eat or be eaten.”310 Men are devoured by war’s “inexorable, insatiable Moloch.”311 Cannibalism seriously undermines traditional notions of glamour and nobility in warfare.

307 Samuel Butler: Characters and Passages from Notebooks, edited by A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 480. [Note: this is the Restoration poet and satirist Samuel Butler, 1613–1618, not to be confused with the Victorian novelist Samuel Butler, 1835–1902.] The notion of swallowing in the context of battle has at times been given a positive gloss: Dawes notes that Ernst Jünger associates battle wounds with “mouths, stomachs, and eating, and each of these with a heroic beauty”: Dawes, The Language of War, 153. I find Dawes’s claim rather questionable. He offers Ernst Jünger as one example: “If the velocity had only been a trifle slower the hit would have got us in the cellar and plastered the walls with us, so that in the nice saying of the trenches we might have been ‘scraped off with a spoon and buried in the pot’”: Ernst Jünger’s The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front, trans. Basil Creighton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 132. There is a similar absence of discernible beauty in other examples from Jünger that Dawes provides.

308 In Stallworthy, ed., The Poems, 132–3.

309 In her chapter about Rivers and his therapy at Craiglockhart, Gloria Emerson refers to the actual patient whose experience Barker imputes to her character, Burns. Emerson quite unconsciously, it seems, conflates his swallowing with war’s swallowing: her next paragraph begins thus: “Each month the war kept swallowing more men …” Gloria Emerson, “Shell Shock” in Writing Between the Lines: An Anthology of War & its Social Consequences, ed Kevin Bowen and Bruce Weigel (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1997), 82.


311 Modris Eksteins, “Modris Eksteins on the Novel as a Postwar Commentary,” in Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front: Bloom’s Guides (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 92. Ehrenreich describes war as “a ‘living thing’ … a kind of creature that, by its nature,
Special knowledge

Evelyn Cobley believes both documentary-autobiographical and fictionalised narratives are especially effective in conveying the horrors of war because they appeal to what she calls a “referential pact” between author and reader that depends upon, but runs deeper than the usual “willing suspension of disbelief”; the reader here actually agrees “to accept a textual construct as a direct reflection of reality.”

War narratives, according to this way of thinking, are not only more likely to be taken as accurate reflections of the real, but are often thought of as containing secret truths revealed by the witnessed horrors. Barker claims that “part of the paradox of Sassoon’s position and, indeed, of Wilfred Owen’s, is that they are simultaneously condemning the war wholeheartedly and claiming for the combatant a very special, superior, and unique form of knowledge, which they are quite implicitly saying is valuable.”

James Meredith’s view of American war novels is that they “seek to do more than merely protest the horrible casualties and suffering of these wars. They aim to convey a deeper truth about the human condition that is ultimately intensified by war.”

Dawes makes reference to Hemingway’s view that special knowledge could be found at the front, on the battlefield, and in the temporary structures surrounding the site of violence, in the liminal spaces at the fringes of the emergency (the encampment, the hospital, the temporary hotel retreats). Outside naturalized social relations, practiced choices, bounded risk, and given moral worlds, certain cherished illusions become unsustainable. In war as a cultural and in particular technological space, the occluded, interior structures of creation and of injuring are thus exposed. Upon their relationship hangs the very possibility of coherent human morality.

James Campbell develops the idea of “special knowledge” further by coining the term combat gnosticism, which he defines as

the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an

devours us. To look at war, carefully and long enough, is to see the face of the predator over which we thought we had triumphed long ago”: Barbara Ehrenreich, Blood Rites, 238.

312 Evelyn Cobley, Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 236.


315 Dawes, The Language of War, 93.
CHAPTER TWO

identical experience ... combat is a liminal experience that sets the veteran irrevocably apart from those who have not crossed the ritual threshold of war.  

Few, perhaps, have been able to describe the uniqueness of Owen’s separate order of experience better than Dylan Thomas:

To see him in his flame-lit personality, against the background, now of the poxed and cratered warscape, shivering in the snow under the slitting wind, marooned on a frozen desert, or crying in a little oven of mud, that his ‘senses are charred,’ is to see a man consigned to articulate immolation.

Campbell, who focuses on canonised poets of the First World War such as Sassoon, Owen, and Robert Graves, dubs their genre the “trench lyric,” comprising realistic accounts of combat experienced by the junior officer soldier, abundant with images of “filth, shellfire, barbed wire” and “the heretofore unknown gruesome details of the physical and psychological situations of the trench as seen from a participant’s viewpoint.” The gruesome details, alleged to be “heretofore unknown,” in fact did become known to some soldiers after the earliest well-known novel of World War I, Under Fire, published in 1916, in which Barbusse records a substantial litany of trench horrors. As Jon Glover notes, Owen, who had read Under Fire both in English and in the original French, would not have been unaware of the nature of war’s horrors even prior to his personal experiences. The female narrator of Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier, published in 1918, imagines her cousin Chris “running across the brown rottenness of No Man’s Land, starting back here because he trod upon a hand, not even looking there because of an unburied head,” which suggests that war’s gruesomeness occupied a place in the imagination of non-combatants even before the trench poets lent it broader exposure.

316 Campbell, “Combat Gnosticism,” 203.
319 Glover notes that “the list of books in Owen’s library” includes Barbusse’s Le Feu and that “Owen must have acquired at some stage between going to Scarborough and his death in 1918 a copy of the original text”: Jon Glover, “Owen, Barbusse and Fitzwater Wray,” Stand 21, no. 2 (1980): 24. Glover also states that “clearly the fact that such scenes of human horror [in Le Feu] could be rendered in literary terms at all must have excited Sassoon and Owen”: Glover, “Owen, Barbusse and Fitzwater Wray,” 29.
Douglas Kerr examines the ways in which officers at this time were privileged by virtue of their position with a peculiar breadth of knowledge not available to the rank-and-file soldier.\textsuperscript{321} They belonged to a sort of “binding (and exclusive) freemasonry”\textsuperscript{322} when it came to tactical intelligence and military decisions, but in his analysis of officers in Owen’s poems, Kerr notes that

there is another and more profound way in which the officer is a man set apart, in Owen’s work, by a special knowledge. By virtue of [the] responsibility and guilt … which inheres in their rank and perhaps in their social class, officers were possessed by something like a biblical knowledge of good and evil, a sense of their own damnability which … the other ranks in Owen are spared … [They] seem singled out by a special doomed self-consciousness.\textsuperscript{323}

In Owen’s poem ‘Insensibility,’ the watchful officers who envy the happy naïveté of a lad on the march are haunted by their knowledge that they are sending him “[f]rom larger day to huger night.”\textsuperscript{324} The imminence of death (with biblical overtones) is also apparent to the officers in ‘Spring Offensive,’ who “know that they are going to hell”\textsuperscript{325} as they are unable to do anything but stare at a blank sky, “[k]nowing their feet [have] come to the end of the world.”\textsuperscript{326}

Lynne Hanley contends that in novels about the wars of the twentieth century

[t]he idea fighting for survival … is the idea that men go to war not really knowing that killing other people is what war is all about. And the story that keeps this idea alive and close to our hearts is the story of the soldier’s tragic discovery on the battlefield that what he is a part of is killing.\textsuperscript{327}

Hanley quotes from Neil McCallum’s Journey With a Pistol: “It is war, and to believe it is anything but a lot of people killing each other is to pretend it is something else, and to misread man’s instinct for murder.”\textsuperscript{328} This is very similar to Scarry’s militarily iconoclastic announcement that war’s main purpose, most

\textsuperscript{322} Kerr, Owen’s Voices, 223.
\textsuperscript{323} Kerr, Owen’s Voices, 223. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{324} Owen, ‘Insensibility.’ In Stallworthy, ed., The Poems of Wilfred Owen, 123.
\textsuperscript{325} Kerr, Owen’s Voices, 223.
\textsuperscript{326} Owen, ‘Spring Offensive,’ in Stallworthy, ed., The Poems of Wilfred Owen, 169.
\textsuperscript{327} Lynne Hanley, Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 29.
\textsuperscript{328} Neil McCallum, Journey with a Pistol (London: Transworld, 1959), 107.
unheroically, is “to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue.” Barker invests her traumatic incidents at the front with the power to enlighten men about war’s base savagery and its futility. Hanley refers to a trope that makes war a player in the game, not the game men play … This fiction of the independent agency of war (the fiction that wars make themselves) lifts the burden of guilt from the men who declare and organize war, as well as from those who actually carry the guns and drive the tanks and drop the bombs. Politicians and soldiers may look like they are making war, but really they are not. Really they are the victims, pawns of a force beyond their control, poor sorry blokes caught up in events too big for them.

Campbell, however, questions the presumption of unchallengeable or overriding truth in combat gnosticism on the grounds that such a presumption over-privileges the story of the white male, marginalising the war truths of non-combatants and also women: “To put this in psychoanalytic terms, combat is phallic: it allows one to speak while those without the phallus must stay silent.” Tim Kendall argues that Campbell’s conspiracy theory that women poets (and others) have been overlooked by scholarship because of its commitment to combat gnosticism collapses … on purely aesthetic grounds. Most combatant-poets are now forgotten: however ‘gnostic’ their work, it isn’t good enough to survive. If Owen had written bad poetry, his truth-telling claims would be irrelevant.

Kendall maintains that Owen’s trench lyrics are valorised by their poetic merits rather than by their possible “extra-aesthetic” character as pieces of documentary evidence (or “truth”). No-one now doubts Owen’s aesthetic achievements in poetry, and it seems overly timid to retreat so gingerly from the idea that extreme horrors are very likely to give to those who experience them some greater, “extra-aesthetic” knowledge of war’s horrors than those who do not experience them.

330 Hanley, Writing War, 29.
331 Campbell, “Combat Gnosticism,” 209.
333 Campbell’s challenge to his own concept of combat gnosticism may be driven by “conspiracy theory” thinking, as Kendall suggests, but also, perhaps, by a measure of political correctness.
Campbell is unhappy with Paul Fussell’s belief that “only the most unmediated statements, those which come straight from the heart of combat experience without the intervention of literary or poetic form, can be trusted,” arguing instead that first-hand combat reportage is nevertheless reportage; the act of its construction according to formal conventions disconnects it from actuality and the resulting loss of immediacy transforms it into a story about the “lingering psychological effects of the actual experience.” There is merit in Campbell’s view that real combat experience carries no more gnostic truth than other narrated experience, for even if actual presence in combat provides much that is valuable in understanding how the soldier receives and assimilates what happens to and about him, trench poetry’s representations of lived experience are not necessarily absolutely factual. Dena Eber and Arthur Neal note that “[h]istorical events cannot have the same meaning for those who only hear about them as compared to those who experience them directly.” Being there must always be granted some measure of authority to speak about that experience, but that is not to say it is an unchallengeable authority. The very extreme nature of front experience, during which, as Owen captures it in ‘Dulce et Decorum Est,’ “All went lame; all blind/ Drunk with fatigue,” suggests there can be no perfect memory of the event that is reliable in every particular; interpolating the experiences of the battle-blind, drunk and lame into coherence involves both art and reportage.

Patrick Johnson maintains that Owen, safe in a protective hospitable environment, approximates the sublime even when describing incalculable horror. Edmund Burke noted that, contrary to what might be expected, “obscurity has a greater affective appeal than clarity … ‘[D]ark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those which are more clear and determinate.’” For Keats, who was Owen’s greatest poetic idol, the sublime was
found in ascendance, but “[i]nstead of following Keats’s nightingale upward into an ideal order … Owen’s poems go ever downward into the chaos of the trenches.”

Glover may be closest to defining the nature of Owen’s poetic purposes when he muses that Owen reports war “as though he were an oracle.” Characteristically, “the oracle’s pointers are singularly ambiguous and maddeningly brief.”

The news bearer at the front, reporting war in oracular style, captures both its horror and its macabre beauty; such opposite qualities suggest an ambivalence in the reporter himself.

Although Owen “accepted his role as a newsbearer [of the war] … he was also driven by his search for intensity (it is Keats’s word), the unsurpassable beauty of a moment that is lived to its full and then trapped in art.” In October 1918, just after he had spent several days engaged in a constant exchange of fire with the enemy, Owen wrote in a letter that the fighting “passed the limits of my Abhorrence. I lost all my earthly faculties, and fought like an angel.”

It is as if he passes through a horror-barrier to find some sort of beauty and satisfaction in the midst of terror in battle; quoting Rabindranath Tagore he claims that “[w]hat I have seen is unsurpassable.” Barker notes that “Owen is all ambivalence” in his engagement with and responses to war. Brannigan contends that Prior’s “amazing sense of exultation” at the moment of going over the top evokes “Owen’s less anthologised ‘Apologia pro poemate meo,’ with its celebration of the “glee” of


339 Glover, “Whose Owen?” Stand 22 no. 3 (1981): 31. Edmund Blunden, too, describes Owen as a kind of oracle: “He was one of those destined beings who, without pride of self … ‘see, as from a tower, the end of all.’ Outwardly, he was quiet, unobtrusive, full of good sense; inwardly, he could not help regarding the world with the dignity of a seer”: Blunden, quoted by Barry Webb, in Edmund Blunden: A Biography (London: Yale University Press, 1990), 178. The quotation within the quote is from Shelley’s ‘The Cenci.’


341 Collected Letters, 580; capitalisation as in original.

342 Collected Letters, 430.


344 We ought not be in the least surprised by such ambivalent or contradictory contemporary responses to the war, particularly in the case of soldiers experiencing the traumas of injury and loss. Edmund Blunden notes that “[t]he face of war is one of protean changes. In order to catch those countenances, a man has to be acute in a rare degree”: Edmund Blunden, introduction to An Anthology Of War Poems, ed. Frederic Brereton (London: Collins Sons & Co., 1930), 20. Cited by George Walter, Introduction to The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry (London: Penguin, 2006), l; n. 91.
soldiers as “we slashed bones bare.” In his letters Owen describes his “exhilaration in baffling the Machine Guns by quick bounds from cover to cover. After the shells we had been through, and the gas, the bullets were like the gentle rain from heaven.” Days later, he describes a boy who was shot in the head and who lay on top of him, soaking his shoulder for half an hour: “Can you photograph the crimson-hot iron as it cools from smelting? That is what Jones’s blood looked like, and felt like. My senses were charred.” Owen’s language implies an internal aestheticising of the terrible noises, the fear, his personal abhorrence, and the deaths of battle, as well as implied sexual feeling in the crimson-hot iron metaphor while he lay underneath Jones. Thus does the art and mind of a poet sublimate horror into a type of terrible beauty.

Nevertheless, the poems of Owen and Sassoon written towards the end of the war for the most part clearly reflect disenchantment and a real distancing from earlier support. One of the first poems Sassoon shows to Rivers in the trilogy, ‘To the Warmongers’ (1917), begins with the lines

I’m back again from hell
With loathsome thoughts to sell;
Secrets of death to tell;
And horrors from the abyss.

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346 Collected Letters, 581 (to Susan Owen).
347 Collected Letters, 581 (to Siegfried Sassoon). Fussell declares that “in Great War diction there are three degrees of erotic heat attaching to three words: men is largely neutral, boys is a little warmer, lads is very warm … As men grow more attractive, they are seen as boys, until, finally, when conceived as potential lovers, they turn into lads”: Fussell, The Great War: The Illustrated Edition, 282. Taylor alludes to Fussell’s observation concerning the homo-linguistic coding of “men,” “boys” and “lads” as though it is established: Taylor, Lads, 41. Fussell, however, does not ground his argument in a body of evidence and fails to develop the idea. I suspect this is one of the examples Leonard Smith alludes to when noting Frank Kermode’s observation that Fussell “pushes too hard and includes some unconvincing evidence, like a man determined to make his point, and empty his card file, come what may”: Leonard V. Smith, “Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory: Twenty-five Years Later,” History and Theory 40 no. 2 (2001): 246; and see Frank Kermode, “An Innocence Died,” New York Times Magazine (31 August 1975). Michael Howard, Smith notes, detects in Fussell’s work “traces of naivety, petulance, and ignorance”: Smith, “Fussell’s The Great War,” 246; and see Michael Howard, “Armageddon and After,” Times Literary Supplement (5 December 1975). The most notable flaw in Fussell’s The Great War is its poor attention to scholarly protocols: as Smith notes, Fussell frequently alludes to materials from the Imperial War Museum, but “[m]ost often, the footnote reference refers simply to IWM (Imperial War Museum), which is a bit like providing an archival citation that states simply ‘National Archives’”: Smith, “Fussell’s The Great War,” 243.
348 Incorporated into the trilogy, 24.
The poem captures the sublime idea of the poet as an Orpheus-like messenger returned from hell to tell the truth of war, an idea the trilogy pursues throughout its narrative, as it focuses on the warning voices of the dead and dying, voices of the abject and the alienated. The idea in ‘To the Warmongers’ of having a message “to sell” suggests the poet is also a polemicist in publicising his anti-war attitude. Hibberd contends that politics and a deeper poetics of meaning are not incompatible: Wilfred Owen, he claims, is “above all an elegist,” but he maintains that the elegiac does not preclude the presence also of protest.349 Owen clearly wanted his poetry to transcend its own political import: in a letter to his cousin Leslie Gunston in 1917, he described the work of his beloved mentor Sassoon as having become a “a mere vehicle of propaganda.”350 Owen, though undeniably a great poet-propagandist in proclaiming through his poetry that “[i]t is war’s habit to bring a man to a peak of physical and mental alertness and then smash him to bits,”351 cannot be reduced to a mere poet of anti-war propaganda. By recognising, as Hibberd points out, “that he was himself an active part of the same, monstrous, damnable evil which he had thought about so much,”352 Owen rose above self-righteous castigation of the war machine and of society in general by acknowledging, Prospero-like,353 that war’s darkness was also his own darkness: “[A]m I not myself a conscientious objector with a very seared conscience?”354

Derangement of the senses

The aims of trench war poets such as Owen and Sassoon in transmuting their battle experiences into poetry include the elegiac, the political, and the sublime, none of which necessarily makes the reportage of the poems’ events untruthful: their multiplicity of aims mean the poets are self-conscious agents of meaning on several levels. The poet, according to Rimbaud, “makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic

351 Hibberd, “Silkin on Owen,” 32.
352 Hibberd, “Silkin on Owen,” 32.
353 “this thing of darkness/ I acknowledge mine”: Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, v. i. 275–6. Prospero alludes to Caliban as the “thing of darkness,” perhaps alluding to Caliban’s dark skin, but the darkness may also symbolise the more primal and sinister aspects of the psyche.
and rational *derangement of all the senses*”; \(^{355}\) the war’s extreme and involuntary scrambling of the poet’s cognitive faculties may well expose the poet to layers of truth concealed from other men.\(^{356}\) Owen’s senses were certainly disordered by his trauma at the front: “He had become unbalanced, disorientated, unreliable, and withdrawn. His body was apt to rebel against his will. He was not a whole person, but subject to violent dissociation.” \(^{357}\) Owen’s poetic composition was extraordinarily prolific during his suffering, \(^{358}\) even though few members of the public had the opportunity to read his almost entirely unpublished verse. The trilogy ends as Owen dies, shortly before the war itself comes to an end, and although Barker includes snippets of just two of his poems in the trilogy, \(^{359}\) the words of the poet are imbued with gnostic importance.

\(^{355}\) Arthur Rimbaud, in his letter to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871. In *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans Wallace Fowlie (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 307 (emphases in original). In French: “Le Poète se fait *voyant* par un long, immense et raisonnable *dérèglement de tous les sens*.” (ibid, 306). Translated elsewhere as “The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses”: Oliver Bernard, introduction to *Arthur Rimbaud: Collected Poems* (Penguin: London, 1987), i. The narrator in a story by Poe also suggests that when the mind is deeply afflicted it may be capable of enlightenment that is unattainable in more quiescent mental states: “Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence – whether much that is glorious – whether all that is profound – does not spring from disease of thought – from *moods* of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect”: Poe, “Eleonora” in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, ed. David Galloway (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 243; emphasis in original.

\(^{356}\) The special intensity of Owen’s trench time is noted by Tony Ashworth – “Wilfred Owen’s experience of the trenches was short but nasty – an active front in winter. It seems likely he did not know firsthand of the undertones of war. But perhaps his poems are, for that reason, a more striking evocation of a particular war experience”: Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914–1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 230, n. 59. Hibberd also notes that Owen’s “front line service was unusually concentrated and varied. It took place in what was said to be the worst winter France had known for forty years, first in mud and heavy rain, then in the intense frost that clamped down on the battle zone in mid January”: Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen*, xvii.

\(^{357}\) Kerr, *Owen’s Voices*, 197.

\(^{358}\) ”The bulk of his best work was written or finished during a period of intense creative activity, from August 1917 (in one week he wrote six poems) to September 1918 – a period comparable with the *annus mirabilis* of his admired Keats”: C. Day Lewis, introduction to *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), 11.

\(^{359}\) The two poems are ‘The Next War’ (125), and ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ (126), the latter of which Sassoon helped Owen to finalise, as Barker depicts in the trilogy. However, Owen’s verse is evoked when body parts (perhaps Owen’s) are described at the end of *The Ghost Road*: “The sun has risen. The first shaft strikes the water and creeps towards them along the bank, discovering here the back of a hand, there the side of a neck, lending a rosy glow to skin from which the blood has fled, and then, finding nothing here that can respond to it, the shaft of light passes over them and begins to probe the distant fields” (589). In ‘Futility’ Owen similarly personifies the sun attempting to stir the dead limbs of a young soldier: “Move him into the sun – / Gently its touch awoke him once,/ At home, whispering of fields half-sown./ Always it woke him, even in France,/ Until this morning and this snow/ If anything might rouse him now/ The kind old sun will know./ Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides/ Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?/ Was it for this the clay grew tall?– O what made fatuous sunbeams told/ To break earth’s sleep at all?”: in Taylor, *Lads*, 94. ‘A Terre’ (1918) also deploys the idea of the sun and the rain unable to restore life to the fallen.
Early in *Regeneration*, Prior remembers scenes at the front as “Armageddon, Golgotha, there were no words” (41); and much later, in *The Ghost Road*, he complains that “if the war went on for a hundred years another language would evolve, one that was capable of describing the sound of bombardment or the buzzing of flies on a hot August day on the Somme. There are no words” (543). Virginie Renard notes that “[t]ransforming [the trench experience] into a coherent story … means betraying its truth by giving it meaning. Giving testimony is thus necessary but impossible, for the medium necessarily dilutes and betrays the truth of the past.”

Testimony in a coherent form may not be possible for the common soldier, but it is possible for the poet even when, and perhaps because, his senses are “deranged” by bombardment. Owen’s and Sassoon’s experiences are communicable through verses embodying war’s unpalatable truths.

Owen, nicknamed “the ghost,” by some contemporaries, is shown to be a humble, stuttering seer in the trilogy, beset by recollections of “[t]he shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells” that are to spell his doom. Kerr dubs Owen “the community’s voice” at Craiglockhart hospital. The war makes its unimpeded way into language through its locutors in Barker’s narrative; Sassoon, Prior, Hallet, Burns, Rivers, and the revenant Njiru all have views on the subject, but the greatest potential to expose the truth of war’s ugly underbelly is contained within the many unseen poems composed by Wilfred Owen. Rawlinson wonders why “we still set so much store by” the idea that Owen told us “what war was like,” suggesting that he “should be less important to us as a historian than a poet.”

The answer to this question is that Owen’s particular gaze is an important corrective to the hegemonic blindness of the non-alienated, a gaze that could cut straight to the quick of the war and reveal truths

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360 Virginie Renard, “‘You Must Speak’: Traumatic Memory and Crisis of Testimony in Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy,” *Interférences Littéraires*, accessed 23 January, 2014. http://www.interferenceslitteraires.be/en/node/75 Renard’s view to some degree resonates with Cobley’s idea, which is challenged later in this chapter, that the soldier who commits his experience to writing makes him covertly complicit in that which he condemns.


of its barbarity so readily overlooked by others.

Johnson contends that “our perception of World War One, and perhaps of all war, has been indelibly impressed by [Owen’s] truth.” Owen, however, did not succeed in convincing the world generally that unimaginable horror is the real truth of war; indeed, George L. Mosse contends that Owen’s compassionate poems … produced envy rather than pity for a generation that had experienced so much … These feelings were … projected onto the “people’s war” in Spain. ‘Even in our anti-war campaigns of the early thirties,’ … a veteran of the Spanish War reminisced later, ‘we were half in love with the horrors we cried out against.’

Rather than explain what indelible truth Owen allegedly gave the world, Johnson explores the “homoerotic impulse” in Owen’s poetry and maintains that Owen employed ghostly tropes as “the most effective and powerful means of cloaking his intense feelings and impulses arising from his sexuality.” But if truth thus cloaked by metaphor is intended for the world’s eyes, truth so presented merely prompts its own disrobing via the hermeneutics that unlock versified expression, and Owen’s tropes may actually be Owen’s subtle method of exposing himself and his desires to the world.

365 Johnson, “Purgatorial Passions,” 152.
368 Lena Steveker notes that the therapy Rivers uses to treat Billy Prior aims at getting Prior “to recognise his internal other.” By “[a]sking his traumatised patient to acknowledge and accept the other within himself, Rivers also argues for an ethical strategy that allows the self to recognise the internal other instead of assimilating or silencing it”: Lena Steveker: “Reading Trauma in Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy,” in Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction, eds. Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 27. Owen, however, was treated not by Rivers but by Brock, who believed in curing shell shock through ergotherapy, or getting the patient to throw himself into activity and work. Owen’s shadowy other, or his homosexual identity, was therefore presumably not confronted head-on in therapy, but remained to all but his intimate homosexual friends a secretive aspect of Owen’s life. Malcolm Pittcock, contends that Owen was a homosexual “in temperament only”: Malcolm Pittcock, “The War Poetry of Wilfred
Owen’s … attempts at searching for and exposing an actual truth were probably encouraged not only by the distinctive events of the war but by his own curious indeterminate position in so many different environments, … including family, education, Church, army, and poetry.\textsuperscript{369}

Owen in fact, occupies “curious, indeterminate” space in the trilogy from the first time he appears, as “a short, dark-haired man sid[ing] around the door, blinking in the sudden blaze of sunlight,” (74) to his death in a shell explosion, his body seeming “to take forever to fall” (588).\textsuperscript{370} He is but a great poet-in-embryo at Craiglockhart, who shies from the limelight, only agreeing with Sassoon to publish his own poems in the hospital journal, the \textit{Hydra}, anonymously.\textsuperscript{371} Owen is painfully aware that, aside from Sassoon, few know of his poetic gifts and his potential to convey the meaning of war when he tells Sassoon he had added his name to the draft back to the front because he is “tired of being regarded as ‘a twitching Nancy boy from a loony-bin in Scotland’” (438).\textsuperscript{372} That Owen would rather face death at the front than risk being thought of as a “nancy boy” indicates how important it is for him to be respected in the way that he believes heterosexual men without neuroses are respected. The comment underscores Owen’s alienated


\textsuperscript{370} Kaley Jones contends that Barker deliberately avoids overstating the oculartistic authority that the mythology surrounding Owen and his poetry has garnered since the war by rewriting his poetry into the narrative: “Barker’s more subtle intertextuality, in which neither Owen nor his poems are identified, challenges the authorial privilege conferred by the aesthetic of direct experience. Barker recasts Owen’s eyewitness perspective using non-combatant characters whose knowledge of the war is second hand and extends this perspective to also encompass her readers, who can only access the First World War via text”: Kaley Jones, “Regenerating Wilfred Owen: Pat Barker’s Revisions,” \textit{Mosaic} 42, no. 3 (2009): 171.

\textsuperscript{371} Thomas Webb describes Craiglockhart’s hospital journal, \textit{The Hydra}, thus: “Within its pages are a series of fascinating and revealing cartoons depicting, among other things, the traumatic nightmares most of those at the hydro suffered, Rivers’ mystical reputation, and the often mixed feelings of soldiers on leaving the place”: Webb, “Dottyville,” 345.

\textsuperscript{372} Owen here quotes an earlier conversation between himself and Prior when the latter told him the C.O. of the Clarence Gardens Hotel where they had been stationed for a time thought of the both of them as “a couple of twitching Nancy boys from a loony bin in Scotland”; 434; emphasis in original. It is sobering to think that the shame of being regarded as a shell-shocked, twitching homosexual was more feared than the twitching in Owen’s 1917 poem, ‘Exposure,’ in wild gusts of wind tug on barbed wire “[l]ike twitching agonies of men among its brambles”: Owen, ‘Exposure,’ in Stallworthy, \textit{The Poems}, 162.
status in society, and how deeply his personal sense of alienation from normative society influences his gaze at war.

Combat gnosis, as Campbell argues, should not be over-privileged in the context of trench lyrics composed by battle-numbed poets, but the concept of battle gnosis is nevertheless both legitimate and effective as a novelistic device to convey experiences perceived by the soldier as epiphanic. Stephen Crane exploited the idea that revelations of higher truths are accessed during battle in his iconic work *The Red Badge of Courage*.  

The novel, for all its apparent authenticity, was entirely fictional; its protagonist Henry Fleming, in his first encounter with a corpse on the battlefield, feels “the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question.” Crane keeps opaque the exact nature of both “the Question” and its answer, if any, but it is via Fleming’s ruminations on life and death when in the presence of death that he learns his place in the scheme of things:

> We recognize in Fleming’s pessimism Crane’s own outlook on life as it emerges in the best things he wrote: the insignificance of man in the universe, man’s futile feeling of outrage at the cruel and incomprehensible ways of the world, the elusiveness and indifference of the governing principle.

O. W. Fryckstedt contends that Crane invests his narrative with knowledge that transcends the mere “lack of meaning” in war:

> There is a faint suggestion that the soldiers are involved in a more desperate struggle than the actual fighting, that the apparent meaninglessness of the war is

373 Weiss notes that Crane’s method of writing “was largely intuitive, a synthesis of hearsay and introspection, born of that callow and orgiastic pleasure the young take in the tales and mementos of wars they are too young to remember”: Weiss, *The Critic Agonistes*, 59–60.


readily surpassed by a greater and more terrifying emptiness. This atmosphere of despair, of mystery, of terror haunts us throughout the book.\footnote{Fryckstedt, “Henry Fleming’s Tupenny Fury,” 277.}

The protagonists of the Regeneration trilogy achieve enlightenment as the result of how the war has ravaged them. Hallet’s Shotvarfet is a soaring moment of gnosis, inspired by his ghastly mutilation and his pain. The sentiment of war’s worthlessness is weakly and ineffectively challenged in the text by his father, the retired Major Hallet, who, always “very erect, retired professional army, in uniform for the duration of the war” (582), is clearly presented as something of a travesty when Prior very soon after affirms that the war is “bloody mad” (588). In The Ghost Road, Rivers undergoes a profound re-orientation of his attitudes to his work and the war after having sent many a “cured” patient back to die at the front.\footnote{A critical moment in Rivers’s introspections regarding his role occurs during his strange encounter with what may be the ghost of Njiru at the very end of The Ghost Road, which is analysed at length in Chapter Five.}

Dr Rivers’s triple-pronged identity as neurologist, psychoanalyst and anthropologist establishes him as a well-credentialed font of knowledge whose role is to unearth the truths his patients are affronted by in the trenches, but find themselves unable to assimilate. The patient-doctor dynamic is an especially multi-faceted one here, for Rivers is an audience to his patient’s special gnosis during the “talking cure”\footnote{Dennis Brown claims “Barker’s whole trilogy is a tribute to the “talking cure” as a form of healing for what is now termed “post traumatic stress disorder”: Dennis Brown, “The Regeneration Trilogy: Total War, Anthropology and the Talking Cure,” in Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker, ed. Sharon Monteith, et al. (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 190. The term “talking cure” originated with Breuer and Freud in the case of Anna O. See “Case Histories: Case I – Fräulein Anna O (Breuer and Freud)” in The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 68. The case study notes that Fräulein Anna, referring to the practice of encouraging the patient to talk uninterrupted, “aptly described [the] procedure as a ‘talking cure,’ while she referred to it jokingly as ‘chimney sweeping’”: Freud, in Gay, The Freud Reader, 68.} therapy he administers, but he also takes his turn at talking about his own childhood trauma when Prior reverses their roles in therapy: recalling his own childhood, eventually Rivers discovers the reasons for his own stammer. Rivers’s patient Burns learns, in the most literally distasteful way, that war is a disgusting, life-swallowing enterprise with no redeeming features; Hallet’s mortal wounds become a conduit for the revelation that war is not worth the candle, and an eyeball in Prior’s hand, a “gobstopper” that literally stops his gob for a time, making him mute, also makes him look into himself (his “I”) and ask what he is doing fighting in this war.
CHAPTER TWO

Iconoclasm as complicity

Evelyn Cobley contends that although war novels attempt to convey an anti-war ethic, many of them are in fact complicit in the ideologies that lead to or support war due to their use of standard literary conventions.\(^{380}\) This ostensibly neat paradox suggests that historical war fictions in fact achieve the reverse of what they intend. Cobley advances her thesis by suggesting that many narrators of their personal war experiences employ an emotionally detached, impersonal position in their accounts of death:

What is striking about most of the personal documentations of the First World War is the rather impersonal turn this commemoration tends to take. Although the authors of autobiographical narratives had all spent time at the front, they adopt an objective and distanced stance … On the simplest level, the war narratives tend to avoid all show of feeling. The dead, for example, are treated as if they were no different from other detritus of the war’s destructive impact.\(^{381}\)

Close examination of Cobley’s analyses of those narratives, however, reveals palpable misrepresentation of the texts she relies upon to support her argument.\(^{382}\) Cobley quotes passages from Barbusse and Renn which she contends restrict themselves to “crisp sentences and external features,” at the expense of emotional reactions. Excerpts Cobley relies upon to substantiate this claim, however, tend to

\(^{380}\) Cobley fails to note examples of literary accounts of personal war experience that challenge the literary conventions of the time. Tim Cross notes that August Stramm, tired of “outworn modes of German verse,” created “a new, non representational kind of poetry” to capture what he saw; thus his poems contain many neologisms and jarring syntax, as in ‘Battlefield’: “Lumpish-mellow lulls to sleep the iron/ Bleedings filter oozing stains”; in Tim Cross, ed. The Lost Voices of World War I: An International Anthology of Writers Poets and Playwrights (London: Bloomsbury, 1988) 124–5; 139. Owen also broke with tradition to create a verse style of “broken down rhyme” (known as “pararhyme”) in his 1917 and 1918 poems composed at Craiglockhart, employing “brutal and cynical language, positioned to fracture unsuspecting lyric grace”: Kerr, Owen’s Voices, 203. Hibberd notes that although half-rhymes, or pararhymes were not unknown in verse before Owen, “Wilfred Owen’s invention, which was his own and not borrowed from any other poet, was the use of terminal pararhymes as a consistent rhyme scheme”: Dominic Hibberd, “Wilfred Owen’s Rhyming,” Studia Neophilologica 50, no. 2 (1978): 214. Paul Peppis contends that “Owen deforms Georgian lyric and patriotic verse, he appropriates shell shock psychology to interrogate modern mental trauma and arraign industrial war”: Paul Peppis, Sciences of Modernism: Ethnology, Sexology and Psychology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 276.

