

INTRODUCTION.

Marcelo Figueras, Argentinian writer and literary critic, in his article “El hombre que amaba a las mujeres” in *Ñ* magazine 2009, comments about the effect that some characters from literature have upon us readers. He wonders why we give these non-existing creatures the power to enter our lives shaping them for ever, the power of being more real than what is real. Notwithstanding the fact that he does not give any final answer to his wonderings, he brings our attention to the existence of these entelechies such as The Quixote, Sherlock Holmes, among others, that have populated works of fiction over the years and have had lasting impressions upon most readers’ minds.

Drawing on these brief thoughts, I must say that I am starting this project from a personal attraction to one of the characters of the *Regeneration* trilogy by Pat Barker, Billy Prior, whose characteristics are so effectively created by the author that you cannot remain indifferent towards him. Although he most probably will not reach the same status as the said entelechies, Billy Prior is such a complex and rich character that he is worthy of deep research.

Following a text versus context and a comparative approach, in chapter 1, I will focus on the theoretical considerations about heroes and antiheroes, modernity and postmodernity, the historical novel and intertextuality. In chapter 2, I will look into the revision that Barker does of her country’s history as she writes the trilogy, I will analyse how she allows the past irrupt into the present in order to better understand her personal and collective identity. Also in this chapter, I will consider the use that the English author makes of intertextuality as a writing strategy to reinforce the construction of the main character and his expressions of discontent about his own historical time.

Chapter 3, I will analyse Pat Barker’s construction of the figure of Billy Prior, the main fictional character of the trilogy. I will consider how, through Prior’s life experiences, we can glimpse the seeds of discontent of an epoch, specifically the beginning of the XXth century during the years of World War I, and how we can sense the cracks that were starting to become visible regarding institutions, authority, war, the empire, religion, social classes and sexual life, all of which lead us to figure out that new answers were being demanded and that old assumptions were proving insufficient. While doing this kind of analysis I will also consider how our character might prefigure some characteristics that will consolidate later in the century.

Starting from the Renaissance, when man took God's place as the centre of the world, following with the Age of Reason in the XVIIth century, the Age of the Enlightenment in the XVIIIth century and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the late XVIIIth century, life in the Western world was organised under the premises of man's power and self sufficiency. Although wars, conflicts and confrontations among powerful groups never ceased to exist during these years, the general belief was that humanity would eventually reach a state of harmony and happiness where all its problems could be solved just by making use of reason, science and technology. But Western societies enter the XXth century and self sufficiency starts to wobble. Two terrible world wars, which were only twenty one years apart, the incredibly high number of casualties and the Holocaust were perhaps the most obvious evidence that the assumptions above mentioned were proving to be wrong. After this, the West inaugurated a culture of uncertainty, confusion and relativism which many have called Postmodernism.

Billy Prior's life develops at the time of World War I within an extremely conflictive social and personal frame. The violence he witnesses at home, his awareness of class difference within the English social system, his experience as an abused child, his practice of sexuality, his life at the front and his exchanges with authority through the doctor-patient relationship he establishes with Dr. Rivers show him to us as an unsatisfied hero and give us the clues of the many aspects in his society that were evidencing fractures and need of improvement. At the same time, at a macro level, these aspects that were demanding renewal, can be taken as signs of how the ideals of the Age of Reason were not leading anywhere and that a new concept of man was starting to emerge.

In her novels, Pat Barker attempts a fresh and critical reading of her country's history and to establish a dialogue between present and past times. In this way the novels become "a back door into the present", as she herself put it during an interview with Wera Reusch for Lolapress. Barker makes use of effective intertextuality as a writing strategy; by doing so, the author practically reconfirms the inevitable influence that one historical time with all its cultural wealth has upon the following one. One cannot erase the past, it is part of us and it will for ever shape our present. On receiving the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1995 for *The Ghost Road*, the third book of the trilogy, Pat Barker stated: 'The Somme is like the Holocaust. It revealed things about mankind that we cannot come to terms with and cannot forget. It can never become the past.'

CHAPTER 1. *Theoretical considerations*

1.1 **Heroes and antiheroes**

Given the fact that this thesis includes the idea of “a discontent hero” as an important component of its title, I will include the topic of the hero as seen by different theorists and authors. Northrop Frye, described by Harold Bloom as “the foremost living student of Western literature”, (Forst 141-43) in his book *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957) introduces us to classically-inspired theories about modes, symbols, myths and genres. His literary approach was highly influential in the decades previous to deconstructivist criticism and other postmodernist trends. In the First Essay “Historical Criticism: Theory of the Modes”, the Canadian critic, states that: “Fictions may be classified, not morally, but by the hero’s power of action, which may be greater than ours, less or roughly the same.” (33) Thus, he describes five types of heroes: a) the mythical hero, who is god like, b) the romantic hero, whose actions are marvellous, c) the hero as leader, who appears in most epic and tragedy, d) the hero as one of us, who appears in most comedy and realistic fiction and e) the ironic hero, who could be described as a powerless being trapped in a life he cannot understand or control. He is at the mercy of his environment. “He is inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of frustration or absurdity.” (34)

These heroes correspond themselves with fictional modes: myth, romance, high mimetic mode, low mimetic mode and ironic mode respectively; the modes themselves can be “tragic” or “comic” and then we can speak for example of “tragic irony” where the hero is: “somebody who gets isolated from his society” and is described by Frye with the Greek word *pharmakos* or scapegoat. “The *pharmakos* is neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes. (...) He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence.” (41) His tragedy, whatever it might be, is: “intelligible because its catastrophe is plausibly related to its situation” and it is also ironic because in it, one can identify this “sense of arbitrariness, of the victim’s having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, not more deserving what happens to him than anyone else would be.” (41) Frye argues that, in tragedy, the incongruous and the inevitable are both combined and they separate in opposite poles of irony. The hero can then be found in the inevitable pole of

irony where what happens to him is not the result of what he has done “but (...) of what he is (...) and ‘all too human’ being.” (42) The archetype of the inevitably ironic is “Adam, human nature under sentence of death.” (42) He can also be found at the incongruous pole of irony “in which all attempts to transfer guilt to a victim give that victim something of the dignity of innocence.” (42).

Let us consider now what Juan Villegas Morales, Spanish linguist, has to say about the topic of heroes. In his book *La estructura mítica del héroe en la novela del Siglo XX* (1973) “...the term and concept of hero have got a dynamic nature and they vary in accordance to the historical frame and to the axiological systems of a given epoch.” (66) He speaks of the hero and of the anti-hero whom he prefers to understand “in the same light as we have outlined the hero.” (67) The antihero would be the one who carries the non-recommended, negative values within the context of the novel just as the hero carries the positive ones. This is a very flexible perspective because then, we have to infer the value system from the novels’ contexts and not search it in our own individual realities.

Villegas also asserts that nowadays, heroes find themselves in a situation where they have had to move from the realm of the social to the realm of the historical and psychological. They have had to conquer themselves and face the darkness of their inner selves. In the above mentioned book the Spanish linguist argues that:

The hero is a man who lives in the XXth century and consequently, he experiences the pressures that modern society has created. In a lesser or greater degree he is aware of his psychological life and of the multiple aspects that form his subconscious. His freedom, therefore, is limited not only by society but by his own inner world. He is a hero who dares or is forced to abandon the given or chaotic but familiar world in order to find or join new ways of life: tempting, demonic or gentle. ¹ (11-12)

Finally, I would like to include here some concepts and ideas about heroes and antiheroes by Ihab Hassan, the American literary critic. He also concerns himself with the heroes represented in literature in the XXth century. In *Radical Innocence* (1961) drawing on Lionel Trilling’s thoughts, Hassan argues that for the last century and part of the XIXth century there has been a standing quarrel between the self and its culture and between the self with itself. (cf. Hassan 21) Literature responds to this fact creating characters who, like Billy Prior, the hero of Barker’s trilogy, maintain a conflict with themselves and with the society they belong to. In Billy’s case, he is unhappy with many aspects of his personal life and he also despises many aspects of the society he was born into: English society at the beginning of the XXth century.

¹ My own translation

Hassan continues saying that there has been a “gradual process of atrophy of the hero” which “may have begun with Don Quixote, or perhaps even Job, Orestes and Christ.” (21) He states that the contemporary novel “redefines the identity of its central character and redirects his energies to (...) virtues that are a good deal more personal than social.” (22) According to him there is a new shifty ego, a new concept of man and “the encounter between this new ego and the destructive element of experience (...) lies at the dramatic centre of the modern novel in Europe and America.” (22) He provides some concrete examples of modern anti-heroes whom “in hope and charity”, he simply calls heroes. Goethe’s young Werther is one of the first literary characters to sever the traditional bond between him and society due to the inordinate conception that he has of himself. Dostoyevsky creates in *Notes from the Underground* (1864) an individual who feels like an insect. “...there’s no one even for you to feel vindictive against. You don’t have and never will have an object of your spite.” (Dostoyevski qtd in Hassan 23) Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz immerses himself to depths where victims and victimizers become the same and when he turns within himself he can only find the “horror”. James Joyce creates Leopold Bloom for whom “insult and pathos, loneliness and failure are his familiars.” (25) Kafka’s characters in *Metamorphosis*, *The Castle*, *The Judgement* and *The Trial* give us a vision of man which is grotesque, which denies him freedom, choice and grace. Existentialist heroes find victory in defeat and there is never any reconciliation. Sartre’s Roquentin “comes to believe that existence is nothing if not superfluous. (...) everything is rooted in the absurd, the irreducible condition of all reality.” (30). Camus’s rebel victim dr. Rieux, takes the victim’s side in *The Plague*. For him the Cartesian formula becomes: “I rebel, therefore I exist”. Therefore “the sad history of the anti-hero is nothing more than the history of man’s changing awareness of himself.” (22). All of Hassan’s arguments regarding the rise of antiheroes come from different areas of study: history, body politics, psychoanalysis, existentialist philosophy and literature. The picture he shows is rather bleak and he concludes that “what the world faces ultimately depends on man’s response to the destructive elements of his experience” (20).

The rich and varied elements these three authors provide to analyse heroes will support the description of our hero, Billy Prior. In the chapters devoted to the analysis itself, Frye, Hassan and Villegas’ concepts will help us to better understand young second lieutenant Prior and confirm or not the hypothesis about him being the personage through whose personal conflicts and struggle against his surroundings, one

can understand the cracks of the conservative and traditional social order of early XXth century Britain. The possibility is there to read Billy Prior's conflicts as the expression of darker and hidden undercurrents that will intensify as the century goes by until we get to our own present times.²

1.2 **Modernity, Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism**

Pat Barker writes the three novels of her trilogy in the 1990's but they are set in the first decade of the XXth century during the First World War. The cultural environments of both these periods are Postmodernism and Modernism respectively. On the one hand, the novels are written during a historical time whose *ethos*, in the words of Terry Eagleton, is one of disbelief in the "classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity", an epoch that sees the world as "contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures and interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities." (Eagleton vii) On the other hand, they are set at a time when the spirit was that of Modernity. Anthony Giddens in his book *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity* (1998) defines Modernity as:

...a shorthand term for modern society, or industrial civilization. Portrayed in more detail, it is associated with a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention; a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. (94)

Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher and sociologist, in his essay "Modernity – an Incomplete Project" from 1980 describes Modernity as follows: "The project of Modernity formulated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic." (Brooker 132). Barker's

²There is a fourth author who devoted a lot of his research effort to the topic of heroes. It is Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist. In his book, *El héroe de las mil caras, psicoanálisis del mito* (1949) he speaks of the monomythic unit which includes the three stages of the hero's journey: a) departure b) initiation and c) return. (35) The unit is subdivided in sixteen mythemes that describe the various events the hero has to confront during his journey. (40-41) We have not included Campbell's concepts in our thesis because of the mythological orientation he gives to the issue of the hero and somehow this is not exactly pertinent to our discussion which is focused on the confrontation of different social discourses (modern and postmodern) on the fall of the traditional and heroic values closely linked to the times of the novels and on how they are challenged by the circumstances and the characters of the trilogy.

novels are then, the *mise en scène* of an encounter between the postmodern present of the writer and the modern setting that Pat Barker re-presents in her narrative, both full of contradictions as well as affirmative processes.

After this brief description of the two periods by different authors, we are going to focus on Modernity / Modernism first, and then proceed to Postmodernity / Postmodernism. In his essay, Habermas reminds us that the term modern has a long history which goes back to the fifth century when it was first used in order to distinguish the officially Christian present from the Roman and pagan past. From then on, it has described various periods in history, which see themselves as marked improvements from developments of the past, until we get to the most recent Modernism that “simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and the present (...), which first appeared in the midst of the nineteenth century.” (Brooker 127) What emerged from the romantic spirit of the first half of the nineteenth century was a more radicalised consciousness “which freed itself from all specific historical ties.” (Brooker 127) Bradbury and Mc Farlane in *Modernism A History of European Literature* (1976), wonder which are seen as the years of concentrated change and of gathering of force and also who is to be included in their identification parade of the modernist spirit. In order to give an answer they quote A. Alvarez, British poet and critic, who seems to think that whoever tries to situate Modernism must seek in the first thirty years or so of the twentieth century and that at the epicentre of that change Pound and Elliot, Joyce and Kafka will be found. (cf. Bradbury and Mc Farlane 32)

At the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth century, doubts emerged regarding the principles of rationality and social progress which were at the very heart of the Enlightenment project. Barker’s novels are set during these years when a new, more radicalised consciousness that tried to free itself from historical ties began to prevail. It was during Modernism, considering it as the years between the 1890’s and the 1930’s, that a deep sense of discontent arose in all of Western Europe. This sentiment was exacerbated by the war, its expression was the break-up with tradition and it generated a number of changes in the arts, politics and social life that were going to continue developing and come of age during Postmodernism.

Modernism as a cultural movement comes at the end of a historical and longer period called Modernity which started around 1453-1500 whose philosophical expression was the Enlightenment and which, according to some, has not finished yet and according to others turned into Postmodernity around the end of the reconstruction

of Europe after the Second World War. Modernity was one of the richest and most creative ages that humans have seen. It brought progress and wealth to many; science and technological advancements were supposed to conquer happiness for all men; however, the price to pay, were two world wars, Afro-American poverty, social exclusion, partition of the world in the hands of financial groups, among other things. Modernity used reason as its critical instrument and through reason it validated nature, man and society, it exalted the idea of the human subject and of reason. Science became secular and, undoubtedly, the French Revolution with its ideals of freedom, fraternity and equality was one of its major achievements. It is also during Modernity that liberalism is inaugurated. Nevertheless, Modernity failed to perceive that, even if man was placed at the highest position thanks to the value granted to reason, it was going to be this same reason that would end up murdering him in his race for development accompanied by an unrestrained idea of progress.

I have mentioned all these aspects in order to complete the description of Modernism which is, strictly speaking, the cultural trend that interests us and which comes at the end of Modernity as a historical period.

