Regeneration

Pat Barker

Unusual place in the canon of literature about WWI and its contribution to historical fiction.

Negotiates roles in a culture not only at war with Germany.

Duty, Cynicism and bitterness, End of chivalry, Morality.

Homosexuality, class, love, memory, value of individual life, value of imagination.

Morally nuanced anti-war novel, reflecting the issues and the concerns in wartime Britain.
Pat Barker

- Born 1943

- Influences include her Grandfather who fought in WW1. He became disturbed with his experiences in WW1.
Synopsis

- Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and others who were treated for 'shell shock' during the first world war by the psychiatrist and anthropologist William Rivers at Craig Lockhart hospital in Scotland.

- Dr. Rivers’ work was largely based on his study of Freud and he introduced Freudian theory and practise to the British Medical Profession.

- http://www.freud.org.uk/warneuroses.html
War Neurosis

- ‘Shell Shock’ was the term that was commonly used to describe the symptoms suffered by soldiers following their experiences in the war.

- Thought and perception are severely impaired

- Not living in the real world

- Experiencing hallucinations

- Usually caused by shock, a change in lifestyle, viruses and even sleep deprivation, to name but a few.
Craiglockhart

- Hospital for officers only
- Spared ‘typical’ treatments like electric shocks
- Treated through dream analysis, conversation etc
- Patients encouraged to face their war memories by expressing them
Dr. W.H.R Rivers

- Based ‘loosely’ on real doctor (1916-1917) who treated Siegfried Sassoon and researched nerve ‘regeneration’
- Protagonist
- Anthropologist – cultures and customs of humankind
- Victorian Education
- Strong belief in honour
- Feels torn between his duty to his patients
- Conflict between control and influence over his patients
- Journey of realization and increasing doubtfulness about the reason for the death of an entire generation.
Siegfried Sassoon

- 1886-1967
- Reaction to the war was harsh and vicious
- ‘Mad Jack’
- Reaction through his poetry
- spoke out publicly against the war, yet returned to it.
- Wilfred Owen
Robert Graves

- 1895-1985
- Poet, scholar and novelist
- Received serious injuries at the battle of the Somme
- Saved Sassoon from court martial
Wilfred Owen

• 1893-1918
• Shocking, realistic war poetry
• Killed in action at the Sambre-Oise Canal
• Influenced by Sassoon
Themes

- Madness
- Homosexuality
- Parenthood-patients, troops
- Regeneration-Healing
- Emasculation- Powerlessness that soldiers feel when confronted with the shocking reality of war
- Mutism- Disempowerment and helplessness the men feel.
- Trenches-Graves
DUTY

Conflicting duties - Sassoon’s letters become a duty to convey argument against war must come at sense of duty to fellow citizens who are dying and suffering.

River helps Sassoon to resolve his tension between his two duties and encourages him to return to war.

Rivers must acknowledge his increasing sympathy for Sassoon’s political beliefs.

He is sympathetic to Sassoon’s view of the war because he feels constant tensions between his obligation to make his patients remember horrifying parts of their pasts and the desire to prevent further suffering.

The above is present inside River’s dreams. His tensions come from his duty as a doctor to create pain, to prevent pain for fellow humans. Rivers conflicting duty.
Women (Sarah etc) able to earn more money in their war work than they could before.

War offers financial and social freedom.

Trapped by cultural conventions of gender and class.

Expected to be male and female.

Restrictions do not make it easy.

Bound by pre-war gender roles
E.g. Sarah to marry

Not to appear sexually promiscuous—women more likely to have sexual encounters i.e. Betty’s botched abortion

Sarah’s mum enjoys financial security

Not pleased with Sarah’s change of cultural employment= cultural limitations troubled by class of women we meet at factory.

Suffer at the hands of husbands and lovers and are relieved to know they are in the trenches

Regeneration: hard working determined northerners tell the truth.

Women’s experiences contradict Prior’s suggestion that there has been a simple reversal of fortune

Freedom from duties as a wife / daughter

Priors complicated view of Sarah as a result of multiple / contradictory roles during the war. (Sarah is one of the boys)

Phosphorus yellow=appearance = class affiliation

Lizzie’s banishment of her husband. - Hatred

Pre-war gender roles
Class-sex
Reproduction
appearance

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Gender Roles

Extraordinary culture of war up ends convention. It requires the exchange of some feminine qualities for the expected masculine.

Soldiers are made feminine by their experiences.

Neurosis – masculinity coming into conflict with logistics of trench warfare.

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Officers become maternal figures who provide ‘domestic’ comfort and emotional support.

Rivers to help escape shame of feminine behaviour. The social expectation for masculine behaviour. R is treated as much a mother and a father.

Rivers engages in conversation with each patient for several weeks (Ethnographic skills).

Rivers believes in neurosis by conditions of war fare and it is caused by socialised gender roles.

Yealland’s presence is a reminder for the read that River’s methods are experimental and amateur, using electric shocks to make patients speak appropriately.

Yelland believes that the men who break down would have broken down in any other circumstances.

Father – Son = Doctor-Patient is intertwined due to RS practice.

Redefinition of masculinity.
• Rivers is different from Yelland. He has the capacity to analyse his own culture and his role in that culture.

• He evaluates himself and others and how he has changed by his contact with his patients.

• Reviews his case files.

• Changes had taken place without his knowing.

• Rivers is a participant not an observer of his work.

• Rivers is sympathetic to homosexuality, others may use a man’s sexuality to discredit his views.

• Rivers is conventional in his preference to keep silent on the subject. Characters in Regeneration avoid discussing homosexuality by name. “The love that dare not speak its name”.

• There is an allusive presence that gives reminders that outside the hospital any deviance from the preferred norms of gendered behaviour will not be tolerated.

• There is a line between homo-social and homosexual love.

• War gives an emphasis on love between men (comradeship) and everybody approves it’s crucial to survival in war.

• Sassoon expresses hope here: “things were getting better for homosexuals”.

• Sassoon warned not to talk about his pacifist views as it will be used to discredit him.

• Rivers is concerned about Sassoon’s future, this warranted as advocating suppression rather than discussion.

• Men who question war was often referred to as a degenerate, a term for someone who expressed homosexual behaviour.

• Clear distinction here- tendencies towards homosexual love were condemned and often connected to other anti-social behaviour.

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• War gives an emphasis on love between men (comradeship) and everybody approves it’s crucial to survival in war.

• Sassoon expresses hope here: “things were getting better for homosexuals”.

• Rivers is wary of homosexuality in conversation with parents. Homosexuality was considered illegal from 1885 – 1967.

• There is an allusive presence that gives a reminders that outside the hospital any deviance from the preferred norms of gendered behaviour will not be tolerated.

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