\(^{381}\) Evelyn Cobley, Representing War, 76.

\(^{382}\) Michael P. Clark finds Cobley’s critical acumen to be obscured, in part, by “piecemeal discussion of the novels” she refers to: “Book Review. Evelyn Cobley’s Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives,” Modern Fiction Studies 40, no. 4 (1994): 835. Richard Badenhausen “calls into question Cobley’s conclusion that ‘the First World War narrator saw no need for rhetorical strategies beyond the simple accumulation of factual data’ … and seeks to overturn her suggestion that these works remain ‘complicit with war’”: Badenhausen, “Representing Experience” 284, n. 10.
subvert rather than support her point. For example, in his novel *War (Krieg)*, Renn recounts his discovery of the body of his comrade Eilitz:

> Painfully I climbed out of the ditch. – I saw no one. I stumbled over branches and dismembered trees. – There! He was lying stretched out in the tangle of branches.
> The moon was shining on his face. There was some blood over one of his eyes. I shivered and moved on. 383

Cobley contends the death of Eilitz is delivered quite impersonally and with no emotion beyond a momentary shiver. However, Cobley seems not to recognise that in the generally word-thrifty prose style of this novelist, less is more. Renn relies upon powerful imagery to convey his tenderness and deliberation upon the sudden sight of the dead Eilitz: there are “dismembered trees” at the shocking discovery of the body, and he notes the way moonlight shines on Eilitz’s face, making visible the blood over one of his eyes. And earlier in *War*, emotive scenes are described, as Renn is so moved by the dead and dying that he wants to pray for them. 384 A little later in the narrative he lays his head on a table and cries. 385

Cobley is even less convincing in accusing Barbusse of impersonal detachment by quoting only the concluding sentence of the following account of Poterloo’s horrible death, claiming Barbusse limits himself to “strictly physical details” while “we are never offered access to the effect this horrifying experience had on him.” 386

This is actually what Barbusse recounts:

> Once more there is a violent black-eddy. We pull up sharply, and I am thrown upon Poterloo and lean on his back, his strong back and solid, like the trunk of a tree, like healthfulness and like hope. He cries to me “Cheer up, old man, we’re there!”

385 Renn, *War*, 48. Ulrich Broich’s analysis of *War* also suggests that Cobley has overlooked the protagonist’s emotional responses: he notes that “the narrator in *Krieg* [War] … becomes increasingly disorientated, and he also oscillates between courage, fear and despair, heroic fighting and total disillusionment about the meaning of war”: Ulrich Broich, *Semi-Autobiographical Fiction*, 320.
We are standing still. It is necessary to go back a little – good Lord! – no, we are moving on again!

Suddenly a fearful explosion falls on us. I tremble to my skull; a metallic reverberation fills my head; a scorching and suffocating smell of sulphur pierces my nostrils. The earth has opened up in front of me. I feel myself lifted and hurled aside – doubled up, choked, and half blinded by this lightning and thunder. But still my recollection is clear; and in that moment when I looked wildly and desperately for my comrade-in-arms, I saw his body go up, erect and black, both his arms outstretched to their limit, and a flame in the place of his head.\textsuperscript{387}

The style of the passage is exclamatory, its highly charged sensory imagery capturing the feeling and the smells, the sights and sounds, and above all, the wild desperation of a man watching his \textit{comrade-in-arms} rise into the air as a religious simulacrum, blackened and burning. And with an exclamation mark the chapter ends, a chapter that belongs entirely to Poterloo, who is described at its beginning as a man with “eyes so blue they make his fine, fair head seem transparent.”\textsuperscript{388} The whole chapter is about a pilgrimage to Poterloo’s native village of Souchez; it captures Poterloo’s nostalgic visions of childhood, his thoughts and his sadness at the destruction of his home, and the deep affection he and Barbusse share. The men at one point encounter stretcher bearers carrying a new corpse, and the two comment on how recently it was that he was standing, how young he is, what he was like, looking almost still alive, seeming less dead than the others:

But being less disfigured, it seems more pathetic, nearer to one, more intimate, as we look. And had we said anything in the presence of all that heap of beings destroyed, it would have been ‘Poor boy!’\textsuperscript{389}

Of all war novels based on first-hand experience, Barbusse’s \textit{Le Feu}, described by Hibberd as “the most harrowing description of trench warfare yet published”\textsuperscript{390} is the richest in detail of the corpses on the fields of battle, bodies in all sorts of configurations and states of damage and decomposition, and Barbusse is never short on emotive editorial commentary:

German corpses are entangled and knotted as in a torrent of the damned, some of them emerging from muddy caves in the middle of a bewildering conglomerate of beams, ropes, creepers of iron, gabions, hurdles, and bullet-screens. At the barrier itself, one corpse stands upright, fixed in the other dead, while another, planted in

\textsuperscript{387} Barbusse, \textit{Under Fire}, 166.  
\textsuperscript{388} Barbusse, \textit{Under Fire}, 144.  
\textsuperscript{389} Barbusse, \textit{Under Fire}, 148.  
\textsuperscript{390} Hibberd, \textit{A New Biography}, 269.
the same spot, stands obliquely in the dismal place, the whole arrangement looking like part of a big wheel embedded in the mud, or the shattered sail of a wind-mill. And all over this, this catastrophe of flesh and filthiness, religious images are broadcast, postcards, pious pamphlets, leaflets on which prayers are written in Gothic lettering – they have scattered themselves in waves from gutted clothing. The paper words seem to bedeck with blossom these shores of pestilence, this Valley of Death, with their countless pallors of barren lies.  

Poterloo’s highly personalised death is so overpowering that any expanded commentary on it would be not only superfluous, but virtually impossible. Jon Glover notes that Under Fire is a difficult work to pigeonhole:

Barbusse “contained” his realism and his political insight within a vision, and … the realism is so relentless at times, so coloured with imagery and so obsessed with the physical and mental merging of the human form with the landscape that even on a simple, technical level Under Fire is hard to place. It is as though there was an insuperable aesthetic problem in uniting the actual, personal experience of the horrors of war with the normal literary techniques of character development, narrative distance and structured form.

Kerr notes the influences of both Dante and Barbusse in “Owen’s notations of intense staring, vivid and ghastly faces, stretching out of arms, writhing, rolling, flinching, shrinking, clutching, wounding, and mutilation”; he alludes to Owen’s The Show, in which a soldier’s “soul looked down from a vague height, with Death” upon fetid and foul, mutilated creatures in “the seventh circle of hell.” John Ellis quotes one French soldier’s description of the trenches as

no more than cess-pools filled with a mixture of water and urine … The sides cave in behind you, as you pass, with a soft slither. We ourselves are transformed into statues of clay, with mud even in one’s very mouth.

Barker’s trilogy relates a similar fetid landscape at the front that creates mud-men out of soldiers: Rivers remembers how Prior had described the front for him as “a dreadful place” in which nothing human could live, and “[n]othing human did” (398); it is this vision that appears to Rivers in a dream: the muddy field belches

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391 Barbusse, Under Fire, 269.
395 John Ellis, Eye-Deep in Hell (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 47. Ellis notes that the French had several names for the trench mud, including la melasse, la gadoue, la gadouille, and la mouscaille. In his letters home, Owen recalls a trench that was “dark, too dark, and the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay”: Owen, Tuesday 16 Jan, 1917, to Susan Owen. Collected Letters, 427.
foul vapours as “the whole night [is] full of … creatures composed of Flanders mud and nothing else, moving their grotesque limbs in the direction of home” (398). Barker’s vision of the trenches approximates Chris Hopkins’s view of the Western Front: “the unprecedented mobilization of the three most industrially advanced nations in the world resulted in millions of men living in mud holes and counting progress in terms of yards of mud won.”396 The “foul vapours” of the mud, however, are comprised not only of the stench of rotting corpses but also the smell of faeces, and so the imagery inevitably becomes to some degree excremental, and a symbol of man’s degradation as he wallows, flounders and dies in his own shit. The stinking swamp that seems to steal their human-ness from the men is in fact composed very much of men and detritus of the bodies of men. In pursuing the tradition of such anti-war novels as Barbusse’s Under Fire and Remarque’s All Quite on the Western Front, the trilogy enlists literary conventions that quite clearly evoke war’s traumatising horrors as dehumanising and unconscionable.

The corpse of the individual soldier is often the most arresting medium of the message of waste. As The Ghost Road comes to a close, Wilfred Owen and Billy Prior die in a dream-like fashion; Owen’s body is first lifted up by bullets, then describes “a slow arc in the air” (588) as it falls. Prior, mortally wounded but insensitive to the pain, dies watching the choreography of Owen’s demise, as his own reflection in the water breaks and reforms. The almost beautiful deaths of these central characters, however, are different in nature from many of the other deaths and gruesome injuries described in the novels. It is possible to infer a small, albeit useless, notion of the heroic as the caustic Prior and the alienated romantic-elegist Owen are killed. The somewhat understated violence that kills Prior and Owen, occurring at so late a stage in the war (one week before Armistice) suggests the sense of tragic irony Remarque captured with Paul Bäumer’s death on a day reported as “all quiet on the front.”397

397 Paul Bäumer dies on a relatively peaceful day at the front, an expression on his face “so composed that it looked as if he were almost happy that it had turned out that way.” Remarque, All Quiet, 200.
Barker, in common with many war novelists and poets, utilises images of dead, damaged and dying bodies as tropes of war’s waste. It is often when first confronting death up close that young soldier-heroes of war are depicted as encountering fundamental moral questions about the role of a soldier. Crane’s Henry Fleming, who has deserted his regiment and fled into a forest, discovers a dead man propped in a sitting position against a tree. Fleming and the dead man exchange a long look, which roots the terrified Fleming to the spot; when he breaks the bonds of his captivity, he imagines a strange, squawking voice from the throat of the dead man addressing him “in horrible menaces.” Crane also visits the idea of a dead man who haunts, or wields power over the living in a short story called The Upturned Face. The scenario is again war, somewhere in Europe. A group of soldiers must bury a dead comrade, but as one man after another shoves dirt into the grave, all avoid the area of the face that stares up at them. “Soon there was nothing to be seen but the chalk-blue face.” The angry sergeant orders a man to cover the face, until a final “plop” of dirt falling is heard. Acknowledging the actual death of a man, whose eyes demand an answer to the question of why, destabilises the mentality governments expect their men-at-war to maintain: that the self is utterly subordinate to country, whose demands are both paramount and beyond question.

The corpse, an abject thing that has been cast off by life, forces upon Fleming a rude awareness of what life amounts to. In the writings of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, according to Julia Kristeva, there is “a black explosion, having the power of a devastating implosion” bringing about “the absorption, ingestion, digestion, and rejection” of meaning. Ernst Jünger notes how German soldiers observing “dislocated limbs, distorted faces, and the hideous colours of decay” may as well have been in “a garden full of strange plants.” The devastating blasting of flesh, sudden and extensive, dissociates form from meaning, numbing emotional response.

The highly educated and literate officer-soldiers of the trilogy, in contrast to the wide-eyed, pilgrim-like Fleming, are specially gifted at turning the grotesqueness of...
the bodily horrors they experience into forms of artistic expression. Embedded in the horrors thus conveyed is the notion that herein lies exposed the truth about war that many war mythologies have tended to obscure or at least to subordinate to war’s supposedly higher, heroic aims. Through their experience of the hellish injuries and inhumanity of war, the trench poets felt themselves to be possessed of special knowledge most men were not privy to, but which could be conveyed poetically. The poets in the trilogy, and indeed the shell-shocked non-poets too, are depicted as gnostics of war as they try to assimilate and to make some sense of the horrors of war. It is their sense of separateness or alienation engendered by horror that leads to knowledge. The poets are not only alienated by horror, however: the next chapter argues that the homosexual orientation shared by Owen and Sassoon also deeply influences their objections to the war.
CHAPTER THREE

The Homosexual Gaze

From childhood’s hour I have not been
As others were—I have not seen
As others saw—I could not bring
My passions from a common spring—

Edgar Allan Poe

I sometimes feel as if we were an undivided whole. Zero distance. Thus I sometimes experience the world as I, the whole universe! Thus I experience you! And those are moments of wonderful intoxication.

August Stramm

Foucault’s concept of heterotopic space, or espaces autrets contributes to an understanding of the Regeneration trilogy’s fictive-historical account of its selected events and people during World War I. My argument in this chapter is that much of the characters’ traumatic responses to and experiences of the war, as well as events in the memories of some of the major characters (such as River’s childhood memories or his recollections of studying Melanesian tribes) occur in heterotopic space within the narrative (itself a heterotopic space) and that since heterotopias subvert many of the tenets governing normative societal spaces, heterotopia becomes a tool that disconnects us from the realities ostensibly forming the subject of the narrative. Subversion and disconnection brought about by its range of many different heterotopias establishes the importance of disconnection as a powerful agent in undermining normative war rationales.

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In the second part of the chapter, I establish that sexual orientation is a significant factor in the development of the major characters’ oppositional stance on the war. Robert Boyers notes the trilogy’s focus on a “radical subversion of authenticity” by demonstrating that “in war, human beings must often be urged not to be what they most deeply are.” 405 As poets, Sassoon and Owen already pursue a vocation characterised by intellectual detachment from and reconfiguration of normative perceptions of the world and its politics; the alienation that a transgressive sexual orientation brings about is a major factor in both men becoming pacifist in outlook. 406 The bisexual and licentious Billy Prior 407 is the most demonstrably transgressive of the characters as he engages in risky, lustful sex with other men, something Sassoon and Owen are not seen to do, and his homosexual desires play a major role in the cynical, at times ambivalent, but always critical, attitude he evinces to the war. The paradox is that all three sexual transgressives return to continue fighting the war against which they have increasingly been mounting political and ethical objections. All three acquire what may be termed “special knowledge of war” that arises in part from the societally alienated status they occupy by reason of their maligned sexual orientation. 408


407 Billy is sexually active with women, (including one woman who had wet-nursed him when he was an infant), men, and a teenaged boy. He looks upon enemy soldiers through his telescope with express sexual interest. He also feels, but does not act upon, a sexual interest in Wilfred Owen.

408 Although there seems little doubt that Owen was homosexual, Guy Cuthbertson mounts a case for Owen being a non-practising homosexual, or at most, a mainly abstinent bisexual, arguing that only a few of Owen’s poems “can be read as homosexual poetry”: Cuthbertson, Wilfred Owen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 256. Cuthbertson concedes that “The poem beginning ‘Who is the god of Canongate?’ seems to be about a rent boy,” but sees it as Owen merely imagining a rent boy’s life “from homosexual desire or from a desire to understand the homosexuality of his friends or from his sympathy for the oppressed (or all three),” rather than reflecting any sort of personal experience of rent boys. “[Owen] took an aesthetic interest in male beauty. But it is not all clear that Owen was prepared to sleep with men. Owen is usually described as ‘homosexual’ these days, but that shouldn’t imply that he was actively so”: Cuthbertson, Wilfred Owen 261–2. Robert Graves’s unkind opinion that Owen was “a weakling, really … there was a passive streak in him which is even more disgusting than the active streak in Auden” – is put forward by Cuthbertson to support his belief that “Owen’s homosexual experiences were probably fewer than those of the average ‘heterosexual’ public school man”: Cuthbertson, 263. Citing Matt Houlbrook, Cuthbertson suggests that “the organization of male sexual practices and identities around the binary opposition
This chapter also discusses the significance of a human eye that Prior discovers lying under a duckboard. A single, detached human eye is perhaps a paradigmatic example of Eliot’s objective correlative since it cannot fail to instantly suggest fearful scrutiny; however, it is only by examining Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, as well as Roland Barthe’s explanation of the metaphoric chain unleashed by Bataille’s ocular metaphor, that the eye trope can be clearly linked to Prior’s transgressive gaze at the world and at the war.

**Des espaces autres**

The *Regeneration* trilogy has received much critical attention since the publication of its separate volumes, but it seems that no published writer has considered the relevance of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia to the trilogy, which is somewhat surprising given the clear emphasis Barker places upon alternative spaces, between ‘homo’ and ‘heterosexual’ – only solidified in the two decades after the Second World War.” [Cuthbertson, *Wilfred Owen*, 264. Matt Houlbrook: *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7]. Cuthbertson is happy enough to ascribe the term “bisexual” to Owen, albeit that there is no evidence for Owen having had intercourse with a woman: (Cuthbertson, *Wilfred Owen*, 265). The term “bisexual” also belongs more comfortably to the post-modern era: Das refers to “the current interest in and celebration of bisexuality as ‘sexually postmodern’”: Santanu Das, “‘Kiss Me Hardy’: Intimacy, Gender and Gesture in World War I Trench Literature,” *Modemism/Modernity* 9, no. 1 (2002): 69, n. 5. Even given the epistemological difficulties when it comes to classifying Owen’s sexual status according to contemporary vocabulary, it seems naïve to suggest the obviously attractive and presumably virile Owen would not have engaged in sex with other young men. Cuthbertson claims Owen’s conservatism, religious upbringing, and childlike devotion to his mother suggest that he was unlikely to have done so. The Criminal Law and the ignominy suffered by Oscar Wilde forced many homosexuals to lead double lives for decades after, and even, for many, into the present day. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores the ways in which male homosexual panic in the Victorian era generated the oddly sexless “figure of the urban bachelor,” a perfect alibi for a closet homosexual: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 189. Cuthbertson also argues that Owen only “spent time with particular gay men, Ross, Sassoon, Scott Moncrieff and Bainbrigge, because they were all examples of superb intellect and refinement” (265). Cuthbertson omits to mention Harold Owen’s censorship of Wilfred’s correspondence, which, Hibberd notes, was carried out “in a desperate anxiety to suppress anything that might assist the rumours that Wilfred had been gay”: Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen*, 370. “A friend of Harold’s once remarked to me that he destroyed more papers than he kept”: Hibberd, *Wilfred Owen*, introduction xviii.

409 George P. Winston notes that the term “objective correlative,” alluding to a set of objects or a situation or chain of events in artistic production that become the formula for a particular emotion, was first used by American painter Washington Allston in c. 1840: “Nearly one hundred years later, T. S. Eliot … brought this term into use.” Winston also notes that Eliot “used the phrase but once, and … seemed to regard it more as a convenient phrase than as a striking principle”; George P. Winston, “Washington Allston and the Objective Correlative,” *The Bucknell Review* 11, no. 1 (1962): 95; 101.


otherness, and transgression throughout the narrative. There are several possible heterotopias in the trilogy, including the Craiglockhart Military Hospital, Rivers’s consulting rooms, Aylesbury Prison, the trenches at No Man’s Land, and Melanesia. My argument is that Britain’s repression of homosexuality becomes a vector for homosexuals to gain insight into the absurdity of war and that heterotopic spaces in the narrative are places of detachment that privilege not only transgressive sexuality but also anti-hegemonic attitudes to war.

A beginning point in Foucault’s explanation of heterotopia is the “constitution of an infinite, and infinitely open space”: man was freed when Galileo dissolved the limitations of finity, creating “a certain theoretical desanctification of space” even if “we may still not have reached the point of a practical desanctification of space.” Foucault distinguished between utopias, which are no places, and heterotopias, which are places that exist in life and society as counter-sites, or extraordinary spaces. Many examples are given, ranging from prisons to brothels, cemeteries and ships. Peter Johnson notes that Foucault’s account of heterotopia “remains briefly sketched, provisional and at times confusing” but “among all the attempts to apply and make sense of the concept, there is a persistent association with spaces of resistance and transgression.” Heterotopias are fundamentally disturbing places. Children’s games, holidays, festivals, brothels, prisons, asylums, cemeteries and ships alter to different degrees what might be described as everyday existence … Heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and challenge the space in which we may feel at home.

Johnson interprets the heterotopic impulse in terms of an “unstitching” of utopic notions, of detachment from ourselves, and of “an escape route from power.” Heterotopias “offer no resolution or consolation, but disrupt and test our customary notions of ourselves.” Some heterotopias may be pleasantly disruptive, while others are dystopically unpleasant: “The sublime heterotopia … has its specifically

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414 Johnson, “Unravelling,” 84.
grotesque counterpart,” although the decision about what is grotesque may be a subjective one that arises in part because of reaction to the seemingly bizarre or new. Yael Allweil and Rachel Kallus, in a case study of the Tel Aviv shoreline, note the potential for a heterotopia to be “a pocket of resistance.” Resistance to prevailing norms is implicit in the heterotopic idea for, in the “ellipsis space” of heterotopia, an affirmation of otherness is implied. James D. Faubion explains that “[h]eterotopias displace the metrics of everyday life with metrics more vast”; vastness, or expansion of ideas, and the inclusiveness that is thus implied, can mean that “[t]he heterotopia is an asulon, a sanctuary, an asylum.” It is this asulon quality and its concomitant freedom of thought or vastness of vision that I suggest allows the trilogy’s homosexuals, transiently at least, to think and to be transgressive.

Johnson acknowledges that there are limits upon how much free play the concept of heterotopia allows:

As forcefully argued in Genocchio’s seminal essay, ‘heterotopia is more of an idea about space than any actual place.’ The concept of heterotopia introduces a starting point for imagining, inventing and diversifying space: nothing more, nothing less.

However, he acknowledges the importance of the concept in expanding new areas of a discipline such as … queer theory, posthumanism and recent conceptions of complexity. Heterotopia disturbs and unsettles wherever it sheds its light: cultural spaces, disciplinary borders and notions of subjectivity.

The trilogy constructs several intra-narrative spaces that have the potential to be considered heterotopic. Craiglockhart Military Hospital qualifies as a “heterotopia of deviation,” a category that includes “rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of

419 Yael Allweil and Rachel Kallus, “Heterotopias of Masculinity Along the Tel Aviv Shoreline,” in Dehaene and Cauter, Heterotopia, 191.
420 Gil Doran, “Heterotopia and the ‘dead zone,’” in Dehaene and Cauter, Heterotopia, 203.
421 Faubion, “Heterotopia” 32.
course prisons,” places designed to accommodate “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm.”

Shell-shocked patients at the facility at Craiglockhart such as Prior and Owen demonstrate various “deviant” forms of behaviour, such as uncontrollable tics, stuttering, and mutism; the aim of their medical treatment is to cure them of deviance so that they may be returned to the front. The Craiglockhart heterotopia, however, which succeeds in eliminating deviant physiological manifestations of behaviour, fails to eliminate psychological deviance: Owen and Prior go to their deaths committing their bodies to a war that their minds excoriate. Sassoon’s nickname for Craiglockhart is “Dottyville” (40), and it is under the “dotty” auspices of the institution that he and Owen utilise much of their time constructing and discussing their bitter, poetic diatribes against the war. The hospitals of the trilogy, in which men examine and question the horrors of their own war-inflicted mutilations and psychic injuries, tend to function as places of refuge for dissident ideology and attitude. Douglas Kerr refers to Owen’s sense of liberation within “the moral quarantine of Craiglockhart.”

Identifying the hospital as a Foucauldian “other space” that fosters transgressive ideas involves a concrete application of the heterotopic notion of space, for the hospital itself occupies an actual position in reality. Foucault maintained that “[u]topias are sites with no real place … [but heteropias] are outside of all places,

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425 Ironically, Rivers suffered from his own non-war-related stammer, and may also have been a homosexual, although there is no certainty about this. James S. Campbell declares that in the Regeneration trilogy, Rivers is “portrayed as a homosexual”: James S. Campbell, “For You May Touch Them Not: Misogyny, Homosexuality and War Poetry,” EHL 64, no. 3 (1997), 840–41; n. 11. But the trilogy’s narrative refrains from actually stating as much; as Jureidini notes, “Barker does not take a position on Rivers’ sexuality, in contrast to Showalter … who concludes, without citing evidence, that he was homosexual”: Jureidini, “W H R Rivers,” 12–13; n. 2. Jureidini refers to Showalter’s The Female Malady. Barker notes that “Rivers was a very secretive man. Immensely so”: Barker, “Interview with Nixon,” 9. Jureidini believes that Barker “is faithful to what little is known about Rivers, and cautious about inventing substantive qualities for him”: Jon Jureidini, “W H R Rivers,” 12; n. 2.
427 Kerr, Owen’s Voices, 311.
even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.”

Benjamin Genocchio notes that

> for Foucault, heterotopias constitute a discontinuous but socially defined spatiality, both material and immaterial at the same time. To outline this other spatiality, six principles were tentatively given, backed up by a dizzying array of examples: brothels, churches, hotel rooms, museums, libraries, prisons, asylums, Roman baths, the Turkish hammam, the Scandinavian sauna.

Genocchio, however, draws attention to Noel Gray’s articulation of a “coherency problem” in Foucault’s notion of heterotopia. Heterotopias are claimed to exist outside other spaces “but to exist ‘within’ the general social space/order”; the question that arises is how is it possible to spatially differentiate the “other space” from what might be called the “this space” or the “that space”? Genocchio suggests that Foucault’s argument “must be assumed to be incomplete” and that “the entire notion of spatially discontinuous ground is bound up with a wider set of complex philosophical questions; in particular, those regarding the impossibility of transcending or transgressing the metaphysics of presence.”

The uncertainty of heterotopia’s spatial definitiveness does not negate the utility of the concept, however. If hospitals comprise a heterotopia within Barker’s narrative, Dr Yealland’s treatment rooms are decidedly not heterotopic, for there the prevalent hegemonies of Edwardian Britain with regard to the war predominate. When Dr Rivers enters Dr Lewis Yealland’s rooms to observe his method of treatment for a shell-shocked patient named Callan, who is unable to speak, Yealland is brutally intolerant of what he perceives to be his patient’s “negative attitude” (200).

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432 Barker includes an Author’s Note at the end of Regeneration that states: “Dr Lewis Yealland’s rather different methods of treating his patients are described in detail in his book, Hysterical Disorders of Warfare,” 220. Barker clearly accentuates the contrast between the respective treatment approaches of Yealland and Rivers. Yealland does indeed reveal his methods to be as harsh and authoritarian as Barker has represented them, including applying lighted cigarettes to the tip of a mute patient’s tongue. Much of Yealland’s actual treatment record has been incorporated verbatim in Barker’s depiction of what Callan endures. The heterotopic space in which Rivers is open to hearing and reading the anti-war poems that Sassoon shares with him was a space Yealland’s approach would have peremptorily closed: at one point in Hysterical Disorders Yealland records the remarks he made to a patient who, when cured, began to quote his own poetry: “Your reason for coming here was to be cured, and not to quote poetry … Emotional demonstrations are entirely out of order in cases such as yours, and I do not appreciate them:” Yealland, “Hysterical Disorders,” Open Library, 138. Accessed March 21, 2016.

https://openlibrary.org/books/OL14014046M/Hysterical_disorders_of_warfare
Electrodes are applied to the back of the patient’s throat, and an electrical current applied “with such force that the leads [are] ripped out of the battery” (202). Yealland’s interaction with Callan is reminiscent of O’Brien’s interrogation of Winston at the Ministry of Love in Orwell’s *1984*, as he plays torturous mindgames, advising Callan that “[y]ou must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say,” (203; emphasis in original) and denying him a drink of water when he needs one. Yealland demands that Callan become “the hero I expect you to be” (202). The relative brutality practised by Yealland compared with Rivers’s gentle talking cure acts to contrast heterotopic and non-heterotopic space. As Rivers watches Yealland’s therapy silently, “his empathy with the man in the chair [keeps] him still” (202). Accordingly, Rivers does not alter his own more benign form of therapy after seeing Yealland’s method, and so his own treatment rooms remain as heterotopic space.

The trilogy is a narrative of paradigmatic conflict: at its heart of course is the supreme paradigm of antinomies, war and peace. Other antinomies that may be identified include men and women, European and Melanesian culture, society and the individual, freedom and imprisonment, heterosexuals and homosexuals, doctors and patients, illness and health, madness and sanity, the physical and the psychic, conscious and unconscious, and past and present. Relative power or powerlessness characterises each antinomy, and generally the antagonism at the centre of each is destined never to be resolved to the satisfaction of both. Though the war is almost over at the moment the trilogy ends, the ghostly Njiru’s lamentation for “the fingerless, the crippled, the broken” (590; emphasis in original) reminds us that victory will be bought at a terrible price.

The trilogy tends toward privileging the anti-hegemonic of each power dynamic: thus are homosexuals represented sympathetically as the repressed and persecuted minority in a paranoid, homophobic culture, and homosexual sex occurs without attracting criminality or censure. Prior’s first act of intercourse with Manning occurs in the heterotopic space of Manning’s house, which had been vacated by the

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433 Barker may be guilty of stretching reader credibility a little too far when Yealland, after objecting to Callan’s smile, applies a final electrode to the side of his mouth, which stops him from smiling (205).
Mannings due to bomb damage – “The family’s in the country. I’m staying at my club” (233). Everything in the house, even a photo of Manning’s wife and sons, is “shrouded in white sheets” (234) when the two men engage in sex with one another in the servants’ quarters. The war has thus cocooned the Edwardian mores of Manning’s house, freeing the space up for classless, illicit, loveless, even brothel-like sex: Prior is prepared to be a sort of “semenal spittoon” (237). Manning diverges from the role considered normative for a married English gentleman when he urges the working class Prior to dominate him sexually.

Anti-hegemonic spaces such as military hospitals and Manning’s temporarily locked-down house are sites in which narrative incidents may occur that “suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.”434 Barker’s description of the approach to Manning’s house is telling: details include the “tall, narrow, dark houses… spindly trees… flowerbeds rank with weeds” demolished residences, “a huge gap” (233). These are signs that indicate normative middle class life seems to have withered; as Manning and Prior approach the gap, the pavement becomes “gritty beneath their feet, pallid with the white dust that flowed copiously from stricken houses and never seemed to clear” (233). Prior feels an “affinity with places where the established order has been violently assailed” (233). There are intimations here of Edgar Allen Poe: crouching on the steps of Manning’s house is “a cat, hunched and defensive… growling over something it had found” (233).435 Manning’s cracked and enshrouded house indeed has a fallen quality: the woman who lives there, like the dead Madeleine Usher, has been placed out of sight. These heterotopian circumstances in which all reminders of normative Edwardian life are bleached out enable Prior and Manning to use the location for their frenzied act of intercourse. When the two men enter, Prior stares at an “ominous” crack above the door (234). The sexual intercourse between Prior and Manning contravenes normative Edwardian precepts of masculinity, social class,

434 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 3.
435 The pavement on the way to the house, “pallid with white dust,” in a street of bomb wreckage and “spindly trees” (237), is not far removed from the desolate landscape of Roderick Usher’s house as the narrator, with crushing despair, looks “upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees”: Edgar Allen Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” in The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings, 138.
marital fidelity, and sexual propriety.\textsuperscript{436} Karen Knutsen sees the cracked state of Manning’s house as an indication that “there is ‘something rotten’ or corrupt about middle class Britain,”\textsuperscript{437} and indeed, Prior’s later observation, during a second visit, that “many of the elegant houses had dingy basements, like white teeth yellow round the gums,” (416) seems to support her view.\textsuperscript{438}

Most of the narrative events of the \textit{Regeneration} trilogy are played out in heterotopic geography:\textsuperscript{439} not only is the site of battle in any war heterotopic – a space constructed by a matrix of political, ideological and sociological impetuses, a space which could be called a heterotopia of crisis (Foucault included military service within this category) – it is very clearly a space that is “other” than civilian and a space in which the normal sanctity of human life is suspended or cancelled. The primary objective of the soldier is to kill; this, and the placement of one’s own body in a killing field where it is at risk of mortal injury, is a suspension of normalcy. That areas of the front are known as “No Man’s Land” advertises their otherness in relation to all nationalities and to humanity itself. Tim O’Brien notes that

\begin{quote}
[f]or the common soldier … war has the feel – the spiritual texture – of a great ghostly fog, thick and permanent. There is no clarity. Everything swirls. The old rules are no longer binding, the old truths no longer true. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, love into hate, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery … and the only certainty is overwhelming ambiguity.
\end{quote}

O’Brien thus locates the soldier quite unequivocally in heterotopic space.

\textsuperscript{436} The war thus demarcates ever more clearly the separate realms of the masculine and the feminine. Adams explains the nature of the wartime fears of men by alluding to the mortal fear that haunts Roderick Usher after Madeleine’s death – “Terror lay in the threat that woman might break out of her sphere entirely and invade the male. Balance would be lost; the sexually or politically aggressive female would overload the already threatened male. Hence, suffragettes were harshly treated in British prisons”: Adams, \textit{The Great Adventure}, 20. 

\textsuperscript{437} Knutsen, \textit{Reciprocal Haunting}, 97. 

\textsuperscript{438} Catherine Bernard notes that “the bombed sites of the \textit{Regeneration} trilogy all tell of a history in pieces, of a Benjaminian history in ruins, that refuses to be sublated into a coherent whole, let alone into the soothing nostalgic grand narrative of a timeless past”: Catherine Bernard, “Pat Barker’s Critical Work of Mourning: Realism with a Difference,” \textit{Études Anglaises} 60, no. 2 (2007): 176. 

\textsuperscript{439} Amna Haider, focusing on evocations of the Gothic, regards the trilogy’s various settings, including the wards of Craiglockhart hospital, the “trenches, Beattie Roper’s prison cell and even the Home Front in general … as sites of spatial and psychological estrangement”: Amna Haider, “War Trauma and Gothic Landscapes of Dispossession and Dislocation in Pat Barker’s \textit{Regeneration Trilogy},” \textit{Gothic Studies} 14, no. 2 (2012): 57. 