What was people's discontent based upon in those days? What traditions or historical ties did they want to break with? Certainly, the ones that originated, developed and were nurtured within the above described frame.

I would also like to make reference to the historical context of the novels which is of paramount importance to understand them in greater depth. In the early years of the twentieth century, Europe was a leading force in the world: Britain, Germany and France together commanded 60% of the world market for manufactured goods, the British empire covered in 1900, a quarter of the land surface of the globe and numbered four hundred million people. In *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature* (1976), Allan Bullock, English Historian, asserts that: "this was the great age of imperialism based on material superiority but also on the widespread belief on the racial and cultural superiority of the white races of European stock." (60). Queen Victoria died in 1901, her son Edward VII followed her and reigned over Britain and the Empire only for nine years. When the war broke up, King George V was on the throne. He was King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India. Socially, Europe remained a "society governed by class distinction, with undisguised inequality between rich and poor" (60) where the poor, says Bullock, were a "lower order of humanity and treated as such, valued only as the vast pool of surplus labour on which the social as

well as the economic system depended.” (61) Also, in the economic arena, the half century before the war was the most remarkable period of growth in history not excluding our own time: technological developments such as the telephone, the internal combustion engine, the aeroplane, synthetic materials produced by the chemical industry, etc. remain the foundations of the technology of the XXth century. Regarding all these advancements, Bullock raises an interesting point when he says that in 1914 “the threat of war didn’t evoke any horror because people were not aware or had any idea of what modern technological war would mean not only for individuals but for societies.” Therefore: “When the crowds cheered the declaration of war in every European capital, did so not out of some collective urge, but out of ignorance.” (62)

This was the age that saw women vote for the first time, the rise of socialism, communism, the Labour Party and Irish Republicanism and the coming into office in 1924 of the first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, all of which radically changed the political spectrum.

Although a lot of aspects of communal life were not the best and there was an “open, uninhibited acceptance of inequality, power and wealth, class or racial superiority”, Bullock insists that this was an age “remarkably unselfconscious, self confident, far less troubled by the anxieties, fears and guilt which (...) have found such a vivid expression and subscription in Europe since then.” (64). Sigmund Freud reconfirms this idea of self confidence when he describes the way Europeans saw themselves as nations then: “...the great white race nations, masters of the world, to which the direction of humanity has been granted, which have been the safeguards of world interests and to which are owed technological progress as well as the highest cultural, artistic and scientific values...”³ (*Consideraciones de actualidad sobre la guerra y la muerte* 3) He identifies this spirit of confidence and self sufficiency as pertaining to all European countries those days but it slowly started to dissolve after two world wars and the Holocaust. In the same paragraph Freud argues that these nations with so many virtues and strengths should have been able to solve their differences and their conflicts of interests without resorting to war. (cf. *Consideraciones de actualidad sobre la guerra y la muerte* 3)

Despite all this self confidence and apparent self sufficiency, Modernism is also described by theorists as a time that not only brought the expected revolution and change of sensibility that every new generation brings, but it was “rather a break-up, a

³ My own translation

devolution, some would say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic.” (Bradbury and McFarlane 20) In *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature* (1976), Bradbury and McFarlane quote Herbert Read, English poet and critic, when he said referring to pictorial art of the time, that: “we are now concerned not with a logical development of the art of painting but with an abrupt break with all traditions... The aim of five centuries of European effort is openly abandoned.” (20) According to C. S. Lewis, quoted in the same book, the division that separated his present (Modernism) from the age of Jane Austen and Walter Scott was the greatest of all divisions in the entire history of Western man, greater than that which separated Antiquity from the Dark Ages or the Dark Ages from Medieval times. In the realm of politics, of religion, of social values, of art and of literature a chasm lay between. (20) The two English critics assert that Modernist art was one that responded to the scenario of chaos experienced on those days at the beginning of the XXth century. They state:

...it is the art consequent on Heisenberg’s ‘Uncertainty Principle’, of the destruction of civilization and reason in First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Freud, Darwin and Marx, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the art consequent on (...) the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character. (27)

On the basis of these thoughts we could infer that if we can find in Postmodernism a fragmented subject, a loss of faith in the narratives of the past, an art of the random, of loose structure and of conscious fictiveness and much more, we can assert with the British theorists that all these aspects are blood-cousins to earlier tendencies. They speak of a new disposition of old forces. (cf. Bradbury and McFarlane 35)

In order to provide an example coming from the realm of literature to show how people were experiencing unsettling feelings and discouragement due to the way things were going at the beginning of the century, I will mention Edmund Wilson’s commentaries on T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land* in his book *Axel’s Castle* (1930) He holds that the atmosphere in which *The Waste Land* takes place is that of the great modern cities with their terrible dreariness. Within them, nameless millions seem “sadder than their pains” and perform “barren office routines wearing down their souls in interminable labours.” The world seen as a Waste Land “is a place not merely of desolation but of anarchy and doubt. In our post-war world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems serious or coherent – we have no belief in the things we do and consequently we have no heart for them.” (106)

The following lines from *What The Thunder Said* poem number V from *The Waste Land* (1922) act as a metaphor of the rather bleak sentiments perhaps shared by many in those post-war years.

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink
 Among the rock one cannot stop or think
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
 If there were only water amongst the rock...

Let us now consider the war itself. We learn from documents that it was the second deadliest armed conflict in Western history and a landmark of the XXth century. A few comments about it might contribute to a better understanding of the novels' times. For some men, the war meant emotional revulsion, for others, these were years of emotional excitement of hysterical proportions at times. In *Britain in the Century of total War* (1968), Arthur Marwick expresses ideas such as: "the war has turned the world topsy turvy"; this was a time of "gestation of a new social order" a time when "that horrible Ogre, tradition lies in the dust." He holds that: "it's the arts, religion, philosophy and politics the areas that show more specifically the wound suffered by British consciousness after the war." (111) One aspect that showed this trauma or psychological wound was the loss of religious faith: "from the trenches, the prisoners' camp, the hospital and the home, the question has been put in the stark brevity of mortal anguish: is there now a God?" (111) At a non-religious level it is easy to imagine how people, who had faith in a number of things and saw them all demolished, must have felt. These were men and women who had "rallied to human reason as an alternative absolute to revealed religion together with Freudian psychology and the Quantum and Relativity theories." For all of them the "useless havoc of war was a shattering experience." (112) Marwick mentions the novels by D.H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley and the works on economy by John Maynard Keynes as evidence of "minds scorched by war and reacting against a nervous strain almost unbearable. Strain caused by the very fact of a European war and the breakdown of accepted standards." (113)

Before I finish with Modernism, I would like to mention two aspects that come up clearly in Barker's work and which were part and parcel of modern times: colonialism and imperialism. According to Edward Said, literary theorist of Palestinian origin, the discourse of travel and conquest was part of the Enlightenment discourse

and, consequently, imperial and colonial feelings and attitudes were an important part of people's life in Britain, part of the accepted way things happened. Said has many interesting thoughts on the topic. In his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he argues that despite the fact that profit and hope for further profit were tremendously important for imperialism and colonialism, there was also a:

...commitment to them over and above profit, a commitment (...) which on the one hand allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples *should* be subjugated and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior or less advanced peoples. (10)

Let us bear in mind that although the hardships the colonisers had to endure were immense and the tremendous physical disparity between them and the natives was rather risky too, they never lacked the “will, self-confidence and even arrogance necessary to maintain such a state of affairs” (Said 11). Moreover, artists and intellectuals at home, as part of the culture they lived in, more often than not, endorsed this way of looking at the world and dealing with it without questioning it, just reflecting it in their works. Culture can never be “antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations” (xiv) argues Said, and the notions of “subject” and of “inferior” races were “widely accepted notions” among French or British artists, and they “helped fuel the imperial acquisition of territories in Africa throughout the nineteenth century.” (xiv) As I said, travel and discovery were part of the Enlightenment discourse and together with it the notions of patriotism and loyalty to king and country. Unfortunately, the war started and events as well as the ways of looking at them began to move in such a direction that this kind of discourse started to lose validity.

Let me now turn to Postmodernity / Postmodernism, the historical times and cultural environment within which the novels were written. Václav Havel, renowned playwright and ex president of the Czech Republic described the postmodern world in one of his speeches from 1994, as one based on science, and yet paradoxically “where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain.”⁴

The term Postmodernism itself has become a popular term that we all use and abuse of. It has turned into a ‘buzz word’ says Dick Hebdige, the British media theorist and sociologist, in his book of essays *Hiding in the Light* (1988). He argues that if it is possible to describe as postmodern the décor of a room, the intertextual relations

⁴ Vaclav Havel “The Need for Trascendence in a Postmodern World” speech in Independence Hall Philadelphia July 4th 1994.

between a television commercial and an arts documentary, the fascination for images, the process of cultural, political or existential fragmentation and / or crisis, the ‘decentring’ of the subject, an ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ and quite a number of other things, we are then clearly in the presence of a buzzword. (181) Similarly, Terry Eagleton, in his book *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), states: “If Postmodernism covers everything from *punk* rock to the death of metanarrative, from fanzines to Foucault, then it is difficult to see how any single explanatory scheme could do justice to such a bizarrely heterogeneous entity.” (21) He also makes it clear in the introduction to that book that when we speak of Postmodernity we refer to a historical time and when we speak of Postmodernism we refer to the cultural environment we find ourselves immersed in these days.

In the preface of *A Postmodern Reader* (1993), edited by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, Hans Bertens is quoted when he states that there are a couple of ‘core’ concepts he finds of great interest to define Postmodernism. One is the “ontological uncertainty” that arises from the “awareness of the absence of centres, privileged languages, or higher discourses.” The second ‘core’ notion involves the postmodern self as “no longer a coherent entity that has the power to impose order upon the environment. It has become decentered.” (3)

When did this ontological uncertainty and this decentered self begin to matter? When did people start speaking about Postmodernism and when did the change exactly happen? The Arab-American literary theorist Ihab Hassan, in his essay “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism” from 1987, admits that the origin of the term remains uncertain though it is known that it was used as far back as 1934 by Federico de Onís in his *Anthology of Spanish and Latinamerican Poetry* published in Madrid during that year. (cf. Docherty 147) In the sixties, it was Hassan himself who used the term in its present form for the first time in his book: *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1971–1982). In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) Jean François Lyotard situates the starting point of a time of transition known as the postmodern age at the end of the 1950’s when the reconstruction of Europe after World War II ended. (cf. 3) It is not easy to speak of fixed dates because this particular style of culture like many others in history should be perceived, in the words of Hassan: “in terms of both continuity *and* discontinuity, the two perspectives being complementary and partial, for history is a palimpsest and culture is permeable to time past, time present and time future.” (Docherty 149) One

epoch in history already prepares and has the seeds that will give life to the next one and it has always been so. Furthermore, history is not a mechanical event with fixed beginnings and ends and the prevalence of Postmodernism today, says Hassan, “does not suggest that the ideas or institutions of the past cease to shape the present. (...) In this perspective, Postmodernism may appear as a significant revision, if not an original *épistème* of the XXth century Western societies.” (Docherty 146)

It is difficult not only to define the beginnings of Postmodernism but also the term itself because, as Hassan suggests, it bears conceptual problems. The word Postmodernism evokes what it wishes to suppress, modernity itself, and it shows semantic instability as there is no clear consensus about its meaning. He suggests that we should call this age the age of *indetermanence*: indeterminacy plus immanence. Why indeterminacy? Because, Hassan argues, there are a number of terms that help to delineate the period such as disintegration, deconstruction, revolt, pluralism, etc. and through all of them moves a “vast will to unmaking affecting the body politics, the body cognitive, the erotic body, the individual psyche – the entire realm of discourse in the West.” (Docherty 153). Why immanence? He devoids the term of its religious echo and by it, he only means to designate “the capacity of the mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act upon itself through its own abstractions and so become its own environment.” (Docherty 153)

Madan Sarup, the Indian born literary critic, in *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* edited by Tasneem Raja after Sarup’s death in 1996, asserts that there is in Postmodernism an acceptance of ephemerality, fragmentation and discontinuity, and that any notion that might suggest that there is a metalanguage or metatheory through which all things can be connected or represented is attacked by postmoderns. Sarup mentions François Lyotard and Michel Foucault and describes them as writers who reject and distrust totalising discourses, metanarratives, and large-scale theoretical interpretations of universal application whilst insisting upon the plurality of power-discourse or of language games. They question the modern ideas about the subject, the progress of history and humanism: the subject is no longer alienated because that would mean to have a centre to be alienated from, but the subject is fragmented and his consciousness is constituted by the immediacy of events and the sensationalism of the spectacle. They reject universalisms and spouse relativism. (cf.

Raja 95-97)⁵ Within this logic, it is no longer valid to talk in terms of *either / or* but in terms of *both / and*. Nevertheless, in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), after admitting that his “review of the topic is generally a negative one” (viii) Terry Eagleton maintains that postmodern theory, despite all its talk of difference, plurality and heterogeneity, ends up being quite monistic, and that it operates with quite rigid binary oppositions. It lines up “bravely on one side of the theoretical fence as unequivocally positive” all the above mentioned terms and their allies and whatever their antithesis might be (unity, identity, totality, universality) are “ranged balefully on the other.” (26) With great irony he states: “Unlike most postmodernists, I myself am a pluralist about Postmodernism, believing in postmodern fashion that there are different narratives to be told of Postmodernism too, some of them considerably less positive than others.” (26) Always in reference to cultural relativism, he adds that despite having produced a “rich, bold, exhilarating body of work across the whole span of the arts” (27) Postmodernism has also raised so many questions about everything that as a result, it has disoriented those “who knew too well who they were and disarmed those who need to know who they are” (27). In the same breath and more importantly it has produced an “invigorating and a paralysing scepticism and unseated the sovereignty of Western Man, in theory at least, by means of a full-blooded cultural relativism which is powerless to defend either Western or Eastern Woman against degrading social practices.” (27)

He also makes it very clear that apart from all the definitions and descriptions we might grant to Postmodernism or from wherever it may spring:

“...the post-industrial society, the final discrediting of modernity, the recrudescence of the avant-garde, the commodification of culture, the emergence of vital new political forces, the collapse of certain ideologies of society and the subject - it is also and centrally, the upshot of a political failure, which it has either thrust into oblivion, or which it has never ceased to shadow-box.” (21).

He most certainly refers to Marxism and socialism as political movements opposed to capitalism.