Heterotopia is a kind of detachment, and it is through a myriad of different strategies of detachment from normativity that Barker reimagines the war in the trilogy. The homosexuals are the most poignantly detached of her characters, compelled to hide their sexual urges from public view, and to give expression to them, if at all, in the heterotopias of cruising areas, private bohemian spaces, or the heterotopia of the military. None of Owen’s sexual experiences with men are imagined or related in the narrative of the trilogy, but Owen is known to have attended social evenings with noted homosexual Robert Ross and his friends at Ross’s Half Moon Street apartment. He may also have been seduced by the writer Scott Moncrieff, an openly homosexual friend and private secretary of Ross’s. Barker’s narrative commandeers Ross’s Half Moon Street address as the location for Charles Manning’s bachelor pad, in which Manning and Prior have sex on two occasions; Ross is present as another guest at Manning’s flat in Half Moon Street. Matt Houlbrook notes that the street, which “became a remarkable queer enclave,” attracted homosexual writer J. K. Ackerley, who used rented rooms at 11 Half Moon Street to entertain his male pick-ups during the 1920s. Fortuitously enough, the half moon in the street name acts as an eponymous symbol of intermediacy or indeterminacy to those who are, according to Mr Prior’s description of his son Billy, “neither fish nor fowl” (52). Edward Carpenter’s The Intermediate Sex endorses Otto Weininger’s view of homosexuality as “a natural intermediate form” of sexuality, rather than a state of inversion, or an “organic aberration” as described by Havelock Ellis. I suggest that this notion of intermediacy, or indeed indeterminacy, established only according to the age’s accepted criteria for evaluating normativity, is intrinsic to Foucault’s notion of heterotopia. Crisis heterotopias (heterotopias of deviation) are spaces for people experiencing change, such as pregnant women, or the mentally ill: suddenly, as normative space is unable to recognise them they must be removed until such time

441 Hibberd, noting Robert Graves’s claim that Ross told him Scott Moncrieff managed to get Owen drunk so that he could seduce him, believes the seduction to be supported in Moncrieff’s own poems: Hibberd, A New Biography, 268; 315.
442 Ackerley notes that in Half Moon Street and its surrounds “[s]treet prowlers and male prostitutes were my first prey”: J. K. Ackerley, My Father and Myself (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), 123.
443 Hammond’s analysis of ocular tropes in the trilogy notes that “[m]oonlight is figured as a liquid that transgresses its own boundaries”: Hammond, “Eyes in the Text,” 41.
as their status changes again. Craiglockhart’s traumatised patients are temporarily unable to behave in what is deemed the correct manner of rational, masculine, soldierly men. Emplacement in an institution for the psychiatrically disordered at first provides a space in which to be dotty. But as the men’s clinical dottiness recedes under treatment, and the traumatised soldier comes to resemble his former self, Craiglockhart sends him back to the front; the shift is from one crisis heterotopia (hospital) to another crisis heterotopia (army/war/the front). Barker keeps the protagonists of the narrative in heterotopic emplacements, even when they are not hospitalised. Prior, in the community, has a dual personality, which in a sense doubles his character, but neither personality can be said to be the sole tenant of the space that is the body and mind of Prior until they are fused as one or until one of the personalities is destroyed or absorbed into the other. The crisis heterotopia within Prior drives him towards a goal of either integration or disintegration.

Moreover, the homosexual-bisexual characters are in permanent heterotopia: their closeted sexuality is a heterotopia of crisis, and one from which the narrative allows them no possibility of escape, if escape is even desired by them. As with all heterotopias, the homosexual closet exists both in and outside of everyday society, it intersects it in time and space: the gay person negotiates his or her path through or around the heteronormative precepts, engaging sexually with members of the same sex against society’s laws, wishes, and customs, but with the support and collaboration of like-minded homosexuals within the same heterotopia.

Although Sassoon claims his objections to the war were influenced by his experiences at the front, and not by homosexual pacifists such as Robert Ross and Edward Carpenter (49), he does reveal to Rivers that reading Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex* “saved” his life by encouraging him to embrace his sexual orientation (50). Bernard Bergonzi indirectly offers some support for my point that the socially alienating homosexual orientation of the poets is a significant factor in the shaping of their responses to the war:

> Their antiwar stance was courageous but shared by very few, even among the poets who had been in action … [A]s homosexuals who did not much like women,
both marginal figures in their respective cultures … they were at some remove from the main currents of English life.\textsuperscript{445}

Removed from their country’s main social currents, the poets developed a freemasonry of secrecy that becomes a motif in their writing: in Owen’s ‘Smile, Smile, Smile,’ which attacks patronising newspaper articles that belittle war injury, amputees smile at one another curiously “[l]ike secret men who know their secret safe”; Randall Stevenson notes that such men share “a knowledge of conditions at the Front apparently as esoteric in nature, so far did it seem beyond the awareness of civilians at home.”\textsuperscript{446} Hibberd points out that this poem’s “stress on secret knowledge is typical of Wilfred alone.”\textsuperscript{447} The secrecy that Owen can speak of with both bitterness and a superior knowledge parallels the secret love that he must keep locked away.

Sassoon reveals the secret of his love for his men when he tells Rivers how he is haunted by the ghostly figure of a “[n]ice lad” called Orme who died under his command. It is this homosexual love that appears to drive his decision to return to the front in spite of his anti-war stance; in ‘Sick Leave,’ which he hands to Rivers, a whole horde of the “noiseless dead … gather about my bed/ They whisper to my heart; their thoughts are mine” (168).\textsuperscript{448} Compounded by a theme redolent of the decadent movement, Sassoon’s poem indicates the connection between his attraction to men and his special knowledge of the pointlessness of the war.

\textsuperscript{445} Bergonzi, \textit{War Poets}, 13. Kali Tal suggests that authors of war trauma feel “the urge to bear witness, to carry the tale of horror back to the halls of normalcy”: Kali Tal, “Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma,” in \textit{Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature}, ed. Philip K. Jason (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 229. Cited by David Jarraway, “Excremental Assault,” 698. Homosexuals, however, who occupy alienated societal space, return to the “halls of normalcy” on an entirely different basis from heterosexuals. Their tales of horror have a greater potential to exacerbate a personal sense of alienation from mainstream society’s “halls of normalcy.” Moreover, given the evident societal dysfunctions in the trilogy’s Britain, any presumptions of a comfortable “normalcy” within the social currents of the homefront are questionable.

\textsuperscript{446} Randall Stevenson, \textit{Literature and the Great War 1914–1918} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 167. Stallworthy notes that the title of Owen’s ‘Smile, Smile, Smile’ is derived from a song that was popular on the Western Front, “So pack up your troubles in your old kit bag/ And smile, smile, smile”: Stallworthy, ed., \textit{The Poems}, 168.

\textsuperscript{447} Hibberd, \textit{Wilfred Owen}, 338.

\textsuperscript{448} Taylor’s inclusion of this poem of his anthology subtitled \textit{Love Poetry of the Trenches} suggests he considers it has “a strong homo-erotic element”: Taylor, \textit{Lads}, 16.
When Barker shifts the narrative events to Melanesia in *The Ghost Road*, she creates yet another heterotopia, the culture of another society, represented in the narrative as it is remembered by Rivers. This tribal heterotopia is largely destroyed by Western culture, as the trilogy reveals. The conclusion that war is killing Western culture or its population of young men, and that the absence of war is killing the Melanesian culture, illustrates what is, in large measure, the purpose and the power of heterotopias of crisis: to provide opportunities for societal self-reflexivity which carries the potential to improve or evolve. The tragedy of heterotopias is that the heterotopic spaces, recognised and identified as anti-hegemonic, act in their otherness to reinforce and consolidate the larger hegemony that creates them.

In the trilogy the many heterotopias intersect, overlap, and trespass upon each other in space and time. As Barker’s narrative moves through its triptych it becomes progressively more heterotopic. *Regeneration* begins and ends in the asylum-like hospital environment of Craiglockhart, where most of its plot is developed. The *Eye in the Door* situates many of its plot incidents outside hospital borders, sliding into other heterotopias, such as Aylesbury prison and the heterotopic world of Prior’s version of a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality. As its title suggests, *The Eye in the Door* is also concerned with abstractions of the mind, philosophical and psychological issues related to Lacan’s notion of the gaze, and the paranoia that a panoptic observation engenders. *The Ghost Road* takes us even further from the mundane or everyday, with its strong focus on Melanesian other-culture, its ghosts, and the ghostly journey that so many of the soldiers are destined for. Rivers and his fellow anthropologist Hocart are present at a type of séance in which the tribesmen seek answers from their ghosts, who are said to make a whistling noise that Rivers and Hocart hear but cannot determine the source of (553).

I diverge from the approach of Joan Gordon, who, “[b]ecause Foucault specifies that heterotopias are ‘real,’ … resist[s] the impulse to see the novel itself as a heterotopian counter-site simultaneously mirroring our world and inverting it,”

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though that is exactly what good fiction of any genre does.” The overarching heterotopia of the trilogy is the novel world itself, a space of otherness that attempts to mirror the 1918 world in its aggregate of contemporary heterotopias that apparently aim to reflect and critically examine (its own reflection of) World War I, and war in general. Heterotopic spaces at Craiglockhart provide opportunities for Sassoon and Owen, in many of their verses, to attack hegemonies of war heroism, a function the novelistic representation also provides. Foucault speaks of heterotopias as real spaces, while being tentative about their physical geography, but heterotopias are not simply either physical or metaphysical, for they may be both. Johnson notes that “Foucault is focusing on the formal, spatial qualities of certain places, which are ‘both mythical and real.’” Foucault’s example of a mirror’s reflection is at once a utopian and a heterotopian site: “It makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived, it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” Foucault suggests that “[h]eterotopias are most often linked to slices in time,” they open onto a variety of diverse chronologies, and in the case of museums and archives they become sites “of indefinitely accumulating time.” The historical novel, which attempts to re-present slices of specific times past and lives there lived, is a product born out of archival histories that then assumes, via the route of artistic conceit, its own archival status.

In the anti-hegemonic espaces autres of the trilogy, continuous suspension of the normative brings about states of ever increasing indeterminacy as the narrative progresses: all we have, in a matrix of heterotopias, is a document that, in its re-visiting of the past, expressly negates the very possibility of such a destination: as if the author were directly addressing the reader via Prior, the text announces that “[t]he past is a palimpsest … Early memories are always obscured by accumulations

451 “Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality”: Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, 24; emphasis added.
452 Johnson, “Unravelling,” 77 (emphasis added). Foucault expressed it thus – “As a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, the description could be called heterotopology”: Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.
of later knowledge” (264). In hermeneutic process, the author may be dead, but in the trilogy’s overlapping layers of heterotopia, the author’s subject itself keeps occluding as it is ensconced more and more in (Foucault’s) espaces autres rather than in ces espaces: the trilogy becomes not an anti-war book in a heterotopian analysis, but a book that can be neither anti- nor pro-war. Its other-space-ness lifts war into the context of non-dialecticism, representing the events of war stripped of the possibility of a final ideological position. The ending of the trilogy lends weight to this understanding: Njiru, the Melanesian tribal chieftain, appears before Rivers in the form of a ghost who is – “not in any way ghostly … but himself in every particular” (589) – and who insists there be no weeping for the tragedy of his people, only departure. Njiru never actually exists at any point in the narrative (to the extent that fictional characters can be said to “exist”) except as a figment within Rivers’s memory, or as a neurological re-creation in the multi-layered heterotopia of the narrative: the text’s insistence upon the ghost’s actual-ness in fact underscores heterotopic otherness in the ward, until the non-ghost reverts to ghostly type by fading into invisibility, and we are left with nothing as the trilogy ends.

The vector of homosexuality
Post-Victorian Britain’s homosexuals occupied an uneasy position in their society. Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick describes the educated middle class (or public school) homosexuals of the time as having “operated sexually in what seems to have been startlingly close to a cognitive vacuum.” Except for a Bohemian minority of men, such as homosexual rights activist Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), the sexual histories of English gentlemen are remarkable for their “resourceful, makeshift, sui generis quality [and for] denials, rationalizations, … fears … guilts, [and] sublimations.” Havelock Ellis observed that the “normal citizen” who discovered someone to have performed a homosexual act felt it his “moral duty to regard the offender as hopelessly damned, and to help in hounding him out of society.”

456 Njiru’s appearance at the end of The Ghost Road is extensively analysed in Chapter Five.
458 Sedgwick, Between Men, 173.
the advent of war in 1914, the homosexual, necessarily secretive about his same-sex attraction, was suddenly placed in the awkward position of fighting to preserve the values of his nation even as the nation considered itself duty bound to “hound him out.” Matt Houlbrook notes that “the queer body was a public body, subject to the potential force of the law even in the nominally private realm of the home.” Homosexual acts, committed in public or private, carried a penalty of two years’ jail, as well as the potential to ruin reputations and lives.

Laws that were intended to stop homosexual behaviour in fact forced homosexuals to find “precarious moments of privacy for sexual encounters in the most public of urban spaces” such as parks or lavatories. The war years sparked a similar sort of closed-open-ness, as trench life fired a passionate love between soldiers, the fierceness of which could be explained as a product of war, even eulogised by the combatants themselves, provided that no-one realised it was homosexuality. Fussell claims the love men felt in battle was “a sublimated (i.e., ‘chaste’) form of temporary homosexuality.” This hybrid love was, in discussion at least, cleansed of its sexual dimension: as Michael Adams points out, love on war’s canvas “is not to be consummated physically. That would not be cricket.” Most war novels

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460 Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 41.
461 The Offences against the Person Act 1861 (24 & 25 Vict c 100) made acts of sodomy punishable with life imprisonment until 1885. The Labouchere Amendment of that year reduced the term of imprisonment to any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour at the court’s discretion.
463 A homoerotic episode in a novel about World War I that seems to have been completely ignored by any published commentator occurs in C. S. Forester’s 1929 novel, *Brown on Resolution*. English seaman Albert Brown, the sole survivor of a sunken warship, is stranded on a Galápagos Island. Brown becomes a sniper, shooting several members of the crew of a nearby German cruiser, until finally he hits a young German sailor who has come ashore. The narration informs us that Albert Brown, also wounded and dying at this point, imagined he “float[ed] down to where the German boy was lying, with the sun on his pale hair; he took his hand, and the boy opened his eyes and smiled. It was such a friendly smile; Albert loved him from that moment for the niceness of his blue, childlike eyes and his golden sunburn.” In Brown’s extended fantasy the two boys drifted away hand in hand and swam naked together in the cool, clean waters of a river, smiling and laughing: “Everything was friendly and happy and most blissfully perfect.” Forester’s narration, emphasising boys and boyishness, cleverly cajoles readers into thinking of this as a pre-sexual fantasy, despite the fact that “leading seaman Albert Brown,” no longer a mere boy, has already systematically stalked and killed several men. Albert Brown, who “had never known a woman’s love,” may simply be sexually immature, but the mood of the quoted passages leans towards a homosexual orientation: C. S. Forester, *Brown on Resolution* (London, Reading and Fakenham: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1963), 138–41.
465 Michael C. C. Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 123. Walt Whitman celebrated adhesive love between soldiers as the “dear love of comrades.” Whitman envisioned, “particularly in what would become his Civil War poems, a stage in the union of sames where the polarities of masculine love
represent love between comrades as intense, but always platonic. Richard Aldington, a heterosexual English writer and poet who served in World War I, claims that men at the front developed a “real and beautiful and unique relationship that has now entirely vanished,” but denies that such relationships ever became sexual: “No, no. There was no sodomy about it.” Aldington’s assumption seems to be that in the absence of actual sodomy, one may or must conclude a heterosexual orientation. Others have found Aldington’s denials of homosexual love overly emphatic: Martin Taylor suggests that many men “of Aldington’s generation” simply found offensive the notion that the “unique relationship[s]” so fondly recalled could have had an erotic dimension. Santanu Das notes that Aldington’s “rather shrill foregrounding of the war as an exclusively male experience cloaks a deep anxiety about gender and sexuality that forms the tortured dialectic of his book.” Barker’s bold challenge to firmly entrenched conventions of World War I novels is to describe Billy Prior’s man-to-man sexual activity in graphic detail that includes anal penetration, which has not appealed to more conservative readers. The trilogy’s extraordinary juxtaposition of “high blown ideas of universal connection, the common experience of soldiers in war” with the recognition of basic and powerful sexual urges demanding satisfaction, even if they “can only be met in forbidden connections,” keeps the narrative grounded in reality. Sassoon and Owen are represented not only as brave soldiers, but also as respectable, intelligent,


669 Barker finds it a rather sad anomaly that people are more shocked by sex in her writing than by human slaughter: “Prior has sex with a boy on a canal bank. It’s very explicit. Then a month further on, another group of young men meet on another canal bank, and they kill each other, and I wish I could say the shock was equal. It isn’t, but perhaps it ought to be”: Barker in Caroline Garland: “Conversation between Pat Barker and Caroline Garland,” Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice (2004): 196. Natasha Alden notes that the critics such as Shepherd, who object to “Barker’s emphasis on sexuality, specifically homosexuality” are perturbed by “the fact that the books are not representative of the majority of heterosexual soldiers or civilians”: Natasha Alden, “Re-writing Rivers: Ethics and Aesthetics in the Regeneration trilogy,” English 61, no. 233 (2012): 192; 193.

If Prior’s high octane sex with men in the trilogy cuts a new path for war-based fiction, so too does the sympathetic portrayal of homosexual soldiers in World War I. But the trilogy’s normalisation of war-novel homosexuality achieves more than that objective: it also suggests that the homosexuals as detached individuals were predisposed to see and evaluate the morality of war service with scepticism.

Gnosis from alienation

The homosexual soldier’s stance on war springs from two sources in the trilogy; the first is his gnosis gained from involvement in battle, and the second is the additional gnosis conferred by the ramifications of his sexual orientation. In Chapter Two, I discussed James Campbell’s concept of combat gnosticism, a special knowledge gleaned only on the battlefield. The soldiers of the trilogy, alienated by their sexual orientation, are further impelled to their oppositional position regarding the war by their alienation from society. Of course the men are subject to a range of shattering psychological experiences that would disorientate anyone. Shell-shock trauma is a type of event that Cathy Caruth describes as “not fully perceived as it occurs” and therefore only “seen,” or assimilated, belatedly. Ankhi Mukherjee maintains that such trauma-incited cognitive anomalies create “luminous space[s] of knowledge in the moment of movement from trauma to recovery.”

Thus unseeable-but-seen battle incidents, only capable of being fully perceived some time after they occur, tend to maintain their extraordinariness in the mind, resisting easy articulation. But adult male homosexuals, never having lived normative adult lives, are more inclined than unalienated men to question generally accepted societal norms after a

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472 In 1976, Peter Jones noted that in the war novel homosexuality “is a weakness, a despised and disruptive anomaly”; homosexuals in war novels tended to be “introverted, intense, rigidly contained men”: Peter G. Jones War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), 132. Captain Corelli’s Mandolin, a 1994 novel by Louis de Bernières, set during World War II, includes a heroic homosexual character, Guercio, who sacrifices his life to save Corelli: though not a despised character, the homosexual must pay a high price for his orientation. Louis de Bernières, Captain Corelli’s Mandolin (London: Vintage, 1998).

473 Niall Ferguson notes that “[s]ex is the thing which the original war literature, because of authorial scruple as much as censorship, largely omits; sex is what Billy Prior is there to provide. To the historian, the character is suspiciously anachronistic; but he is also surely the key to the novel’s success”: Ferguson, The Pity of War, xxxi.


harrowing experience sustained in the course of protecting their country. Luminous spaces of knowledge for alienated men during recovery are likely to further alienate them from a mainstream of men who accept the scars of battle and assimilate their experiences via the “talking cure.”

The aim of the teasing out suppressed or half-remembered traumatic experiences is to integrate the extraordinary into the realm of the ordinary through the medium of his stimulating a type of “autognosis”; Prior cynically accuses Rivers of “trying to create a safe space round what you’ve said already, so you can think about it without shitting yourself” (555). Craiglockhart’s most historically famous patients, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, are men who possess quite outstanding talents for transposing personal experience into words. Dennis Brown notes that “poetry is the oddly privileged, if mainly marginalized, articulation of what in The Ghost Road is called ‘talk blong tomate’: the language of ghosts.” Taylor contends that the “exclusive and incommunicable secret” of the trench poets is “the truth untold” in Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting.’

As homosexuals, the two poets inhabit an extraordinary space that encourages intellectual detachments that society’s pariahs are wont to adopt, whether consciously or not. John Middleton Murry explains the unique depth of Owen’s immersion in war’s horror:

476 Dennis Brown, “The Regeneration Trilogy: Total War,” 194. Rivers’s colleague Arthur Hocart explains the meaning of tomate in an article published in 1922: “TOMATE means ‘a dead one,’ ‘a ghost’; but it is also applied to certain spirits who, the natives think, do not belong to deceased human beings. It is also applied to animals connected with spirits or shrines. Njiruviri states: ‘Sometimes men see a spirit (tomate); they take it for a man; when they look again it is gone; a spirit cannot stay like a man’”: Arthur M. Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead in Edystone of the Solomons,” The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Vol. 52 (Jul. – Dec., 1922): 259.

477 The status of the secretive homosexual is comparable to Virginia Woolf’s perception of the status of women: “As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world”: Virginia Woolf Three Guineas, 1938. (New York: Harvest Books, 1963), 109. Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting,’ in which the German soldier addresses the English soldier who killed him as “my friend,” may be seen as leaning towards to an idea of world citizenship, or statelessness, which pertains to those whose secret kinship-in-exile is imposed upon them by their homophobic culture: “Whatever hope is yours, / Was my life also; I went hunting wild/ After the wildest beauty in the world.” Sarah Cole notes the concentration in Owen’s poetry upon the special relationship that develops between those whose bodies are blighted by war, a “tragic union in dismemberment”: Sarah Cole, “Modernism, Male Intimacy and the Great War,” EHL 68, no. 2 (2001): 487. Mutilated men are suddenly members of a parallel community that does not exist within their monolithic home life, which makes “no room for alternative cultures” (Cole, “Modernism,” 487). Clare Tylee notes that in Despised and Rejected Rose Laure Allatini advanced the idea that “belligerence had been bound into the very definition of masculinity, and that homosexuality and the refusal to kill were intimately related in their defiance of the established notions of manhood”: Clare M. Tylee, The Great War and Women’s Consciousness (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990), 123.
There have been war-poets; but he was a poet of another kind. He was not a poet who seized upon the opportunity of war, but one whose being was saturated by a strange experience, who bowed himself to the horror of war until his soul was penetrated by it, and there was no mean or personal element remaining unsubdued in him.\(^{479}\)

At their first meeting in the trilogy, Owen quite passionately praises Sassoon’s ‘The Redeemer,’ in which a soldier, “[s]houldering his load of planks” is personified as a messiah figure: “I say he was Christ, who wrought to bless/ All groping things with freedom bright as air.” Owen declares “I’ve been wanting to write that for three years” (75), suggesting a level of identification with the messenger who bears the burden of society’s misunderstanding. Basil de Selincourt, writing in 1921, wonders from where on earth came Owen’s visceral rejection of the alleged glory of war, his “scathing bitterness for men who nurture this illusion. We ask ourselves in vain where among English readers these men are to be found.” The answer, Selincourt suggests, “is that a nation is divided into two parts, one of which talks of war and ordains it, while the other acts and suffers.”\(^{480}\) The very particular loathing felt by Owen and Sassoon arises, I suggest, from their shared locus of secret alienation from the country they loved, predisposing them to question the nation’s shibboleths as other less distanced men were not. In her study of political exiles who are committed to “truth, solidarity and warning” Kinga Olszewka sees in Owen a deep sense of “internal exile” that suggests “a quest for the meaning of existence in the country of his identity, but where he no longer belongs.”\(^{481}\) The emotional locus of the homosexual in a homophobic society is similar to the position of the child of unloving parents who craves the love that other parents bestow on their children.

At the beginning of the war, Sassoon and Owen shared the nation’s enthusiasm for the war: very early in the narrative we are told that Sassoon, who “took a German trench single-handed and got recommended for the VC” (22), had “joined up on the first day” of the war (33). Biographer Jean Wilson describes Sassoon’s early war

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poems as “largely idealistic.” In ‘Absolution’ (1915), for example, the “happy legion” acquires wisdom through war, “and fighting for our freedom, we are free.” His later war poems, as Virginia Woolf notes, are fired by “the hot fluid of honest rage and scorn”: one of the poems Sassoon invites Rivers to read is ‘To the Warmonger’ (1917), which begins with the lines “I’m back from hell/ With loathsome thoughts to tell” (24-5). The reason Sassoon continues to fight despite his outspoken criticism of the war is his compassion for “the lovely soldier lads” (387) he commands. In his 1917 poem, ‘Banishment,’ Sassoon notes it was “Love drove me to rebel.” But, he continues, “Love drives me back to grope with them through hell;/ And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven.” These words suggest not just love, but a sense of guilt at having abandoned his men.

The ideological and emotional disenchantment that Owen and Sassoon feel concerning the war is strongly affected by their homosexuality. Neither is able to admit his attraction to men publicly, a difficulty exacerbated by the Pemberton Billing trial in 1918, which not only sensationalised Britain’s intolerance of sodomy and lesbianism, but also led many to believe Britain’s homosexuals were collaborating with the Germans in a plan to bring about the fall of the British Empire. Billing’s published denunciation of homosexuals, entitled “As I See it: The First 47,000” is reproduced in full in the trilogy (333-6). Philip Hoare notes that “Billing’s claims struck deep into the sensibilities of wartime Britain and its leaders … His allegations played on deep-seated ideas of nationalism, xenophobia, homophobia and anti-semitism.” Owen and Sassoon, fighting dutifully to

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484 Quoted by Wilson, Siegfried, 360, from Woolf’s review in The Nation, 16 June 1917.
485 Sassoon, in The War Poems, 97.
486 Homosexuality, as Linda Dowling notes, was constructed in the nineteenth century as “sexual pathology,” but the love that, especially after Oscar Wilde’s downfall, dared not speak its name publicly, nevertheless established for itself “a hidden, or ‘coded’ counterdiscourse” in the form of Hellenic studies at Oxford that were to play a crucial role in developing modern homosexual identity”: Linda C. Dowling, Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), xiii.
487 Hoare, Wilde’s Last Stand, 2.
preserve the very culture whose values condemn them, thus take on the strange, oxymoronic position of pariah-patriots.488

Owen was, like Sassoon, initially enthusiastic about serving his country: in her Author’s Note at the end of The Ghost Road, Barker mentions “Owen’s MC, for gallantry in capturing an enemy machine-gun and inflicting ‘considerable losses’ on the enemy at the battle of Joncourt,” and also his award of a posthumous VC (591). The increasing detachment of both men from belligerence fuelled by nationalist sentiments is underscored in the narrative when Owen, on Sassoon’s advice, alters “the monstrous anger of our guns” in ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ (1917) to the “monstrous anger of the guns” (126).489 This change broadens the anthem’s compassion to include German as well as British servicemen who have died “as cattle.” The breadth of Owen’s empathy is evident, too, in another conversation with Sassoon during which he recalls a line of skulls “[l]ike mushrooms” in one of the trench walls and observes that they could be skulls of men who had died in much earlier wars: “It’s as if all other wars had somehow … distilled themselves into this war, and that makes it something you … almost can’t challenge” (77). The implicit textual reference here is to Owen’s 1917 poem ‘Strange Meeting’ in which the ghost of a German soldier killed in battle a day earlier laments not his death but the death of the “truth untold / The pity of war, the pity war distilled.”490 As noted by Adrian Caesar, “Owen’s erotic impulses may be glimpsed behind most of what he wrote” (167), a claim I believe receives some support from Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting,’ which suggests an exceptional kind of passion common to the poem’s two soldiers: both “went hunting wild/ After the wildest beauty in the world.” The final words of the poem, “let us sleep now,” uttered by the dead German to the British soldier, may be construed as an invitation to bed down together.491 Thus is

489 Hibberd’s biography of Owen confirms that Sassoon advised Owen to make this alteration to the draft of ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ so as to prevent the poem from being understood as a statement in support of the war: Hibberd, Wilfred Owen, 270.
490 Stallworthy, The Poems, 125. Malcolm Pittock suggests that in ‘Strange Meeting’ Owen subscribes to a central feature of the doppelgänger myth, “that in killing one’s double one is killing oneself”: Malcolm Pittock, “The War Poetry of Wilfred Owen,” in The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered, eds. Patrick J. Quinn and Steven Trout (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 217. Inevitably, the poem also evokes the myth of Orpheus descending into Hades
Owen’s sexual attraction to men an impulse to question the entire notion that the supposed enemy nation is actually his enemy.

Caesar, on the contrary, suggests that Owen’s homosexuality may in fact have acted to endear him to the war: “Owen cannot and should not be seen as an entirely anti-war poet … [for] war was the place that legitimized love between men.” This argument is a little thin, however, given Owen’s strong poetic focus on the horrifying slaughter of those much-loved men. Positive views of the war are entirely absent in the trilogy as Owen nears his demise: shortly before Owen is shot, Prior’s unpunctuated censure of three notions normally revered in wartime, “Patriotism honour courage vomit vomit vomit” (579), resonates with Owen’s ‘Dulce Et Decorum Est,’ which condemns as a lie the almost sacrosanct notion that dying for one’s country is a good and noble act. Prior and Owen patiently await the hour of their deaths at the Sambre-Oise Canal, both looking at their wrists to check the hour, both making the same mistake, for their watches had been taken away for synchronisation (581); in this timeless pocket, death integrates the sublime poet with the earthy sensualist. Prior’s and Owen’s shared abhorrence for the war as well...
as their common status of pariah-patriots lends greater pathos to their peculiarly synthesised deaths in battle.

The Decadent influence

One of the poems that Sassoon asks Rivers to read in the trilogy, ‘The Rear-Guard,’\textsuperscript{493} (14; 23), probably influenced Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting,’\textsuperscript{494} as both poems imagine a soldier groping his way along a dark, Dante-esque tunnel in which the decaying corpses of men glare up horribly at the poet. The imagery in these poems resonates with the spirit of the Decadent movement, to which Owen was particularly attracted.\textsuperscript{495} Taylor contends that Decadent poets, “exquisitely tuned … to registering with intensity and accuracy all sensations, painful or pleasurable,” found at the front “a tangible realization of the nightmares of Decadent literature.”\textsuperscript{496} Although, as Martin Lockerd notes, “all attempts to define decadence produce problematic contradictions,”\textsuperscript{497} fundamental to the notion of decadence is the metonymic signifier of the rotting human body; in Wilde’s \textit{The Picture of Dorian Gray},\textsuperscript{498} for example, “the decadent body reflects the slowly decaying soul and the slowly decaying body politic.”\textsuperscript{499} Representing the body in this way, Decadents boldly attempted to arrive at a new reality, the essence of the real, the \textit{vérité vraie}. Edmund de Goncourt explains in his Preface to \textit{Cherie} that the intention of Decadence was the stamping of a personal signature upon the world: “\textit{une langue rendant nos idées, nos sensations, nos figurations des hommes et des

\textsuperscript{493} In \textit{The Winter of the World}, 191.

\textsuperscript{494} In \textit{The Winter of the World}, 232. Stallworthy cites a study by Sven Bäckman linking ‘Strange Meeting’ not only with Sassoon’s ‘The Rear Guard,’ but also with the Bible, Barbusse, Keats, Shelley, Sir Lewis Morris, Harold Munro, and Cary’s translation of Dante: Stallworthy, \textit{The Poems}, 125. See also Sven Bäckman, \textit{Tradition Transformed/ Studies in the Poetry of Wilfred Owen}. (Sweden: Gleerup, 1979), 96–117. Sassoon includes images of hell in ‘Enemies,’ (1917) and also in ‘To the Warmongers’ (1917), in which the ghost of a dead German soldier takes the hand of the narrator and forgives him for killing German soldiers when his “brooding rage was hot”: \textit{The War Poems}, edited by Stallworthy, 55; 66.

\textsuperscript{495} Hoare, contending that the decadent poet Laurent Tailhade strongly influenced Owen, notes that “[a]t Craiglockhart, under Sassoon’s influence, Owen began to write the poems which would ensure his immortality, fusing his vague Uranian sensibilities and Decadent nightmares with the horrific reality of trench warfare; the aesthete’s heartfelt reaction to the antithesis of beauty that war represented”: Hoare, \textit{Wilde’s Last Stand}, 14–15.

\textsuperscript{496} Taylor, \textit{Lads}, 48–9.


\textsuperscript{499} Lockerd, “Into Cleanness,” 3.
chooses, d’une façon distincte de celui-ci ou de celui-là, une langue personnelle, une langue portant notre signature.” From its outset, with Sassoon’s *A Soldier’s Declaration*, in “wilful defiance of military authority,” (5) the *Regeneration* trilogy supplies the reader with the personal signature of the homosexual transgressive, his separated, alienated vision of the world at war, a vision that attains its vérité vraie qualities from a place of societal exile.

The alienated vision of the homosexual poets is shared by the bisexual Prior, to whom the narrative also attributes gnosis by reason of his alienation from a place of normality in British society. It is through Prior that the reader witnesses Owen’s modernist version of a St Sebastian-style death at the front, as he is pierced by bullets that cause him to rise into the air and then seemingly fall to earth in a dream-like, floating movement (588). Taylor notes that St Sebastian, “a particular favourite of Decadent writers and painters, [was] characterized by Wilde as possessing ‘all the pathetic uselessness of martyrdom, all its wasted beauty.’” At a meta-narrative level, Owen’s homosexual body attains its desired penetration, but punitively and mortally, as if to appease Britain’s homophobic society. Prior’s witnessing of Owen’s military martyrdom, which occurs mere seconds before his own death, is actually unknowable but for this exercise of authorial omniscience. Prior, also shot through with bullets, believes that his “consciousness … flutter[s]… language reveals our ideas, our feelings, our representations of men and things, a distinct ‘this way or that way,’ a personal language, one that carries our signature” (My translation). Edmund de Goncourt, *Chérie* (Paris: Charpentiere, 1884), v–vi.

Knutsen claims that Barker “does not reduce [Owen] simply to ‘Saint Wilfred, poet of pity’”; Knutsen, *Reciprocal Haunting*, 39. Knutsen alludes here to a deprecating epithet used on a poetry website by Esther MacCallum-Stewart. I agree that Barker does not “simply” portray him as saint-like, but the description of his death, including the slow fluttering down to earth of his consciousness, together with Prior’s consciousness, tends to lift him into an extraordinary realm upon his demise.

In his exploration of the links between sexuality and war, Fussell suggests there is a conscious sexual dimension to Owen’s act of presenting his body to be shot, quoting a letter from Owen to his brother Colin dated May 1917 which describes the sensations felt when going over the top: “There was extraordinary exultation in the act of slowly walking forward, showing ourselves openly” (*Collected Letters*, 458). According to Fussell, “Owen seems to hint that there is something ambiguously exhibitionistic about exposing the body to bullets and shellfire”: Fussell, *The Great War: The Illustrated Edition*, 340; 341. Fussell alludes to the exhilaration felt by John Bell while masturbating in a situation that puts him at great risk of being seen in James Jones’s *The Thin Red Line*. In the novel, Bell wonders “Could it be that all war was basically sexual? Not just in psych theory, but in fact, actually and emotionally? A sort of sexual perversion? Or a complex of sexual perversions?”: James Jones, *The Thin Red Line*, (New York: Delta, 1991), 286; emphasis in original. First published, 1962.
down” with Owen’s damaged body; he “gaze[s] at his reflection in the water” (588) watching himself die. This clear evocation of the death of Narcissus lends a Decadent quality to Prior’s own final moments.504

Although the voice of cultural transgressives challenges the conventional war heroic within the narrative of the trilogy, it is unable to dominate beyond its brief intra-narrative expression. In her examination of Prior’s transgressive sexuality, Vickroy concludes that although “Barker makes readers question cultural inscriptions [she] also points to the difficulty of changing structures and consciousness even if we are aware of problems.”505 Despite Prior’s deliberate challenge to the socio-sexual political order, Rivers’s reconfiguration of masculinity to include “feelings of tenderness for other men [as] natural and right” (44) and a highly charged episode of illicit sex between Prior and a teenaged boy (574), the trilogy finally resigns itself to “an authoritative world that creates chaos so that it can reassert order” (104). The monolithic, inexorable nature of that reasserted, normative order suppresses the verdicts upon war expressed by all of the narrative’s alienated: the shotvarfet (“it’s not worth it”) verdict of the grotesquely mutilated Hallet, (588) the balls up, bloody mad verdict of Prior (588), the men who die as cattle verdict of Owen (126), the fingerless, crippled and broken verdict of Njiru (590), and the evil and unjust verdict of Sassoon’s Soldier’s Declaration (5). These characters become experiential gnostics of the war, and yet are all doomed to suppression even by the very narrative giving them voice.

When Prior visits pacifist inmate Beattie Roper in Aylesbury prison he notices that the prison wardress sits in a pit and that “simply by looking up [she can] observe every door” of every cell on three landings (347). Prior is acutely aware of the sinister eye painted on the door of Roper’s prison cell, which creates a sense of being watched continuously, even when there is no human eye watching; thus is a Lacanian sense of anxiety established as the inmate internalises the eye’s

504 Cole, though not identifying a Decadent influence per se, notes that in his verse Owen “stresses that the pathos of the physical body reaches its apex … at the moment of dismemberment and death”: Cole, “Modernism,” 483.
505 Vickroy, Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 102. Jackson suggests that the Regeneration trilogy’s “silences and absences” indicate that Barker has created “a traumatized narrative … She points explicitly to her research … to indicate what is missing from her texts”: Jackson, “Narratives of Trauma,” 210; 198.
scrutiny. Roper herself is aware of the power of the painted eye, as revealed by her comment “‘S not so bad long as it stays in the door.’ She tap[s] the side of her head ‘You start worrying when it gets in here” (252). Barker’s war trilogy becomes a “Foucauldian analysis,” which uses the eye “as a metaphor for awareness and limitations.” Foucault noted that

[t]he eye, in a philosophy of reflection, derives from its capacity to observe the power of becoming always more interior to itself. Lying behind each eye that sees, there exists a more tenuous one, an eye so discreet and yet so agile that its all-powerful glance can be said to eat away at the flesh of its white globe; behind this particular eye there exists another, and then, still others, each progressively more subtle until we arrive at an eye whose entire substance is nothing but the transparency of its vision.

The all-observing eye is “deeply disturbing” (252) to Prior, who as a psychiatric patient is closely observed in the narrative, and who, as a sexual transgressive, is astute enough to know that observing eyes are to be feared; Prior also occupies the role of an observer who is caught up in “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” that come from watching. As a person with two independent personalities, the narrative actually doubles Prior’s potential for watching and being watched. The most distressing aspect of the eye for Prior, however, is that as he looks at it, he feels he is “for a moment … back in France” (252) at the site of battle, holding a man’s eye in his hand.

The eye under the duckboard
After an episode of shelling that kills two of his companions and leaves only a black hole in the ground, Prior, cleaning up the mess, retrieves a curious object he spots under a duckboard, handling it delicately as if it were “a particularly choice morsel from a plate”; he is suddenly startled to realise he is “staring into an eye” (93). The eye, which had belonged to a comrade named Towers, sits momentarily in the palm

506 Krips notes Lacan’s explanation of the anxieties generated by the gaze of another: “[B]ecause it encounters an uncomfortable resistance, a conscious look that is directed outwards transforms into an (sic) self-consciousness that returns to its agent as anxiety in relation to the scrutiny, but also to the object that is its source as ‘the gaze’ … As Lacan emphasizes, a gaze must also precipitate anxiety (specifically what Freud calls “unrealistic anxiety”) which, in turn, transforms the viewer’s look into a self-directed, passive ‘being looked at’”: Krips, “The Politics of the Gaze,” 93.
507 Vickroy, Trauma and Survival, 99; 102.
508 Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 45.
of his hand while Prior asks another soldier “What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?” (94). The eye is referred to a total of eight times throughout the narrative; five of those eye references recall Prior’s conflation of the eye with a “gobstopper.” Roberta Jackson claims that the trilogy might be deemed a “discourse of the disembodied eye,” and quotes Peter Kemp’s comment that *The Eye in the Door* “seems to have germinated from an eyeball.” The duckboard eye incident has, in fact, been linked by Alistair Duckworth to Edmund Blunden’s memoir, *Undertones of War*, in which a soldier similarly finds an eyeball under a duckboard, but in fact the eyeball in the trilogy taps into a richer vein of meaning than Blunden’s eyeball.

Foucault’s *A Preface to Transgression* deconstructs the trope of “the enucleated or upturned eye” in Georges Bataille’s *Story of the Eye* and is helpful in elucidating the importance of the only remaining trace of Prior’s fellow soldier; the eye, though handed over to and bagged up by another soldier, continues to reverberate in the narrative: Prior is to be chased by a great single eye in his nightmares: he tells Rivers of “an eyeball … Huge, and alive. And it was directly in front of me and I knew this time it was going to get me … Do whatever eyeballs do” (321). The dream image is so frightening on one occasion that he springs out of bed, “stabbing [the eyeball] again and again, his naked body spattered with blood” (267). Prior’s knowledge of the power of the eye perhaps derives from the extraordinary depth of vision possessed by his own eyes, described by Rivers as “immensely shrewd … X-ray eyes” (97). Foucault explains that the violently uprooted, “exorbiated eye to which all sight is now denied” leaves behind a measureless void from which

the sovereignty of philosophical language can now be heard … The upturned eye discovers the bond that links language and death at the moment that it acts out this

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510 Pages 93–4, 96, 154, 252, 265, 274, 275 and 413.
511 The supremacy of single-eyed vision is further affirmed by the example of the dying Hallet who, “[o]ne eye gone” (542), now knows that the war is “not worth it” (588).
513 Alistair Duckworth, “Two Borrowings in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, no. 3 (2004): 67. Duckworth calls Barker’s accidental borrowing “an instance of Jungian ‘cryptomnesia,’ that is, a memory that has become hidden or secret, so that one believes one has invented something which, in fact, one has merely forgotten”: Duckworth, “Two Borrowings,” 67.
515 Foucault, *Preface to Transgression*, 45.
relationship of the limit and being; and it is perhaps from this that it derives its prestige, in permitting the possibility of a language for this play.  

The annihilation of all of Towers excepting his eyeball necessitates that meaning be found in the sudden void: the remaining eye, as if noticing the anomalous absence of its hitherto home,\(^5\) impresses this need upon Prior, who retreats into traumatic amnesia until Rivers enables him to address his own awareness of the eye’s “smooth surface” (93), and his conflation of it with his favourite childhood lolly, the gobstopper (265). Georges Bataille notes that

the eye – as Stevenson exquisitely puts it, a cannibal delicacy – is, on our part, the object of such anxiety that we will never bite into it. The eye is even ranked high in horror, since it is, among other things, the eye of conscience.  

At the time it occurs in the narrative, Prior’s fleeting eye-mouth association is easily overlooked, but later in the narrative, when Prior’s Jekyll-and-Hyde duality is known,\(^5\) along with his fondness for the voyeuristic and the salacious,\(^5\) it is conceivable that he harbours traces of taboo, cannibalistic impulses regarding the gobstopper eye. Prior confesses to feeling sexual gratification in horror: he tells

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\(^5\) As Ankhi Mukherjee notes, the eye performs a proactive, reciprocal act of seeing, “uncannily seeing him see it”: Mukherjee, *Aesthetic Hysteria* 88. However, Mukherjee contradicts his own suggestion that the eye can see Prior in his next sentence: “Towers’s eye in the palm of his hand is like a hole in reality, a lack, a look without vision that shatters all narcissistic integrity”: Ankhi Mukherjee, *Aesthetic Hysteria* 88, emphasis added.


\(^5\) In the trilogy, as Rivers muses on Prior’s fugue states, he thinks of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and parallels his own internal divisions with Jekyll’s description of his duality: “It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both” (328; emphasis in original). Rivers also mentions Stevenson’s book to Prior in therapy: “You’ve read Jekyll and Hyde?” (322). Sheryl Stevenson notes that several of R. L. Stevenson’s characters feel a compelling desire to see Hyde, which illustrates how important it is to look inwardly, no matter how painful or frightening it may be: Sheryl Stevenson, “The Uncanny Case of Dr Rivers and Mr Prior: Dynamics of Transference in *The Eye in the Door,*” in *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker*, eds. Sharon Monteith, Margareta Jolly, Nahem Yousef and Ronald Paul, 219–34 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).

\(^5\) There is much in the text to support such a view of Prior: after sex with a prostitute he feels “excitement at the idea of sliding in on another man’s spunk” (453); Prior at one point “transform[s] himself into … a sort of seminal spittoon” (235); and one of his duties as officer is to read the mail his men send home, some of which are passionate letters to wives. He admits “I get erections from reading them” (559).
CHAPTER THREE

Rivers, “in a tone of icy self disgust that his dreams of mutilation and slaughter [are] accompanied by seminal emissions” (275). In a catalogue Jacques Derrida prepared for an exhibition of works of art at the Louvre Museum that had an ocular theme, Derrida connects the image of the solitary eye to fetishistic impulses. He refers to the Graiae, sisters of the Gorgons, who share only a single eye between them. When Perseus steals the eye of the Graiae, “he steals a sort of subjectless vigilance. (Once again, the lone, unique eye stands out, is detachable; it circulates between subjects like an instrumental organ, a fetishized prosthesis, an object of delegation or representation).”

The eye of Towers, detached and subjectless, is traumatising for reasons outside of Prior’s understanding – “Is that all?” he asks when Rivers uncovers the repressed memory of his finding the eye (95; emphasis in original). Rivers, too, seems only to understand that the violence of the experience is horrifying enough to cause amnesia; neither man connects the eye at a deeper level to Prior’s libido.

James Hammond contends that the eye is “assimilated, taken in by Prior’s consciousness,” but it has a “migratory” facility within the narrative similar to migration of Bataille’s eye, as explained by Roland Barthes: the eye transverses a variety of forms and occupies “multiple stations” in its trajectory. Numerous “images of liquidity” possess a “linguistic proximity to the eye”, for example, after one of Prior’s nightmares about a giant eye, he notices there are blobs of ejaculate (“thick whitish fluid”) on his belly (267). Roland Barthes explains that Bataille’s disembodied eye is a metaphor that operates on several levels, and that it results in a disease-like “contagion of qualities”: thus eye, sun and egg link to genitals –

the world becomes disturbed, its properties are no longer divided; to flow, to sob, to urinate, to ejaculate – these form a vacillating meaning.

An interpretation of Prior’s sexual exploit with a French boy reveals how the voyeuristic, the fetishistic, and the ocular cohere in such a way as to lend great

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significance to the eye whose powers over him Prior naively discounts. Prior meets the French teenager and engages in sexual acts with him that include licking the boy’s sphincter, having the boy perform fellatio on him, and anally penetrating the boy after he tries to pull away (574). Prior’s lust overpowers any reservations about the boy’s age, his willingness, any diseases he may have, or his naivety: the boy addresses him in German, prompting Prior to think to himself, “Have you really got your head stuck so deep in the fucking pig bucket you don’t know which army’s up the other end?” (574) The episode of opportunistic sexual engagement is tinged with nastiness rather than any trace of tenderness or affection.

Sexual intercourse between men is a rare, almost unknown, occurrence in the context of historical novels about World War I. Barker is credited by Ronald Paul with “extend[ing] the artistic boundaries of the war novel” in exposing wartime Britain as troubled and socially dysfunctional rather than the epitome of the pastoral ideal; the trilogy’s sexual candidness, especially in male-to-male sex, also extends those boundaries. Prior’s intense encounter with the French boy is a transgressive act according to Anthony Julius’s definition of acts of transgression as “outrages that can liberate”. Prior, whilst in the commission of his duties, tastes “forbidden fruit” by engaging in sex with a boy who is of dubious legal age, a boy who is not very intelligent, and who is arguably taken advantage of (the boy submits to Prior in return for cigarettes). Prior also seems to relish a spirit of sacrilege as he mentally appropriates the devotional words from Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy,’ a “kiss for the whole world,” to describe his licking of the boy’s anus (574). Prior desires not

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527 It is only after his fun with the boy that Prior worries about possible infection: “I’ve been neurotically running my tongue round my lips feeling for sores ever since” (574).


530 Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 17. Demelza Morgana Hall, citing the Oxford English Dictionary, defines “transgression” as “passing beyond the bounds of legality or right.” An act of transgression “is traditionally considered as something negative and sinful.” Trans’ derives from the Latin for ‘cross’ and refers to the action of ‘stepping over,’ and ‘gress’ from ‘gradi,’ which means ‘to go’ (OED). Therefore, the word ‘transgression,’ as well as denoting a sin, also has a distinctly spatial element in that it implies moving or crossing from one space to another: Hall, “Space and Sexuality,” 19–20. Monteith’s description of Prior’s sexual exploit with the boy as “pure farce” (Monteith, *Pat Barker*, 75), though not entirely wrong, is somewhat reductive.

531 Friedrich Schiller’s hymn “An die Freude” (“Ode to Joy”) is best known for its incorporation into the choral movement of Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. The hymn suggests “the millions” bow down
only the sperm of the boy he ravages, but also the semen of German soldiers he has peered at lustfully through his periscope. He eroticises a musty smell from the boy, “a smell of chrysanths left too long in water” (574), imagining it to be the smell of semen from German men who may have penetrated the boy before him. This seminal imagining places Prior on a similar plane to Bataille’s narrator in *Story of the Eye,* who looks at the Milky Way and perceives of it as “astral sperm.”

Bataille’s orgy of eroticism, though described by one critic as “a kind of desperate, failed pornography” offering images of no definite meaning, is credited by Foucault as opening up a volatile realm of “philosophical turbulence.” Derrida expresses the view that Bataille’s story of the enucleated eye indicates “in its recess or hollow – the necessity of an anthroplogy or cultural ophthalmo-pathology.”

The “obscenely roving, sightless eye” in Bataille’s story is strongly sexualised: Simone inserts the eye of a bull into her vagina at the same moment as a matador is impaled by a bull, forcing his right eye to pop out. The narrator, staring up to the heavens, is aware of “immensity – a broken egg, a broken eye, or [his] own dazzled skull … bouncing symmetrical images back to infinity.” Later, Simone rolls an eyeball cut from a dead priest (the eye once again described in culinary terminology as “an egg”) over her body, between her buttocks, until it rests at her vagina, looking “wanly through tears of urine.” The richly symbolic eye of Bataille’s novella is both participant in and observer of its handlers’ gluttonous sex, “wanly” in gratitude before God, the “loving father.”

Prior’s transposition of the ode’s “kiss for you millions” to his raw, sexual context is surely intended by him to be irreverent. However, Schiller’s Ode actually acknowledges that “Every creature drinks in joy/ at nature’s breast; / Good and bad alike / follow her trail of roses … / Even the worm was given desire.” David Pugh notes that Schiller expressed a “suspicious attitude to utopias”: David Pugh, *Dialectic of Love: Platonism in Schiller’s Aesthetics* (Montreal: MQUP, 1997), 414. In “Die Götter Griechenlandes,” Schiller rejects Cartesian dualism’s separation of the intellect and the senses and declares nature to be “unified, organic, joyful, humane”: Pugh, *Dialectic*, 414. Although in an introductory note Pugh cautions that there are many “contradictions and complexities in Friedrich Schiller’s labyrinthism thought” (Pugh, *Dialectic*, 414), the Ode seems quite unambiguous in its inclusion of the earthly with the sublime.

Mukherjee contends that the eye Prior finds, lacking “any correlatives in consciousness,” therefore has a quality of “spectrality” (Mukherjee, *Aesthetic Hysteria*, 88). However, the “gobstopper” comment made so immediately upon encountering the eye, together with Prior’s act of reaching for the eyeball “like somebody selecting a particularly choice morsel from a plate” (93) suggests a conscious, and quite organic, correlative.

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532 Mukherjee contends that the eye Prior finds, lacking “any correlatives in consciousness,” therefore has a quality of “spectrality” (Mukherjee, *Aesthetic Hysteria*, 88).
disapproving perhaps, but to the frenzied, copulating couple, its judgement means nothing. Hammond elucidates the link between the enucleated eye and transgressive sex in his discussion of Barthes’s structuralist reading of Bataille’s text: when the eye is enucleated, the world becomes disturbed and spilled onto itself, resulting in a transitioning sense of reality. Fluidity, as represented by various forms of liquidity (flowing, spitting, seminal emissions, blood, urine), signals an overflowing of boundaries, and depictions of transgressive acts through eroticism or perversity in Bataille’s novel mirror the disturbed borders of the eye and its free flowing vitreous fluid.  

The soft morsel of human eye that Prior spies upon the ground, at once terrifying and tantalising to Prior, immediately afflicts him with a strange emotional blackout. The eye recovered from under a duckboard needs later to be unearthed once more, this time from beneath the amnesia protecting Prior from its remembrance. In the unfolding narrative that follows, the eye proves itself to be, in Foucauldian language, a “prestigious” agent in its role as a germinative element for Rivers’s “talking cure” therapy as the eye becomes the trigger of an extensive domain of critical focus on war and society. The eye which is suddenly, shockingly, nothing but eye, awakes in Prior a similarly transcendent or unencumbered vision. At the point of his death, the river bank that offers no cover from enemy fire is “[a]s bare as an eyeball” (587), but Prior’s thoughts have moved beyond repression, trauma and fear; they are instead “[b]anal, simple, repetitive” (588). Prior has assimilated the blasted eye of Towers into his view of the world, and knows, as Van Gogh learned through cutting off an ear, that it is possible to arrive at “a deeper, paradoxical unity accessible only through the violent rupture of apparent wholeness.”  

Prior’s psychoanalysis of himself and his world complete, his initially traumatic encounter with an enucleated eye resolved, he is now united to the lacerated and violent world, fully prepared to die (and die happily) fighting a

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war he can see is “bloody mad,” gazing in so godlike a way that he can reconcile contrary propositions utterly satisfactorily.

The gaze of the homosexual poets is the look of an alienated eye, figuratively an eye enucleated from the body of society, an eye that casts approving scrutiny both at heroic patriotism and at ethical resistance to war. The decision both men make to return to fight cannot be taken to imply a disavowal of their transgressive stance on the war: instead, an enduring underbelly of principled opposition in poems such as Owen’s ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’ and Sassoon’s ‘To the Warmongers’ suggests the men’s opposition to the war is painfully wrought into an internal, and merely passive transgressive, position.\(^{542}\) Bergonzi contends that the anti-war positions taken by Sassoon and Owen were “undermined by their return to the Front.”\(^{543}\) Andrew Rutherford also suggests that the British war poets “remained committed to the activity which they condemned” and that this was not for fear of punishment or ignominy: “it was more fundamentally a matter of their own acceptance, to a very large extent, of many of the values which the war generated.”\(^{544}\) These judgements of Owen and Sassoon fail to appreciate the moral bind that both men found themselves in: as young men they are lured into endorsing society’s conventional masculine war heroic, even to the point where they acknowledge feelings akin to Stramm’s “moments of wonderful intoxication”\(^{545}\) in battle, but their covert heterotopic homosexual/poet/pacifist/trauma-space persists as a powerful agent resisting the normative ethics of war. These are men unnaturally masquerading a persona of sexual “normalcy” in their daily lives, men unable to draw their biological passions “from a common spring.”\(^{546}\) In the trilogy it is in the heterotopic realms of escape from socially engendered hypocrisy that the poets make their most

\(^{542}\) Prior recognises the morally admirable but nevertheless dubious position that Sassoon and other protesters find themselves in: “I mean in spite of Not Believing in the War and Not Having Faith in Our Generals and all, it still seems the only clean place to be” (420; upper and lower case usage plus emphasis in original). In his study of Levinasian ethics as they pertain to the trench poets, James S. Campbell asserts that passivity “became the most abasing and ignominious of conditions” for “passivity is the ethical high ground ... [y]et passivity is also untenable: the responsibility for both inflicting and articulating the suffering of his men often becomes more than the officer-poet can bear”: James S. Campbell, “For You May Touch Them Not,” 826; 829–30.


\(^{544}\) Rutherford, *The Literature of War*, 80.

\(^{545}\) Sheppard, “The Poetry of August Stramm,” 269

effective protest “against human debasement and verbal fraud” as they use their weapon of honesty to excoriate romantic notions about the war that utilise notions of honour as a means of obfuscating the less admirable aspects of passionate commitment to fighting. The moral dilemma the war raises for the alienated homosexuals is made clear in the trilogy as the patriotism, honour and sense of duty that both Owen and Sassoon feel for their country rubs up against an abundant awareness of the disgust Britain expresses towards its homosexuals, so freshly underscored in Maud Allen’s suit against Billing.

Finally, transgressive voices in the narrative are stifled by war’s violence as Owen meets his death in accordance with history, and as Prior is also killed; the deaths of both men serve to underscore the inevitable dominance of Britain’s repressive culture. Ironically, though, as Foucault observed, the act of suppression merely underscores the power of transgression, for transgression is dependent on the continuation of the limits that define it. The transgressor crosses crossable limits, creating “a flash of lightning,” and a reverberating “‘yes’ of contestation.” A flash of lightning is an apt metaphor for the brevity of the challenge to war rationales conveyed in the trilogy by the homosexual poets; that brevity, though, exists only in the narrative; extra-textually, the message of the poets lives on. Although the deaths of the transgressive gnostics Owen and Prior, and the fading protest voice of Sassoon reaffirm society’s limits to transgression in this anti-war

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547 The phrase is used by Fussell: “Of all writers, it can be assumed that poets are especially sensitive to the adequacy of language to register honest experience, and it was the poets of the Great War who protested most effectively against human debasement and verbal fraud”. Fussell, The Bloody Game: An Anthology of Modern War, edited by Paul Fussell (London: Scribners, 1991), 34.

548 Allen’s suit is discussed further in Chapter Four.


550 Prior’s last memory of Sassoon is of “him legging it down the main corridor at Craiglockhart with his golf-clubs on his back, hell-bent on getting out of the place as fast as possible (555).” Sassoon survived the war, but did not become a voice for the marginalised homosexual, preferring the
narrative, the voice of transgression is in fact empowered by society’s limits and its proscriptions; the alienated thus remain a gnostic voice in the novelist’s domain of re-imagined history, empowered by repression to speak the language of transgression.

persona he constructed for himself in *Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), perhaps because “fox hunting men” are perceived as conventional and impliedly respectable. Wilson notes that Sassoon, a man of good intentions, “was seriously considering a life spent in the service of the working classes, though that plan was never to materialize”: Wilson, *Siegfried*, 526. Sassoon married in 1933, “to many people’s surprise”: Wilson, *Siegfried*, 526. Knutsen remarks somewhat cryptically that Sassoon’s marriage “proved precarious”: Knutsen, *Reciprocal Haunting*: 149, n. 150.
CHAPTER FOUR
The Female Gaze

[T]he warring world has become a mere homogeneous mass of systematic and automatic imitation of enemy by enemy: conscription, trenches, poison gases, submarines, air-raids, propaganda of hatred, atrocity mongering, coalition government and postal censure having given Britain and Germany and France, Austria and Italy, a most conspicuous and lamentable family-likeness. Vernon Lee551

T. S. Eliot strove to depersonalise his poetry in order to effect “the final negation of authorial sentiment” on the grounds that “the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.”552 Decoste explains that depersonalising the work brings about an “effacement of the author as editorialist or emotional guide”; thus Ford Madox Ford sought “to ensure the writer’s own absence from his work.”553 H. Robert Huntley contends that in The Good Soldier, indeed, “all signs of authorship are obliterated from the novel.”554 It is difficult to mount a similar argument for the trilogy in the presence of the “Author’s Notes,” in which author addresses reader. Such notes, however are para-texts; in the narration per se, the constant shifting of narrative focalisation diminishes reader consciousness of the author as an editorialist or an emotional guide.555 Nevertheless, the author’s gender is never fully effaced in the trilogy: during a discussion of the roles of women in her fiction, Barker has declared that “[t]here is a woman on every page – me.”556 To assert as much is to

555 See note 106 in Chapter One concerning the capacity of the author’s notes to influence or control the reader’s interpretation of the narrative.
contradict the Barthean notion that the author is dead, or “is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate.” Barker attempts to retain a clear authorial nexus between herself and her work, at least insofar as her gender is concerned. This presence of a female gaze, discernible in the narrative, assists in undermining some of the traditionally male bastions of war.

My argument does not mean to suggest a homogenisation of the trilogy’s women to a single definition of “woman” or the gaze of women to a single gaze. Adrian Howe notes the implications of deploying Mary Daly’s universalising and essentialising ‘gynocentric’ methodology. What post-structuralist would be caught dead today invoking that universalising foundational category, ‘Women’, in order to ground a political strategy in ‘our’ experience? Indeed, such a homogenising approach, … eludes crucial questions of race, ethnic and class differences between women.

In the _Regeneration_ trilogy Barker gives voice to women of different socio-economic classes, and, as Rivers recalls his tribal studies, to women of Melanesia. Barker’s stated intention in writing the trilogy is to “provoke a different reaction to World War I”; the female gaze of the trilogy impels her narrative towards this objective. The trilogy inclines towards sympathy for certain types of British women who serve in the narrative as a corrective to, and a criticism of, the traditional British masculinist war rationale. Such characters are less evident in most novels about World War I, in part because those novels were written by men. Ronald Paul notes that

apart from Rebecca West’s _The Return of the Soldier_ (1918) and Virginia Woolf’s _Mrs Dalloway_ (1925), which both deal with the traumatic domestic effects of shell shock, all of the contemporary, classic novels of the Great War were written by

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557 Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” np.
558 Barker’s comment about herself being on every page of her work does not necessarily deny the possibility of patriarchal influences into her writing. As McGee notes, discussing Woolf’s _The Waves_, patriarchal culture “situates the author of the text, the one who rules the waves, who draws the lines that constitute its form, in a margin or on the borderline of the text she writes. She is framed by the text she frames — she is ruled by the text she rules”: Patrick McGee, “The Politics of Modernist Form; or, Who Rules _The Waves_,” _Modern Fiction Studies_ 38, no. 3 (1992): 640.
560 “Do I want to provoke a different reaction to World War I? Yes. It is the national sacred cow, isn’t it?”: Barker, in Garland, “Conversation,” 197.
CHAPTER FOUR

men whose literary response to war was conditioned by their own personal experience of fighting on the frontline trenches. 561

Claire Tylee claims that even when women of the war years write about the war, their work rests on the foundations of male assumptions: Tylee contends that both *The Return of the Soldier* and *Mrs Dalloway*

take for granted a common fund of images of the war-zone and of home-front reactions to it. … [T]hese novels have continued to be of interest precisely because of their reliance on generally accepted ideas about the Great War, and the use they make of these ideas in their analysis of women’s gender identity, especially as it is defined in relation to men. 562

Kate McLoughlin notes that “[l]ikeness of experience has become a trope” and that “representations of wars – like the wars themselves – are often heavily intertextual (or interbellical).” 563 In Chapter Two I established that the *Regeneration* trilogy’s graphic representations of the war-damaged body conform to a writing tradition in (mostly male) war novels such as Barbusse’s *Under Fire*, thus confirming McLoughlin’s position on the commonality of war writing in one respect. Generally, though, the trilogy diverges from entrenched traditions of male war writing, as it impels its readers towards an identifiably “female gaze” upon war. Nancy Huston lists the normative roles played by women in male war narratives as “sympathetic nurses … cheerleaders … castrating bitches … miracle mothers … wistful wives … treacherous tramps [or] co-operative citizens.” 564 Barker’s female gaze operates to insulate the trilogy’s narrative against such male perspectives on war, extending the parameters of war writing to configure women in a variety of roles that the male gaze for many years foreclosed.

The ocularcentric view

Traditional war stories generally favour an ocularcentric point of view. Ocularcentrism privileges the body that was present in battle, usually male: “The
soldier’s story is posited as free from narrative conventions, making male military experience the source of immediate, ‘real’ narratives that women may only mimic.” Barker eschews the dominance of ocularcentricity in recounting war by representing most of the soldiers’ active experiences through the medium of the non-combatant Rivers: “If you put a psychiatrist in the foreground, and he has never been in a trench, and nor have you, the distance from your material is right.” Though the soldier still speaks, the focus is upon what he says as it processed by the passive listener and interpreter, an ersatz spectator of the original experience.

Western narratives generally maintain “a clear and gendered distinction between the masculine ‘authoritative eyewitness’ and the feminine ‘passive spectator.’” Leonard V. Smith notes, however, that “[h]istorians nowadays rarely take the ‘evidence of experience’ as a given or at face value—whether for kings, politicians, or generals, or for women, industrial workers, or peasants.” The privileged status granted to the ocularcentric gaze in traditional war writing is the focus of Edith Wharton’s “Writing a War Story,” published in the American Woman’s Home Companion in 1919. The story’s protagonist “pretty Miss Ivy Spang,” who had visited the front (as Wharton herself had done), is instructed by her publisher to write “a good stirring trench story.” Miss Spang, whose slightly ridiculous name suggests that Wharton intends to parody her own heroine, is finally accused in the story by a male literary critic, Harold Harbard, of “mauling” her subject, presumably, Gallagher suggests, because she is merely “mimicking a soldier’s voice.” The subtext of Harold’s comment is that frontline war as it is experienced

567 Gallagher, World Wars, 3
568 Smith, “Fussell’s The Great War;” 250. Smith notes that “for Fussell, experience provides evidence that reproduces itself in as straightforward a manner as memory. As such, experience can trump any other kind of intellectual authority”: Smith, “Fussell’s The Great War;” 251–2.
570 Wharton, Writing a War Story, 1.
571 Barker’s avowed anti-war position (“It’s not an antiwar book in the very simple sense that I was afraid it might seem at the beginning. Not that it isn’t an antiwar book: it is”: interview with Rob Nixon, 7) contrasts with Wharton’s stance on the war. Julie Olin-Ammentorp notes that Wharton “never gave up the belief that the war could be an ennobling, even transcendent, experience”: Julie Olin-Ammentorp, Edith Wharton’s Writings from the Great War (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2004), 20.
572 Gallagher, World Wars, 17.
is actually secret men’s business;\textsuperscript{573} he does not understand Miss Spang’s tears when he tries to compliment her looks after insulting her story. The frustration expressed by Miss Spang suggests that literature’s ocularcentric ownership of war springs in part from the chauvinistic/patriarchal attitudes of war’s mainly male combatants and reporters. Julie Olin-Ammentorp understands Wharton’s story to suggest that “in war, the specular’s relation to sexual difference might be reconfigured as something between men, a homosocial visuality that situates the female observer outside of its circle.”\textsuperscript{574} The outsider, however, may in fact be able to adopt a more detached vision: Gallagher suggests that “the troubled nature of vision for women in a belligerent culture” stems from “a potentially damaging excess of visual experience.”\textsuperscript{575} Barker’s trilogy situates women outside the damaging ocular experiences of war, but does not suggest that their distance from active service disqualifies the women from comprehending or knowing the war.

Though the literary world today is generally more intolerant of the sexist attitudes Wharton reveals, and even adopts, Bergonzi’s accusation\textsuperscript{576} that Barker is “more concerned [with] gender roles, feminism, psychotherapy, false memory syndrome and the sexual abuse of children” than she is with “getting her history right,” is sexist in its tone; Bergonzi condescendingly suggests that “[p]erhaps [Barker] believes … that all wars, whether the First World War, the Second or the Vietnam War, are ultimately the same war,”\textsuperscript{577} though he offers nothing to corroborate this

\textsuperscript{573}Cyril Falls, in a 1930 review of Mary Lee’s \textit{It’s a Great War} (1930), states that “[n]ovels by women with the ‘Great War’ as subject are not numerous. In the best of them the authors have wisely pictured events at home or at any rate far from the front. Miss Lee is more ambitious. But, really, it is not the place of women to talk of mud; they may leave that to men, who knew more about it and have not hesitated to tell us of it”: Cyril Falls, \textit{War Books: A Critical Guide} (London: Peter Davies, 1930), 282.

\textsuperscript{574}Olin-Ammentorp, \textit{Edith Wharton’s Writings}, 18.