On the positive side, Eagleton seems to think that Postmodernism’s single most enduring achievement has been “the fact that it has helped to place questions of

⁵ Lyotard and Foucault are in fact post-structuralist thinkers whose discourses have been appropriated by postmodern theorists.

sexuality, gender and ethnicity so firmly on the political agenda that it is impossible to imagine them being erased without an almighty struggle.” (22)

Jean-François Lyotard, the French post-structuralist philosopher, who is a larger figure than Eagleton and Sarup, defines Postmodernism simply as "incredulity towards metanarratives," (xxiv) in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). Metanarratives would be the set of values and expectations underlying faith in reason and science. He argues that somehow metanarratives have been lost on the way and that there is a general attitude of mistrust towards almost everything. He asserts that “the old poles of attraction represented by the nation-states, political parties, professions, institutions and historical traditions are losing their attraction. And it does not look as though they will be replaced.” (14) The technologies and techniques that have blossomed since the end of World War II are part of the reason for the decline of metanarratives together with the redeployment of liberal capitalism and the retreat or elimination of the communist alternative. (cf. 37-38)

Many of us are, in the words of Lyotard, “haunted by the paradisiac representation of a lost organic society” (15) and feel at a loss vis-à-vis all the above mentioned transformations. Lyotard, though, does not seem to think that “the breaking up of the grand narratives” necessarily leads us to “what some authors analyse in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion.” (15) He seems to think that “life goals depend on each individual’s industriousness. Each individual is referred to himself.” (15) Also, that “legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction.” (41)

Lyotard wonders “what is the postmodern?” “It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. But, all that has been received has to be suspected.” And the emphasis perhaps should not be upon the word itself, he continues, but on the “powerlessness of the faculty of representation, on the nostalgia for presence felt by the human subject today, on the obscure and futile will which inhabits him in spite of everything.” (79) All this may sound obscure and academic but in a way it is the description of what we are experiencing these days: we do not trust authority, the world can no longer be explained in theological terms, our old paradigms of social behaviour show cracks and we do not know any longer the difference between right and wrong. Our truth is not our

neighbour's truth and we are expected to accept as many versions of it as there might be. Relativism prevails then. As a consequence of this frame within which we move and live, individualism and selfishness blossom and are promoted but they only bring loneliness in the end. There is little commitment in relationships and our lifesavers these days go from drugs, to oriental religions, going through hedonistic excesses or plain indifference.

Finally, and in order to round up this section in an affirmative tone, I will say that in 1987, when Ihab Hassan wrote his essay "Toward a concept of Postmodernism" he chose to end it with a question:

One may well wonder: is some decisive historical mutation – involving art and science, high and low culture, the male and the female principles, parts and wholes, the One and the Many as Pre-Socratics used to say – active in our midst? Or does the dismemberment of Orpheus prove no more than the mind's need to make but one more construction of life mutabilities and human mortality? And what construction lies beyond, behind, within, that construction? (Docherty 154)

Years later, already within the XXIst century, in 2006, Juan José Sebreli, goes a few steps further. In *El olvido de la razón* (2006), he deconstructs many postmodern axioms and describes for us some of the new schools of thought that are emerging as a continuation and at the same time a discontinuation of Postmodernism. After this, and making a brief summary of the many ideas that Postmodernism has concerned itself with, he concludes in an affirmative frame of mind saying that:

The relationship between society and philosophy, between history and reason, between action and theory and the search for meaning or the immanent rationality of the social and historical process do not imply the acceptance of teleologies, eschatologies, millenarisms or providentialisms; on the contrary, they all reconfirm freedom within the boundaries of a given situation, reject determinism (...) and deny a predetermined future as our fatal destiny. They rely on the ability of humans (...) to understand, select among different alternatives, transform their situation in the world and grant a rational meaning to historical development and to their own existences.⁶ (350)

In her book *Poetics of Postmodernism*, (1988) Linda Hutcheon also appears as one who sees Postmodernism under a positive light and one who tries to reach a balanced viewpoint of the whole matter. She seems to think that despite all the

⁶ My own translation

apocalyptic rhetoric of a Charles Newman, a Jean Baudrillard or an Arthur Kroker, she can see little in the postmodern to warrant the “arc of disintegration and decay” Kroker and Cook speak about. (221) She admits that Postmodernism may be, “as so many want to claim, the expression of a culture in crisis, but it is not in itself a revolutionary breakthrough. It is too contradictory, too wilfully compromised by that which it challenges.” (230) Postmodernism contests modernist (humanist) premises of art’s apolitical autonomy and of theory and criticism as value free-activities. Its paradoxes reveal and question prevailing norms and they can do so because they incarnate both processes. There is in Postmodernim a double encoding, contestatory and complicitous at the same time: for example “representation cannot be avoided but it can be studied to show how it legitimates certain kinds of knowledge, and therefore, certain kinds of power.” (230) Historical knowledge, subjectivity, narrativity, reference, textuality and discursive context are all issues consistently problematized by Postmodernism and it is this problematization which defines it. This art does not emit clear signals and therefore it makes us question. “But it does not offer answers. It cannot, without betraying its anti-totalizing ideology.” (231)

I will conclude this section saying that the authors we have mentioned contribute in one way or other to see Postmodernism as a time of incredulity, relativism, ephemerality, decentering and fragmentation. Regarding Modernity some think that it was a project as yet unfulfilled and that there is still some more life in it. Both, Modernism and Postmodernism are relevant for us in this thesis as there is a *continuum* between them given by the fact that Postmodernism is Pat Barker’s cultural environment while writing the novels and Modernism is the cultural period when the events in the novel take place. In the trilogy, we can already sense fractures in society denounced by its characters which make it possible for us to think about the problems of our postmodern present and why not, take them as the first signs of a wider and more lasting discontent that will eventually become more obvious and perfectly identified in the postmodern world.

1.3 The historical novel

Tamsin Spargo, the editor of *Reading the Past: literature and history* (2000), states in his introduction to the book: “arguments about the past are often explicitly and

always implicitly interventions in debates about the present and the future.” (2) There are always political, ethical and intellectual motivations for reading the past. He argues that the reading of the past is normally founded on motivations such as: current political ends, ethical concerns, learning lessons for the future or paying debts to the dead. Then, I might infer that when novelists write historical novels, they do not only show that they have a strong affinity with history, but also that they are informed, influenced and encouraged by the above mentioned concerns. Their intervention in debates about the past through a fictive work will automatically act as an intervention in debates about the present and the future.

What is a historical novel? What defines it? The Italian writer Valerio Massimo Manfredi author of the historical trilogy *Alexandros* (1998), makes perhaps an oversimplified comment to his interviewer: “...I believe that all novels are historical, who can for God’s sake write outside history?” Later in the interview he adds: “As I said before, there does not exist a novel which can be labelled as non-historical, how do you manage to create the setting otherwise?”⁷

In a more demanding and more strict frame of mind, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Canadian fiction writer, decided that the above mentioned question was one for which he had to find a clear answer as a writer of historical fiction. In his essay called “Writing History vs. Writing the Historical Novel” (2006) he declares that the easiest response for him was that a historical novel is that whose action is set in the past. However, he states that the passing of time ensures that this is a description that will, inevitably, apply to all novels. For Jane Austen’s first readers, *Pride and Prejudice* was contemporary fiction, but from our standpoint her characters live, breathe and scheme in a world far removed from our own. He concluded then, that what distinguishes novels merely set in ‘long-ago days’ from true historical novels is “the consciousness of and concern for the subject of history itself that such books display” which coincides with Linda Hutcheon’s definition found in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). Although the Canadian critic admits that “history plays a great number of distinctly different roles, at different levels of generality, in its various manifestations” (113) and also that it is difficult to provide a definition of the genre just as it happens with most literary genres, she states that “I would define historical fiction as that which is modelled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force (in the narrative and in human destiny)” (113)

⁷ Interview published by *adn CULTURA La Nación* June 26th 2010. My own translation

In her doctoral thesis, Dr. Cristina Elgue de Martini quotes Avrom Fleishman and his book *The English Historical Novel* (1971). In it, Fleishman argues that we should describe as historical all those novels whose actions are separated from the author by at least two generations; whilst Anderson Imbert, Argentinian writer and literary theorist, also quoted by Dr. Martini, called historical all those works whose action happened at a time previous to that of the novelist's life. (cf. 106)

Colombian writer William Ospina, author of extraordinary historical novels such as *Ursúa* and *El país de la canela* and chosen by Gabriel García Márquez as his heir, was asked in an interview for *La Nación* newspaper, what new perspective the historical novel brings to the events of our past. He responded:

What is new about this kind of narrative is the effort they make not to look at the world in black and white and to try to look at things that went willingly unsaid, as well as to revalue new aspects (...) I always remember some words by Freud that say that what remains undeciphered will always return as a suffering soul until it finds explanation and redemption. Language performs its part of the task when it interrogates the past and tries to make out its meaning.⁸

Ospina added that this explanatory and redemptive goal is one of the writer's tasks when he writes a historical novel and he quoted Thomas Mann when he says that the work of culture is to bring to the realm of light and of the spirit those things that are initially sombre.

Somehow, when writers write a historical novel, they are refusing to see the past die and are trying to make it present through memory. I am paraphrasing Carlos Fuentes in his essay "Words Apart" included in the book *Postmodernism a Reader* (1993) (cf. Brooker 245). Linda Hutcheon provides further support to this idea that historical novels are a good way of disclosing the past and not letting it die when she states that these particular works of art open history to the consideration of new generations in order to prevent it from becoming teleological, that is to say closed and finished. (cf. *Poetics of Modernism* 110)

Why do writers choose to write historical fiction? According to Vanderhaeghe, writers of historical novels act "out of a belief that the unseen hand of history is everywhere at work in the present, that history is one of the ways by which we come to understand ourselves, not only as beings in society, but also as individuals." Perhaps this is the reason why these novels are so popular because in a way "they are interested in discovering how and why we have become what we are—perhaps to an even greater degree than conventional history—and they tend to blur the emotional distinction

⁸ Interview by Susana Reinoso for *La Nación* 28.02.10 My own translation

between past and present.” In order to illustrate his thoughts Vanderhaeghe quotes T.S. Eliot’s poem “Burnt Norton”: “Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past.” (Vanderhaeghe vol. 1 no. 1-2).

On the other hand there are those who hold more sceptical viewpoints about the possibility of reconstructing the past. Such is the case of Juan José Saer, Argentinian writer (1937 – 2005). Fernando Ainsa, in his article “La reescritura de la historia” (1991), states that authors like Saer: “do not believe in the possibility of reconstructing the past with the written word.” (29) He quotes the Argentinian novelist’s own words when he asserts that:

There are no historical novels whose actions happen in the past and which attempt to reconstruct a given epoch because the reconstruction of the past can never become more than just a project (...) no past time is reconstructed; we just have a vision of it, a certain picture which belongs to the observer and which does not correspond itself with any precise historical event.⁹ (29)

Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher, literary critic and theologian among other things, provides some elements that emerge from his philosophy of history which may prove useful to analyse the trilogy. In his book *Por los campos de exterminio* 2003, Manuel Reyes Mate interprets Benjamin’s Theses and his thinking in general. In Thesis VII for example, the Spanish philosopher states that Benjamin refers to all culture that lies in between the present and the past as a “booty that owes its existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses that created them (the present and the past) but also to the endeavours of their un-named contemporaries” (Benjamin qtd in Reyes Mate 138) Culture as well as tradition, adds Reyes Mate, must be objects of creation and we construct or create tradition when we try to interpret history. He affirms that those who interpret history are those who feel frustrated in it whereas those who hold power in this world prefer not to interpret it but to repeat it. (139)

The past Benjamin is interested in is “the non-public, unpublished side of reality, that which emerges at the present moment.” (...) And he argues it is only through and thanks to the power and light that emerges from the vitality of our present that “the most intimate structures of the past become visible in the present.” (140) In other words, the ambitions and expectations that we put in our present are the ones that allow the past to come to the surface.

Taking into account another aspect, it could be said that there is a “secret complicity between the historical subject that attempts to know the past and the object

⁹ My own translation

of knowledge that strives to become present.” (141) Even more, Benjamin proposes that an authentic or real knowledge of history should turn into self-knowledge for the knowing subject.

It is important to acknowledge that there was a political interest in Benjamin, meaning by politics the means to change and construe the present. In Thesis VI he refers to the fact that “whilst the enemies of long ago remain unquestioned, the dead will not rest in peace and the living will be exposed to the same dangers as the old victims.” (151) Each casualty from the past has got impending rights. Benjamin believes these rights belong to them even though they may not be satisfied or recognised. If so, if these rights are not recognised, history will repeat itself. For example, if, at the same time that we admit Spartacus’ importance as a slaves’ leader in the Roman Republic, we do not remember or consider those who were less relevant than him but who also contributed to the same end, with their own lives perhaps, “the anonymous deaths, with no newspapers headlines, victims of an equally anonymous injustice” (144), it will be highly unlikely that we become aware of the dangers that threaten us. That is why he speaks of - *das Zitat* - (the German for date) as a figure of the “secret reunion between the past and the present. It is as if those who have already departed were waiting for us.” (Benjamin’s Thesis II qtd in Reyes Mate 142) If we look closely, it can be said that Benjamin comes from the past to the present and not the other way around as Historicism does. According to him, if we interpret the past starting from the debates of the present, then the past will reproduce a given situation, whereas “if it is the past that introduces itself to us, things change: its presence is an interruption of our times” (142) This “irruption of the past into the present is that about it, which is capable of conforming together with the present, in a creative manner, a new constellation of meaning.”¹⁰ (143)

In conclusion, it could be said that it is in their effort to let the past speak by itself that writers of historical novels create the necessary conditions for *das Zitat* to take place and for that new constellation of meaning to become real.

Now, let me consider readers instead of writers. When asked why people like reading historical novels, Valerio Manfredi again, gives his all-embracing viewpoint stating that:

In my opinion, more than historical novels, what people love is Antiquity. (...) we are living in an always increasing, fortuitous dimension, in a situation where human beings, individuals, are practically like leaves carried by the wind. There are no more

¹⁰ All quotations from Reyes Mate are my own translation

ideologies, no more beliefs in anything. Religion suffers for various reasons. There is no longer a reference point (...) and people are under the impression of not being of any importance. (...) Therefore, Antiquity appears as a new dimension in which there is still room for the individual, for mystery, for adventure, for expanding one's personality. (...) That is why Antiquity becomes *another time, another place*¹¹, a place where somehow it was all possible and all impossible at the same time.¹²

He refers to Antiquity in particular because it is the setting of his novels, but I think his comment can be applied to all historical novels no matter what time or event of history they are built around. Regarding this widespread acceptance and liking of historical novels by the general public, Dr. Martini argues that their boom is somehow based on the popularity acquired by the study of history such as it is proposed by *la nouvelle histoire*. The *nouvelle histoire* is an off-spring of l'École des Annales in France, a style of historiography developed by French historians in the 20th century and institutionally based in l'École Pratique de Hautes Études, Paris. The term *nouvelle histoire* became public in 1978 when Jacques Le Goff together with Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel, all of them identified with l'École des Annales, published their work called precisely *La Nouvelle Histoire*. The historians who adhere to its concepts will not accept the possibility of "an automatic history" but would rather deal with the idea of a "problematic history". (cf. Martini 57) This is so, they argue, because among other reasons, documents on which their studies are based are never innocent as they "have been produced by past societies not only to tell the truth but to impose a given image of that past." (Martini 58)¹³ I argue that readers as well as writers seek in historical novels the self knowledge Benjamin speaks about. We could say they are searching the roots of their identity.