\textsuperscript{575}Gallagher, \textit{World Wars}, 2; emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{576}Bergonzi’s criticism is also referred to in Chapter Three of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{577}Bergonzi, \textit{War Poets}, 14. Barker, indeed, has conceded that “I chose the First World War because it’s come to stand in for other wars … I think because of that it’s come to stand for the pain of all wars”: Pat Barker in an interview with Wera Reusch, accessed 16 March, 2015. \url{http://www.lolapress.org/elec1/artenglish/reus_e.htm} Quoted in Esther MacCallum-Stewart, “Female Maladies? Reappraising Women’s Popular Literature of the First World War,” \textit{Women: A Cultural Review} 17, no. 1 (2002): 92; emphasis added. Bergonzi, similarly to Shephard, purports to diminish the \textit{Regeneration} trilogy by comparing it with Tolstoy: “But great historical novels exist, and \textit{War and Peace} is one of the greatest”: Bergonzi, \textit{War Poets}, 9. It is also pertinent to note that Barker imputes an observation to Owen that suggests there is indeed a sameness about all wars: “It’s as if all other wars had somehow … distilled themselves into this war” (77), which is a prose transposition of Owen’s concept, “the pity of war distilled” (in ‘Strange Meeting’) and is a clear allusion to the pity evoked by all wars. As Dylan Thomas observes, “we can see, reading Owen, that
claim. His endorsement of an unnamed reviewer’s assertion that Barker takes “a very female view of war”\(^578\) could almost be an incarnation of Miss Spang’s condescending critic; Bergonzi’s declaration that “Pat Barker has … little sense of the past”\(^579\) is an opinion proffered with no evidence to support it.

The differences between male and female perspectives of war may also in large part turn on notions of bellicosity inhering more often in men than women. Lynne Hanley, notes that

> [a]s a structure of consciousness, bellicosity describes a mental habit of creating arbitrary categories that are presumed to be mutually exclusive and hostile (self/other, masculine/feminine, white/black, us/Them), and of then insisting on the supremacy of one category over the other.\(^580\)

Hanley quotes Woolf’s characterisation of this bellicose state of mind, in *Three Guineas*, as an attribute of “the monstrous male.”\(^586\) Hanley’s claim is that “women, children, non-combatants, and the enemy have an experience of war as much worth telling and remembering as is the story of any soldier,” which suggests not only that there is an identifiably female gaze at war, but that the female mentality, not being testosterone-driven, is free from “monstrous” bellicosity.\(^587\) The less monstrous gaze that does not rest upon binary oppositions is generally subsumed in importance to the more energetic and esteemed “monstrous male” gaze. Hanley mounts a formidable case against the virtually iconic status that has been generally attributed to the male gaze of Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*.\(^588\) The grounds for Hanley’s objections are that Fussell presents men as victims of war, and that there is a “collective, single consciousness” about war that men share. But the most shocking fact about Fussell’s book is that “[wo]men are nowhere to be

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he is a poet of all times, all places, and all wars. There is only one war: that of men against men”: *Quite Early One Morning: Broadcasts by Dylan Thomas* (Great Britain: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1954), 92.


\(^580\) Hanley, *Writing War*, 7.


\(^582\) Hanley, *Writing War*, 9.

\(^583\) Hanley, *Writing War*, 23.

\(^584\) Hanley, *Writing War*, 24.


\(^586\) Woolf maintains that “the monstrous male, loud of voice and hard of fist” is so ingrained in men that it will take “millennia, not decades” to eradicate: Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 105.


\(^588\) Fussell, *The Great War*. 
A major danger of such an androcentric appreciation of war is that it fosters a resigned attitude to war as an inevitable, if undesirable cultural phenomenon of which the major victims are men; it also “discourages the formulation of certain kinds of questions about war and its relation to literature.”

The *Regeneration* trilogy is about the ways war impacts upon men, but counters androcentricity with its woman’s gaze, its female characters who challenge men, and its absence of all certainties about war’s moral dimensions; in line with Bakhtin’s view of narration, Barker’s multiple points of view create “a plenitude of meanings, some intended, others of which [she] is unaware.” Her polyphony of voices thus has the potential to “refract authorial intentions.” Barker’s comments on the female voices of the trilogy imply such a refraction of authorial intention as she points out that the ostensibly minor significance of the female masks an underlying supremacy of importance over the male:

“Although women in the trilogy characteristically play rather small roles, I would say that each of the roles that the women play is absolutely vital, and that actually if you wanted a key to the whole work, you could do a lot worse than just to go through from woman to woman. Essentially what women are doing and talking about is – as much as Rivers was – the underlying moral question of the entire work.”

Even if men occupy most of the active roles in the narrative, Barker introduces the subversion of a norm to question the assumed normativity of male role dominance. Directly attacking normative gender-appropriate roles or activities permeates the

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590 Hanley, *Writing War*, 33. Others have also criticised Fussell – Desmond Graham describes *The Great War and Modern Memory* as “stimulating – if infuriating”: Desmond Graham, “Acknowledgements,” in *The Truth of War: Owen, Blunden, Rosenberg* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), i. Daniel Swift declares Fussell’s work to be “a superb study of the literature and language of the Great War and specifically the metaphors and myths by which it was waged. Fussell’s readings of Rosenberg and Owen’s poetry or Robert Graves’ subsequent memoir, *Goodbye to All That*, will perhaps never be bettered. But the book is also a weak, often simplistic, account of almost everything before and after the war. It is great literary criticism and lousy history”: Daniel Swift, “The Classic Book,” *History Today* 64, no. 8 (2014): 61. Elisabeth Samet suggests Fussell’s concept of the ways the war is remembered is questionable, that the war actually “need[s] to be coax(ed) out of hiding, exorcised from a place of repression and concealment, where it had been imperfectly overwritten”: Elisabeth Samet, “War and Memory,” *American Literary History* 24, no. 4 (2012): 866.


593 Stevenson, “With the Listener in Mind,” 177.
narrative: Prior remarks during therapy that he regards Rivers as more of a “male mother” than a father figure (97). Rivers “distrust[s] the implication that nurturing, even when done by a man, remains female” (97), a rather forward-thinking assertion that men may also be emotional and gently parental without forfeiting their masculinity.

The trilogy’s women are anything but obsequious in the face of men, and do not necessarily respect or admire their war service, except insofar as it means they are free to do as they wish. When Sarah asks Lizzie if she is looking forward to her husband coming home on leave:

‘Don’t you want to see him?’ asked Sarah.
‘I do not. I’ve seen enough of him to last me a lifetime.’ (99)

It is women who suggest that there exists a covert homosexual sub-culture in their communities that includes even their husbands: when Sarah Lumb contradicts her friend Madge’s claim that English men are “all disappearing up their own arseholes” by telling her “[t]hey’re not all like that,” Madge replies, “even the ones that aren’t like that take one look at the Missus and bugger off round the Club” (177; 178), implying an absence of love, a weak heterosexual drive or a misogynistic streak. Madge’s comment has a bitter edge to it, but also suggests that she is not afraid to speak up for the status of women in a patriarchal world that undervalues her. Pacifist Beattie Roper, jailed for a trumped up “plot to assassinate the Prime Minister” (262), expresses equally staunch opposition to the men who have locked her up: “I might look like a bloody scarecrow but in here – she tapped her head – I’m the same” (371; emphasis in original). Beattie Roper is the antithesis of Billy Prior’s mother (who is a battered wife) and accentuates the indomitable spirit that is evident in many of the trilogy’s women.

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594 Jones demonstrates the way in which “Barker counters the misogyny often found in combatant writing, including Owen’s, by reconstructing Owen’s poem ‘Disabled’ as a scene featuring one of Regeneration’s purely fictional characters, a female munitions worker named Sarah Lumb”: Jones, “Regenerating Wilfred Owen,” 177.
The trilogy’s primary characters, as Chapter Three noted, find themselves in para-normative societal spaces; their views are the eccentric, or “ex-centric” views of the oppressed and the abject. The trilogy’s most questioning and embittered soldiers, who become highly dubious about the traditionally espoused moral bases of war and its killing, nevertheless remain committed to the much lauded ideas of honour and sacrifice, and to following “the ghost road.” Rivers, increasingly troubled by the role he plays in facilitating his patients’ progress along their paths to death, is powerless to do other than what he is doing, even as he listens finally, in a half-dreaming state, to the mournful reckoning of an abject spirit. Genuine contempt for all facets of the war requires as emphatic a detachment from patriotism as Virginia Woolf’s previously noted declaration that she was a person with no country. Over-hallowed concepts of honour, patriotism, masculinity and heroism diminish in weight as a more deeply intellectual response to war, or to use Rivers’s term, an epicritic rather than a more primitive or protopathic response, is privileged by the text. Barker adopts an approach to her subject typical of modernist

596 The final words of the ghost of Njiru are discussed more fully in Chapter Five.
597 Woolf, Three Guineas, 125. Alice Wheeldon (upon whom Barker based her character Beattie Roper) is also recorded to have expressed the view that “[t]he world is my country”: Adam Hochschild, To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918 (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001), 377.
598 In Regeneration, Rivers and his colleagues argue about Sassoon’s “protopathic” response to the slaughter at the front—
   “‘He’s completely inconsistent. And that’s all the more reason to get him to argue the position.
   ‘Epicritically’
   ‘Rationally’” (67; emphasis in original).
599 Francis Seeburger notes that in the Regeneration trilogy, Barker makes it clear that “as time went on, both words had acquired broader meanings [or had they perhaps gone through a process of degeneration and “idolization”?] so that ‘epicritic’ came to stand for everything rational, ordered, cerebral, objective, while ‘protopathic’ referred to the emotional, the sensual, the chaotic, the
novelists in Victorian times, who stormed the “monolithic and exclusively empowered majority” by imagining society “from the viewpoint of those excluded from the moral core – women, children, homosexuals, the Irish, or working-class people.”

Deliberately emasculating heroic mythologies of war and subsuming the narrative of war to a polyphony of minority views derogates very powerfully from a transcendentalised, godly perspective, restoring to the men whom Owen described as “the seed of Europe” their inestimable value, and giving primacy of place to unhegemonic voices.

Ronald Paul distinguishes the trilogy from a canon of male-authored war novels whose idea of Britain subscribes to “the romantic idea of rural English retreat … a classless, pastoral England that was nostalgically evoked and celebrated in prewar Georgian poetry.” It is not the case, however, that men invariably subscribed to the pastoral ideal. The male wartime canon occasionally includes less than pastoral pictures of home: Richard Aldington, in *Death of a Hero*, presents the mother of his protagonist George Winterbourne as “a particularly virulent specimen of the human scorpion,” shamefully capitalising on the news of her son’s death:

the effect of George’s death on her temperament was, strangely enough, almost wholly erotic … Mrs Winterbourne was not only a sadist, but a necrophilous one.

Barker deviates from pastoral ideals as male British characters in the trilogy behave in ways that may be deemed misogynist, gynophobic, paranoid, sexist, homophobic, wife-beating, or child-abusing. In the eyes of many of the trilogy’s women, it seems primitive.”


The poem, ‘The Parable of the Old Man and the Young’ (1918), in Stallworthy, ed., *The Poems*, 151, is a reimagining of Genesis 22 in which Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son, but God accepts a ram instead of the boy. In Owen’s parable, despite God’s offer, the son is slain, along with “half the seed of Europe, one by one.”


Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, 18; 20. The narrator also records that “one of the horrors of the War was not fighting the Germans, but living under the British”: Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, 242.
there is almost nothing to recommend the typical Englishman. The unflattering view that Sarah Lumb’s friends hold about Englishmen and their men’s clubs is borne out by Broughton and Rogers, who cite J. Tosh’s view that “middle class men … embarked on a ‘flight from domesticity,’ opting for prolonged bachelorhood and the freedom afforded by the burgeoning homosocial worlds of city club-life and imperial culture.” It is reasonable to impute the female gender of the author as a catalyst to these unflattering re-presentations of male bastions.

Some critics have drawn attention to the trilogy’s alleged feminist qualities. Shephard’s hostile rejection of Barker’s historicity, for example, suggests that only those uninfectected by what he deems “post-feminist pieties,” a term he does not define, are able to write war correctly. I suggest that what primarily informs Barker’s position on war is her ability to dissociate from the masculine heroic. In her analysis of Louise Bogan’s “poetic language and écriture féminine,” Suzanne Clark suggests that Bogan’s “gender is marked only by her alienation from the male heroic quest.” It is in the trilogy’s persistent challenge to masculinist views of war that traditionally inhere in male war writing that an authorial female gaze manifests itself.

The female gaze has traditionally been overshadowed by the male in the context of war writing; Sayre Sheldon notes

There are thousands of stories, poems, diaries and accounts of war by women … yet war literature is still seen as almost exclusively male. The reason is one of definition: war literature is traditionally about being in war, more precisely about being in combat. By limiting war literature to actual combat, men have claimed war as their subject.


607 Sayre P. Sheldon, preface to Her War Story: Twentieth Century Women Write About War, ed. Sayre P. Sheldon (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), x (emphasis in original).
However, the comparative rarity of women at the battlefront in history is not fully satisfying as an explanation for an “almost exclusively male” domination of the literary World War I: Angela Smith points out that it is “surprising how many women did manage to become deeply involved with the war and experience it close up, and how many of them chose to write about it.”\textsuperscript{608} Though widely read at the time, “few of these women’s stories … still remain in print or feature in the public perception of the First World War.”\textsuperscript{609} As Margaret Higonnet et al. observe, “literary scholars customarily exclude women’s voices from the canon of war literature, favouring writings based on the actual experience of combat.”\textsuperscript{610} Niall Ferguson’s observation that “[i]n its revised second edition, The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry includes … in deference to feminist sensibility, nine female poets”\textsuperscript{611} suggests the inclusion was prompted by a capitulation to feminism rather than a recognition of genuine poetic merit. Agnès Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman and Judith Hattaway note that “[t]he male canon, while not directly inimical to women’s writing about the war, often seems oblivious of its existence, let alone its claims to significance.”\textsuperscript{612} Sheldon notes that as women incorporated their experience into writing, they were in fact “choosing the right to imagine war, just as men for centuries had written about war without actually experiencing it.”\textsuperscript{613} Stephen Crane’s classic war novel, The Red Badge of Courage (1895), hailed as “the most realistic war novel in [America’s] literature,”\textsuperscript{614} may be cited as evidence to support Sheldon’s argument, for Crane had “never been closer to a battlefield than the

\textsuperscript{608} Angela K. Smith, The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), 170. Smith notes that despite Vera Brittain’s concern, “[w]omen had in fact been producing the ‘living words’ she called for throughout the war and its aftermath, and continued to do so for many decades, some with great success” (Smith, The Second Battlefield, 106).

\textsuperscript{609} Smith, The Second Battlefield, 106.

\textsuperscript{610} Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al., introduction to Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 1.

\textsuperscript{611} Ferguson, The Pity of War, 449; emphasis added. Ferguson also implies there is some significance in the fact that “none [of them] fought.” In his introduction to the edition of The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry that Ferguson alludes to, Jon Silkin in fact stresses that, in choosing which poems to include in the anthology, he was “in the end concerned with excellence, not the representation of extrinsic concerns”: Jon Silkin, introduction to The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry, ed. Jon Silkin (London: Penguin, 1981), 74.

\textsuperscript{612} Agnès Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman and Judith Hattaway, eds. Women’s Writing on the First World War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

\textsuperscript{613} Sheldon, Her War Story, xi.

parade ground of his military prep school.” Harold Frederic suggests that in fact actual war experience is a handicap to writing on war, for the “actual sight of battle has some dynamic quality in it which overwhelsms and crushes the literary faculty in the observer.”

Violet Paget, who adopted the male pseudonym Vernon Lee, also believed it was only by being detached from the war that one could view it objectively: “Holding thus aloof I have been able to see the war under a certain angle and in certain of its aspects which would have been hidden from me had I, as the phrase goes, been in it.” A lack of active war service no more precludes a woman than it does a man from a realistic imagining of war.

The degree of female involvement in the war, however, is itself often under-rated. The variety and richness of women’s war writing across several genres is evident in the anthology entitled *Women’s Writing on the First World War*, which “testifies to the variety of ways in which women on both sides participated in the conflict.”

The participation of women not only as munitions workers on the home front, but as ambulance drivers and nurses in close proximity to battle contributed to the canon of war writing; women’s accounts “reveal the difference between women’s experience and that of men and combatants” — such contributions “offer not only a complement to men’s narratives of war but also a perspective which corrects and reshapes our understanding of war writing as a whole.”

Female writers show far less dependence upon a common “stock of motifs — literary [and] mythological — on which men [draw] when giving shape to their war experience.” Reinforcing myths need not be the driving force behind stories of war.

There is no reason to assume that women, not expected by Edwardian Britain to bear arms, could not understand the masculine motifs and rationales of war, but it is

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617 Lee, *Satan the Waster*, xviii, emphasis in original.
619 Cardinal et al., *Women’s Writing*, 4.
620 Cardinal et al., *Women’s Writing*, 4.
clear that women’s writing is less driven by such motifs. Vickroy contends that Virginia Woolf is correct to observe that women “are not socialized to war and domination in ways men are.” Vickroy credits both Woolf and Barker with writing “ethical fiction [that] engages readers’ sympathetic imaginations with humanity in extremis … through a language undergirded by feminist analysis and psychological insight.” 622 Mark Greif contends that “Barker’s books can be seen as an extension of Woolf’s final project – performing a kind of therapy on male culture.” 623 Barker’s gender, therefore, is a very significant factor influencing the trilogy’s narrative detachment from traditional masculine heroics and quite powerfully underscores the narrative’s ethical position on war.

This is not, however, to suggest that there exists an identifiable “woman’s novel” in the war fiction genre, pace Angela Smith, who claims that Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier (1917) is a “woman’s novel.” 624 Smith’s opinion is based not upon the book’s female authorship but on certain organic qualities within the novel itself. As it concerns a shell-shocked soldier who is sent home from the front to be cured, The Return of the Soldier has a special relevance in discussing and interpreting the Regeneration trilogy. The Return of the Soldier represents a literary and sociological milestone in being “the first World War I novel written by a woman.” 625 However, even though the term “woman’s novel” may have some currency in the context of the reading marketplace, Smith undervalues the important contribution of West’s The Return of the Soldier to the canon of war literature by implying in her “woman’s novel” epithet that the book is of interest only, or mainly, to women.

Smith justifies her assessment by pointing out that the action of The Return of the Soldier takes place “almost entirely in the domestic sphere.” 626 This very doubtful

624 Smith, The Second Battlefield, 171.
625 Cover blurb, Rebecca West, The Return of the Soldier (Kentucky: Circle Square Circle Books, 2009).
626 Smith, The Second Battlefield, 171. This remark seems predicated upon the presumption that domesticity is the correct province of “women’s literature,” and is on a par with Cyril Fall’s previously quoted remark to the effect that that women should stick to what they know and leave such gritty subjects as trench mud to men.
argument hardly requires challenge; suffice it to say that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* at no point ventures beyond the grounds of the royal household at Elsinore. Smith also deems *The Return of the Soldier* to have “the ‘woman’s novel’ format” on the basis that West’s “narrator is a very conventional woman, feminine, but not feminist in outlook, forced to confront ideas foreign to her sphere of experience.”627 Any study of literature, however, from the works of Austen, the Brontes, Dickens, Tolstoy and countless others will reveal the presence of “conventional” and “feminine” characters who are forced to confront new experiences. I question also the viability of Smith’s contention that Jenny is a particularly “feminine” character, which is a loose enough description on its own. Jenny, cousin to the shell-shocked soldier Chris, in fact plays a strong, controlling, and therefore a stereotypically masculine role in the narrative, manipulating Chris’s separation from Margaret, the woman he has attached himself to in his state of clinical amnesia. “Femininity,” moreover, seems to be a rather elusive, if not an irrelevant, aspect of Jenny’s character as the plot unfolds. She eventually interposes herself as a sort of surrogate for Chris in his affair with Margaret, for the two women, Jenny and Margaret, kiss each other “not as women, but as lovers do.”628 There is also an element of male soldierliness in Jenny as she imagines the gritty horrors of the trenches of No Man’s Land, “where bullets fall like rain on the rotting faces of the dead.”629 Her dreams bring visions only trench combatants have seen: stepping on severed hands and unburied heads;630 this image represents a sudden, albeit brief, narrative leap from the domestic front to the battlefront. The boyish voice of “the modern subaltern” has acquainted Jenny with a macabre joke: “We were all of us in a barn one night, and a shell came along. My pal sang out, ‘Help me, old man; I’ve go no legs!’ and I had to answer ‘I can’t old man; I’ve got no hands!’”631 These elements of the narrative detract seriously from the idea that Jenny is meant to represent the idea of a conventional Edwardian lady.

628 West, *The Return of the Soldier*, 70.
630 West, *The Return of the Soldier*, 6
631 West, *The Return of the Soldier*, 6
Smith also defends the “woman’s novel” epithet by declaring that, although the work is in some ways “innovatory” in its foregrounding of “a number of modernist narrative experiments in a particularly successful way,” it nevertheless rests upon “the obscenity of sentimentality.” Leaving aside the suggestion that sentimentialty in literature is “obscene” and the implication that sentiment is specific to women, whether The Return is sentimental at all is questionable: such a judgement requires interpreting the end of the novella as merely depicting the joyful reintegration of a newly healed man into the bosom of his family, and looking askance at the uncomfortable, almost Madame de Farge-like glee felt by Kitty and Jenny as they exult in their (rather rapidly effected) “cure” which ensures that Chris is fit to return to the very No Man’s Land that Jenny knows is a place of “rotting faces” and “unburied heads.” The position of the women at the end of the text is similar to that of Dr Rivers at the end of Barker’s trilogy, except that Rivers feels morally conflicted concerning the tremendous consequences of taking away his patients’ symptomatic aversion to combat, for by declaring his patients to be cured he is ensuring their return to such horrors as caused their dreadful afflictions.

Higonnet contends that “war must be understood as a gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of a society, whether or not they are

632 A 1917 essay by Rafaël de Mesa’s may have captured something of the wartime perception of women writers as it praises the illustrious “race of women novelists … from Mme. de Lafayette to George Sand and George Eliot”; unlike men, “who can only describe in their books the heroic deeds of our time, the women … publish works of the imagination … which are full of tenderness and of the poetry of peace”: Rafaël de Mesa, “Novels by Women,” The Lotus Magazine 8, no. 8 (1917): 352; 349; emphasis added.


635 Jenny, it must be conceded, is not quite in the same position as Rivers, who has a duty to ensure the men are healed and able to defend the country once more. Jenny feels it is morally incumbent upon her to cure Chris’s delusions on the grounds that the truth “is a draught that we must drink or not be fully human”: West, The Return of the Soldier, 87. If Jenny and Kitty had made a decision to try to keep Chris out of the war by not intervening, their course of (in)action would not have had legal ramifications; Rivers, on the other hand, may have opened himself to the charge of treason if he did not adhere strictly to the official criteria of fitness. Moreover, Jenny’s justification for forcing the truth upon Chris is reasonable: the “return” of the soldier in the title refers not only to his return to his soldier status, to his wife and to the war but also indicates his return to reality.
combatants.” War inevitably underscores gender consciousness as many men and women are assigned special roles in wartime not customary for them at most other times; Higonnet contends that war gendering persists beyond the war’s duration, for “messages of reintegration are expressed within a rhetoric of gender that establishes the postwar social assignments of men and women.” The reimagining of the war by female writers may well be affected to one degree or another by the persisting syndrome of war’s alleged ritual gendering power. It is important in this context to be wary of essentialising a sexual war ideology dichotomy: as Sharon Ouditt notes when distinguishing the “male gaze” from the “female gaze” at war, there is no “simple male-bellicose/female-pacific opposition.” Nevertheless, Ouditt identifies a narrative perspective in Virginia Woolf’s writing which, owing to her gender, is resistant to the masculine ideologies and patriarchy that “generate a predisposition towards war.” While men evince “an obsession with linearity and unity,” Woolf’s particular vision is “fragmented, multiple-visionsed, detached, [and] ironic.” Female narrators, as “external focalisers” and observers with “less to gain from patriarchal tradition” than men, develop a far less “monolithic” perspective.

Greg Harris suggests that Barker examines how patriarchal constructions of masculinity colonize men’s subjectivity in ways that, especially in wartime, prove oppressive, repressive, and wholly brutal in their effects on the male psyche.

Barker believes that “[w]hat women see is the spot at the back of a man’s head, which he cannot see himself no matter how often he cranes and tries to see it in the mirror … I think what women know about men is the extent to which men lie to each other.” The women in the Regeneration trilogy almost invariably demonstrate a focus that is impliedly unavailable to men, so that the trilogy’s gaze is removed from, and antagonistic to, contemporary patriarchal hegemony.

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636 Higonnet, Behind the Lines, 4; emphasis in original.
637 Higonnet, Behind the Lines, 4.
639 Ouditt, Fighting Forces, 176.
640 Ouditt, Fighting Forces, 169.
641 Ouditt, Fighting Forces, 188; 181.
One example of such a woman is Maud Allen, who in 1918 brought a libel suit against political patriarch Pemberton Billing. The trilogy’s representation of Allen’s suit exposes Billing as an apotheosis of masculine failure; Billing’s zealous attempt, via the medium of Allen’s suit against him, to re-ingrain traditional ideas of masculinity into the public’s consciousness, is considered by Rivers and Charles Manning to be farcical. Only Manning’s wife is astute enough to see that the doggedness of Billing’s attack upon Allen’s character exposes the fragility of masculine hegemonies, as she observes that Billing’s outrage “masks a kind of deep-rooted fear that [women are] getting out of line … Maud Allen is teaching them a lesson. Not just lesbians. All women” (337; emphasis in original). Allen’s alleged lesbianism and the flagrant nakedness of her stage performance were the express grounds of Billing’s abhorrence, but opposition in the trilogy to Salomé the play and Salomé the character illustrate Britain’s suppression of diversity in matters of sexual orientation, gender assumptions and cultural norms, for the out-groups of society posed a perceived threat to the country’s support for the war.

Smith lists the artist, the woman, the pacifist and the maimed in the First World War as persons who “lived on the margins of society, often unwelcome as a result of [their] conscious rejection of the militarist orthodoxy on which society depended in order to sustain the war effort.” Wilde’s play, with its perverse, decapitating heroine was especially challenging to Britain’s orthodoxy; Elizabeth Richmond-Garza notes that Salomé resist[s] the hegemony of Anglophone, hetero-normative, neo-Roman London through a recourse to a Francophone, Hellenized Palestine. … [I]t offers what we might now call a position of queer resistance to monologic integrity, founded as it is upon an insistence upon nuance, multivalence and the aporetic, just those

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644 Jane Manning does not actually appear in the text, except in a photograph that had been covered by a sheet in the Mannings’ war-damaged house; it is her absence that enables her husband to use the Manning home as a venue for sex with Prior. Jane’s reported comment about Billing’s fear of women and lesbianism reveals her to be a more astute student of human nature than her husband. Women of the trilogy, such as Sarah’s friends, are under no illusions about why men spend so much time at their clubs. Almost without exception, the narrative’s women show a peculiar insight, and it is not far-fetched to suspect that Jane knows more about her husband’s ostensibly secret sex life than he thinks she knows.

features that lie at the core of the practices of translation, sexuality and nationalism.\textsuperscript{646} 

Tony W. Garland, refuting a suggestion that Salomé is unable to turn Herod’s gaze back upon him,\textsuperscript{647} maintains that “Salomé’s failure to reciprocate the gaze, whether obligatory or intentional, perpetuates her objectification, generates desires that are deviant and fortifies her power as a \textit{femme fatale}.\textsuperscript{648} Allen is given no dialogue in the narrative, other than the lines spoken by Salomé, who asks the head of John the Baptist a question that suggests a failure on the part of men to acknowledge women: “\textit{But wherefore dost thou not look at me iokanaan? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut?}” (281, emphasis in original).\textsuperscript{649} Allen’s performance of Salomé, Walkowitz notes, “gave unusual status to a self-pleasuring, embodied, and expressive female self.”\textsuperscript{650} The sexual discourse around which the play revolves is lost on Manning, who looks away from Salomé at this point, recalling the time when Scudder, from his own battalion, sank into the mud of the trenches. Ignoring the play, he asks himself “Where’s Scudder? Where’s Scudder?” – and answers his own question with “He’s dead, for Christ’s sake” (281, emphasis in original).

The impact of Allen’s interpretation of Salomé’s macabre, histrionic challenge to male dominance, which confronts “Victorian concepts of femininity, how women should behave and what their place in society should be,”\textsuperscript{651} is deftly allowed to be overshadowed in the text by Manning’s own private torments.\textsuperscript{652} This narrative emphasis mirrors the way in which Billing and his friends “usurped the role played


\textsuperscript{647} The suggestion, by Sarah E. Maier, is that “[f]ixed in place and objectified by the gaze of Herod [Salomé] can never retaliate by turning that gaze back upon the gazers”: Sarah E. Maier, “Symbolist Salomés and the Dance of Dionysus,” \textit{Nineteenth Century Context} 28, no. 3 (2006): 220.

\textsuperscript{648} Tony W. Garland, “The \textit{Femme Fatale} Status of Salomé and the Dance of the Seven Veils,” in Bennett, \textit{Refiguring Oscar Wilde}, 129.

\textsuperscript{649} The absence of Allen’s voice in the narrative, except in the persona of Salomé, accentuates the repressiveness of patriarchy, especially in the light of Jane Manning’s reported opinion that Allen has a message to impart to all women.

\textsuperscript{650} Walkowitz, “The ‘Vision of Salome,’” 340.

\textsuperscript{651} Hoare, \textit{Wilde’s Last Stand}, 70.

\textsuperscript{652} The intriguing intertextual link here is to E. M. Forster’s homosexual novel \textit{Maurice}, in which the hero falls in love with a working class man named Scudder. Subtly, the issue of female repression is allowed to be overshadowed by men’s concerns in order to reflect Edwardian Britain’s patriarchal culture.
by liberal feminist campaigners” in Allen’s trial, appealing to the “hyper patriotism of leading suffragists” to maintain the status quo of patriarchy. Allen’s libel suit against Billing in 1918 was inverted into a circus of accusations that made it seem to a befuddled public that the defendant Billing was the aggrieved party rather than Allen the plaintiff. In a different time, further removed from the Wilde scandal and unafflicted by the pathology of war, Allen may have attracted outspoken support from similarly repressed artists and minorities.

A little later in the narrative, as Charles Manning mentions to Rivers that he has been sent a newspaper cutting “about Maud Allen and the ‘cult of the clitoris’” (333), he hands Rivers a news report of the alleged list of London’s 47,000 traitorous homosexuals: Manning is worried that his own homosexuality may be disclosed publicly. The shift of narrative attention away from the trampling of Allen’s reputation and onto preserving the reputation of a man is a reflection in the trilogy of the egregious subordination of women’s to men’s interests, even at the expense of justice. Allen had become “a Medusa figure, on whom merely to gaze would be to risk danger”; the trilogy underscores this perception of Allen by itself gazing only momentarily upon the Medusa figure.

Hoare notes that “[f]orever after, Maud Allen would be defined by this trial, just as Oscar Wilde was condemned in memory by his own appearance at the Old Bailey.” In her para-textual note at the end of The Eye in the Door, Barker records that “Pemberton Billing went on to have a distinguished parliamentary career” (423). Historians generally refer to “The Pemberton Billing Affair,” rather than “Maud Allen’s Libel Suit,” and are wont to mention, as Barker has done in her Note, that “Billing won the case and was carried shoulder-high through the cheering crowds that had gathered outside the Old Bailey,” while omitting (as

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654 Hoare, Wilde’s Last Sland, 84.
655 Hoare, Wilde’s Last Sland, 170.
Barker also omits) to record the unfortunate impact of the scandalous affair on Allen’s life. Allen’s very brief, half-suppressed vignette in the trilogy, however, vindicates Barker’s remark that the women of the trilogy act as “a key to the whole work”; Billing’s concerted counter-attack levelled at a woman striking against the hegemony of masculinity was symptomatic of a kind of “gender panic.” Billing’s paranoid claim was that Allen’s alleged clitoral cult would exterminate “the manhood of Britain,” and bring down the Empire: “[I]t is a terrible thought to contemplate that the British Empire should fall as fell the great Empire of Rome.” Medd sees in Billing’s denunciations of Allen and lesbianism a growing insecurity about the “the ‘New Women’ emerging in the public sphere.” These included prostitutes on street corners, protesting suffragists, and women of the theatre. Lesbianism, an unthinkable idea to many in Victorian Britain, was beginning to emerge from the shadows in tandem with such exemplars of female independence. Allen’s lawsuit illustrates that British masculinist culture felt seriously troubled by a sense that the strictures on women’s identities were starting to unravel. In an unpublished paper, the real Rivers recognises a generalised public fear in the UK of “the danger of the destruction of the social framework in which each one of us has his appointed place … producing a state which may be regarded as a universal neuro-psychosis.” His conclusion that “our national state shows every sign of becoming one comparable with the anxiety-neurosis of the individual” anticipates

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657 James alters the focus as his reimagined Allen laments that Billing “destroyed me in front of everybody, with the press and the public gallery hanging on every vicious word. It was unfair. Despicable. And he called me shameless! From that terrible moment I was the one on trial. But must I – must we – continue to bear the guilt after twenty silent years?”: James, The Maud Allen Affair, 2; emphasis in original.
658 Stevenson, “With the Listener in Mind,” 177.
659 Jodie Medd, “‘The Cult of the Clitoris’: Anatomy of a National Scandal,” Modernism/ Modernity 9, no. 1: (2002): 23. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that a common trope in several modernist literary works (such as such as Lawrence’s Lady Chatterly’s Lover and Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises) is the maimed or castrated male, imagery that accentuates “male impotence and female potency” as the indicator of societal breakdown: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 38.
663 Rivers, in Piette and Rawlinson, eds, The Edinburgh Companion, 293; n. 45.
a similar observation to be made by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* in 1929.\(^{664}\)

A neurotic, patriarchal society is more prone to scapegoat its oppressed and marginalised women, as the narrative suggests. Thus the trilogy’s pacifist Beattie Roper\(^{665}\) is jailed on flimsy evidence that she had plotted to murder Lloyd George. The trilogy’s women do not succumb easily to oppression, however, and generally rise up in defiance of masculinist assumptions. In her small cell and under constant surveillance, Roper steadfastly refuses to let her spirit be subdued. Even the women who express their support for the war are shown not to do so on ideological grounds, but rather because war exposes the weakness of men and opens up opportunities for women to lead, as Lizzie, a suffragette friend of Hettie’s, observes: “‘Hettie, for women this is the first day in the history of the world’” (296). Lizzie not only does not miss her soldier husband, but is happy to see the back of him, perhaps permanently:

> Do you know what happened on August 4th 1914? … I’ll tell you what happened. Peace broke out. The only little bit of peace I’ve ever had. No, I don’t want him back on leave. I don’t want him back when it’s over. As far as I’m concerned the Kaiser can keep him’ (99; emphasis in original).

Lizzie’s attitude represents a radical re-envisioning of the government’s famous war-poster line, “Women of Britain Say Go!” The bold assertion of the propaganda machine that Britain’s women were happy *en masse* to jeopardise the lives of their husbands and sons did not result from any known survey, as Claire Tylee points out:

> There was no referendum to establish what women said. The poster seems designed as much to convince women of what to say, as to convince men that they

\(^{664}\) “If the development of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilization – possibly the whole of mankind – have become ‘neurotic’?”: Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents” in *Group Psychology: Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works* by Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 338.

\(^{665}\) “Beattie Roper’s story is loosely based on the ‘poison plot’ of 1917. Alice Wheeldon, a second-hand clothes dealer living in the back streets of Derby, was accused and convicted of having conspired to murder Lloyd George, Arthur Henderson, and other persons by poisoning”: Author’s Note: 422.
were saying it. Actually many women tried to get their sons out of the army. Others were agitating to prevent conscription.

Lizzie supports the war not in affirmation of, but as an expression of contempt for, patriarchal hegemony: this amounts to an iconoclastic recognition that for some women the soldier husband’s absence from home and hearth is desired not because it helps the war effort, but because the home front is more enjoyable without him. Tylee contends that “[w]omen have been left with a legacy of guilt for the misery and death of a generation of young men.” The female gaze of the women in the trilogy not only does not concede to female responsibility for the war, but also scorns the notion of women’s war guilt by rejecting ideas of female complicity in masculinist propaganda through characters such as the cynical, misandrist, anti-wife Sarah, and also through Beattie Roper, who works at her own peril protecting pacifists from legal sanctions.

The idea of re-envisioning World War I via the female gaze is not limited to female authors; Julian Barnes’s short story *Evermore* achieves a similar questioning of the masculinisation of remembering war using a less polyphonic approach than Barker’s. Barnes’ protagonist, who is given the deceptively risible name “Miss Moss,” revisits the battlefields of France every year in order to honour her dead brother’s memory. Miss Moss studiously approaches all the extant documents of the war “with a skeptical, … proof-reader’s eye.” Obsessive about historical veracity and the protection of the past, Miss Moss angrily complains about errors of spelling and spacing on monuments. As Virginie Renard observes, however, texts of war such as this

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666 Tylee, *The Great War*, 257. The wife-mother in E. V. Kealey’s *Women of Britain say Go!* poster appears to be an elegant, upper class woman in stylish dress; I suggest that the working classes may have felt quite distanced from the image.


668 Jackson notes that neither of the two male-authored “standard cultural histories of Britain during the first world war … Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* nor Samuel Hynes’s *A War Imagined* contains even a passing mention of Alice Wheeldon or her trial: Jackson, “Narratives of Trauma,” Jackson, “Narratives of Trauma,” 79.


do not say much about the past, despite Miss Moss’s very close reading. The Great War remains for the most part inaccessible to Miss Moss, who then resorts to imagination to fill the gaps: she is said to “imagine his story,” i.e. History.671

But the “history” Miss Moss vigilantly guards is actually her story of his story, and of her own perceptions of history’s story. Miss Moss’s ever-recurring journey to France demonstrates a type of motherly-cum-sisterly guardianship of her brother’s experience, and even an obsessive, impossible attempt “to fuse with her own brother.” 672 Evermore does not override or cancel its obsessive-neurotic protagonist’s preserved version of the war, nor does the story suggest that the dead brother’s frontline participation was the only “real” war; instead, the subjective experiences of active and passive participants are equally open to doubt. In fact, by acknowledging the impossibility of disavowing Miss Moss’s rigid certainty, the story vindicates her claim to historical accuracy, if not the historical accuracy of that claim. Miss Moss, desperate to prevent the moss from growing over her brother’s life, has a story, a female non-frontline participant’s story, that can be respected. Evermore’s imputed female gaze, and indeed the Regeneration trilogy’s authorial female gaze, lean powerfully towards Virginia Woolf’s view that the war was underpinned by a mass of “preposterous masculine fiction.”673 In its oblique validation of a non-male, non-participant’s gaze at the war, Evermore leans gently towards a palimpsestic or flexible idea of remembered pasts, as well as towards Steven Connor’s conception of historical fiction writing as “a conversation or structure of address between the past and the present.”674 The trilogy quite directly invites a questioning of entrenched masculine war myths with Prior’s observation that “the past is a palimpsest” (264); alternative visions of female characters who

672 Renard, “Reaching Out,” 298.
673 From a letter written by Woolf to Margaret Llewelyn Davies in 1916. Quoted by Ouditt, Fighting Forces, 171. Original source: Nigel Nicolson, ed., The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, vol II: 1912–1922 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), 76. Ouditt notes that this statement captures Woolf’s view that feminism was aligned with anti-militarism: “The war, as represented by the most powerful national newspaper, seemed an outrageous display of masculine pomposity that bore little relation to the complexity of reality”: Ouditt, Fighting Forces, 171. Note also Barker’s observation that “I think what women know about men is the extent to which men lie to each other,” suggesting that, unlike women, the men are unable to discern the lies from the truth: Garland, “Conversation,” 186.
disrespect their men at war are no less valid than the vacillating stances on war that Owen, Sassoon, Prior and Rivers are shown to adopt.

In his analysis of Barker’s novels prior to her authorship of the *Regeneration* trilogy, Peter Hitchcock notes “the polyphony of women’s voices which figure in the social relations of her fiction” and posits “the importance of women’s historiography in telling the past.” Hitchcock also refers to “ventriloquy [as a] relatively unexplored component of dialogic strategies” and to Patricia Yaeger’s claim that women’s writing “can ‘plagiarize’ patriarchal discourse without being reducible to it.” Hitchcock’s acknowledgement of a feminine voice in Barker’s writing is underscored by his denial of a suggested “Lawrentian” quality in Barker, which he claims is “damning praise.” Barker recoils from suggestions that Lawrence is a significant influence in her writing, and is recorded as saying she feels it is “never a compliment” to be compared with D. H. Lawrence. However, who declares Barker’s working-class voices to be “modulated, questioned, and polyphonic” finds “Lawrentian echoes related to the discourse of class” in the *Regeneration* trilogy. Knutsen sees Billy Prior, whose family is similar to that of Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, as “basically [a] Lawrentian figure.” It is almost


678 Hitchcock, “Radical Writing,” 116, n. 5. Hitchcock fails to establish why a Lawrentian element in Barker’s work would be so damning, but his claim that Barker’s “technical expertise has correlates outside the traditions of the English novel” (Hitchcock, “Radical Writing,” 116, n. 5) suggests that he finds the description too reductive; Barker’s narrative style, he notes, adopts a more “compound eye” approach, cf. Dinah Birch, who notes that “the authority of the eye, what it sees and what it imagines, has always mattered to Barker. A single gazing eye has brooded over her fiction from the first. ‘Her one naked eye staring out like the eye of God’ is what we remember of Beattie … [the] raddled prostitute in retirement, in *Blow Your House Down*”: Dinah Birch, “Invalided Home,” Review of *The Eye in the Door*, London Review of Books 21 October (1993), 22.

679 “Though hailed as ‘Lawrentian’ (‘never a compliment,’ she remarks acidly), Barker found D. H. Lawrence a brilliant example and a warning: ‘He suddenly has a sentence of sociology and the prose goes dead’”: Pat Barker, Interview with Maya Jaggi, np.

680 Knutsen, *Reciprocal Haunting*, 95; 96.

impossible to deny that Lawrence’s Paul Morel is evoked in a comment uttered by Prior’s father, as noted by Peter Preston.\(^{682}\) However, Billy Prior is really a postmodernist fabulation of an Edwardian bisexual transgressive and Marxist autodidact with elements in his make-up of Wilfred Owen, Billy Pilgrim,\(^{683}\) Freudian theory, and Stevenson’s characters Jekyll and Hyde.\(^{684}\) Barker’s nod to D. H. Lawrence in the character of Billy Prior, therefore, is quite negligible.

The authorial position of a woman critical of normative masculinist traditions influences the shaping of Barker’s characters, who similarly observe the world through non-normative lenses. Most major characters of the narrative occupy an out-group position as they are not compliant with many of their society’s norms. In an interview with Mark Sinker, Barker suggests that Billy Prior’s perspective is our perspective

because it is the perspective of the outsider – in class, in sexuality and in temperament. He is completely outside. Most of all in temperament – because it’s not as if he’s securely part of the working class, he has this corrosive skepticism about everything.\(^{685}\)

The power of the narrative to attack normative attitudes is greatly enhanced by the outsider status of this major sympathetic character, which becomes obvious when that status is removed in a new version of the narrative: Gillies MacKillon’s filmed adaptation of Regeneration is a case in point: in the film, as Stella Bruzzi points out, “[a]ll evidence of [Prior’s] bisexuality is absent,”\(^{686}\) so that much of what underpins Prior’s “corrosive skepticism” is lost. Monteith notes that “the film falls down ... in its refusal to pursue the homoeroticism that charges exchanges between men in

own conscious resistance to its influence: Michael Ross, “Acts of Re-vision: Lawrence as Intertext in the Novels of Pat Barker,” \textit{D. H. Lawrence Review} 26, no. 1–3 (1995–96): 52. Peter Preston argues that “it is by arguing with Lawrence that writers like … Barker are better able to define or sharpen their own ideas”: Peter Preston, “‘I am in a Novel!’: Lawrence in Recent British Fiction” in Cushman and Ingersoll, \textit{D. H. Lawrence}, 43–4.

\(^{682}\) Preston, “‘I am in a Novel,’” 25–49. Preston notes Prior’s father’s accusation that his mother has made “a stool-arsed Jack” of Billy: 32–3. This echoes Morel’s contempt for his wife’s aspirations for Paul: “‘What dost want ter ma’e a stool-harsed Jack on ’im for?’”: Lawrence, \textit{Sons and Lovers} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

\(^{683}\) Pilgrim is the protagonist of Kurt Vonnegut’s \textit{Slaughterhouse Five} (1953).

\(^{684}\) Prior may also represent aspects of Robert Louis Stevenson himself. Karl Miller acknowledges the mysteries of Stevenson’s “strange sex life: homosexuality, impotence, a passionate feeling for his stepson, submission to a wilful and predatory wife – such charges have been pressed”: Karl Miller, \textit{Doubles: Studies in Literary History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 213.


Barker’s fiction.” Also lost in the film is the crucial female gaze: in the script for the film, written by Allen Scott, “the narrative has been stripped of its women (Sarah Lumb is now a fairly minor character) and all overt sexuality.” In essence, then, the film tends towards a conventional, heterosexual, male gaze at war that fails to acknowledge the position of those who are oppressed by marginalisation in patriarchal and homophobic society, a position the trilogy is at pains to convey. The most apt epithet for the characters thus marginalised, I suggest, is “abject.” Julia Kristeva describes an abject person as one who “does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules” – the abject are the transgressors of normative boundaries. As Atfield notes, “[w]omen writers, traditionally ‘outside’ [society’s] parameters, seem more able to confront that which could be seen as transgressive: the challenging of class and sexual barriers.” Those who are not marginalised are circumscribed by their mainstream stance from fully understanding the position of the outsider. Suzanne Keen notes that

[p]aradoxically in fictions that emphasize their subjects’ marginal positions and exceptional experiences, continuities of nationality, location, religion, genealogy, gender, and sexual preference constitute privileged authorities that not only know, but also embody, the past.

Atfield contends that the female narratives of Barker and Jennifer Johnston (How Many Miles to Babylon) articulate what the male filmic narratives adapting those texts are able to say only metaphorically, accentuating “the filth and putrefaction of the trenches and the battlefield” rather than forbidden sexual desire. MacKinnon’s reconfiguring of the narrative from the perspective of the outsider-female to the more conservative insider-male gaze means that the film forfeits some of the critical dimensions of Barker’s Regeneration. The protagonist called upon to sacrifice his life for a society that otherwise alienates and oppresses him/her has the potential to

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687 Monteith, Pat Barker, 78.
688 Sinker, “Regeneration,” 22.
690 Suzanne Keen, Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 207.
evoke a greater degree of pathos, enhanced by the injustice of the situation; this is even more so when the war as it is being waged is shown to be causing far more suffering for its participants than any good it is supposed to be achieving.

Masculinist hegemonies are challenged, if not vanquished, in the narrative: Rivers allows the men at Craiglockhart to express emotions in ways normally deemed unmasculine in Edwardian Britain. “Crude copies of Tenniel’s drawings from *Alice in Wonderland*” (439) adorn one of the wards of the London hospital in which he works, suggesting that the men are infantilised by their traumas. At one point, Rivers actually finds himself running along a corridor, looking at his watch, realising he is the living embodiment of Carroll’s “large, eccentrically dressed white rabbit” (443). In the enshrouded Manning home, sexual stereotypes are shattered by the “un-manning” of Charles Manning (according to Victorian homophobic notions) as he adopts the receptive role in sexual intercourse with Prior. The term “no man’s land” used to describe a “landscape apparently devoid of life that actually contain[s] millions of men” (197) suggests that those millions become something other than men: that they are suddenly the monsters placed in non-spaces by medieval map-makers: “*where unknown, there place monsters*” (350). The narrative thus unmans the battlefields via a female gaze which undermines the normative view that soldiers are archetypal warriors whose masculinity is proved in combat.

Lieutenant Hallet’s *shotvarfet* cry in the ward of Craiglockhart represents a final male vindication of what the female gaze exposed earlier when Sarah Lumb, who had stumbled into the carefully hidden ward of war atrocities, felt shame and horror at being “forced to play the role of Medusa” (143). Hallet’s mutilated Gorgon-like face finally vanquishes respect for masculinist war mythology that would have lent some small deference to elements of noble sacrifice, no matter how pointless, in the deaths not only of Hallet, Owen and Prior, but of the thousands of others killed in the war.\(^\text{693}\)

\(^{693}\) Shaddock notes that the *shotvarfet* chant is “a visceral howl against the codes of British masculinity, the glorious warrior ethic, that perpetuates the war”: Shaddock, “Dreams of Melanesia,” 670.
Pity and sacrifice

Pity, normally lauded as a virtue in those who extend the emotion to the suffering, is also eminently susceptible to exploitation by bellicose politics. Vernon Lee’s *Satan the Waster* indicts Pity as the perpetuator of heroic myths of war, for it is pity which drives misguided heroism when all else has failed, and in so doing prolongs the war. Heroism’s motivation might change – sacrifice for ‘the men’ replaces sacrifice for one’s country – but the end result is the same.694

Plain parallels Wilfred Owen with Lee’s “misguided” figure of Heroism: “Owen [comes] close to having the scales lifted from his eyes” but is “drawn back into complicity by Pity – ‘gentle murmuring and lovely,’ but dangerous in her innocence.”695 Owen, the tragic messenger famous for poeticising war’s pity, is also himself an object of pity in the trilogy’s historiographic narrative when he is cut down so close to the end of hostilities. Had the Owen of the trilogy been a fictional poet decrying the war, his death at the front could be looked upon as a mere irony-rich narrative contrivance. As I have noted earlier, though, Barker has acknowledged the famous inconsistencies in the real Owen’s expressed attitudes to fighting the war, and it is not possible to say with certainty that the death of the most famous paragon of pity is intended to stand as the trilogy’s supreme and unequivocal embodiment of war’s terrible folly.

In fact, the female gaze of the trilogy, sympathetic to its transgressive heroes, boldly undermines the idea, enshrined in Christianity, that sacrificing one’s life is a selfless, noble act.696 Prior’s thoughts as he is about to die are neither profound nor altruistic, but merely “[b]anal, simple, repetitive” (588). Plain suggests that to reject the alleged nobility of sacrifice in battle is an attack upon the “pervasive, corrupting...
homogeneity at the root of war,” allowing one to arrive at Virginia Woolf’s stance of the “critical, anti-empathetic spectator.” François Lagrange identifies religion and patriotism as the driving forces behind a personal eagerness to offer oneself to (the likelihood of) death:

[L]e moteur soit la religion ou le patriotism (ils ne sont pas exclusifs l’un de l’autre), la caractéristique d’une bonne troupe est son aptitude à aller au sacrifice.

– the engine is religion or patriotism (these are not mutually exclusive ideas) the characteristic of a good company is the ability to enact sacrifice.  

Notions of patriotic duty empower the sacrificial impulse in men given the opportunity on such a large scale to experience the brief exhilaration of martyrdom. Vernon Lee, more distanced from “the engine of patriotism,” observed the war from “the alienated perspective of the outsider.” Lee, noting men’s “amazing blindness to the symmetrical irony of war’s realities,” contends that placing nationhood before individuality submerges the self under a blanket of group emotion which actually amounts to “a hysterical enlargement of private selfishness: ‘love of … tribe, country and mankind at large, are successive expansions of Egoism.’

Lee was aware that the “hostile aloofness,” of her stance was a “monstrosity … to those participating in the war with hand on heart.” Plain notes that Lee’s public declarations against the war placed her “beyond both pity and patriotism”; but perhaps a certain detachment from both pity and patriotism is necessary if such emotions are not to be used as tools of manipulation by militarists.

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697 Plain, “The Shape of Things,” 17.
700 Plain notes that Lee describes Satan the Waster as “a philosophic war trilogy”: Plain, “The Shape of Things,” 12.
702 Plain, “The Shape of Things,” 6. Plain quotes Lee, Satan the Waster, xiii. Bataille saw sacrifice as “the unleashing within the social framework of an ‘unknown and dangerous force’ that takes no account of rational goals”: Irwin, Saints, 12. Unlike Lee, who recognised a fleeting compensatory return for the sacrificer in the form of Ego satisfaction, Bataille noted that the idea of sacrifice without reserve and with no possibility of return “represented a nonutilitarian anomaly”: Irwin, Saints, 7.
It is important, of course, not to over-generalise about male war writing, and equally important not to accuse Barker of essentialising gender and ideological gender binaries; Marie-Luise Kohlke, citing Elaine Showalter, cautions against “hyperboliz[ing] biological and behavioural male characteristics, such as aggression and the sex-drive to the point of de-naturalising and ‘making monstrous’ even ordinary masculinity.”

Kohlke quotes Barker’s comment that “I hate to generalize at all about the sexes”\(^\text{704}\); nevertheless, the tragic flaw of the trilogy’s protagonists is the extent to which even their “ordinary masculinity” is colonised by deeply imprinted notions of the heroic warrior.\(^\text{706}\) Patrick McGee notes that “Virginia Woolf was not wrong to see a connection between Western patriarchy and fascism.”\(^\text{707}\) Voices of “masculine, imperialist authority”\(^\text{708}\) acquire an oracular status within men, who then cannot empathise with the other. An internalised, conventionally patriotic and pro-war mode of thinking, may be what originally moved Sassoon and Owen to enlist; later in the trilogy, though, the two men change and fight at last with sorely tried and attenuated motives,\(^\text{709}\) Owen disturbed by thoughts of sending men no different from himself to hell.


\(^{706}\) In her interview with Nixon, Barker notes that the men of the trilogy “must have been the last generation of men who could talk about manliness without going ‘ugh’ inside”: “An interview with Pat Barker Conducted by Rob Nixon,” 7. Kohlke notes, however, that “Barker … is concerned with more than the phenomenon of male perpetrators or what men do to society; as she herself remarked, ‘I find more interesting what society does to men’”: Kohlke, “Pathologized Masculinity,” 81; emphasis in original. Kohlke cites an interview with Donna Perry, “Pat Barker,” in Backtalk: Women Writers Speak Out, ed. Donna Perry (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 51.


\(^{708}\) McGee, Telling the Other, 178.

\(^{709}\) Within the trilogy, the only evidence of Owen’s ambivalent attitude to the war, acknowledged by Barker in an interview – “Owen is all ambivalence” (Barker, Interview with Rob Nixon, 13) – is his willingness to return and fight at the front despite the contempt for war expressed in his verse. The real Owen, in 1917 wrote a letter expressing his vehement determination to engage with the enemy: “While I wear my star and eat my rations, I continue to take care of my Other Cheek; and, thinking of the eyes I have seen made sightless, and the bleeding lads’ cheeks I have wiped, I say: Vengeance is mine, I, Owen, will repay”: quoted in Hibberd, Wilfred Owen, 262; Hibberd notes that “the handwriting of this letter, scribbled late at night on 10 August 1917, slants awkwardly across the page, and around the phrase ‘made sightless’ there are marks that could be blots or tears”: Hibberd, Wilfred Owen, 262.
The sense of the brotherhood of all men permeating the closing pages of *The Ghost Road*, is given another form via the ghost of the chieftain Njiru, aware that the proscription on headhunting that has brought about a sense of purposelessness in his people was imposed by a bellicose and slaughtering European culture. It is only by adopting a macro-view of humankind that all violence against the other is violence against the self, for everything is then other, even the self. Concepts of enmity that bring about war are seriously undermined by what Derrida refers to as *mondialisation*, or “worlding”:

> the concept of war, and thus of world war, of enemy, and even of terrorism, along with the distinctions between civilian and military or between army, police, and militia, all of these concepts and distinctions are losing their pertinence.

Barker leans towards such a world, as the destructiveness of binary oppositions is continually challenged.

The created world of the novel is a place in which anti-homogeneity should be possible for all writers irrespective of gender, but few male authors of war novels, even those intent on exposing the unmitigated horrors of war, unequivocally renounce heroic mythology. Though the pain and suffering is depicted as a version of hell, the fighting often futile, and the war propaganda exposed as mendacious, male war writers prove themselves rarely able to arrive at Vernon Lee’s conclusion, that *all* sacrifice is a pointless, unheroic act. Even the embittered Barbusse defends the

> grandeur of the dead. They have given all; by degrees they have given all their strength, and finally they have given themselves, en bloc.

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700 Derrida, *Voyous: Deux Essais sur la Raison*, translated as *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (Paris: Galilee, 2003), 154. It is necessary to note that Derrida is suspicious of the notion of *mondialisation*, or globalisation. Leonard Lawlor points out that Derrida does not trust the notion of globalisation that we use in the Anglophone world, for it implies that “the world is concentrated into a small ‘parcel,’ the Latin parcel, which is also English, or even American: ‘the United States and its allies’”: Leonard Lawlor, *This is Not Sufficient: An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 18.

711 Even those who shun the idea of heroism in war may unwittingly become heroic in their very resistance. Hibberd notes that “[b]y a nice irony, Sassoon’s anti-heroic stance was taken as evidence that he himself had been turned into a hero”: Hibberd, *A Casebook*, 15.
They have out-paced life, and their effort has something of superhuman perfection.  

Frederic Manning, too, lavishes almost embarrassing accolades upon the fighting soldier, who, even when “floundering in the viscous mud, [is] at once the most abject and the most exalted of God’s creatures.” In Stratis Myrivilis’s Life in the Tomb (1924), the “extraordinarily cruel and inhuman” horrors sustained in trench warfare at the Macedonian front are on a par with the ghastliness of those of Barbusse in Under Fire, and yet Myrivilis finds bombardment to be divinely majestic. Man becomes a Titan who makes Earth howl beneath his blows. He becomes Enceladus and Typhon, raises up mountains, juggles lightning bolts playfully in his hands, and causes indomitable natural forces to mewl like whipped cats.

Is it not man ‘who looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; who toucheth the mountains, and they smoke’? 

Despite its bitterly critical stand on the war, Aldington’s Death of a Hero actually re-invigorates the heroic ideal as it expresses unstinting admiration for an “intensity of manhood” in the soldier, described as the incarnation of “a new race of men, the

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712 Barbusse, Under Fire, 266. In Under Fire also, one soldier excuses the brutality of the war: “If the present war has advanced progress by one step, its miseries and slaughter will count for little”: Barbusse, Under Fire, 344.


masculine men.” 715 War novels that expose the most gruesome of horrors nevertheless “consecrate the fighting man and extol his singular devotion to the men fighting beside him.” 716 Barker, by comparison, admits little in support for heroic myths, despite Prior’s Sydney Carton-like 717 statement that his return to the front and his men was the best thing he has ever done:

Well, here I am, in what passes for a dug-out. And I look round me at all these faces and all I can think is: What an utter bloody fool I would have been not to come back. (579)

This remark also evokes Owen’s final letter to his mother, written in a smoky cellar while shells crashed above him:

It is a great life … Of this I am certain: you could not be visited by a band of friends half so fine as surround me here. 718

Prior’s acceptance of what is expected of him evokes, albeit faintly, Henry V’s glorious St Crispin’s day speech, 719 but is also a sad enactment of the archetypal sacrifice that the father demands of his son, as Prior’s last letter to Rivers makes abundantly clear:

715 Richard Aldington, Death of a Hero, 255. Aldington lavishes hyperbole upon his idealised perception of the soldier, described as “[i]ntensely masculine,” “pure,” “immensely friendly and stimulating,” “timeless and remote,” like “Roman legionaries or the men of Austerlitz or even the invaders of the Roman Empire,” and “lean and hard and tireless.” “By God! he said to himself, ‘you’re men, not boudoir rabbits and lounge lizards. I don’t care a damn what your cause is – it’s almost certainly a foully rotten one. But I do know you’re the first real men I’ve looked upon. I swear you’re better than the women and the half-men, and by God! I swear I’ll die with you rather than live in a world without you’” (253–4). Further, “[t]hey showed “amazing simplicity and unpretentiousness [in their] manhood and humanity” (258), “…that manhood and humanity existed in spite of the War and not because of it. They had saved something from a gigantic wreck, and what they had saved was immensely important – manhood and comradeship, their essential integrity as men, their essential brotherhood as men” (258).

716 Hanley, Writing War, 29. James Jones is a rare example of a male war novelist whose soldiers “mostly behave like beasts and where human dignity, while welcome and often redemptive, is not the general rule … [James] continued to insist that war was a congenital and chronic illness from which we would never be fully delivered”: William Styron, preface to Jones’s From Here to Eternity: Uncensored, x. Jones does not endorse the notion that heroes emerge out of war’s chaos: “War rarely ennobled men and usually degraded them; cowardice and heroism were both celluloid figments, generally interchangeable, and such grandeur as could be salvaged from the mess lay at best in pathos: in the helplessness of men’s mental and physical suffering”: Styron, preface, x-xi.

717 “It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done, it is a far, far better rest I go to than I have ever known”: the final words uttered by Sydney Carton in Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities as he goes to the guillotine in place of Charles Darnay.

718 Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters, 591.

719 Shakespeare, Henry V, Act iv, Scene iii, 18–67. The famous speech is directly mentioned in The Ghost Road when Prior notes that his servant Longstaffe is fond of quoting “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers” (517). Prior considers that “a more appropriate quotation for this stage of the war might be Macbeth’s line: “‘I am stepped in blood so far that should I wade no more’” (517).
CHAPTER FOUR

My Dear Rivers … My nerves are in perfect working order. By which I mean that in my present situation the only sane thing to do is to run away, and I will not do it. Test passed? (577).

Prior’s last request for his father-figure’s approval, indicated by his “Test passed?” question, conveys the failure of his heroic, anti-hero transgressiveness. Prior describes his question to Rivers as a “[c]hilly little note to send to someone who’s done so much for me” (577), apparently aware that his surrender to Rivers’s paternal expectations is the enactment of filial capitulation in a classic Oedipal conflict. Just how Rivers reacts to the “chilly note” is not revealed in the narrative, but his most likely response, given the moral uncertainties that besiege Rivers in the final pages of the text, is one of misgiving.

The sense that women rise above male assumptions is perhaps most pronounced as Rivers recalls his experience in Melanesia when women laughed at his attempt to explain the concept of “the life of a bachelor Don in a Cambridge college” (500). Their laughter prompts Rivers to realise that “their view of his society [is] neither more nor less valid than his of theirs” (500). The notion that entrenched societal structures can appear absurd when viewed from the perspective of another culture (or simply from the perspective of the opposite gender) ought not perhaps be so surprising to as astute an anthropologist and psychologist as Rivers, but it provides another instance in the narrative in which the views of women are unsettling to men. Remembering his experiences with the Melanesian tribes profoundly influences the change in Rivers’s position on sending shell-shocked men back to fight the war, and his readiness to validate the laughter of women consolidates the text’s own validation of female perspectives.

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720 The question relates back to previous conversations with Rivers in which Prior had suggested the “real test cases” for the efficacy of therapy are the men who get sent back to the front: 487; emphasis in original.
721 Hammond also notes the “Oedipal implications of Prior’s behavior” when he sucks the breasts of Mrs Riley, who had wet-nursed him as a child and whom he views as a mother figure: Hammond, “Eyes in the Text,” 64.
722 An irony-laden letter from Sassoon to Robert Graves dated 24 July 1918, which is in verse form, provides evidence of how influential Rivers was in Sassoon’s decision to return to fighting, mostly in a spirit of martyrdom – “But yesterday afternoon my reasoning Rivers ran solemnly in/ With peace in the pools of his spectacled eyes and a wisely omnipotent grin; And I fished in that steady grey stream and decided that I/ After all am no longer the Worm that refuses to die/ But a gallant and glorious soljer”: Sassoon, ‘Letter to Robert Graves’ in Hart-Davis, The War Poems, 119–22. Sassoon’s humorous mis-spelling of “soldier” lends an ironic or ambiguous tone to the poem. Further in, the lines beseech “O Rivers please take me. And make me/ Go back to the war till it break me.” Hart-Davis notes that Rivers “had in many ways taken the place of the father S.S. had scarcely known”: Hart-Davis, The War Poems, 120, n. 3.
The female gaze of the trilogy resists and refutes the notion that women are responsible for war. Nancy Huston contends that in war narratives at least since Homer and the Iliad, “[w]oman reappears in the final analysis as the ultimate cause of war.”

Women who love and support and grieve the warrior supply “at least one good reason to make the supreme sacrifice, at least one transcendental value that justifies rushing headlong into as insane an undertaking as war” (emphasis in original).

The “Women of Britain Say Go!” message is a chilling example of society displacing responsibility for the war from men onto women. However, the tacit assumption that women en masse take wars and the military minds behind them seriously is not entirely soundly based. Huston notes one alleged historical incident in which “women reacted to the military masquerade with laughter instead of tears”: Sun Tzu attempted to induct women into his military training, but rather than march to his drumbeats, they dissolved into peals of laughter. Although they were executed for their misbehaviour,

[t]hese women said no, they laughed in the face of the ineluctable, they refused to collaborate in the making of tragedy, they denounced it for what it is: a theatre of the absurd.

The female gaze is anti-collaborative with regard to men, acting as a foil to the hegemonic, masculinist gaze at war as it sympathises with the more prescient, transgressive characters of the narrative.

The alienated gaze of women is a powerful medium, not commonly adopted in war novels, through which insight is made possible in the trilogy, as it disempowers the hegemony of the masculine gaze that leans towards an exclusionist attitude to women on the subject of war. The trilogy’s female gaze allows a less ocularcentric narrative that is unsupportive of mythologies inspired by excessive patriotism and patriarchal notions. The trilogy does not embrace the idea that soldiers are a heroic species of men whose self-sacrifice is to be admired despite all else that is lamentable in war, and in this regard it diverges from most war writing by men. Vernon Lee’s courageous condemnation of the sacrificial impulse demonstrates

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723 Huston, “Tales of War,” 279; emphases in original.
724 Huston, “Tales of War,” 279.
humanity’s potential to free itself from the human waste that sacrifice engenders. An alienated gaze is necessary for the possibility of such freedom; in the trilogy, the narrative’s female gaze leans toward Lee’s position, as it suggests there is little, if any, objective value in the sacrifices made by Hallet, Prior, Owen and, by extension, the countless thousands of others whose lives were blighted by the war.
CHAPTER FIVE
The Ghostly Gaze

There is then some spirit. Spirits. And one must reckon with them.
Jacques Derrida

_The Ghost Road_ is bookended by revenants: it begins with four lines of ‘Roads’ by Edward Thomas:

Now all roads lead to France
And heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead
Returning lightly dance

and, as noted by Bernard Bergonzi, the narrative ends with

a sudden visitation from Njiru, the crippled medicine man and exorcist whom [Rivers] had known in Melanesia; in the London of 1918 he is a ghost or hallucination, but the superimposition of a primitive past on a mundane present makes a deft conclusion. It is the kind of effect we are used to from _The Waste Land_ and other modernist monuments.

Ghosts, or spectres, within the narrative of _The Ghost Road_ hold the key to understanding the psychological journey undertaken by Dr Rivers in the trilogy, a personal journey of enlightenment about war and about himself. The trilogy leans always away from men as being capable of solving the problem of violence and toward a supernatural perspective on war. Derrida’s influential notions of hauntology provide this chapter with a basis for understanding the function of the spectre in the trilogy’s narrative. The haunting presence of Njiru does indeed provide a “deft conclusion” to _The Ghost Road_ and to the trilogy as a whole. Bergonzi’s suggestion that Njiru represents a primitive or uncivilised past, however, in contradistinction to a “mundane” or civilised present, is hard to justify given the systemic slaughtering being carried out by modern men at war. Njiru stares at his

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728 Bergonzi, _War Poets_, 14.
modern counterpart in Rivers, as if in need of some explanation for the terrible state of humanity, but Rivers does not even attempt to satisfy him. The spectre possesses such an alienated status that notions of heroism, sacrifice, or the good of the nation, rationales that are used to vindicate the cruelty of men or to warrant self-sacrifice, are drained of sense.