I shall consider now the different ways of writing a historical novel. In this, I will follow Dr. Martini's scheme. She identifies three kinds of historical novels: the classical or traditional ones, the ones called by Linda Hutcheon "historiographic metafiction" and the ones labelled by Seymour Menton as "new historical novels".

In the first case, Dr. Martini states that the novels are built with the classical elements assigned to them by Georg Lukács. His description of the traditional historical novel is well accepted and used by teachers and students. Dr. Martini quotes the Hungarian critic when, in *Studies in European Realism* (1948), he speaks of the "type" as the critical category that embodies "a unique synthesis which organically unites what

¹¹ In English in the original

¹² Interview published by *adn CULTURA La Nación* June 26th 2010. My own translation

¹³ My own translation

is general with what is particular in characters as well as in situations.” Walter Scott’s novels would be a good example of the expression of this so called “type”. (Martini 99) The underlying epistemology in this kind of novels is basically “positivist, the text is considered a reflection of reality and the problem of representation is not dealt with. The real existence of the represented reality is not questioned and in some cases the author has been part of it; there is also an implicit trust in the ability of language to speak about this reality.”¹⁴ (Martini 98) In reference to characters themselves, which can be real figures of history or not, Linda Hutcheon paraphrases Lukács when she states in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), that in classical novels real personages are relegated to secondary roles and are only “deployed to validate or authenticate the fictional world with their presence as if to hide the joins between fiction and history in a formal and ontological sleight of hand.” (*Poetics of Modernism* 114) However, although they are relegated to secondary roles, these characters never produce a mediocre impression upon the reader and even though they are “described with all their weaknesses, they always appear as impressive personages.” (Lukács qtd. in Martini 104)

Linda Hutcheon also devotes some thoughts to the non-historically real characters of these novels and to do so she mentions Lukács’ vision of them. His idea is that the characters in a traditional historical novel “should be a type, a synthesis of the general and the particular, of all the humanly and socially essential determinants.” Besides, he argues that the use of detail is relatively unimportant in the historical novel and it is only “a means of achieving historical faithfulness” (Lukács quoted in *Poetics of Postmodernism* 113)

The second type of historical novel is the one described by Linda Hutcheon as “historiographic metafiction”. In this case, the critic argues that an obvious scepticism of positivist and empiricist epistemologies prevails and novels are more often than not auto-representational and auto-referential works with a variety of narrators and with a marked tendency to thematise the historical past and the historically conditioned expectations of the reader. (“Canadian Historiographic Metafiction” 84/85) Guy Vanderhaeghe contributes to the discussion stating that in this kind of novels, “history is at centre stage like in any other historical novel but, because postmodernists are sceptical about master narratives, the objectivity of history and the coherence of identities, they typically rewrite the past from the point of view of those who have been

¹⁴ My own translation

victimized: women, native peoples, gays, etc. and they knowingly disrupt chronology, introduce supernatural occurrences and obviously historically inaccurate elements to remind the reader that history is a relative construct, riddled with subjectivity. Some more wild-eyed postmodernists refuse to admit any real separation between fiction and history since both, in their view, are human-made “ways of world-making.” (cf. Vanderhaeghe Vol. 1 nos. 1-2)

Regarding characters, Hutcheon compares the postulates that pertain to the classical or traditional historical novel and confronts them with the situation in historiographic metafiction and she concludes that in this last case, characters are “anything but proper types: they are the ex-centric, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history” for example Saleem Sinai in *Midnight’s Children* by Rushdie. (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 114) Even real characters of history take on “different, particularized and ultimately ex-centric status” for example Richard Nixon in *The Public Burning* by Coover. (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 114) In historiographic metafiction Lukács’ ‘type’ has little function. This fiction sometimes falsifies known historical details “in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error.” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 114) Here, historical characters are rarely relegated to secondary roles, and the subterfuge of trying to hide the joins between history and fiction is not pursued, on the contrary, these novels pose that “ontological join as a problem: How do we know the past? What do (what can) we know of it now?” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 115)

There is a third possibility put forward by Seymour Menton, a specialist in Latin-American historical novels. He uses the expression “new historical novel” to make a distinction between the traditional historical novels and the novels that narrate events from the past using postmodern techniques while also defying the majority of the assumptions inherited from modernism. (cf. Martini 98)

The techniques and aspects that Menton identifies as pertaining to this kind of novels are: a) the subordination of the mimetic reproduction of a given historical period to the introduction of philosophical ideas such as the impossibility of really knowing the truth of history and its cyclical and unpredictable characteristics, b) history is distorted through omissions and / or exaggerations, c) historical characters are fictionalised by writers who enjoy creating *sui generis* versions of them, d) the use of intertextuality, e) the writer or narrator allows himself to make comments about or to reflect upon the

creative process, f) the novels are informed by the Bajtinian concepts of dialogism, the carnivalesque and heteroglossy.

In order to expand the discussion about historical novels, I would like to mention an idea designed and sustained by Lukasz Grützmacher from Warsaw University, Poland. In his article “Las trampas del concepto ‘la *nueva novela histórica*’ y de la retórica de la historia postoficial” published in *Acta Poética* (2006), he is very critical of Seymour Menton’s description of the “new historical novel” and at the same time he contributes to the topic with his own arguments.

According to Grützmacher, the six features designed by Menton to better describe the “new historical novel” are rather “superficial and consequently, despite making some aspects clearer, on the whole, they bring more confusion into the picture.” (Grützmacher 144) He also asserts that it is quite unfortunate, in the first place, to call something “new” because in everyday language, what is new today it is no longer so tomorrow, and in terms of literary theory, “nueva novela” makes you think of the “nouveau roman” of the 50s. (Grützmacher 150) Furthermore, he thinks it is almost impossible to make a clear division between novels and call them “new” or “traditional”. Why is this so? Because in novels described as “traditional” by Menton, we can find features Menton himself describes as belonging to the “new historical novel” and also, many novels that are “new” in his opinion, are pretty close to the classical version of the genre or they show the six characteristics in highly varied degrees. (Grützmacher 147) Grützmacher’s conclusion is that he would rather speak in terms of two poles or extremes. He quotes Fernando Aínsa, literary critic from Uruguay and his article “La reescritura de la historia en la nueva narrativa latinoamericana” (cf. Aínsa 1991) In it, states Grützmacher, Aínsa observes two opposite tendencies which are both present in contemporary historical novels: “on the one hand, we have texts which try to *re-create* the past and its characters and on the other hand we have those which *deconstruct* it.” (Aínsa qtd. in Grützmacher 148) The first ones use available historiographic sources, the rest emerge from their authors’ free imagination. That is to say, some texts will give readers one more version of the past and historical data and chronologies will be faithfully transported into them, whereas some other texts will deconstruct the past and will purposely alter data and chronologies such as the free imaginations of their authors may dictate. According to Grützmacher, this classification coincides with the two forces mentioned by Elzbieta Sklodowska in her book *La parodia en la nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1991) He describes her argument that

there is a centripetal force which may lead the discourse in the novel towards a “faithful and coherent construction of the past” and another centrifugal force directly “related with the crisis of the concept of truth.” which expresses itself in the deconstruction of each discourse that might have an aspiration to be a true reconstruction of the past.¹⁵ (Sklodowska qtd. in Grützmacher 149) Authors led by the centrifugal force tend to ridicule and make a parody of all serious interpretations of history and of its characters and they arbitrarily combine images and elements of different epochs in a playful, postmodern manner. These novels never stop mocking any aspiration of faithfully representing the past and its actors and they keep violating three basic restrictions of the traditional historical novel: a) not to fictionalise those aspects that history did not register b) to avoid anachronisms, that is, to avoid contradictions between the cultural material of the period described by the novel and the one provided by official history, and c) to create realistic historical fictions, that is to make the logics of the fictive world compatible with the logics of reality. (cf. Viú 167-178) On the other hand, authors led by the centripetal force will produce works located at the opposite end where sources are faithfully respected. In these novels you cannot find any questioning of what is conventionally accepted as true about events or people. Even if they play with conventions, they do not get too far from them either, so that the reader may not lose total faith in the possibility of reconstructing the past and the characters that populated it.

It is not difficult to perceive the presence of these two different forces in the majority of Latin-American historical novels of the second half of the XXth century, states Grützmacher. (149) Although the Polish critic, Aínsa and Sklodowska theorise about Latin-American historical novels, I argue that their ideas are still valid, useful and helpful to describe works from other origins. Summarising, Grützmacher concludes it is better to divide historical novels, not in new and traditional. He would rather situate them in the two different poles he suggests in his article. Then, novels dominated by the centripetal force would be closer to the pole of the traditional model and those dominated by the centrifugal force would be closer to the pole of a postmodern narrative. (149)

There is one last and highly significant aspect that Fernando Aínsa points out in Latin-American historical novels of the last decades which I would like to mention because I think it could easily be used to describe Barker’s trilogy. Aínsa argues that

¹⁵ My own translation

“this is the most important characteristic of the new Latin-American historical novel: among the ruins of a history dismantled by rhetoric and lies, it searches the authentic individual lost behind events; it discovers and sings praises of human beings in their most credible dimension, even when these beings might *seem* invented, even when ultimately, they *are* invented.”¹⁶ (Aínsa 31)

Now, let me focus on another aspect of great importance when it comes to analyse historical novels: the opposition between fiction and history. Various authors have dealt with the matter. *Comment on écrit l’histoire* (1971) by Paul Veyne, *Metahistory* (1973), by Hayden White, the article by Roland Barthes “Le discours de l’histoire” (1982), *Temps et Récit* (1983-85) by Paul Ricoeur and *Fiction et Diction* (1991) by Gérard Genette are all works that have contributed to the understanding of the topic. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider each one of them in depth and individually, we might say that Paul Veyne refuses to call History a science while Hayden White believes, among other things, that “the use of language implies a specific attitude before the world which is both ethical and ideological or political: not only every interpretation, but also every use of language is politically contaminated” (White 129) This means that both fiction and history are non-innocent types of discourse. They are certainly influenced by the writers’ ethical, ideological and political concerns and the way they use language to construe a fictive or historiographic work will always be particularly coloured by their own visions of things.

Roland Barthes speaks from the perspective of the linguistics of discourse. In his article “Le discours de l’histoire” from 1982 he wonders whether it is pertinent to keep placing historical discourse and fictional discourse on opposite sides. (Barthes qtd. in Martini 83) He adds that “due to its very structure (...) historical discourse is basically an ideological construct more precisely an imaginary construct.” (Barthes qtd. in Martini 87) Most interestingly, at the end of the article, he admits that he can perceive a “weakening (almost disappearance) of the act of narrating in today’s historiography because the focus is placed on structure rather than in chronologies.” He concludes that the “historical narration is dead because the sign of History is from now on, less real than intelligible.” (Barthes qtd. in Martini 88)

Paul Ricoeur believes that both the discourse of fiction and the discourse of history share the same configuring operations (mimesis) and narrative structures; what separates them is their ambition to tell the truth. History searches truth whereas fiction

¹⁶ My own translation

suspends deliberately the alternative between false and true. (cf. Martini 92) In conclusion, when an author writes historical fiction he is not expected to show evidence or reasons to justify what he says and the fictionality of his work is not defined by the story's characteristics or by its referents who may or may not have been real, but just by the intention of the artist in his act of writing, in other words by an agreement he establishes with his or her readers. (Martini 70)

From the point of view of a novelist, not of a theorist and about this particular matter, Guy Vanderhaeghe very clearly argues that history gives us “what men have performed” whilst historical novels are the arena of serial, multiple voices:

...that insistently remind us that historical abstractions were once acted out by flesh and blood, and that historical struggles were also once human struggles with much at stake. This view, I would argue, helps promote a stronger emotional identification with the past and encourages the feeling that history is not broken up into *then* and *now* but can also be regarded as an experiential continuum. (Vol. 1 nos. 1-2)

Massimo Manfredi adds:

History with capital letter is the collective attempt of humans to construct a common memory. Memory then becomes identity, something of which we are in great need. No one can live without memory, no one can live without identity. (...) History has got the duty to show proofs whereas literature has not. In literature you speak as if you were the only existing witness of what you are telling. (...) Also literature has got a third dimension which is that of life, feelings, emotions, terror, anxiety, love. It has got the capacity to recreate settings, environments, whereas historiography cannot move its characters in a similar way, in a unitary way.¹⁷

There is a final consideration I will introduce at this point and it is the treatment that fictional characters get from authors in their interplay with the real ones. In her article “The Secret History: The Power of Imagined Figures in Historical Fiction” (2009), Maud Casey reviews three historical novels by American authors and she states that the pathos of these imagined lives, their secret history which we *do not*¹⁸ know are not only as important as the history we *do* know, but they give it credibility. Through them, writers make visible what sheer facts have obscured. The imagined man or woman, wedged into any historical moment, renders a kind of truth to the novel - not a real history but a true history. It is history in its profoundest sense. (cf. Casey 2009) Also, the other way around, a real character fictionalised by an author is granted a kind of life, a soul, he or she may not have had. The creator of fiction animates the spirit of history, the spirit that was Dr. Rivers’, for example, and that imagined character causes

¹⁷ Interview published by *adn CULTURA La Nación* June 26th 2010. My own translation

¹⁸ In italics in the original

a vibration. It pushes against the confines of its historical container. Authors carefully lay down the facts and then they eviscerate them in order to free the souls of their chosen personages. (cf. Casey 2009) Casey makes these comments in reference to Madeleine a fictional character in the book *Hausmann or the Distinction* (2001), by Paul LaFarge and to Marie Antoinette, queen of France, in the novel *Versailles* (2003), by Kathryn Davis but I think her contributions can be applied to any fictional or real character in a historical novel or to any author that writes historical novels. She speaks of a “fifth dimension of history, in which a kind of probability space is created, a space in which fact and fiction collide and the finite and the infinite co-exist.” (Casey 2009) In order to describe this fifth dimension she quotes Nabokov in his book *Lectures on Literature* (1980), where he states on this matter: “Time and space, the colours of the seasons, the movements of the muscles and minds, all these are for writers of genius, not traditional notions which may be borrowed from the circulating library of public truths but a series of unique surprises which master artists have learned to express in their own unique way.” These secret histories that authors create about real and non-real characters are such series of unique surprises, which master artists have used *in conjunction with* the circulating library of public truths to illuminate the shadows. (cf. Casey 2009)

1.4 Intertextuality

In her book *De la escritura y sus fronteras* (1992), Silvia Barei states that: “At an elementary level, intertextuality is described as the relationship found between two different texts.”¹⁹ (36) Nevertheless, she considers that this bond between texts goes over and above the border of literary discourse and that intertextual relationships can also be found with discourses coming from non aesthetic linguistic practices such as history, philosophy or politics. Linda Hutcheon, the Canadian critic, shares this view when she states that:

In many cases, intertextuality may well be too limited a term to describe the process; interdiscursivity would perhaps be a more accurate term for the collective modes of discourse from which the postmodern parodically draws: literature, the visual arts, history, biography, theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology. (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 129/130)

Furthermore, the study of intertextuality could be done using wider semiotic

¹⁹ All quotations from Silvia Barei’s book are my own translation

points of view or perspectives including other forms of social communication such as non verbal signs. (cf. Barei 36)

Mijail Bajtin prepared the ground for the concept of intertextuality to emerge but it was Julia Kristeva who actually coined the term in France in the 1960's when she introduced Bajtin's ideas to the French literary critique. The typically Bajtinian principles of polyphony and dialogism can be seen as forerunners of the concept of intertextuality although their scope is much greater. It is well known that it was Kristeva who first used the word intertextuality after amalgamating principles of Saussurean linguistics together with principles of Bajtinian theory. She entered the French literary world in the 1960's and she shaped her thoughts at a time when structuralism was already becoming poststructuralism. Kristeva was part of the editorial committee of *Tel Quel* a literary magazine founded in 1960 in Paris by Philippe Sollers and Jean Hallier, which counted among its contributors people such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Kristeva herself, Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, etc. Its publication ceased in 1982.