Freud saw war as exemplifying his belief that regression to an earlier stage of human development can happen in any culture, regardless of how culturally advanced it seems, for “the primitive mind is, in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable.”729 The suppressed instinct of aggression may not have manifested itself for many years, but none the less is so far present that it may at any time again become the mode of expression of the forces of the mind, and indeed the only one, as though all later developments had been annulled or undone.730

Thus does the past persist as a haunting of the present; Knutsen notes, however, that hauntings in the trilogy are not confined to the idea of a revenant, or a figment of the past returning to lightly dance in the present:

Barker’s writing has shown a concern with how traumatic events become temporally dislocated. These events cannot be securely located in the past or consigned to history. Instead, there is a continual return of the repressed that produces effects in the present. In many ways the trilogy illustrates how the past returns to haunt the present, but also how the present reciprocally haunts our perceptions of the past.731

Inevitably, reciprocal haunting implies a sense also that any particular present is going to be haunted by its future, for it is through acts of retrospection in the present of things that occurred in the past that that past is shaped and reshaped. Knutsen contends that there are reciprocal hauntings that pertain to the Regeneration trilogy; contemporary issues at the time of its writing, such as the Gulf War Syndrome,732

730 Freud, “War and Death,” 73.
731 Knutsen, Reciprocal Haunting, 11.
732 Iversen et al. note that after the Gulf War, “[e]ven if medical research has failed to provide a satisfactory explanation, it remains the case that many of those affected continue to be unwell and disabled some 15 years after returning from combat … An increase in distress and unexplained symptoms is beyond dispute. Gulf veterans report … non-specific constitutional symptoms such as tiredness and headache, [and] specific neurological complaints such as numbness and limb
and the events of the Falklands war, precipitated a surge of imperialist sentiment in Britain and brought about renewed interest in attempts to understand World War I. Knutsen links these contemporary issues with the trilogy’s treatment of shell-shock. She also examines the rich hauntings of a dialogic nature within the Regeneration trilogy, noting several intertexts, but does not explore Derridean notions of hauntology. The trilogy gradually becomes more and more hauntological a text as it progresses through its three phases: after the conceptually concrete (albeit ironic) “regenerative” theme of Regeneration, the trilogy’s book titles reflect a narrative increasingly privileging states of human disengagement: as noted in Chapter Three, disengaged, heterotopic spaces enhance clearer visions of the war’s futility; a bodiless “eye” in The Eye in the Door links to the enucleated eye as a trope of omniscience. The final volume, The Ghost Road, represents a step further towards establishing war’s absurdity by concentrating much of its attention upon ghostly figments, which by their very nature occupy the most extreme alienated status of all. A ghost, in the end, is arrogated the most transcendent vision in the entire narrative; it articulates an ethereal, god-like perspective to which the mortal Rivers can offer absolutely no reply.

The desirable condition of invisibility

The attribute of a spectre that empowers it to haunt is its ability to retreat into invisibility; the utilitarian value of self-obfuscation, or of finding strategies to avoid being seen, is highly prized throughout the narrative. The men in No Man’s Land,
for example, work particularly hard at seeming not to be present on the landscape, even when they are actually present in their thousands. Prior had, as a child, discovered his own private strategy for effectively “disappearing” when he experienced his father’s violent rages at home: by staring solidly at the shine of a street light on a hall barometer, he was able to “go into the shine on the glass” (410). The strategy was so effective it caused a psychic split into two distinct personalities.

The eye painted around the peep hole on the door of Beattie Roper’s cell in Aylesbury Prison can itself see nothing, but nevertheless serves as a constant reminder to Roper that she can at no time presume that no one is looking at her. The person on the other side of the cell door is inordinately empowered as an invisible observer. Derrida describes the power to see without being seen as “perhaps the supreme insignia of power.” The state, however, could exercise its punitive power over societal transgressives only when they were capable of being seen; homosexuals like Wilfred Owen satisfied their sexual drives secretly, in shadows and places hidden from public view. Even in his verse, Owen’s allusions to homosexual desire are rendered invisible to many by deliberate equivocation.

The only realm in which true invisibility “exists” is the imagined spiritual or metaphysical realm; the mysteriously invisible beings that are supposed to exist in this realm engender both respect and fear. Sigmund Freud explained that worshipping a non-visible god is in part the basis of religious antipathy between Jews and Christians. The Judaic capacity for abstraction is evident in the Jewish belief in a dematerialised god. Mark Edmundson summarises Freud’s position thus:

Someone who can contemplate an invisible God … is in a much better position to take seriously the invisible, but perhaps determining, dynamics of the inner world. To live well, to begin to know himself, the modern individual, with his divided psyche, must live with abstraction."

735 Derrida, Specters of Marx, 8.
The trilogy’s Christian protagonists are disturbed by ghosts; their Christian God, though invisible, is somehow known to have the form of a man, as he is frequently thus represented, and holds out the promise of one day being seen by his believers. The tribespeople of Melanesia fearlessly converse with their invisible gods of unassigned form; Rivers and Hocart, however, are quite unsettled when the tribal ghosts seem to whistle, for the sound, so “curiously difficult to locate” (553), seems indeed to be of the formless supernatural. The tribal séance unnerves the two anthropologists, as Rivers feels “the hairs on his arms rise” (553). The occasion moves Rivers “in a way he’d never expected when he sat down at the fire” (554). Rivers’s emotional reaction may be caused by a sudden awareness that there is a strange congruity between the unseeable world of the unconscious and the equally unseeable spiritual world of the natives. The tribe’s attribution of power to invisible ghosts denotes their transcendence of a limited, ocularcentric orientation. In the words of Derrida, the visible “has an invisible framework (membrure), and the invisible is the secret counterpart to the visible, it appears only within it … it is inscribed within it.”

Rivers, whose capacity for internal visualisation was lost as a child, has been excluded from the world of the invisible. Suddenly, at the end of the narrative, the doctor does, very acutely, visualise something that actually cannot be there. However, this ability to see a vision represents more than a miracle cure for his life-long mental block: for Rivers looks upward into the chieftain’s piercing eyes, appearing to defer to the chieftain’s heightened gaze. Earlier, Rivers had allowed his patient Prior to step into his analyst’s chair and reverse the roles of analyst-analysand; now Rivers concedes the greater power to Njiru in their strange anthropologist versus ghostly-tribal-chieftain dynamic. The diminutive, deformed tribal islander with his lime-streaked face casts upon Rivers such an extraordinarily penetrating gaze that his whole sense of himself as an expert in his various fields of human behaviour is disrupted.

proud so that they feel superior to those who have remained in the bondage of the senses … this whole development, so characteristic of the Jews, had been initiated by Moses’ prohibition against worshipping God in a visible form”: Freud, Moses and Monotheism, trans. Katherine Jones. (Great Britain: Hogarth Press, 1939), 181; 182. Žižek notes that the Jewish proscription upon images of the holy father militates against a gnostic experience of God and quotes John 4:12: “No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” Žižek states that “Judaism is anti-Gnosticism par excellence”: Slavoj Žižek, “Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence,” in The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology, eds. Slavoj Žižek et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 141.

The reports of Rivers and Hocart on Melanesian tribal kinship and customs expose blind spots in the Victorian anthropological gaze. When Njiru’s ghost stares at Rivers, it merely returns the gaze of modernity that arrogates to itself the higher moral ground in its act of proscribing the warfare of tribesmen. European warfare demonstrates the shocking truth that violence does not diminish with civilisation, but that violence, “in the end, must be recognized as part of the meaning of being … civilized.”\(^{738}\) The abbreviated exorcism rite that Njiru’s ghost reprises in the ward of Craiglockhart suggests that, despite its advances, European culture has never developed a meaningful ownership or understanding of killing or of death. And while the exorcism rites of the tribespeople successfully appease the ghosts that otherwise haunt them, the appearance of Njiru attests to the fact that modern European civilisation remains incurably haunted.

The dying man’s cry, [i.e., shotvarfet] on which the whole trilogy almost concludes and which Rivers interprets as meaning “it’s not worth it,” is but the extreme, apocalyptic form of a running paradigm which, from Rivers’s relapsing stammer, to Prior’s aphasia and even Rivers’s illegible handwriting which only Prior can decipher, all point to that core of darkness that resists all sublation.\(^{739}\)

Time and again modern man\(^{740}\) visits his core of darkness, whether it be in an analyst’s rooms, in dreams, séances, in poetic realms, or in ordinary conversation,


\(^{740}\) I am conscious that my use of the generic “man” here to indicate humankind may be objectionable if it is understood as denoting a generalised conflation of humanity with men to the exclusion of women. Often in the writing of this thesis, in which gender issues are very pertinent, especially in Chapter Four, I have opted to use less gender-connotative words than “man,” in such descriptive phrases as “European Man,” where alternatives such as “European culture” or “civilisation” are appropriate. In the present instance I have chosen the term “modern man” on the grounds that the gender content of the expression is congruent with the intent of my argument, which involves masculine aggression and men killing other men and, later in this chapter, Conrad’s “heart of darkness,” or the heart of Mister Kurtz writ large upon society. Almost invariably in the past it was men who waged wars; women who supported or played innumerable roles that assisted the execution of the wars were seldom the instigating or dominant voices in the declaration of those wars, even though, in mythology at least (as noted in Chapter Four) men may have identified women as their reason for going to war. David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham, alluding to the Fall of Man in Renaissance verse, make it quite clear that in some cases, as in the study of anti-feminine literature of an earlier era, it can become problematic if due respect is not shown to linguistic forms and sexist or patriarchal conventions contemporaneous with that era – “there could hardly be a worse occasion for employing gender-free language than in the story of the Fall of Man. The traditional language is the theology”: David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham, introduction to *Andrew Marvell: Pastoral and Lyric Poems 1681*, edited by David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham (Nedlands: University Of Western Australia Press, 2000), xlix; n.36, emphasis in original. The perpetration of extreme violence in innumerable wars, which may also be viewed as the “fall” from
but as the persistence of war demonstrates, he is highly driven by aggression. Since the instinct of aggression has survival value, effective sublation of human aggression is unlikely, but a diminution in the incidence of war may be possible if the spectre of Owen’s dead enemy soldier is heeded, and men at last recognise that in killing their other they kill themselves.

In the hospital ward, Njiru turns modern man’s gaze back onto himself and his failure to exorcise the “imperishable” demon of innate human aggression. As the leader of a race of men whose headhunting tradition has been proscribed by the higher culture of Europe, he now views the western anthropologist from a curious, critically enlightened position. The exorcism rite that Rivers hears reprised when he sees Njiru is a powerful reminder that Rivers has not exorcised and cannot exorcise Njiru’s “ghost,” which exists despite all our rational leanings to the contrary. The text assures us five times of the physicality of this spectre: it is “there,” it is “not separate from the ward,” it is “not in any way ghostly,” it is “not in fashion blong tomate,” and it is Njiru “himself in every particular” (589; emphasis in original). Understanding the significance of these iterations of the unghostliness of the spirit that visits Rivers requires an examination of the relationship that Rivers and Njiru shared in the past, as well as Derrida’s ideas about hauntology and the role played by ghosts in literature.

Brannigan claims that the scene of Njiru’s dance performed for the living dead and it is therefore implied by the narrative that after the ghost leaves him “Rivers … belongs … to the land of the living dead, like all his patients.” There is in fact no an indication, after the fading of the spectre, that Rivers feels he is one of the “living dead.” Furthermore, when Brannigan claims in the same paragraph that the trilogy suggests that “[h]istory, after the Great War … is continually haunted by the memory of loss, and is constantly striving and failing to regenerate the past,” he is only correct in the sense that that history fails to regenerate the past. As discussed in Chapter One, “the past” is a subjective agglomeration of conclusions and speculations about what did happen or what may

an idealised or imagined state of arcadian tranquility, is human activity in which I suggest the implied exclusion of women may be not only unobjectionable, but perhaps also welcomed.

741 Brannigan, Pat Barker, 112.
742 Brannigan, Pat Barker, 112.
have happened in times prior to the present, based on accumulated documents and other evidence, most of which is open to more than one interpretation. The past, itself now a ghost, must haunt us, or nothing can be learned from it; ghosts within the narrative of the trilogy are symbols of psychic disturbance, inner demons that alone have the capacity to make us re-examine the past. Njiru represents one such demon, benign perhaps, but troubling, to Rivers’s psyche; the spectre, apparently deferential to Rivers, nevertheless exudes an air of immanent supremacy with its cryptic enunciations and its long stare into Rivers’s eyes. The two men, each a figure of knowledge and authority in his own culture, share a special relationship that is key to understanding the re-appearance of Njiru in the ward of Craiglockhart.

**Rivers vis-a-vis Njiru**

Njiru and his culture form the subject of an anthropological study carried out by Rivers and Hocart. The two anthropologists seem tacitly to represent the more advanced culture and the more authoritative roles, but as they observe, question, and learn the ways of the tribespeople, the anthropologists assume the roles of de facto students. Njiru, as teacher and host, explains the practices and processes of tribal life and the meanings of tribal rituals; the chieftain undoubtedly occupies the higher relative power position in this dynamic. The anthropologists are welcomed as guests and even friends, but realise that if they unwittingly offend their subject culture, their lives may be at risk. Njiru is described as highly intelligent, but mercurial in his moods and attitudes towards the anthropologists, and Rivers is uncertain about whether he can rely on the chieftain not to harm him:

> A stormy relationship, then, on Njiru’s side, and yet the mutual respect went deep. He wouldn’t kill me, Rivers thought. Then he thought, Actually, in certain circumstances, that’s exactly what he would do. (567)

The dynamic between the two men, therefore, has overtones of an archetypal Oedipal relationship, fraught with suspicion and fear of the power of the father. Rivers had had a traumatising experience as a child when his father forced him, in public, to examine a gruesome picture of a surgical amputation, causing Rivers to scream as he imagined “bits of him were being cut off, bits of him were dropping onto the floor” (483). When the boy Rivers howled, his father slapped him and ordered him to stop crying; “And I’ve been stammering ever since, Rivers thought”
(483). On Eddystone Island, Hocart and Rivers have the power to report any tribal breaches in the headhunting ban on Eddystone that would bring about appropriate sanctions; thus does the power of the symbolic “son” over the now powerless father figure Njiru take on an Oedipal quality. Pressing Njiru to share his most treasured and secret exorcism ritual on Eddystone further reinforces Rivers’s power; and finally, with the appearance of Njiru in the ward, Rivers is granted leave to “depart” and forget Njiru, possibly vanquishing the Oedipal spectre forever.

But it is not so simple: Njiru is a spirit whose own once-secret rite of exorcism in the trance will not succeed in exorcising and relegating Njiru himself to oblivion. On the contrary, the corporeal phantom Njiru, almost malevolently, underwrites for itself a permanent place in Rivers’s memory as it entreats Rivers not to mourn for the death of his crippled and broken people. Njiru’s exaggerated pathos cements a certain permanency of place for his spirit in Rivers’s world. Njiru, as an identity in the text at this point, is comparable to the figure of Crick in Graham Swift’s *Waterland: Crick*

is presented in highly existential terms, as an intransigent ontological given, resistant and indifferent to attempts to make it signify … Crick’s reality refuses to satisfy our longing for purpose and looms instead as an inescapable ontological ‘something,’ which is also a metaphysical or semiological ‘nothing.’ 743

Wolfreys, addressing Žižek’s complex notions about the relationship between the real and the spectral, and the “ghostly transference between theoretical discourses,” notes

the struggle in Žižek’s language to come to terms with the question of the spectral, as he shifts between the figure of hermeneutic closure and the aporetic opening, between a kind of Derridean disinterrance and a Lacanian mapping of co-ordinates, which themselves become, in relation to the spectre, an ‘incomplete-failed symbolization,’ a haunted topography of what we call ‘reality.’ 744

Taking account of the purpose of a haunting episode within a narrative, the ghostly event must be a mystery, unmappable in both the psychological and geographical sense, and represent a no-space somewhere between “hermeneutic closure and … aporetic opening.” It is its very elusiveness that empowers the spectre to capsize our

reality by destabilising all we had believed was contained within a normative, graspable framework. Literature’s self-referentiality, via intertextual echoes, assists in understanding what a particular ghost may mean, as is the case with Njiru. Prominent intertexts in interpreting the ghosts of the final portion of the trilogy are *A Passage to India*, *Heart of Darkness*, and the works of Lewis Carroll. A strange experience in a cave on Eddystone Island brings Rivers face to face with what may be a truth or may be a lie.

Žižek, acknowledging that the trope of descent into a deep cave served Freud as “a metaphor for entering the netherworld of the unconscious,” notes an incident that took place during one of Freud’s summer vacations. Whilst sightseeing in the “twilight depths” of Southern Slovenia’s Škocjan caves, Freud, according to Žižek, “suddenly turned pale” upon noticing Dr Karl Lueger, “a right wing Christian demagogic populist and notorious anti-Semite.” By focusing on the name *Lueger*, and its immediate German association with *Lüge*, a lie, Žižek construes Freud’s experience to mean that plumbing the depths of our psyches uncovers not the truth, but its opposite:

> What we discover in the deepest kernel of our personality is a fundamental, constitutive, primordial lie, the proton pseudos, the phantasmic construction by means of which we endeavor to conceal the inconsistency of the symbolic order in which we dwell.745

Turning the popular conception of psychoanalysis on its head resonates with the fundamental aim of the trilogy to unsettle and subvert the normative gaze. Although Rivers pursues truth in his therapy, finally he must wonder about whether his work rests on firm foundations. He recalls his own caves experience while on Eddystone

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745 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996), 1; emphasis added. It is worth noting that Freud’s brief allusion to meeting Leuger in the cave, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, does not suggest that he “suddenly turned pale” at the sight of Leuger, nor that he was particularly unsettled. Freud merely records, in a tone of derision, that “the master of Vienna, Herr Dr. Karl Lueger, was with us in the cave”: Freud, letter to Wilhelm Fliess April 14 1898, in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887–1904*, translated by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 309. Nevertheless, Žižek is not alone in regarding the historical incident as extraordinarily symbolic – “Freud, the paradigmatic Jew, meeting the paradigmatic anti-Semite in the Slovene Inferno, of all places – the image deserves to be seen, in retrospect, as an emblematic icon inaugurating the century, laden with forebodings of so much of what was to happen”: Mladen Dolar, “Freud and the Political,” *Theory & Event* 12, no. 3 (2009): np.
Island that unleashes the suspicions of troubling foundations beneath his rational analytical world, as well as an uncertainty about ghosts of the tribes of Melanesia.

The concluding chapters of *The Ghost Road* include a great many of Rivers’s memories of Eddystone and his life with the tribes he studied; those days, and the subjects of his study (which now comprise figments of his memory), haunt his consciousness; the memories themselves are quite heavy in spectral content, as they concern tribal rituals of death, the language of ghosts, actual conversations with ghosts, and genuine uncertainty on the part of Rivers and his associate Hocart about whether some uncanny whistling noises they heard at a ceremony were really ghosts of the tribe speaking or simply the natives themselves. In a cave that the tribesmen believe is inhabited by old ghosts, Rivers experiences a very unusual feeling:

He felt … not dazed, dazed was the wrong word. The opposite of dazed. Almost as if a rind had been pared off, naked, unshelled, lying in contact with the earth (526).

Despite an initial attitude on the part of both Rivers and Njiru that there are no actual ghosts present – Njiru “did not himself believe, he said, that there were ghosts in the cave” (524) — the sensation Rivers recalls is couched in the language of the supernatural, as though now, similarly to Mrs Moore in the caves of Forster’s *A Passage to India*, he is suddenly enlightened (“the opposite of dazed”) into mystical knowledge. For Mrs Moore, the human stench in the Marabar Caves becomes so stifling, and the mysterious, echoing “boum” so deafening, that she is near to fainting; Rivers is similarly oppressed by the noise and the closeness of the Eddystone cave as he stands “with his eyes closed, teeth clenched, senses so inundated they’d virtually ceased to exist, his mind shrunk to a single point of light” (526). Though the bat screechings inside the cave do not verbalise themselves into anything like Mrs Moore’s clairaudient phrase, “nothing has value,” Rivers is momentarily aware of a deeply visceral connection with the world: he is “naked, unshelled, lying in contact with the earth” and at the same time seems to transcend

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746 Paradoxically, even if the ghosts are not physically real, they are present as actual imaginings or as objects of thought, and as such exert power. Njiru’s claim that he “did not himself believe … that there were ghosts in the cave” (524) may have been a disingenuous remark, offered in deference to a skeptical Rivers, but Njiru’s belief or disbelief in the ghosts is irrelevant to the question of whether the ghosts are real or not.

his physicality, “as if a rind had been pared off” (526). The narrative transitions quite suddenly from Rivers’s recollection of himself and Njiru gazing in “intense silence” at the granite wall of the cave to River’s bedroom as he is offered tea by his housekeeper:

All night he’d had bats clinging to the inside walls of his skull. But now at least there was a breeze, the curtains breathed gently (527).

Rivers’s profound bafflement, indicated in this paraphrase of an idiom of madness – “bats in the belfry” – ends in reflection as the normal world returns. Emberley believes that “Rivers is reborn in this shared experience of nature’s terror with Njiru, an event that becomes the possibility of transformation.” I maintain that the cave experience is less clearly conclusive than Emberley suggests, but that it is indeed a critical event. Shaddock notes that there has been a surprising dearth of critical commentary upon the “bi-racial relationship” between Rivers and Njiru, “though the two arguably share the most intimate experience in the trilogy.” As has been noted earlier in this thesis, Rivers is conflicted by the hypocrisy of a European culture proscribing a Melanesian headhunting tradition now that Europe engages in its own killing on a far larger canvas than that of the tribes. His recounted anthropological expedition to Eddystone, in some ways comparable to Marlow’s “journey through the underworld” in *Heart of Darkness*, lacks the moral extrapolation that Conrad’s reflective narrator supplies, but the journeys of both Marlow and Rivers end in moral aporia, touching upon “the heart of an

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748 Emberley, *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal*, 146. Emberley is not alone in concluding that Rivers’s Melanesian experiences lead to a positive narrative resolution in the trilogy; Shaddock contends that “River’s dreams of Melanesia enact and ultimately help him resolve his increasing ambivalence about his institutional role as military psychologist and state advocate of the war effort”: Shaddock, “Dreams of Melanesia,” 657. Mona Radwan also maintains the Melanesian memories provide a positive ending to the trilogy: “Njiru’s words are soothing and help Rivers and the readers to accept the death of the characters … Feeling the evil spirit will depart fills Rivers and the readers with relief”: Mona Radwan, *Aspects of War Neuroses in Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy: The Great War and Neuroses* (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012), 252. I suggest, however, that moral ambivalence and deep misgivings about his own role afflict Rivers right to the end. The heavily melancholic tone in Njiru’s exorcism, together with its macabre allusions to “the fingerless, the crippled and the broken” (590) belie the possibility of a comforting resolution. Radwan also understands the text’s description of the sun striking body parts of fallen soldiers and “finding nothing … that can respond to it” at the end of the trilogy (589) to mean that the dead are thus blessed by the sun’s rays – “sunrise and shafts of light travel through the battlefield blessing the dead [before they] fly to distant fields”: Radwan, *Aspects of War Neuroses*, 251. Radwan’s claim is not sustainable, however: the impotent sun in the narrative is a clear evocation of Owen’s ‘Futility.’ See note 357 in Chapter Two of this thesis.


immense darkness.” 751 Rivers had earlier intimated to Sassoon that his anthropological experiences lead him to the existential understanding that not only were Europeans not the measure of all things, “but that there was no measure” (212; emphasis in original). *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India* both present a gaze into the abyss of human baseness, but ultimately reach the point at which all moral measuring fails. After the caves experience is remembered, the narrative suggests that Rivers is ever more concerned about the ethical dimensions of patching up damaged men so that they are fit to return to the killing fields of France. The patients loudly wail their chorus of *shotvarfet* and Rivers realises soon after that he “could not … be sure that he had succeeded in being silent” (589). Rising tides of disillusionment with the war would have been especially apparent to those working with shell-shocked men. Doubts about the work of such military doctors as Rivers were felt at the time, as Slobodin notes:

> Although most people who have written about Rivers see him as a man of high morality, one contemporary anthropologist accuses him of colluding to send men back to slaughter on the Western Front. This cannot be denied. He was as guilty as, presumably, every other military physician. 752

We are not informed of Rivers’s response when Prior asks him in a letter “Test passed?”, alluding to his decision to stay at his post at the front rather than doing “the only sane thing” which would be “to run away” (577). It is unlikely that the psychologist Rivers would fail to realise that he has, effectively, infantilised Prior by slipping into the role of an omnipotent father figure dispatching his dutiful son to sacrifice himself in the war. 753 Just as the work Rivers did with Hocart on Eddystone is subjected to Rivers’s personal review in these final sections of the narrative, the entire point of his restorative work with his traumatised patients is

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751 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 86.
752 Slobodin, “True Valour,” 307. Slobodin notes further that “it might be argued that the sum total of medical treatment contributed to the war effort, and hence was tragic or sinful”: Slobodin, “True Valour,” 308.
753 In her study of the ageing subject in three of Barker’s novels (not including the trilogy) Sarah Falcus notes that the bodies of protagonists are often “literally imposed upon by others” and as a result become “silenced and infantilised”: Sarah Falcus, “Unsettling Ageing in Three Novels by Pat Barker,” *Ageing and Society* 32, no. 8 (2012): 1397. Powerful forces of silencing and infantilising are evident throughout the trilogy and may be observed in relation to Dr Yealland’s cruelly silenced patients, Beattie Roper, the actress Maud Allen, all outspoken critics of the war sent back to the front, including Sassoon, Owen and Prior, the latter two silenced forever, and Rivers (whose father had beaten him into silence for crying as a child). Prior’s major shell-shock symptom is mutism, or a silencing caused by battle, but on regaining his powers of speech, the policy of sending “cured” men back to the front ensures he is eventually silenced for good.
disavowed on moral lines as the trilogy moves toward its close. Rivers even reveals an element of hypocrisy in his patient care when he is dismayed to spy a look of relief on Hallet’s fiancée’s face when Hallet breathes his last breath; in fact, Rivers himself had felt exasperated by how long Hallet was taking to die: “Oh, God … it’s going to be one of those” (586). Something is obviously amiss, for despite a prevailing sense of the war being almost over,


The hospital fog blurs the boundaries between life and death: a moribund Lieutenant Hallet “becomes the linchpin between the living and the dead, the faceless and voiceless phantom who is not yet mate ndapu, that is, ‘die finish.’” Shaddock notes that with

[t]he final vision [of Njiru] the bubble of [Rivers’s] emotional ambivalence has surfaced, enabling him to begin overtly to question the ethos of the Western scientist – the detached, authoritative empiric – and enact an alternative ethic, that of the engaged, complicit healer and emotional as well as intellectual father.

Importantly, it is the cold and unghostly, albeit fleeting, real-ness of the revenant Njiru that undermines the “detached, authoritative empiric” underpinning of Rivers’s three disciplines of psychology, neurology and anthropology.

**Carroll’s psychic states**

An odd source for understanding the mechanics of just how spectral beings see and are seen is a humorous work by Lewis Carroll that explains psychic states in which fairy hauntings may occur.

In his Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, Carroll draws upon the principles of “Esoteric Buddhism” to describe the various ways in which Fairies may see and be seen by people in the real world:

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754 “At any moment now, one felt, the guns would stop and they would all be released into their private lives. They all felt it – and yet it seemed not to matter” (580).
I have supposed a Human being to be capable of various psychical states, with
varying degrees of consciousness, as follows:

(a) the ordinary state, with no consciousness of the presence of Fairies;

(b) the ‘eerie’ state, in which, while conscious of actual surroundings, he is also
conscious of the presence of Fairies;

(c) a form of trance, in which, while unconscious of actual surroundings, and
apparently asleep, he (i.e. his material essence) migrates to other scenes, in the
actual world, or in Fairyland, and is conscious of the presence of Fairies. 757

Carroll also supposes the obverse psychical states of Fairies:

I have also supposed a Fairy to be capable of migrating from Fairyland into the
actual world, and of assuming, at pleasure, a Human form; and also to be capable
of various psychical states, viz.

(a) the ordinary state, with no consciousness of the presence of Human beings;

(b) a sort of ‘eerie’ state, with no consciousness of the presence of Human beings;
if in Fairyland, of the presence of the immaterial essences of Human beings. 758

There follows a table that records all possible Fairy and Human psychic states that
may occur in each Fairy visitation in the two volumes of Sylvie and Bruno. Though
it seems somewhat incongruous at first to connect Carroll’s fancies about the
technicalities of fairy spectrality to a serious work of historical fiction about World
War I, Carroll was, as the trilogy reveals, a personal friend of the Rivers family and
a frequent guest at the Rivers household when Dr Rivers was a boy; it is very
possible, then, that Rivers, who had been jealous then of the affection Carroll
expressed toward his sister Kathleen (480), read Sylvie and Bruno when he was
young. Rivers (as noted in Chapter Four) is also described at one point, with Carroll
in mind, as looking like “an extremely large, eccentrically dressed white rabbit,
forever running down corridors consulting its watch” (443). Ward 7 of the military
hospital in London is decorated with “copies of Tenniel’s drawings from Alice in
Wonderland … for in peacetime this had been a children’s hospital” (439).

757 Lewis Carroll, Preface to Sylvie and Bruno Concluded (London: Macmillan, 1898), xiii.
758 Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno, xiv. There is some parity between Carroll’s conceptualisation of Fairies
and Derrida’s conceptualisation of spectres. Derrida notes that in Hamlet the ghost is the “Thing that
is not a thing” that no one sees in flesh and blood. “This Thing meanwhile looks at us and sees us not
see it even when it is there. A spectral asymmetry interrupts here all specularity. It de-synchronizes,
it recalls us to anachrony. We will call this the visor effect: we do not see who looks at us”: Derrida,
Specters of Marx, 6–7; upper case T of “Thing” as in original.
The ageing doctor had lost his capacity for visual memory early in life, as he explains to Prior (324), and yet he now has a vivid visual experience of something perhaps confabulated from his memory bank: Njiru and his retinue appear “as Rivers had so often seen him on the coastal path on Eddystone” (590).\(^{759}\) The “piercing, hooded eyes” (590) of Njiru stare at Rivers, as though in judgement, thereby inviting speculation about the ghost’s own standpoint of subjectivity.\(^{760}\) The vision may be a hypnagogic hallucination, or the result of Rivers entering the “eerie” state, in which he is conscious of a spectral presence in his own world: it is when Rivers is “on the edge of sleep” (589)\(^{761}\) that he hears Njiru repeating the words of an exorcism rite.\(^{762}\) Rivers may also, in the form of a trance, have “migrated” into Njiru’s spectral realm of a recalled Eddystone. The spectre itself is evidently conscious of the Human presence of Rivers, but despite its provocative wail of “oh, oh, oh” and its imposing glare, Rivers stays mute, unlike Hamlet, who consoles the clearly unhappy ghost of his father by urging “[r]est, rest, perturbed spirit!”\(^{763}\) From his silence it may be assumed that there is no such propitiating

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\(^{759}\) Considered in relation to Rivers’s peculiar inability to visualise his past (until now), the incidence of the spectre takes on a particular significance. Avery Gordon notes that “[h]aunting … alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future … [S]pectres or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view … Haunting and the appearance of spectres or ghosts is one way … we are notified that what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us”: Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, xvi. Njiru’s spirit certainly seems to be directly pertinent to Rivers’s mental blocks, and to suggest a portal into the blocked domain of his consciousness is being opened, linking past to present.

\(^{760}\) Derrida describes a process of “Vertiginous asymmetry: the technique for having visions, for seeing ghosts is in truth a technique to make oneself be seen by ghosts. The ghost, always, is looking at me … Follow my gaze, the specter seems to say with the imperturbable authority and the rock hardness of a Commandatore”: Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 134–5; emphasis in original.

\(^{761}\) Though not fully conscious, Rivers may for that reason be more acutely gnostic; throughout the narrative, it is often when there is a profound disruption or “disordering of all the senses” (Rimbaud) that the greatest insights are gained, as discussed in Chapter Two.

\(^{762}\) My analysis of Njiru’s visitation turns upon the idea that the haunting episode in the ward cannot be dismissed simply as the re-activated memory of a ceremonial rite. The sound byte from a ritual exorcism that the spectre utters, now re-contextualised into the hospital ward, and expressly precluded by the narrative itself from being a mere neurological event—Njiru is “not in any way ghostly … but himself in every particular”: 589—is open to a plenitude of meaning that extends beyond its original context.

\(^{763}\) *Hamlet*, Act i Sc. v 183. Lewis Carroll also alludes to this line of Hamlet’s in a humorous discussion about railway ghosts in the first volume of *Sylvie and Bruno*: “‘Then you think,’ I continued aloud, ‘that we ought sometimes to ask a Ghost to sit down? But have we any authority for it? In Shakespeare, for instance—there are plenty of ghosts there—does Shakespeare ever give the stage-direction ‘hands chair to Ghost’?”

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advice that Rivers can bring himself to give to Njiru and therefore no solace for the chieftain.

The perturbed tribal spirit is the end point of a long journey into the agony of war. Njiru only enters Rivers’s present world (as opposed to the recalled world of his memories) at the close of the narrative, unlike King Hamlet’s apparition, whose imminent entrance is declared at the very beginning of Hamlet. The castle ghost, however, is noticeably absent at the play’s end:

He has disappeared. There is no word of approval, or sorrow, or anger. He neither praises his dead son nor blames him. Nor, if he was a devil, does he come back to gloat over the devastation he has caused. The rest is silence indeed.764

As the last of the trilogy’s “characters” to make an utterance, Njiru’s italicised words, transposed from a formal rite, take on more importance than those of the narrative’s worldly characters. Unlike King Hamlet’s ghost’s lengthy speech ordering Hamlet to avenge him whilst bewailing his own fate: “O, horrible, O horrible, most horrible!” and beseeching his son to “Remember me,”765 Njiru’s ghost asks neither for sympathy, nor even remembrance, from Rivers, even though he portrays the fate of his people to be quite horrible: “Do not yearn for us, the fingerless, the crippled, the broken. Go down and depart, oh, oh, oh” (590; emphasis in original).766 The very plangency of this wailing speech practically

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765 Hamlet, i. v. 80.
766 Emberley quite unequivocally paraphrases Njiru’s speech as saying “do not desire your own disfiguration and put an end to the culture of dismemberment, and all the rationalities of violence that sustain it”: Emberley, Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal, 145. I suggest that although in the tenor of Njiru’s speech as it is incorporated into the narrative of the trilogy there may be a cryptic entreaty to improve the condition of men in some way, it cannot be interpreted quite so emphatically as Emberley suggests. The words of Njiru are based upon Hocart’s report of the rites on Eddystone: “Njiruviri, his father Rembo, and Keoro were said to be the only ones who know how to expel Ave. The ceremony is called l’oka Ave. The people all give five arm-rings to Rembo, together with much calico and tobacco. Njiruviri goes outside the house in Ogogo, or Patusogara, and utters the following words, which he revealed very reluctantly and secretly: ‘O Sumbi! O Gegese! O Palapoko! O Gorepoko! O you Ngengere at the foot of the sky (?)! go down, depart you; there is an end of men, an end of chiefs, an end of chieffains’ wives, an end of chiefs’ children; then go down and depart; do

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guarantees it will haunt Rivers and evoke the pity that Njiru overtly professes not to desire for Melanesia’s blighted tribespeople. Njiru’s portent of the future, in which “[t]here is an end of chiefs, an end of chieftain’s wives, an end of chief’s children” (590), suggests, despite its tone of sadness, the possibility of a world which has no use for the symbols of power that bring about war. We are not informed of Rivers’s assessment of the whole apparitional experience, for as the ghost’s visitation and the narrative both terminate suddenly, the rest is silence. Nevertheless, the valedictory observations of the spectre remain; the visitation of the speaking revenant Njiru, in fact, becomes a type of novelistic deus ex machina: until the ghost-who-is-not-ghostly visits his threnody upon Rivers in the ward of Craiglockhart, death as life’s antithesis is men’s persistent horror; but suddenly the ghost’s “real” presence re-absorbs death into life by giving death an essential, performative role in the business of life.