In *Séméiôtiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969) by Julia Kristeva which was translated into English as *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* in 1980, we can find two articles: "The Bounded Text" and "Word Dialogue and Novel" whose concepts are quoted by Graham Allen in his book *Intertextuality* (2000). He retrieves ideas such as "the manner in which a text is constructed out of already existent discourse," or "texts are made up of (...) all the different discourses, ways of speaking and saying, institutionally sanctioned structures and systems which make up what we call culture." (Kristeva qtd in Allen 35-36) Allen asserts that Kristeva restates Bajtinian's notions of the dialogic but: "whilst Bajtin's work centres on actual human subjects employing language in specific social situations, Kristeva's way of expressing these points seems to evade human subjects in favour of the more abstract terms, text and intertextuality." (Allen 36) This would be more in tune with the poststructuralist postulates of "death of the author, death of the subject and end of history" that were emerging in the 1960's when she wrote *Desire in Language*.

Kristeva was not the only one who looked into intertextuality, Gérard Genette, Jean Ricardou, Philippe Boyer, Roland Barthes, Marc Angenot and Michel Riffaterre did too. Barei quotes Gérard Gennette and the three different intertextual practices he identifies in his book *Palimpsestes* (1982): quotations, allusions and plagiarism. In the same book, Genette speaks of "hypertextuality" or "text in second degree" such as *The*

Odyssey would be for Joyce's *Ulysses*, although Barei seems to think that Genette's "hypertextuality" can be absorbed by the term intertextuality without too much problem. (cf. Barei 53)

For her research, Silvia Barei draws on the initial critical theories about intertextuality developed by Bajtin, Kristeva and Genette but she insists upon the need to count on a clear classification of it and that is why she mentions Lucien Dällenbach's encompassing proposal. According to the French theorist there are three categories of intertextuality: a) general intertextuality, b) limited intertextuality and c) internal intertextuality. (a) refers to the plurality of social discourses found in the structure of every utterance or said differently, to the relations established among texts which may not necessarily be fictional or aesthetic texts. (b) refers to the relations between two different texts of the same author. And (c) refers to the relations that a text establishes with itself. This last type is very much used in contemporary literature and is also described as a metafictional resource. (cf. Barei 57)

Within all these different intertextual relations we can find formal strategies through which a given utterance migrates towards a second text. Of these, we will mention quotation and allusion which can easily help us identify an intertext. According to Gérard Genette quoted by Barei, a quotation is the "most explicit and literal" form of the intertext and it forces the reader to use his or her detective abilities to identify the original text. Allusion is a more distant manner of using other people's words in a new text and it is only for a highly trained reader to find the origin. (cf. Barei 70)

Barei adds to her analysis of intertextuality that despite the fact that we can count on a valuable and extended corpus of theory about intertextuality, it is not the same with the research results that refer to a definite methodology to operate the intertext which she thinks are still missing. (cf. Barei 55) She suggests that we can follow three steps to analyse the migration of a text to a second one: 1. identification of the intertext 2. analysis of the transformations operated on the intertext 3. evaluation of the intertext in reference to its new context. In this last step, we are encouraged to find the different "value" that the intertext acquires in the new text which is itself subject to different conditions of production and of intratextual relations from the original one. (cf. Barei 69) Even when the migration is performed word by word there still exists at the level of meaning an opposition, a non-similarity, a non-complete "identity". This brings

us back to the bajtinian concept of “dialogism”: “a statement speaks, opposes, answers, reads another statement but it always *establishes a distance*²⁰ between them” (Barei 69)

Michael Worton and Judith Still, editors of the book *Intertextuality Theories and Practices* (1990), assert that when talking about intertextuality there are two axes to consider, “texts entering via authors (who are first, readers) and texts entering via readers (co-producers)”. Both axes, according to them, are “politically and emotionally charged.” (2) They also believe that quotations “function as textual strategies, as tropological events, as *metaphors*” and that they signal “a repetition and a ceding of authorial copyright; (...) acting as a blocking mechanism which (temporarily at least) restricts the reader’s free, aleatory intertextual reading of the text.” (10-11) The reader inescapably and naturally “strives to incorporate the quotation into the unified textuality which makes of a text a semiotic unit. The reader thus seeks to read the borrowing not only for its semantic content but also for its tropological or metaphoric function and significance.” (11) The text, in the words of Worton and Still,

...certainly depends for its full significance on the activity of the reader who perceives that something is happening rather than simply being said. To quote is not merely to write glosses on previous writers; it is to interrogate the chronicity of literature and philosophy, to challenge history as determining tradition and to question conventional notions of originality and difference. (12)

Therefore “meaning and significance are to be constructed rather than extracted. In other words, hermeneutic activity must give way to semiotic, intertextual analysis.” (12)

Worton and Still also quote Genette when he states that the phenomenon of intertextuality, which is as old as recorded human society, would be more adequately named transtextuality which, according to him, is “everything, be it explicit or latent, that links one text to others...” (22) and it includes as sub-categories a) Kristeva’s intertextuality b) metatextuality: the relation established between two texts through a comment without necessarily quoting it: normally a non-literary work, c) paratextuality: the relations between the body of a text and its titles, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, first drafts, etc. d) architexte: the relations that the text establishes with the genre to which it belongs. These concepts were made public in Genette’s book *Introduction à l’architexte* from 1979; in *Palimpsestes* from 1982, he corrects and sustains some of his earlier theories and adds the term *hypertextuality*. Thus, we learn about *hypertexts* and *hypotexts*, the latter being the ones that inform or feed the first ones. (cf. Worton and

²⁰ In italics in the original

Still 22) Hypertextuality is a practice which includes and informs all literary genres and he asserts that the hypertext necessarily gains in some way or another from the reader's awareness of its signifying and determining relationship with its hypotext(s) (cf. Worton and Still 23)

Linda Hutcheon, has very clear opinions about intertextuality too. In her book *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), she refers to the importance of intertextuality when interpreting a work of art: "a literary work can no longer be considered original; if it were, it'd have no meaning for the reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance." (126) She also asserts that: "...among the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning." (127) Intertextuality is one more ingredient worth analysing in a literary work that proves that writing as well as reading are not un-problematic experiences. They are loaded of extra meanings and of non-single, non-centralized forces some of which are found in the intertextual traces all works of art include.

Let me add a few more thoughts on the matter. When Kristeva first coined the term "intertextuality", drawing on Bajtin's dialogism, it was a time of transition between structuralism and post-structuralism during which "assertions of objectivity, scientific rigour, methodological stability and other highly rationalistic sounding terms were replaced by an emphasis on uncertainty, indeterminacy, incommunicability, subjectivity, desire, pleasure and play." (Allen 3) Bajtin's dialogism and heteroglossia are two aspects of language "which threaten any unitary, authoritarian and hierarchical conception of society and life." (Allen 30) When the dominant ideology in any given society argues that "there is only one unified and unifying language" (Allen 30) Bajtin reminds us that: "the dialogic word or utterance is double-voiced, heteroglot and possesses a meaning 'A' at the same time that it possesses an alternative meaning not 'A' " (Allen 43) Therefore, "Bajtin's dialogic vision of human consciousness, subjectivity and communication is based on a vision in which language embodies an on-going dialogic clash of ideologies, world-views, opinions and interpretations." (Allen 28) The concept of dialogism from which Kristeva reaches the wider term "intertextuality", also implies that every character in a novel is someone who "has got a specific, in some sense unique personality. This personality involves that character's world view, typical mode of speech, ideological and social positioning, all of which are expressed through his or her words." (Allen 23)

Kristeva uses Bajtin's emphasis on the doubleness or dialogic quality of words or utterances to "attack notions of unity which she associates with claims to authoritativeness, unquestionable truth, unproblematic communication and society's desire to repress plurality. Kristeva's attack is against the foundations of Western logic" (Allen 43) All these arguments lead us to think that the times were over when literary meaning could be fixed and easily located. A time was inaugurated when meanings began to be seen as non stable and not easy to find. Moreover, the concept of intertextuality promoted by Kristeva "is meant to designate a kind of language which because of its embodiment of otherness is against, beyond and resistant to (mono)logic. Such language is socially disruptive, revolutionary even." (Allen 45)

There are three more terms that Graham Allen mentions as part of Kristeva's discourse when she tries to define intertextuality and these are: *practice*, *productivity* and *ideologeme*. The text as *practice* and *productivity* implies that all texts are not closed systems, that they do not belong exclusively to their authors but are affected by a varied number of influences such as the social environment, the power of institutions, the belief system of an epoch, books and texts written in previous times. Besides, the power and effect upon a text provided by the reader also has to be taken into account. They, the readers, bring into the text what might be named poly-hearing, their own set of conditioning realities, truths and ideologies that contribute to its re-creation and re-interpretation. Therefore, a text can never be considered a closed system, it is always alive and ready to be altered and re-interpreted time and time again.

Along the same lines and with Bajtinian contention, Silvia Barei sees the text as an object that has to be approached from a historical - social perspective and she argues that it becomes intelligible for its readers only because it is sustained by a number of other texts. This essential polyphony, she argues, is accompanied by a process of poly-hearing, a term that we have already mentioned borrowed from *La polifonía textual* (1985) by Graciela Reyes. Each reading and interpretation of the text will hopefully allow its recovery but also its probable distortion. (cf. Barei 37)

Ideologeme is a concept that describes the social environment that surrounds the production of a text and I believe it will be a useful tool to analyse the trilogy. It will be better understood if I mention the example provided by Graham Allen. He quotes Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* (1826), where we find this particular phrase: "England seated far north in the turbid sea, now visits my dreams in the semblance of a vast and well-manned ship, which mastered the winds and rode proudly over the waves" (Shelley

qtd. in Allen 37) Here, Shelley transmits the idea of the pride to belong to a country like England, a nation with “mastery over the natural world and over its own special destiny among other nations.” (Shelley qtd. in Allen 38) Allen argues that: “This proto-imperialistic rhetoric is hardly Mary Shelley’s own invention: the sentence’s reference is to a discourse very much part of the nineteenth century English culture and society.” (Allen 38) Therefore, we see how the social and cultural environment has shaped, has entered the text without the writer even being aware of it. Shelley is just part of that whole and the “inside” of her novel overlaps automatically with its “outside”. When Graham Allen considers Kristeva’s concepts about ideologeme, he asserts that in order to grasp some kind of meaning in a text we will always have to consider both, the inside and the outside of it. (cf. Allen 37)

The term *ideologeme* stems from the acceptance and recognition that words are subject to immense social conflict and tension both of which will necessarily show in any produced text. It will be useful to quote Kristeva’s own assertion:

The ideologme of a text is the *focus* where knowing rationality grasps the transformation of utterances (to which the text is irreducible) into a totality (the text) as well as the insertions of this totality into the historical and social text. (Kristeva qtd in Allen 37)

To sum up, the term intertextuality reminds us that “all texts are potentially plural, open to the readers’ own presuppositions, lacking in clear boundaries and always involved in expressing or repressing the dialogic voices which exist within society. It is a term which refers to the impossibility of singularity, unity and thus of unquestionable authority...” (Allen 209)

I would like to finish this section with the following words spoken by Umberto Eco’s Adso in *The Name of the Rose* (1980):

Until then, I had thought each book spoke of the things, human or divine, that lie outside of books. Now, I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed all the more disturbing to me. It was then the place of a long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by the human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors. (Eco qtd in Allen 198)

CHAPTER 2. *The historical novel and intertextuality in the novels*

2.1 **Pat Barker interrogates history and its actors**

“For a novelist, a given historical situation is an anthropological laboratory in which he explores his basic question: What is human existence?” (Milan Kundera vii) In her trilogy, Pat Barker embarks herself and her readers in the re-creation of her country’s history and while doing it, she certainly explores that basic question Kundera asks. She sets on a journey that will partially answer it guided by the effort on her part of “looking straight at the world” which is in her own words “part of your duty as a writer.” (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 155)

In this chapter, first I will focus on the reasons for writing the trilogy and the spirit that prevails in it; then, I will outline the aspects of the novels that will help me

decide whether they are examples of the classical tradition of the subgenre historical novel or examples of the more recent historiographic metafiction style. Finally, I will consider how Barker establishes a dialogue between the past and her postmodernist present by raising the various issues she chooses to deal with, how she allows the past to talk to us in her novels and how she poses problems and unsolved questions to her readers when she deals with difficult, painful issues which do not leave anybody indifferent.

In the book *Contemporary British and Irish Fiction: Novelists in Interview* (2004), Sharon Monteith states how Pat Barker has “successfully captured the social and emotional landscape of contemporary Britain.” She has managed to tap “into the kinds of social anxieties that animate discussions of modern Britain.” (19) Indeed, Barker’s trilogy acts as a trigger to intervene in debates about the present and the future of Britain such as Tamsin Spargo suggests. (cf. Spargo 2) Let us remember that Pat Barker belongs to the generation of writers who have had to deal with the loss of power and world leadership of their country after many years of Imperialism. Therefore, it can be argued that most certainly, there must be in their narrative, included Pat Barker’s, an element of search to find out who they really are, that might reflect the general social mood. In her article “Writing Life / Writing Fiction” (2004), Paula Marantz Cohen somehow reconfirms this idea when she states that “(...) life and literature are in many ways analogical activities – we construct ourselves much as authors construct their texts, constrained by our cultural context and empowered by our imagination.” (v-vi)

Peter Hitchcock refers to the search for identity British people may be going through after the many changes they have seen in their socio-political reality in the last decades. In his article “What is Prior? Working Class Masculinity in Pat Barker’s Trilogy” (2002), he asserts that:

...the impact of the trilogy is also positioned by the heritage industry which has found in World War One a way to rearticulate heroic Englishness in the face of a much diminished and troublesome image of England as a nation state. This nostalgic mode is not just raging against the dying of England’s light (or might) but it is part of a complex array of cultural discourses that are rearticulating what it means to be English into the new millennium.

The search of identity is one of the hidden reasons for writing historical novels. When the English author writes her trilogy, somehow she is forcing the past back into the present and we could argue that she is acting “out of a belief that the unseen hand of history is everywhere at work in the present, that history is one of the ways by which we

come to understand ourselves, not only as beings in society, but also as individuals.” (Vanderhaeghe 2006)

In the book *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (1996), edited by Tasneem Raja, Madan Sarup states that being the past the foundation of individual and collective identity, many of us turn to it in order to know ourselves better. He admits that since the 70’s there has been a pervasive preoccupation with identity, with the self, with personal and collective roots, so people turn to their past in order to preserve their selves. Sarup asserts: “The search for historical roots is a sign of search for more secure moorings and longer lasting values in a shifting world. Images of the past influence the present and the future. And there are many conflictive pasts.” (98)

I believe the trilogy is a most powerful work that looks at the history of Britain from a controversial viewpoint or angle, not the official one, not the one that comes out in newspapers or history books. This can be interpreted as good news because Barker opens the door to discussion and forces everybody to find new answers. In the words of William Ospina, Colombian writer of historical novels, she makes the effort, like many other writers of historical novels “not to look at the world in black and white and to try to look at things that went willingly unsaid, as well as to revalue new aspects.”²¹ The British author tries to enquire within the past such as Walter Benjamin described it: “the non-public, unpublished side of reality, that which emerges at the present moment.” (Reyes Mate 140) It could be said that Barker “opens history to the consideration of new generations in order to prevent it from becoming teleological, that is to say closed and finished.” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 110) and that she allows the past to interrupt the present, to introduce itself to readers so that it may conform “together with the present, in a creative manner, a new constellation of meaning.” (Benjamin qtd in Reyes Mate 142) I believe that by writing her trilogy Barker prepares the ground for Benjamin’s *Zitat* to take place: the secret reunion between us and those who have already departed and who are waiting for us. (Benjamin’s Thesis II qtd in Reyes Mate 142) I can very easily associate Barker and her characters in the trilogy, the real and the fictional ones, with the “secret complicity” Benjamin writes about, a complicity “between the historical subject that attempts to know the past (Barker) and the object of knowledge that strives to become present (the war and its actors).” (Reyes Mate 141) Even more, Benjamin proposes that the real knowledge of history we get from wherever, in this case the *Regeneration* trilogy, should turn into self-knowledge for the

²¹ Interview with Susana Reinoso, *La Nación* 20.02.10. My own translation

knowing subjects be it Barker or her readers. (Reyes Mate 141) Thus, we go back in a circle to the question of identity.

In close connection with the spirit that conducts the trilogy, I would like to consider here some aspects related to the topic of fiction and history. We might say that Barker's ambition is not to tell the truth about WW I because in fiction the alternative between false and true is deliberately suspended. (Martini 92) Also, that the novels are the unavoidable result of: "a specific attitude before the world which is both ethical and ideological or political." (White 129) Hayden White reminds us that "not only every interpretation, but also every use of language is politically contaminated." (White 129) Consequently, Barker's is one more interpretation of events we may agree with or not. Historical truth is not pursued in fiction and what she does is to establish an agreement with readers which implies they are all clear about the fact that the objective of literature is in books not in truth. This does not prevent the novels from "promoting a strong emotional identification with the past and from encouraging the feelings that history is not broken up in *then* and *now* but can also be regarded as an experiential continuum." (Vanderhaeghe 2006)

Let us now move on to the second objective of this section: what kind of historical novels Pat Barker's novels are. In order to decide it we are going to analyse how far or how close the trilogy is to one of the two opposite poles of significance designed by Elzbieta Sklodowska and Fernando Aínsa to study historical novels. Once we do that, we will be in a position to assert whether the novels belong to the classical tradition or to the more recent historiographic metafictional style.

In the first pole of significance we find the historical novel of classical tradition with all the characteristics as defined by George Lukács and Fernando Aínsa. Why might the novels belong to this tradition? To begin with, I argue that it is quite clear that Barker is driven by the desire to "re-create the past and its characters" and not to deconstruct it. (Aínsa qtd in Grützmacher 148) She uses available historiographic sources and in her own words she "tries to stick to historical facts." (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 177) Discourse in her novels moves in such a way that we can sense that a "faithful and coherent reconstruction of the past" is being done, (Aínsa qtd in Grützmacher 149) so that the reader may not lose total faith in the possibility of reconstructing this past. I also argue that the underlying epistemology in the novels is basically "positivist, the text is considered a reflection of reality and the problem of

representation is not dealt with. (...) there is also an implicit trust in the ability of language to speak about reality.” (Martini 98)

Now, let us see how Lukács’ assertions on the classical historical novel can or cannot be applied to the trilogy.

a) Billy Prior, the protagonist of the trilogy, is not the “type” Lukács expects him to be. The theorist speaks of a “type” that is “the synthesis of the general and the particular, of all humanly and socially essential determinants.” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 14) Indeed, Billy Prior does not fit this description, on the contrary, he challenges all the essential determinants of his time: he belongs to a broken family, he was an abused child and he is bisexual.

b) Barker’s handling of historical data is close to Lukács’ description when he asserts that historical details are irrelevant and are there only to lend the novel a feeling of authenticity. This is so because she does not indulge in over informing the reader with dates, names of battles, number of casualties, politicians’ names, political viewpoints and so on, but the little data she provides is accurate and it does give the novels the necessary verifiability.

c) Barker’s handling of historically real characters does not meet Lukács’ demands, because Dr. Rivers, Siegfried Sassoon and to some extent Wilfred Owen, who are all real characters that populate the trilogy, are not relegated by the author “to secondary roles” and are not put in there just to “validate or authenticate the fictional world as if to hide the joins between fiction and history in a sleight of hand” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 114) Rivers is of paramount importance in the three novels. I have already mentioned that, at times, you have the feeling the story is about him actually. He plays a most preponderant role in the healing process of all the fictional soldiers that come under his care at Craiglockhart and plays a decisive part in helping Siegfried Sassoon make up his mind to go back to France after a period of nervous unbalance spent in England. Sassoon himself is presented as a highly impressive character. He had the courage to show strong resistance to the continuation of war adducing it was being fought as a war of “aggression and conquest” and not as one of “defence and liberation” (R. 3) as it had first been proposed to the soldiers. His dilemma was moral and he was prepared to confront his government and prepared to face criticism from his own friends and family: “better *mad* than a pacifist” (R. 81) were his mother’s words. She (Sassoon’s mother) regarded Rivers, who was supposed to “cure” Siegfried and send

him back to war, as “the Saviour of the Family Name from the Disgrace of Pacifism.”²² (R. 186) Sassoon’s case was highly dramatic I would say, because on the one hand, he had a sincere hatred of war and so he stated in his Soldier’s Declaration, the document that opens the trilogy and which was read in Parliament in 1917. In it, he made it clear that he refused to fight for the wrong reasons and took the freedom to criticise his superiors, accusing them of being too complacent and of not having the sufficient imagination to realize the agonies soldiers were going through, apart from also blaming them for the “political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men were being sacrificed.” (R. 3) But, on the other hand, he was the most devoted platoon commander you could find. He performed his soldier role to the best of his ability. He was given a medal in recognition for his gallantry and heroism on the battle field. He threw it away in an act of defiance and anger. The following is a citation in Sassoon’s medical report before he entered Craiglockhart as a patient. In it, the reasons are given for him to receive the medal:

*For conspicuous gallantry during a raid on the enemy’s trenches. He remained for 1 ½ hours under rifle and bomb fire collecting and bringing in our wounded. Owing to his courage and determination, all the killed and wounded were brought in.*²³ (R. 8)

This real character in the novel is there telling us his dramatic story. Wilfred Owen, in my opinion, does not stand out in the novels. He is not dealt with in depth as the other two characters, therefore not much can be said about him even though in *Regeneration* we are witnesses of the beginning and development of his friendship with Sassoon and of Sassoon’s intervention in the improvement of his famous poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth* for which he created the name: “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? / Only the monstrous anger of the guns. (...)” (R. 142) In her article “Generation not Regeneration” (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 162) Karin Westman argues that Owen is given a more central or meaningful role in the film *Regeneration* directed by Gillies Mackinnon from 1997, than she could really find in the book. Actually, I agree with her and I argue that Sassoon and Rivers are Barker’s strongest bets in the trilogy as far as historically real characters are concerned.

d) Last but not least, in Pat Barker’s work, the reader is not invited to participate in the writing process for which the novels would be removed from the metafictional pole and would situate themselves closer to the classical tradition.

²² In capitals in the original

²³ In italics in the original

Let us now look into the opposite pole of significance: that of historiographic metafiction.

a) Guy Vanderhaeghe states that authors of historiographic metafictional novels “typically rewrite the past from the point of view of those who have been victimized: women, native peoples, gays.” (Vanderhaeghe 2006) The characters in this kind of fiction are “anything but proper types: they are the ex-centric, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history.” Hutcheon adds: “type has little function here, except as something to be ironically undercut” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 114) and we can confidently say that Billy is not the “type” of anything. Barker chooses not to write about “types” but to tell the stories of all those private soldiers who came under Rivers’ care and who were the real victims of a war situation created by others in which they had little or no say. They would be the anti-heroes, the victims, the un-named, the ex-centric peripheral figures of history, the marginalized by official history, only a good reason for statistics. This aspect then, brings the trilogy closer to the pole of historiographic metafiction.

All the Burns, Hallets, Priors, Campbells and Andersons whose physical and emotional conditions or even deaths, nobody except their families knew about, are Benjamin’s “anonymous deaths, with no newspapers headlines, victims of an equally anonymous injustice.” (Reyes Mate 144) They are the geniuses’ “un-named contemporaries” (Benjamin qtd in Reyes Mate 138) whose endeavours also contributed to the creation of all culture that lies between the present and the past. Barker took up the task as a writer to establish “*das Zitat*”, a date between them, herself and all those who read her novels. These soldiers are the “non-public, unpublished side of reality, that which emerges at the present moment.” (Reyes Mate 140) Barker’s expectations of her present and the vitality she finds in it are the forces that make her establish this kind of dialogue between herself and those who have gone, and that make her bring their testimonies back to life through a fictive work of art. While doing it, she searches “among the ruins of a history dismantled by rhetoric and lies, the authentic individual lost behind events” and she “discovers and sings praises of human beings in their most credible dimension, even when these beings might *seem* invented, even when ultimately, they *are* invented.”²⁴ (Aínsa 31)

Let us remember that Pat Barker is the daughter of a woman who was active in World War II and of a soldier who died in the same war, whom she never knew. She

²⁴ My own translation

was the step daughter of a man who had a paralytic stammer acquired during WW II, she was the step granddaughter of a man with a bayonet wound who was in the trenches of WW I as a boy of fifteen. Ever since she was a child, she was surrounded by people whose ties with the war were measureless. So, at the risk of speculating, it could be said that she had enough reasons to want that “*Zitat*” to take place between her postmodern present and all these people, and also that perhaps one of the motivations to write the novels was to pay a debt to the dead, in the words of Tamsin Spargo. (cf. Spargo 2)

b) Historiographic metafiction does not render highly impressive real historical characters but in the case of our novels, real characters appear as rather imposing. Neither can we find in them the reflection upon the writing process, the self-referentiality or the disrespect for the chronicity of events typical of historiographic metafiction.

c) Barker does not “knowingly disrupt chronology, introduce supernatural occurrences or obviously historically inaccurate elements to remind the reader that history is a relative construct, riddled with subjectivity.” (Vanderhaeghe 2006)

After analysing all the previous aspects that make me think of the trilogy as an example of the classical tradition apparently rather far from the pole where more centrifugal novels are situated, I must now add that there are two aspects in the novels which have a particular role to play in the classification within the generic typology.

Pat Barker uses fictionalisation of real historical characters and intertextuality as writing strategies and this grants the novel an important degree of heterogeneity. *Regeneration* is not a homogeneous work of art.

Therefore, and without disregarding or going back on all I have already said, the final conclusion is as follows: from the formal point of view and from the point of view of language, *Regeneration* can be classified as an example of the traditional historical novel and for this, it can be situated close to the classical pole of significance but, due to the fact that Barker uses intertextuality and fictionalisation of historical characters as writing strategies which helps to foreground the tension between reality as described by the author through Prior’s life experiences and reality as constructed and sustained by the accepted discourses of the time designed by the people who had access to power, *Regeneration* distances itself from the classical pole of significance and moves closer to the historiographic metafictional pole where more experimental and centrifugal types of novels are found.

Summarising, if I consider that:

1) the author does not “ridicule or make a parody of all serious interpretations of history and of its characters”; she does not “arbitrarily combine images and elements of different epochs in a playful, postmodern manner” and she does not “mock the aspirations of faithfully representing the past and its actors.” (Vanderhaeghe 2006)

2) she does not violate the three basic restrictions of the traditional historical novel: a) not to fictionalise those aspects that history did not register b) to avoid anachronisms, that is, to avoid contradictions between the cultural material of the period described by the novel and the one provided by official history, and c) to create realistic historical fictions, that is to make the logics of the fictive world compatible with the logics of reality. (cf. Viú 167-178) and

3) the novels are not homogeneous, they are constructed with a noticeable degree of heterogeneity because of the use of intertextuality and the fictionalisation of historical characters.

Then, all this allows me to assert that they can be seen as an in-between example of a traditional historical novel and of a historiographic metafictional novel. The reasons for this, I have already extensively provided.

Finally, we will consider how and why the author interrogates history in her novels. I believe Barker is not prepared to fully and blindly accept the official version of events that took place during World War I. Neither is she content to look only into aspects that are commonly looked into and written about by historians or writers. She writes from a feminine and realistic vantage point and her approach is uncommon and fresh. By doing so, she automatically poses new questions. By bringing into life the people and aspects of history she chooses to bring into life, she promotes discussion and presents us with new, different and controversial viewpoints. We could say she is guided by the spirit promoted by *La Nouvelle Histoire*: history is not automatic, it is problematic. Let us provide some examples.

First, we can mention the way the authorities handled Siegfried Sassoon’s protest against the continuation of war. Sassoon’s story bears witness to how the mechanisms of power function and how they are implemented through established politics and how stories can be manipulated. In order to keep the war machine going and not to demoralise the people, the poet was made to appear as an officer who was just suffering from a nervous breakdown but who had no real case to put forward. By using this historical fact in *Regeneration*, the first novel of the trilogy, she is showing that Sassoon’s case was not so simple as one might think, she is asking history why this

happened as it did. It was a problematic case and it could be looked at from many different angles. Basically, he was not listened to, he was dismissed as troublemaker because he did not adhere to the general purposes of the war that authorities had.