767 Shoshana Felman observes that not yearn for us the fingerless, the cripple, [sic] the cramped hands’ (?)... This last exclamation is uttered like a bark, then all raise a shout... Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead,” 268. It exposes something of the Edwardian anthropologist’s cultural insensitivity that Hocart reveals to the world in 1922 the secret prayer that Njiruviri had “very reluctantly” shared with him. Near the end of the Regeneration trilogy, as Rivers remembers the Ave and its secret words of exorcism, he recalls Njiru’s anxiety: “And now,” Njiru said, lifting his head in a mixture of pride and contempt, ‘now you will put it in your book.’ I never have, Rivers thought. His and Hocart’s book on Eddystone had been one of the casualties of the war” (585). History reveals Hocart not to have shared Rivers’s compunction, going on as he did to publish the words of the secret rite in “The Cult of the Dead” in 1922, the year of Rivers’s death.

In the British Library there are digitalised reproductions of wax cylinders recording tribal music that were made by W. H. R. Rivers and his colleague William Hocart on Eddystone Island (known today as Simbo) in 1909. At the beginning of each cylinder, an Englishman’s voice may just be heard through heavy static hiss introducing the particular performers: for example, the words “Baniatta, Simbo,” on Cylinder 1. The library’s catalogue describes the introductions, not strictly accurately, as “indecipherable announcements.” The faint but audible announcements are extant audio traces of Rivers and/or Hocart: fancifully, the phonetic ghosts of one or both of the anthropologists. Derrida referred to modern recording technologies including film, television and telephone, as “inhabit[ing]… a phantom structure…[A] voice on the telephone also possesses a phantom aspect: something neither real nor unreal which recurs, is reproduced for you and in the final analysis, is reproduction”: Derrida, “The Ghost Dance: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” by Andrew Payne and Mark Lewis. Accessed April 13, 2015.

http://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/29785 Phantom creations in digital technology have increased their potential exponentially since the time of Derrida. The voices of the tribespeople and the anthropologist on the 1909 recording are ghosts from the past that have been brought into the present. The British Library’s recordings of Rivers and Hocart are listed in its online catalogue at http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhthbin/cgisirsi/?ps=rqlaSrwfub/WORKS-FILE/19070042/8/5791608/Rivers,+William+Halse The recording of Simbo and Baniatta is numbered C108/1413 C1. Accessed March 21, 2016.

Nick Hubble suggests that in the trilogy Barker employs the device not of deus ex machina but of eucatastrophe, a concept conceived by J. R. R. Tolkien denoting “a sudden turn in the story that, just for a moment, lets a gleam of final victory shine”: Nick Hubble, “Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy” in British Fiction Today, edited by Philip Tew and Rod Mengham, (London and New York: 2006), 162. For the definition, Hubble cites Christopher Toner, “Russell and Tolkien on Fiction” New Blackfriars 89 (2008): 81. Hubble contends that the positive note for protagonists of the trilogy,
CHAPTER FIVE

dead is, in a sense, as Georges Bataille has put it, “an imposture.” Like the ghosts, death is precisely what cannot die; it is therefore of death, of ghosts, that one can literally say that they are “a living affair,” an affair of the living, the affair, indeed, of living. 769

Njiru is death as he is also life: he impostures life by being his actual living self whilst dead. But the dead in the trilogy also merely imposture death, as the traumatic residue from the killing fields of war persist in the form of spectral imaginings, as in the nightmares of Craiglockhart’s patients, or in the spectro-poetic realms of Sassoon and Owen, articulately undermining the purposefulness of war.

The spectre of the dead chieftain exceeds the imposturing of the war dead, however: Njiru mocks death by actually being, which is to say by becoming a manifest, actual thing. Shortly thereafter, the figure “fade[s] into the light of the daytime ward” (590) in the manner of a typical ghost. The assertion that a thing is what it is and yet is also what it is not, i.e., that it is a ghost but is simultaneously a person who is not a ghost, requires a closer reading of the visitation in terms of Derrida’s theory of hauntology if sense is to be made of it.

**Derrida, hauntology, and Njiru**

Davis notes that

> in literary circles, Derrida’s rehabilitation of ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry has proved to be extraordinarily fertile. Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. 770

Davis affirms not only the recognised status of hauntology in the study of literature, but also its purpose:

> Hauntology is part of an endeavour to keep raising the stakes of literary study, to make it a place where we can interrogate our relationship to the dead, examine the elusive identities of the living, and explore the boundaries between the thought and

who escape war’s horrors in their dissociative states, is being able to find solace in the meaninglessness not only of war’s horrors, but of life in its entirety – “The dissociation caused by modern life can only be regenerated by going beyond fate, meaning and irony”: Hubble, “Pat Barker’s *Regeneration*, 81.


the unthought. The ghost becomes a focus for competing epistemological and ethical positions.

The denial-affirmation of ghostliness amounts to a synthesising of body and spirit, in an implied abnegation of the separateness of the apparitional and the corporeal. As Graham Fraser notes, Derrida “is attracted to the notion of ghosts and spectrality in part because ghosts violate the binary categories of alive and dead, body and spirit, present and absent.”

Max Stirner propounded the idea that the spirits men imagine are not external to their corporeal selves, but exist within men as a component of corporeality:

The corporeal or embodied spirit is just man; he himself is the ghastly being and at the same time the being’s appearance and existence. Henceforth man no longer, in typical cases, shudders at ghosts outside him, but at himself; he is terrified at himself.

Stirner’s anti-dualism seriously challenges the concept of the ghostly other or “the hypothesis of supervention, within the individual, of autonomous and adversary selves” that permeates so much of modern literature. If Stirner is right, Njiru’s ghost is more than a passing figment of imagination, and has the potential to reveal something of great importance to Rivers and to the narrative.

This narrative anomaly of the impossible-actual ghost is noticeably out of kilter with the rest of the trilogy’s narrative; elsewhere, even when the odd or the mysterious occurs, such as the apparent ghost-whistling noises on Eddystone, there is the possibility of a rational explanation: one of the tribesmen could be whistling. Njiru’s ghost, by contrast, is definitively severed from the rational, explanatory realm by the narrative itself. Ideas in Derrida’s Specters of Marx assist in developing some understanding of Njiru’s ghostliness in the trilogy.

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772 Graham Fraser, “‘No More Than Ghosts Make’: The Hauntology and Gothic Minimalism of Beckett’s Late Work,” Modern Fiction Studies 46, no. 3 (2000): 777.
774 Miller, Doubles, Introduction, viii.
775 Although Karl Marx himself, and Marxism as a political and philosophical discourse, are not central to any discussion of the trilogy in this thesis, a remark Billy Prior makes in a discussion with Beattie Roper about Lloyd George, connects indirectly to Marx’s ideas on war, admitting Marx to the narrative, metaphorically, as a ghostly presence. Prior’s observation, “I don’t see how you can derive that from a Marxist analysis” (249) may not be fully understood by Roper, whose response is “Bugger Marxist analysis, I hate the sod [Lloyd George].” She detests Lloyd George due to “the
advantageous first to determine just what constitutes a haunting within the world of literature.

Avery Gordon, with seeming simplicity, defines a “haunting” as “that which appears to be not there.” The things which haunt us, however, must also appear to be there (or rather, here) even as they are (or seem) not to be. The past may haunt memories, and when these occur we think of them as aspects of the past returning to us in the present; elements of the past in this way become revenants. Wolfeys, discussing the persistence of the unseen in Thomas Hardy, notes that

_The Mayor of Casterbridge_ is haunted. Spectres are everywhere, even in the faces and actions of the living. The town of Casterbridge is a haunted place, its topographical, architectural and archeological structures resonating with the traces of the spectral.

A similar comment could be made about the _Regeneration_ trilogy, the very title of which implies a re-establishment in the present of something from an earlier time. Psychotherapeutic treatment at the hospital manifestly activates “a return of the repressed as a foreign element that strangely seems to belong to the very domain that renders it foreign.” Derrida and Mehlman conceive of the psyche itself, only representable by text, as dependent upon text, and because a text suppresses what it cannot or will not represent, the psyche suppresses and resists many memories that make up its mental text. The foreign-but-not-foreign quality of psychic energies

millions and millions of young lives he’s chucked away” (249), indicating that hers is an emotional and ethical stance, rather than a socio-political analysis of the government and its policies. For the reader, however, Prior’s allusion to Marx establishes a link both to the past – to the _Communist Manifesto_ of Marx and Engels – and to the future: “the intellectual small change of 1968 rather than of 1918,” as Bergonzi characterises it: Bergonzi, _War Poets_ , 9. Marx is thus granted a small haunting of the trilogy’s text that indirectly bolsters Roper’s anti-war stance despite her purported disdain for Marxist analysis: Mark Broder notes that “again and again Marx or Engels declared against supporting either belligerent in a war — even when they specifically recognised one side or another as more ‘progressive’”: David Broder, “Marx and Engels on War” _Workers’ Liberty_ , accessed March 23, 2015. http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2002/03/30/marx-and-engels-war Prior’s flippant allusion to Marx represents a textual haunting of 1960s Marxist analytical discourse, adding a slightly disconcerting sense of temporal displacement to the narrative. A “spectre of Marx” is thus gently evoked by narrative.

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Derrida and Mehlman ask “what is a text, and what must the psyche be if it can be represented by a text? For if there is neither machine nor text without psychical origin, there is no psyche without text”: Derrida and Jeffrey Mehlman, “Freud And The Scene Of Writing,” _Yale French Studies_ 48 (1972): 76.

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776 Gordon, _Ghostly Matters_ , 8.
777 Wolfeys, _Victorian Hauntings_ , 110.
779 Derrida and Mehlman ask “what is a text, and what must the psyche be if it can be represented by a text? For if there is neither machine nor text without psychical origin, there is no psyche without text”: Derrida and Jeffrey Mehlman, “Freud And The Scene Of Writing,” _Yale French Studies_ 48 (1972): 76.
exemplifies the ways in which ideas of ghostliness elude containment within one or the other of diametrically opposed notions of the extant; the ghost belongs, simultaneously, to both and to neither.

Catherine Bernard, discussing Derrida’s ideas of hauntology in relation to the *Regeneration* trilogy, notes that the text’s haunting possesses a historical quality that transcends the specific time of the text’s events:

> With Derrida when defining the strange time of haunting (“la hantise”), one may suggest that the hauntology explored specifically in the trilogy is of a historical nature, yet cannot be dated, “does not date” easily just as spectrality does not narrate easily.780

Narrating historical trauma is an uneasy task precisely because, as Bernard notes, narratives emerge from the “shattered ruins of active recollection.”781 Narrating spectrality is also made an uneasy task by a spectre’s elusiveness from definitional precision and its absence of spatio-temporal locus. Mark Fisher explains Derrida’s notion of haunting as “intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space.”782 Hitchcock notes that “[t]hinking the ghost is … coming to grips with the ungraspable.”783 Spectrality in narrative that creates an ontological paradox of *being without being* may indeed “not narrate easily,” but narrating a ghost should not be too problematic unless the text attempts a logical explanation of how absence may also be presence, or nothing may also be something; literature’s spectral traditions in fact circumvent the need for such explanations, and grant ghosts their unconditional license to transcend all natural laws. Thus denizens of the past may trespass into the future as though they belong there.

The phenomenon of absent-presence should, in any case, not be problematic in a literary context, for “[l]iterature is not obliged to make sense, it is not obliged to be

783 Peter Hitchcock, “( ) of Ghosts” in *The Spectralities Reader*, 180. Hitchcock explains his title thus – “Paradoxically the condition of … the spectre … can be ‘represented’ by the materiality of … an empty space. The empty parentheses in my chapter title are meant to signify this philosophical and political conundrum. The difference, I would argue, is an example of an undecidable, or what Derrida terms ‘a determinate oscillation’”: Hitchcock, “( ) of Ghosts,” 195; n. 22.
in referential harmony with the world ‘out there.’”

As Edouard, in Gide’s *The Counterfeiters* observes, “the novel, of all literary genres, is the freest, the most lawless.” Martin Hägglund argues that

[w]hat is important about the figure of the specter ... is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet. And since time – the disjouncture between past and future – is a condition even for the slightest moment, spectrality is at work in everything that happens.

Wolfreys suggests that the haunting figure,

[n]either material nor non-material, ... uncannily traverses between matter and the abstract, between the corporeal and the incorporeal, incorporating itself within both, while never being available corporeally.

This assertion posits the ability of a spectre to assume the qualities of embodiment and disembodiment while *at all times* being bodyless and serves more to mystify than to explain, but it at least captures the peculiar omnipotence of fiction. The narrative of *The Ghost Road* gives itself the power to collapse space and time to permit a sort of ontological override that melds the gone with the now to become an aggregate form of past and present. That Njiru is actually in some sense “there” in the ward, quite independently of Rivers’s imagination, is suggested not only in the text’s initial insistence that Njiru is “himself in every particular” (589), but also in an abberant switch of tense in the narration: at first, a grey and rosy light “seeps in through the tall windows”; Rivers “struggles to stay awake ... he hears Njiru’s voice”; but then, suddenly, “came Njiru,” who “bent over Rivers” before he “faded into the light of the daytime ward” (589-90, emphases added). Past and present are confused in the spectral-but-actual visitation of this figure from a momentarily resurrected fragment of history. But it also has the effect of creating narrative

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788 Derrida claims that “a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back”: Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 11; emphasis in original. It may be asked, though, what it is that this particular spectre of Njiru is “coming back” to. It is unlike the ghost of King Hamlet, which, though now of an immaterial realm, demonstrates a persisting connectedness to the materiality of its lifetime home; it also appears wearing the armour the king wore in life, accoutrements that one would expect to have no use or value in the spirit realm. Fisher notes Frederic Jameson’s observation that the ghost in Stanley Kubrik’s film *The Shining* seems to have a “peculiarly contingent and constitutive dependence on physical place and, in particular, on the
distance from Rivers as the sole witness to the appearance of Njiru: suddenly the actuality of the event is reinforced by an objective, omniscient account of Njiru’s spectral visitation.  

If we are effectively dissuaded from questioning the actualising of Njiru, we are just as disabled from questioning the ability of the thus actualised mass of Njiru’s body to dissolve into light. Hauntologically speaking, what we must understand, in the light of such a clear demonstration of extra-corporeal powers, is that the disappeared actual is possessed of a capacity to return, even after fading:

The ghost always registers the actual “degraded present” in which we are inextricably and historically entangled and the longing for the arrival of a future, entangled certainly, but ripe in the plenitude of nonsacrificial freedoms and exuberant unforeseen pleasures.

Njiru’s ghost and its glare at Rivers as the narrative closes can not, even with the ghost’s disappearance into light, ever vanish from the final page of the trilogy: “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come [l’arrivée] and to come-back [le revenant].” Njiru’s ghost is fixed as surely as Njiruviri’s photographic image in Hocart’s published account of his anthropological studies on Eddystone stares forever at its potential observers.
Derrida explains why the spectre, if conceived as the projection of a human thought onto the corporeal world, is unable to be corporeally destroyed, or reappropriated into the incorporeal thought-realm. This idea is predicated upon the notion that the human body’s corporeality is itself a mere construct: “The fact that he arrives at his own corporeality only through the negation of specters, shows the nature of this constructed corporeality of the man.” Derrida, quoting from Stirner’s “nearly literal … paraphrase” of Marx, calls the act of causing to disappear while creating apparitions a “conjuring trick” and a “fable”; the fable being that “I alone am corporeal.”792 Where Stirner asserts that ghosts disappear back into the corpus of the man, in an interiorising process, Derrida insists that Marx “denounces this egological body; there, he cries, is the ghost of all ghosts.”793 Corporeality of the ghost is therefore not destroyed, “as if with a spell, in an instant … Marx is very firm: when one body (die gespenstige Leibhaftigkeit) of the emperor disappears, it is not the body that disappears, merely its phenomenality, its phantomality (Gespensterhaftigkeit).”794 This means that “rather than being expelled, the ghost should remain, be lived with, as a conceptual metaphor signalling the ultimate disjointedness of ontology, history, inheritance, materiality, and ideology.”795 Njiru, a ghost reappropriated permanently into the corporeal world, even if he is not always visible, has an analogical function: in him can be seen the suppressed but always potentially active, ever imperishable human instinct of aggression which ensures that war will always be both revenant and arrivant.

Ghosts are because literature is not

There can be no final interpretive containment of literature’s ghosts since there is a very real sense in which fictional literature itself is nothing, its unreal subject matter comprising merely an ether of fantastic thoughts. Derrida observes that literature

792 Derrida, Specters of Marx, 128. “In the time of spirits thoughts grew till they overtopped my head, whose offspring they yet were; they hovered about me and convulsed me like fever-phantasies – an awful power. The thoughts had become corporeal on their own account, were ghosts, e.g., God, Emperor, Pope, Fatherland, etc. If I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: ‘I alone am corporeal.’ And now I take the world as what it is to me, as mine, as my property; I refer all to myself”: Max Stirner, The Ego and Its Own, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17.
793 Derrida: Specters of Marx, 129.
794 Derrida: Specters of Marx, 131.
“has no essence or substance ... literature is not. It does not exist” and so “the historicity of its experience ... rests on the very thing that no ontology could essentialize.”

Wolfreys notes that “literature can only ever be received as hauntological, in that, lacking and resisting all determination strictly speaking, ‘it’ exceeds and overflows ontology.”

Both Derrida and Wolfreys suggest that normative ideas about being, or becoming, are simply inapposite in the context of literature’s ghosts. The ghostly event in such a context has a quality of fathomlessness, which “as a non-event, lie, fiction, or ‘phantasmatic hallucination’ has to be understood as having ‘taken place ... through a phantasmaticity, according to a spectrality ... that is its very law.”

Lubomir Doležel notes that “fictional facts,” or novelistic events presented as being facts, acquire their narrative authentication via their inscription within the norms of the narrative genre:

Let us note that all discourse features of the authoritative narrative are negative: it lacks truth-value, identifiable subjective source (it is “anonymous”), and spatiotemporal situation ... This annuling of all the typical features of natural discourse is a precondition for the performative force to work automatically. If this negativity reminds the reader of ‘God’s word,’ so be it. It is precisely the divine world-creating word that provides the model for the authoritative narrative and its performative force.

Doležel notes that “Paradoxically, authoritative narrative is a prisoner of its authentication force: it cannot lie or err” – Njiru’s appearance in the ward of the hospital is governed by such an imprisoning force of narrative authentication.

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797 Julian Wolfreys, Occasional Deconstructions (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 116. Loevlie also notes Joseph G. Kronick’s observation that literature itself has a spectral quality: “it is not an existent or being nor a localizable remains or archive but belongs to a future ... As a spectre, literature is neither spirit nor body and both at the same time, which makes it difficult to name”: Loevlie, “Faith in the Ghosts,” 342. See Joseph G. Kronick, Derrida and the Future of Literature, (Albany: Suny, 1999), 17.


800 Doležel, Heterocosmica, 149.
The narrative also subtly authenticates the existence of its atypical ghost using an implied *credo quia absurdum*, a form of reasoning according to which something too absurd to be credible must be true for that very reason. Tertullian relied upon such fideist reasoning to establish the factuality of Jesus Christ’s story: “the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible.” The Ghost Road’s emphatic insistence upon the actual presence of what is indisputably incapable of being present seems to impel the reader towards such a thought process.

And this assertion that the vision is real, in spite of its imaginary qualities, holds the key to the role the visitation plays. Žižek notes F. W. Schelling’s insistence that there is the *spiritual element of corporeality*: the presence, in matter itself, of a non-material but physical element, of a subtle corpse, relatively independent of time and space, which provides the material base of our free will (animal magnetism, etc.); on the other hand, there is the *corporeal element of spirituality*: the materializations of the spirit in a kind of pseudo-stuff, in substance-less apparitions (ghosts, living dead).

Though materiality and immateriality seem to be opposites, Schelling suggests they do not or cannot exist independently of one another. Lacan’s materialism also negates the idea that the material and the imaginary are antithetical. As Tom Eyers notes, in Lacan’s materialism, “the Real continually enacts and dissolves with the Imaginary and the Symbolic.” Eyers marries Lacan’s materialism to Žižek’s contention that “materialism means that the reality I see is never ‘whole’ – not because a large part of it eludes me but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it.” Rivers’s deep reflections on his Eddystone days in the final parts of the narrative form an attempt to analyse himself and his studies, but no amount of introspection can make whole his view of reality, which has a blind spot of his own presence in that reality, a blindness to the very nature of himself and his assumptions. The enigmatic Njiru who is staring into his eyes may

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802 Žižek, The Indivisible Remainder, 4; emphasis in original.

be the definitive evidence of all the blind spots of Rivers’s own vision (his blindness to the reality of the immaterial) in all of his professional and personal capacities. Finally, as Lacan suggests, and as the narrative establishes here, “we may begin to recognise the materiality of the immaterial, and the stubborn opacity of the material itself.” There is, as noted by Eyers, “no neat separation of the ideal from the material.” 804 It is the immateriality of Njiru that adds material gravitas to his prophecy concerning the dire fate of humanity. Derrida contends that to live “finally” is not a lesson that can be learned from life, but only from “the other, and by death. In any case, from the other at the edge of life.” 805 It is only in relation to our own death and to the deaths of others that ethical relations to others are established:

Thus ethical – and just – being … necessitates stepping to and beyond the (impossible) border between life and death, demands listening to, learning from, conversing with those inhabitants of this border; the dead as undead, the revenant as arrivant. 806

The narrative is about to die at this point and its reconstructed Rivers is to die only three to four years after the war’s end.

As Hamlet submits, finally, to the demands of the spectre of his dead father, and as the soldiers in the trilogy submit to the Abrahamic figures of their fathers by setting themselves up for killing, so Rivers submits to Njiru’s omnipotence. If Njiru is a phantasm created by Rivers’s own traumas, the emphatic physicality of that phantasm suggests its eventual vanishing is an impossibility and that Njiru remains even after the spectre’s phantasmic aspect fades. Conceivably, Rivers incorporates Njiru through a psychic process known as “introjection.” Wolfreys explains the process by which spectres of trauma are assimilated through introjection, citing Abraham and Torok’s notion of a “secret tomb” erected inside the subject:

Sometimes … the ghost of the crypt comes back to haunt the cemetery guard, giving him strange and incomprehensible signals, making him perform bizarre acts, or subjecting him to unexpected sensations. 807

805 Derrida, Specters of Marx, xviii.
806 Bailiff, “Historiography as Hauntology,” 140; emphasis in original.
Rivers had suffered from a stammer all his life; now, Njiru, through his mystical reprise of an exorcism ritual that in fact precludes the possibility of exorcism for Rivers, sets up a secret tomb in his mind. Abraham and Torok, as Wolfreys explains, differ from Althusser on the concept of the incorporated spectre: where Althusser sees the phantasm as a metaphor,

for Abraham and Torok, the spectre of trauma, in its incorporation, is antimetaphor ... because it effectively blocks all access to figurative contiguity or correlation, and therefore to any proper or appropriate narrative or symbolic reassembly.\(^{808}\)

Njiru’s ghost, a narrative element that is utterly resistant to unequivocal meaning, stands somewhere outside of both normative reality and normative unreality. The text does not indicate whether Rivers accepts that Njiru is actually there before him, it merely assures the reader that Njiru is there, arrogating to itself a higher authority on the matter of the ghost than Rivers’s judgement. An inference may be made concerning European modernism’s profound failure to hear (and, in fact, except through its own misted lens, to see) its other. Edward W. Said, noting the nineteenth century’s ineluctable rise of white Christian Eurocentrism, notes that

[a]ll ... subjugated peoples ... were considered to be naturally subservient to a superior, advanced, developed, and morally mature Europe, whose role in the non-European world was to rule, instruct, legislate, develop, and at the proper times, to discipline, war against, and occasionally exterminate non-Europeans.\(^{809}\)

Rivers may have studied Njiru’s culture with great erudition and cultural understanding when he visited Eddystone Island, but the situation suddenly confronting Rivers is doubly reversed, for not only is Njiru now the visitor, he is also more savvy than Rivers, having apparently mastered ontological secrets that enable him to be while he is not. This ability, as well as the abbreviated form of Njiru’s exorcism rite, a reminder of his treasured secrets that the white anthropologists teased out of him, may well indicate anxieties Rivers harbours over his personal presumptions concerning the European idea of its other.\(^{810}\) In an

\(^{808}\) Wolfreys, Occasional Deconstructions, 178.


\(^{810}\) Rivers may have been able to mentally reconcile the spectre Njiru with his scientific, rationalist outlook. For him to arrive at a state of acceptance that the ghost was there does not necessarily mean
interview with Brannigan, Barker confirms that Rivers finally concedes the higher ground, in some respects, to Njiru’s culture:

Rivers has a real fascination with the intuitive, the irrational, the so-called primitive, and I think he knows perfectly well that the source of creativity is in that area. The epicritic can dress it up, but the goods are delivered by the protopathic.\textsuperscript{811}

His last gesture of deference to Njiru, whose forgiveness is implied in his “do not mourn for us,” may also be understood as Rivers’s symbolic redemption; Dinah Birch notes that “Rivers ... emerges as the moral pivot of Regeneration.”\textsuperscript{812} Having adopted a holistic gaze that transcends the limits even of his own erudition, Rivers is forgiven for being human.

Finally, war’s lightly dancing dead, who speak via their poetic oracles and spectres, act as portals to understanding and self-reflexiveness. Njiru’s appearance, impossible but irrefutable, occurs during a sudden moment of porousness in Barker’s historia of Rivers. Njiru’s cryptic pronouncement concerning the “end of men” introduces obfuscation rather than an answer to the problem of violence; sidestepping literature’s traditional dénouement, the narrative prefers instead to introduce this tantalising nouement that cannot be unravelled. The opportunistic spirit, the narrative assures us, is of too solid a flesh to be an irrelevant fancy; the gaze it levels so rigidly at Rivers suggests that the anthropologist, whose moral stand on tribal headhunting hastened an end to the practice, is yet complicit in the moral deficiencies of his own culture.


\textsuperscript{812} Dinah Birch, “Invalided Home,” 22. A less sympathetic view is expressed by Boyers, who imputes a dictatorial quality to Rivers’s moral position within the narrative of The Ghost Road: “[B]y bringing Prior and the others round to Rivers, Barker leaves us with his perspective as the sole dominant possibility”: Robert Boyers, “Pathos and Resignation,” 160.
CONCLUSION

The disenchanted protagonists of the Regeneration trilogy include men suffering from extreme physical and mental trauma and the minority groups of pacifists, homosexuals and women. Occupying a far more alienated locus than any of these people, however, is the ghost of the tribal chieftain, Njiru. The indeterminable nature of this spectre in the schema of the narrative stimulates a level of inquiry into the human condition only possible for an entity that, despite its apparent human features, actually transcends human-ness. The spectre, which possesses the attributed quality of a mystic, draws particular attention to human dystopia.

As an expression of humanity’s abysmal core, the “heart of darkness” metaphor has become almost trite since the publication of Conrad’s masterpiece, but nothing else quite so successfully describes the core of humanity’s existential misery. J. Hillis Miller claims that Conrad’s iconic novella “promises an ultimate revelation without giving it”; and indeed, as we live in a post-Nietzschean world of dead gods, I suggest there are no ultimata that can be revealed. The Regeneration trilogy finally relinquishes the problem of war to a spectre that is declared quite unequivocally by the text to be real, but which behaves in such a way as to suggest it may just be a congregation of vapours in Rivers’s memory. Clearly, the enlightenment that men seek is unattainable for “the darkness can never be enlightened.” Although Slobodin suggests that Barker, in the end, “does not want to leave the reader on a positive note,” there is, in fact, a positive note evident, right from the beginning, in the deep moral perturbations about the terrible consequences of war that are raised by the narrative’s alienated protagonists.

It is important to note that although the war’s violence takes centre stage in the trilogy’s theatre of inhumanity, it represents only the most egregious expression of a broader societal malaise: Britain is beset by inadequate parenting, domestic

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814 Miller, Tropes 192. Miller, using these words, is referring to the absence of enlightenment in Heart of Darkness.
violence, gender inequality, homophobia, xenophobia, paranoia, and generalised neuroses. It has been acknowledged by Barker herself that the trilogy is antiwar, but as Mark Greif suggests, describing *Regeneration* as an antiwar novel is like saying Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is antislavery; the authors’ respective narrative positions on their central themes are too obvious to require stating. Good fiction, according to E. M. Forster, is “sogged with humanity”; what it has to convey should emerge from the writing’s “intensely, stiflingly human quality.” As victims of war, the suffering wounded in the trilogy are also victims of the multifarious and intense human discontents that cause wars to happen.

The prevailing mood of the trilogy, as Robert Boyers notes, is one of “disinfatuation,” for it “looks at everything with an eye unclouded by romantic longing.” Atypically for its war novel genre, battle heroism is not a prized or lauded concept; the most heroic of characters, indeed, are those who express their oppositional stance to the war. The narrative mood of disenchantment is the more palpable for emerging from some of the most alienated sectors of British culture: notably, the traumatised soldier, ideological pacifists, the suppressed homosexual, Britain’s women, Europe’s cultural other in the personified form of a Melanesian chieftain, and that paragon of alienation, the abject spirit.

The first chapter of this thesis examined the ways in which the narrative’s historic fictional form effectively challenged romantic myths of war. As noted by Hammond, Barker’s method “constitutes historical transgression; … she folds historical figures and facts into a piece of fiction so that both may be experienced simultaneously by the reader.” Transgression is an endemic feature of the trilogy, for practically all of its views of the war involve transgressing ideology, belief, attitude, prejudice, propaganda, principle or expectation.

Chapter Two examined the ways Barker, following traditions established in many war novels, deliberately evokes a repugnance to the consequences of war violence.

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818 Boyers, “Pathos and Resignation,” 151.
with her details of eviscerated flesh. The technique of shocking readers with the use of grotesque bodily damage has a long history that began in records of ancient battles, then moved through diverse satirical works involving standard tropes of decapitation, the splattering of brain matter, and diverse extremes of organ mutilation. The grotesque literary trope has over time evolved out of its carnivalesque origins into a form that leaves little room for humour. In the modern war novel, authors employ tropes of grotesquery in representing the damaged body that act to preclude romanticising war violence. Men exposed to such a shattering loss of romance are suddenly encumbered with an unpleasant and often traumatising, special knowledge of war that few others can possibly share. This specialised perspective is characteristic of the trilogy, representing war through the privileged gaze of an oppositional, or transgressive eye.

The third chapter examined the importance of the trilogy’s homosexual gaze, and established that the homosexual, as an often despised, alienated individual, occupies a heterotopic *espace autre* in the narrative. Sassoon and Owen, already equipped by their poetic skill to record, and even to *see*, the war in ways not available to the war’s less gifted participants, were also, in the war’s latter years, distanced from normative ideas and from durable pacifism by their own alienation as homosexuals. By having to live their lives psychologically detached from homophobic Britain, the homosexual poets are predisposed to transgression in their gaze at the war, as is the bisexual character Prior, and the possibly homosexual Rivers.

Chapter Four continued to explore the trilogy’s transgressive or alienated gaze by establishing the importance of a female perspective on war. The author’s gender is a crucial element in the narrative, as the author herself has indicated in her statement that she is herself present as a “woman on every page.”820 The fact that a large majority of war writers are men, and that war is often seen to be the province of men, means that this particular work of fiction has the potential to diverge from traditional war narration. Careful not to essentialise gender approaches to war, the chapter proceeded on the assumption that most warrior myths are aimed at and primarily appeal to men, and that culturally women are less responsive to the

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820 Interview with Maya Jaggi, “Dispatches,” np.
warrior content and intent of mythology. It is from her woman’s perspective that Barker most effectively challenges patriarchal hegemony in the narrative, and it is through the gaze of the female characters of the trilogy that much of the masculinist hegemony is exposed as harmful to society as a whole.

Finally, the fifth chapter analysed the narrative’s gaze at war from what must be the ultimate position of alienation: that is, the space occupied by a spirit which is not even a bona fide spirit, for it cannot be contained within a spirit paradigm, but rather is a ghost that has form while being formless. Derrida’s notions of hauntology were helpful in determining the credentials of this spirit, so far as they could be determined, for the ontology of spirits in literature is an elusive idea that rests upon contingent, flexible notions of fictive ghosts. Both despite and because of its alienated status in extremis, the spirit in the narrative has an unchallengeable voice and the most penetrating vision. The long and disconcerting stare that Njiru fixes upon Rivers at the end of The Ghost Road suggests that only by turning the modernist anthropological gaze back upon itself will purportedly advanced nations begin to realise how firmly violence has become reified within their own cultures.

John Keegan states that “despite the … cruelties of the battlefield,” World War I was a “curiously civilised war.” If human mutilation and killing can so easily be subsumed under the rubric of civilised behaviour and if, as Emberley suggests, the practice of war “must be accepted as part of the meaning of being … civilized” there seems little hope of ever avoiding acts of systematic human slaughter. Paradoxically, a level of detachment is necessary in order not to be inveigled into supporting the rationales for war, while at the same time a powerful human empathy for suffering must be allowed to guide society towards peace. Considered in the light of modern nuclear capabilities, Njiru’s prophetic remark that there will be “an end of men” (590) is ominous.

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821 John Keegan, “The First World War” (London: Hutchinson, 1999), 8. The first sentence of Keegan’s next paragraph seriously undermines his point as he notes that the war “damaged civilisation, the rational and liberal civilisation of the European enlightenment, permanently for the worse and, through the damage done, world civilisation also”: Keegan, 8.

822 Emberley, Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal, 147; emphasis added. Cited in Chapter Five hereof.


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