Another case worth mentioning and open to discussion is that of the conscientious objectors, the pacifists or “conchies”. Billy Prior’s friends, the Ropers, who meant so much for him as a child, objected to the war and acted accordingly. Beattie Roper’s story is loosely based on Alice Wheeldon’s story and the ‘poison plot’ of 1917. This woman was accused and convicted of having conspired to murder David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister at the time of the war. These people, the ‘conchies’, were absolute pacifists and they were spied on by agents of the Ministry of Munitions. Billy Prior was one of these spies during his sick leave in England. Barker introduces the topic into her novels through a plot that involves Billy Prior directly. As a child he was very close to Betty Roper and her children. He used to find refuge in their home when things got too heavy in his own home. The way Barker handles the situations does not only contribute to the construal of the character but it also activates a second look, a second reading, a re-consideration of the pacifist movement itself which was not well seen and strongly disparaged and criticised at the time of the war. The general public was in favour of the war and pacifists were scorned and left aside.

‘How are you managing?’ (Billy to Hettie one of Betty’s daughters)
 ‘I survive. Your dad brings me a bit of meat now and then. (...) I’ve nothing to thank the others for, except, a few bricks through the window.’ (*T.E.D.* 102)

Pacifists were mistreated, incarcerated, tortured, left aside by the rest of society and they had to live in hiding. In a letter to her mother in prison, Hettie Roper tells her about friends and family who have either escaped or are interned in camps:

8’s been in touch. You know I’ve been worried sick since he was nabbed, but he says it’s not too bad. One of the lads had a beard and they shaved him with a cut-throat razor. He ended up pretty cut about, but it’s surprising what they can find to laugh at. He says he hasn’t seen our William but of course he wouldn’t with him being in solitary. (*T.E.D.* 85)

Thus, Barker brings to light and questions issues such as the relation between the state and its citizens which was and is not always as healthy as desired. On this matter, I will quote Sigmund Freud in “Considerations about the War” from 1915. In these notes he asserts that:

The state demands total obedience from its citizens while at the same time disables them to do anything due to an excess of lies, rhetoric and censorship of communications and free expression of opinions. (...) Finally, the state openly admits its greed and its craving for power both of which have to be accepted as good by the individual in the

name of patriotism. (...) The state very rarely compensates the individual for all the sacrifices it has demanded of him. (note 415)

I believe Pat Barker's novels are partly an indictment of this kind of situation. The ones who hold power and who are in charge of making decisions in a nation expect everything from those below, but are sometimes, if not always, unprepared to compensate all what the common citizens give of themselves in the name of the nation and of patriotism. Therefore, Barker encourages readers to see that "the official or traditional view of war is not the only one and that cultural patterns are open to change." (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 171) Through the experiences of her broken hero, Billy Prior, and of all those who surrounded him, she sets up a tone that is far from complacent and is not politically correct. The images that populate the books, the dilemmas and the suffering men at the front went through, not only while exercising their duty as soldiers but later on in their lives, when they had to carry the burden of terrible memories for the rest of their days on earth, all of these facts and events turn into possible questions for the readers and establish a dialogue between the present and the past of Britain: 'Is this what we were partly like?' 'Are we still a nation prepared to send their young ones to death?' 'Why do men go to war?' 'Is there an element of cruelty in us that we have to accept and admit as part of our making?' Barker herself wonders: "To what extent are we intrinsically violent toward other groups?" (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 183) Karin Westman, one more of Barker's reviewers wonders: "Why does England produce these situations, why does the conflict persist in their culture?" (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 162)

Barker's answer to all these questions is one of cautious optimism for her nation and history in general. When she re-creates a Dr. Rivers who is flexible enough to admit his own doubts about the war and the leadership of his country instead of remaining dogmatically closed to any other alternative than his own; when she establishes a dialogue between generations in the novels; when she is prepared to disclose difficult matters and circumstances pertaining to British history and culture then, what she achieves is to make people see things differently, in alternative ways that may widen their opinions about events, the world and history. In fact, Barker describes herself as an optimist. Her own words are: "You cannot create out of despair, which is why it is important for the writer not to offer a completely despairing response to the universe. (...)

If you are creating you have hope.” (*Contemporary British and Irish Fiction: Novelists in Interview* 34)

I will end this section quoting Maud Casey in her article “The Secret History: The Power of Imagined Figures in Historical Fiction” (2009). In it, Casey speaks of a “kind of probability space” that fiction writers create “in which fact and fiction collide and the finite and the infinite co-exist.” It is in this space that Barker mingles real characters with fictional ones and thus, she “animates the spirit of history” to cause a vibration in today’s readers. Along these lines, Nabokov in his book *Lectures on Literature* (1980) states: “time and space, the colours of the seasons, the movements of the muscles and minds (...) are not traditional notions which may be borrowed from the circulating library of public truths, but a series of unique surprises which master artists have learned to express in their own unique way.” (Nabokov qtd in Casey 2009)

Barker has created secret stories for all those men and women and they have become for us readers the series of unique surprises Nabokov speaks about, which combined with the circulating public library of truths, that is historiography, can illuminate the shadows of the past and help us, or at least British people, to construct a common memory and a common identity.

I will finally say that in her own particular way, Pat Barker interrogates history through all the voices she brings back to life, fictional or real. They all speak their own brand of the truth, and they prompt us to the realization that our understanding of “the past needs to be won by our own efforts, that history is a subject to be thought through and pondered upon individually.” (Vanderhaeghe 2006) They prompt us to realize that there is not one and only way of looking at things; that the contemplation of the past can enrich us as individuals and as a community; that we may find an alternative way in compassion, dialogue and flexibility, that war may be a repeated event but that does not make it less evil, that perhaps a *Regeneration* is possible. Certainly, the choice of the trilogy’s name was not purposeless.

2.2 Intertextuality in the trilogy

In his book *Intertextuality* (2000), Graham Allen quotes one of the many revisions to be found in Julia Kristeva’s re-reading of Bajtin and he states that the Bulgarian author “employs Bajtin’s emphasis on the doubleness or dialogic quality of words and utterances to attack notions of unity, which she associates with claims to

authoritativeness, unquestionable truth, unproblematic communication and society's desire to repress plurality." (43) These are illuminating words with which to start this section because insofar Pat Barker introduces intertextual resources such as documents, newspaper articles, nursery rhymes, lines of plays, poems and church hymns to reinforce her story lines and to help her construe the characters, she is automatically adhering to the just mentioned ideas rephrased as follows: the authority of a text is limited, it relies on other texts, truth is not unquestionable, communication is not unproblematic and plurality is a fact.

The essential polyphony of any text, accompanied by the poly-hearing we make of it (cf. Barei 37) is conformed, in Barker's case, by intertexts in the form of quotations and allusions that contribute to the construction of the characters and to a better understanding of the characters and to the reinforcement of the story line.

In this section, such as the title suggests, we will consider the intertexts Barker introduces in her novels and we will analyse why and with what aim she uses them. Following Silvia Barei's suggestions, first, I am going to identify the intertexts and the forms that they take in the three novels and then I am going to evaluate them in reference to its new context. I am going to disregard Genette's definitions of metatextuality, paratextuality and architexte which we included in our theory and focus on allusion and quotation which are the formal intertextual strategies constantly used by the author.

The trilogy is essentially an anti-war manifesto therefore, I will start my analysis by looking into Siegfried Sassoon's "A Soldier's Declaration" found at the very beginning of it and into some of his anti-war poems.

"Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration" signed by Siegfried Sassoon is one of the most powerful intertexts of the trilogy. It was forwarded to the press and read out in Parliament in 1917. Barker uses it to initiate *Regeneration*, the first novel of the trilogy, and it clearly sets the tone of the novel. Sassoon was friends with Bertrand Russell and Lady Ottoline Morrell who were well known pacifists at the time and he was encouraged by them to write the declaration where he expressed his disappointment with the way the war was being conducted and where he sternly declared: "I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority" (...) "I believe that the war upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation has now become a war of aggression and conquest." (R. 3) These are two memorable sentences in the declaration. Authorities disregarded Sassoon's claims and considered he was going through a time

of nervous unbalance for which he should be treated. Following the advice of his friend, the poet Robert Graves, Sassoon accepted being sent to Craiglockhart hospital where he came under the care of Dr. Rivers. Had he not accepted, he would have probably been court-martialled. Right from the start of the trilogy, we can anticipate a questioning attitude on the author's part and we can sense that there are always two sides to everything, that truth is not unquestionable, let alone the official "truth".

Siegfried Sassoon's war poems reflect the folly of war and it is expected that they would automatically give rise to anti-war feelings in most of Barker's readers. For example, when she migrates the poem "The Rear Guard", one of the possible pictures in a war situation is described:

(...)
 And flashed his beam across the livid face
 Horribly glaring up, whose eyes still wore
 The agony that died ten days before (...) (R. 25)

By using "The General" she questions the apparent incompetence of some officers:

'Good morning, good morning!' the General said
 When we met him last week on our way to the line.
 Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
 And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine. (...) (R. 25)

Mystical ideas about the similarity between the soldiers and Jesus Christ are suggested by the migration of "The Redeemer". Barker does not hold any prejudice regarding religion and she openly deals with the matter through her characters. In "The Redeemer" Sassoon speaks of the English soldier "white and strong, /Who loved his time like any simple chap, /Good days of work and sport and homely song" and compares him with Christ who redeems the "groping things" in the world with his suffering.

(...)
 He faced me, reeling in his weariness,
 Shouldering his load of planks, so hard to bear.
 I say that He was Christ who wrought to bless
 All groping things with freedom bright as air
 And with His mercy washed and made them fair.
 (...) (R.. 82)

Faith in the Christian God was at the brink of disaster during the war. For believers the war was difficult to take because it provoked too many contradictions for

which they did not seem to find any reasonable answers. Wilfred Owen's doubts about his faith, which he shared with Sassoon during their time at Craiglockhart, illustrate what many must have felt about the matter in those days: "I don't know what I am. (christian or non-christian) But I do know I wouldn't want a faith that couldn't face the facts." (R. 83)

As I said, Barker does not overlook the question of faith in one God and in more than one occasion she makes characters busy themselves with the matter: e.g. Burns, Owen, Sassoon's cases. From the very beginning till the end, the trilogy is plagued with stories of common soldiers, young men who went to war and who lived through more or less terrible experiences that profoundly affected their bodies and their psyche. Therefore, the choice of "The Redeemer" as an intertext, where all these men become individual Christs suffering and dying for others seems to be a very pertinent choice.

Going back to Sassoon's case, I will mention now the inner divisions this young man experienced about the war which are made evident in some of the selected intertexts. In the words of Robert Graves, the poet and one of Sassoon's friends, he was a "tremendously successful and *bloodthirsty*²⁵ platoon commander" (*T.E.D.* 158), but back in billets he was also capable of producing amazing anti-war poems which would bring him world recognition as a poet later on. He could not bear the idea of letting his men down and not being there on the battle fields with them but, on the other hand, his ideas against the continuation of the war were apparently non-negotiable. The poem "Sick leave" partly shows his dilemma and perhaps that of many others:

When I'm asleep, dreaming and drowsed and warm,
They come, the homeless ones, the noiseless dead. (...)
In bitter safety I awake, unfriended; (...)
'When are you going back to them again?
Are they not your brothers through our blood?' (R. 189)

"The Kiss", a poem where he manages to produce more clearly both versions of himself, is only alluded by Barker.

The omniscient narrator tells us that when Sassoon wrote his poems he was "motivated less by the desire to save his own sanity than by a determination to convince civilians that the war was mad" (R. 26) and it could be argued that Barker uses them in her trilogy for the same reason.

I have already mentioned some possible reasons for the use of the poems above as intertexts but let me consider in greater depth, what new value they all acquire in the

²⁵ In italics in the original

context of Barker's novels. If we remember that in the words of Worton and Still intertexts entering via authors into a novel are "politically and emotionally charged" (Worton and Still 2) we could say that Barker chose a war poet and his work to be introduced as intertext because she was determined, as much as Sassoon was in his own time, to transmit anti-war feelings. The three novels are a proof of this. I believe that the value that the poems acquire in their new environment, almost one hundred years after being conceived and written by Siegfried Sassoon, is exactly that: the value of a renewed protest against armed conflicts, against nonsensical and indiscriminate killing. In the novels, it is made obvious that there is much more to lose than to gain in a war situation.

The same argument could be used to justify the inclusion of Wilfred Owen's poem.

O my brave companions, when your souls
Flock silently away (...)
Death will stand grieving in the field of war(...)
The unreturning army that was youth
The legion who have suffered and are dust. (R. 157)

The memorable lines of "Anthem for Doomed Youth" can move more than one person to reconsider the real value and justification of wars.

Let us go back to the matter of faith but in a different context. "God moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform." (R. 149) are two lines taken from the Anglican church Hymn No. 373. I find the use of this intertext related to religion and the church of great interest and its analysis may result in many and varied conclusions.

Billy Prior, our problematic hero, never concerned himself with religious matters. He never admitted the slightest adherence to faith, religion, God or Jesus Christ. His memories of the church go in a different direction as we already know. Therefore, Barker uses another character, Dr. Rivers, the son of an Anglican minister himself, brought up within the Christian faith and a loyal member of the church, to deal with this controversial issue. Let me explain, when we reflect upon the changes that took place during the XXth century and that gradually and slowly shaped a new cultural period called Postmodernism, Ihab Hassan's words resound in our minds. According to him we have reached a time when a "vast will to unmaking" prevails and this has affected "the body politics, the body cognitive, the erotic body, the individual psyche – the entire realm of discourse in the West." (Docherty 153) At the time of the war the assumption that there was a stable substratum or foundation for everything was

beginning to shake; this “vast will to unmaking” was already emerging and it had reached the realm of religion too. It was at the time of the Big War that we can already see signs in this direction which consolidated later on and which are partly described by T.S. Eliot in his *Choruses of The Rock* (1934)

... it seems that something has happened that has never happened before: though we know not just when, or why, or how, or where.
 Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for no god;
 and this has never happened before,
 That men both deny gods and worship gods, professing first
 Reason, And then Money, and Power,... (*Chorus of The Rock* VII)

Barker perceives the situation and she writes about it in these terms: she introduces us to congregations at church singing hymns that praised a God who “moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform.” (R. 149) The narrator reflects upon the fact that: “Since the Somme, this seemed to have become the nation’s most popular hymn.” And that: “Rivers had lost count of the number of times he’d heard it sung.” (R. 149) Many people then, still held on to the stability provided by a religious belief; however, Dr. Rivers started to experience contradictory feelings regarding this matter. It was almost impossible not to feel doubtful about *God’s ways* after hearing the accounts of soldiers who had been in France. For some, it was easier to remain as and where they were and they preferred not to think too much: “The congregation, having renounced reason, looked rather the happier for it, and sat down to await the sermon.” (R. 150) But for others, like Rivers, it was not so easy and with nostalgia and perhaps with a deep sorrow for not being able to believe fully and confidently any more, the doctor concluded: “They’ll never come back those days.” (R. 150)

The singing of hymns itself is a symbol of protestant churches because for them, praising the Lord through music is of paramount importance, even more than for catholics. The problem is that in the context of the war, the hymn acquires an almost ironic tone. How can you speak of *wonders* vis-à-vis of the Somme, Arras or Ypres²⁶. I believe that this is what Barker is pointing to. People like Rivers began to feel uneasy about their faith in a God who apparently allowed events such as First World War to happen. Even worse, they began to adhere to the possibility of a God who might not be

²⁶ Names of battles during WWI

there at all. Burns, one of Rivers' young patients, was very much interested in theology and after one of their conversations, Dr. Rivers wondered "whether this was an expression of faith, a quest, or simply an obsession with the absence of God." (R. 181)

In conclusion, here we are faced with another matter to reflect upon. Is our God there? Does the idea of a world of brothers have any meaning at all?

Let me now focus on an issue that will bring Billy Prior back into the picture. In *The Eye in the Door*, the second novel of the trilogy, Barker uses as an epigraph a short paragraph from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by R. L. Stevenson:

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...(T.E.D. epigraph)

I believe her choice is amply justified by the fact that, in the trilogy, there is more than one example of human nature's ambiguity and duality. I will consider some of these cases including Billy Prior's.

First Dr. Rivers; this real character felt divided about the war and various other issues. Although he was firmly committed to the task of sending young men back to war in acceptable psychological conditions, he openly admitted that: "A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestionable allegiance" (R. 249) He also experienced controversial feelings regarding the well known attitude of superiority of Europeans upon other races and peoples on earth. During his time in Melanesia he had the opportunity to share time with the natives and this caused a turmoil in him that Barker describes as follows:

‘And I suddenly saw that their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs. And do you know that was a moment of the most *amazing* freedom. I lay back and closed my eyes and I felt as if a ton weight had been lifted.’
 ‘Sexual freedom?’
 ‘That too. But it was more than that. It was... the *Great White God*²⁷ dethroned, I suppose.’ (R. 242)

His contact with the people from the islands and then the war were a turning point for him in relation to his beliefs, principles, ideas of racial superiority and faith: "Because we did, we quite unselfconsciously *assumed* we were the measure of all things. That was how we approached them," (R. 242) he admitted with honesty. Behind

²⁷ In italics in the original

him were the concepts he had been brought up to respect and believe in, and ahead of him was this new world of ideas and ways of looking at things that demanded a response from him.

Another case of duality is Sassoon's. This young poet of 30 years of age at the time of the war, felt divided between his hatred of the war, his commitment to the pacifist movement and his desire to be at war sharing with his men as the platoon commander he was. He thought he might be capable of turning the direction of events by writing his manifesto but it did not work and he was sent to Craiglockhart hospital with a diagnosis of nervous breakdown. He was Dr. Rivers' patient and, after a while, he decided he was going back to France:

How on earth was Siegfried going to manage in France? His opposition to the war had not changed. If anything it had hardened. And to go back to fight, believing as he did, would be to encounter internal divisions far deeper than anything he'd experienced before. (*R.* 249)

Billy Prior's case of duality was manifested in his fugue states. These were times when he would carry on doing things of his daily life of which he would not be aware afterwards. Fugue states are perfectly identified psychological states whose main characteristic is that you are not aware of yourself, of what you do or say and when you recover you cannot remember anything that happened during that time.²⁸ For Prior, they started when he was a child: his father was a violent man and used to hold terrible arguments with his wife where physical violence was not spared. The little boy managed to find refuge in a second state where he was protected from the conflict and later on in life he rediscovered this possibility when the intolerable pressure of the war situation in France was hard to bear. He was highly preoccupied for what he might do during his fugue states: "His nerves were bad (...) The gaps in his memory were increasing both in length and frequency and they terrified him." (*T.E.D.* 176) Finally, he had to admit that during one of this dissociated states he had betrayed his best childhood friend Mac. Mac was a pacifist, Prior gave away his hiding place in his fugue state, consequently, he was found and imprisoned. Prior's painful conclusion was that if he had done that, it was because: "His other self might be less tolerant of healthy strapping young men spending the war years trying to disrupt the supply of ammunition on which other lives depended." (*T.E.D.* 256) This is one of the practices that conscientious objectors used to implement in order to protest against the continuation of war: to provoke strikes in ammunition factories in order to disrupt the delivery of the necessary

²⁸ Diccionario Akal de Psicología (1991) Madrid: Ediciones Akal S.A. 1998.

stock to the Army. Billy felt his loyalties were with his men at the front line but he was highly disappointed with himself for betraying Mac too. Then again, one more example of someone for whom it was difficult to feel utterly committed to one and only cause.

This sense of duality, of being two people in one, was experienced by all men who went out to war, Prior included. After being out there, they were never the same: “If you asked anybody who’d fought in France whether he thought he was the same person he’d been before the war (...) *all of them, all of them*²⁹ would say no.” Not only that, but they also felt that: “...the only loyalties that really mattered were the ones forged there. Picard clay was a powerful glue.” (*T.E.D.* 255)

Let me move further. Barker only mentions the poem by Alfred Tennyson “The Charge of the Light Brigade”. This is an 1854 narrative poem about the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War. As a child, this poem had meant a lot to Prior and certainly to many English children like him, because it seemed to embody an unreflecting admiration of courage for them. The problem now was that all these dreams of heroism had acquired a “considerably more complex meaning” Billy thought. (*T.E.D.* 127) Although Tennyson's verses refer to the nobleness of supporting one's country, he also speaks in it about the horrors of war. (...)

Cannon to the right of them,
Cannon to the left of them,
Cannon in front of them,
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.
(...)

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

The allusion to the poem by Barker is tied to the fact that private soldiers and officers entered the war with the degree of idealism you find in children's rhymes or poems. I have quoted the previous verse in order to illustrate my thoughts but the poem itself is not found in the trilogy.

²⁹ In italics in the original

By using this intertext, Barker is trying to emphasise the contradictions men at the front had to face. The war in books of poems was one thing and a very different one in the trenches. They were promised manly glories at war and they only got brutality, hysteria and immobility in the dug-outs which provoked nervous breakdowns in more than one soldier, as we already know. Not without irony and even if it is not included in the novels, we can quote Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum est": "To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est / Pro patria mori." The reality in the trenches utterly surpassed the magic of the childhood poem and men must have certainly experienced the impact and the inner contradictions that the whole event of war provoked.

Another, more humorous inclusion is that of a Salvation Army hymn turned by the soldiers into a new version that mocked army superiors in a more hilarious tone than that used by Sassoon in "The General". This is the original version:

Onward Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before.

New version:

Forward Joe Soap's army
Marching without fear
With your brave commander
Safely in the rear.

He boasts and skites
From morn till night
And thinks he's very brave,
But the men who really did the job
Are dead and in their grave. (*T.G.R.* 178)

In *The Ghost Road*, third novel of the trilogy, we find three short and illuminating intertexts which come from two of Shakespeare's plays: *Henry V* from 1599 and *Macbeth* written some time between 1603–1607.

Why Shakespeare? Perhaps not many in the Army would have been able to recite Shakespeare, but Prior, who was in his own words a "phoney gentleman", could. He had been educated above the level of his natural school friends thanks to his mother's efforts and ambition and to his natural gifts. He knew his Shakespeare well and the intertext supports Barker's description of Prior as that of an educated young

man who did not quite fit with his real working class origins. It also illustrates and supports the different ways of looking at the war people had in those days.

The lines from the first intertext were recited by Prior's servant, a man called Longstaffe, who happened to be an actor. Longstaffe was, in Prior's opinion: "A curious, old-fashioned romantic patriot,..." (*T.G.R.* 150) an enthusiastic supporter of war:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
(For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,)...³⁰

This particular quotation is part of the *St.Crispin's Day Speech*, a famous motivational speech from the play, delivered by the king before the battle. (act IV scene iii) It was a good choice to be put in the mouth of a soldier utterly committed to the cause of war such as Longstaffe. This was obviously part of the story too. Many, probably most men, were in France completely convinced that dying for King and country was the best that could happen to them.

In contrast, Prior was not so clear about his loyalty to a war nobody seemed to be in command of. He responded to Longstaffe with a quotation from *Macbeth* where the king says: "I am in blood stepped, in so far that should I wade no more, (returning were as tedious as go o'er.)"³¹ In Prior's opinion, the war had become a self-perpetuating system where nobody benefitted, of which nobody was in control and which nobody knew how to stop. (cf. *T.G.R.* 144) Macbeth considered that he was so far into the situation of death and evil he and his wife had created, that there was no turning back and that he had to continue with what he was doing despite the consequences and immorality of it. Similarly, when Prior answered Longstaffe with the quoted lines, he was thinking that things in the war situation, had gone in such direction and so far that there was no return either. They had to get to the end of it, to the point of considering that: "...in spite of Not Believing in the War and Not Having Faith in Our Generals, it still seems the only *clean* place to be."³² (*T.E.D.* 275) Or that: "Five months ago Charles Manning offered me a job at the Ministry of Munitions and I turned it down (...) What an utter bloody fool I would have been not to come back (to France)." (*T.G.R.* 258) It is contradictory but it is like that, for Prior at least. Despite all the suffering, the wounded, the dead and the incompetent officers, it seemed that taking part in the war

³⁰ What is between brackets is my own addition, it is not in the text itself

³¹ What is between brackets is my own addition

³² In capitals and italics in the original

was what he felt he had to do. That was his place on earth at that moment. Perhaps a little bit like Rambert, the journalist in *The Plague* (1947), by Albert Camus. When he decides to stay in the city with the people affected by the plague rather than going back to Paris to the woman he loves, he says: “But now that I have seen what I have seen, I know that I am from here whether I want it or not. This business is everybody’s business.”³³ (Camus 160)

As I said before, things had gone in such direction and so far that there was no return, death was everywhere just like in Macbeth’s case. The following are Billy Prior’s words from his personal diary:

Letters arrive for the dead. I check names against the list and write *Deceased* ³⁴(...) Casualties were heavy, not so much in the initial attack as in the counter-attacks. Gregg died of wounds. (...) Hallet’s wounds are so bad I don’t think he can possibly survive. And Longstaffe’s dead. (*T.G.R.* 198/9)

This diary entry dates from one month before Billy died and as we can see, it is saturated with death. The war is almost at its end, on November 11th an Armistice was signed. In an ironic tone, Prior wrote:

We (himself and Wilfred Owen) are Craiglockhart’s success stories. *Look at us*. We don’t remember, we don’t feel, we don’t think. (...) By any proper civilized standard (...) we are objects of horror. But our nerves are completely steady. And we are still alive. (*T.G.R.* 199)

It is within this frame of events and for this particular emotional state, that Barker selects a third intertext, also taken from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*: “The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?” (*T.G.R.* 199) Tired of so much killing and afraid for her and her husband, Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep and speaks of Lady Macduff, the wife of the Thane of Fife. The Macbeths had the woman and her children killed during Macduff’s absence. It was one more on the list of so many other murders they were responsible for. Lady Macbeth committed suicide not long after she said this. Similarly, where are they all now? All of Billy’s friends? Dead. Only that this time it was not for the action of a woman and her husband obsessed with power but for the actions and decisions of many who were also obsessed with maintaining their portions of power and keeping under control the power of others i.e. Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On the one hand, intertexts taken from Shakespeare help construe a hero whose ambitions go up and above his natural social level and on the other hand, they also complement the characters’ affirmative or

³³ My own translation

³⁴ In italics in the original

negative viewpoint about war. In all three intertexts, death is present and ready to take its victims due to the wilful actions of humans.

Sentimental ballads from before the war and trench songs created by soldiers themselves became very popular at the time and they are included by Barker as intertexts. (*T.G.R.* 71 / 72 / 218) I do not think they are that helpful to understand Prior but they certainly take us back to those days and give us a better picture of the cultural scene that surrounded him and the rest.

Finally, I would like to mention something about the novel's ideologeme, a term closely related to intertextuality. The ideologeme of a novel, as suggested by Julia Kristeva describes the social environment that surrounds the production of a text. It is through the analysis of an *ideologeme* that we see how the social and cultural environment shapes and enters any text without the writer even being aware of it. Barker is part of an entire social and cultural reality that conforms the "outside" of her novels. This "outside" automatically overlaps with the "inside" of them. Julia Kristeva, cited by Graham Allen in *Intertextuality* 2000, considers that in order to grasp some kind of meaning in a text we will always have to consider both, the outside and the inside of a novel. (cf. Allen 38) In Barker's novels, we can find expressions that define the ideologme of her novels in the context of the war as well as in the present of production of the novels. Let me provide these two illuminating examples:

He (Rivers) looked up, at the blue, empty sky and realized that their view of *his* society was neither more nor less valid than his of theirs. No bearded elderly white man looked down on them, endorsing one set of values and condemning the others. And with that realization (...) he was in the same position as these drifting dispossessed people. A condition of absolute free-fall. (*T.G.R.* 119/20)

Or:/

'And I suddenly saw that their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs. And do you know that was a moment of the most *amazing* freedom. I lay back and I closed my eyes and I felt as if a ton weight had been lifted.'

'*Sexual* freedom?'

'That too. But it was more than that. It was... the *Great White God* de-throned, I suppose. Because we did, we quite unselfconsciously *assumed* we were the measure of all things. That was how we approached them. And suddenly I saw not only that we weren't the measure of all things, but that *there was no measure.*' (*R.* 242)

These two quotations in a way show the outside of Barker's novels with all its uncertainties and loss of faith in more than one thing that British people may be experiencing these days. Nowadays, and for a few years already, Britons have been surrounded by and have been feeling the effects of the scepticism of Postmodernity like everybody else, but in their case, they have had to accept they are no longer at the centre; they have lost their Empire as well as their influence in decision making about world issues; they have had to admit that white men are no longer the ones who give names to everything. England has stopped being Mary Shelley's "well-manned ship which mastered the winds and rode proudly over the waves" to become just one more big and highly developed country, that is all. All these issues, that timidly see the light in Rivers' times and in his own discourse, are part and parcel of today's England and we can confidently describe this as the ideologeme of the trilogy. The ideologeme corresponds itself with Rivers' times as well, because his words reflect the sentiments of incipient uncertainty about the social order that people were experiencing at the time of the war and even before. The exploration Barker does of this matter allows us to reflect upon Rivers and Prior's times but also about the author's present. The doctor's doubts would be then a description of the general ideologeme of the novels, past and present.

In conclusion and in the belief that "...not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves", (Eco qtd in Allen 198) I will finish this section saying that indeed, Pat Barker's novels allow many different voices to emerge via intertexts and they all conform a network of meanings construed by the dialogue established among the intertexts, the works from where they come and the trilogy itself. This network of meanings gives testimony of the fact that the works of art of all epochs and the epochs themselves exercise a definite shaping influence among them, an influence which can never be underestimated, overlooked or ignored.

CHAPTER 3. *The broken hero*

3.1 **Billy Prior**

When Billy Prior is sent back home to Craiglockhart hospital to be treated by Dr. Rivers for shell-shock, his main symptom is his mutism. He cannot speak, he has “chosen” not to speak when faced with the terrible and desolate picture of war. We are introduced then to a key character in the novels, the one I have decided to analyse and whom I will take as one more example of the kind of heroes that populate XXth century literature. In the words of Ihab Hassan, many of them, Billy included, maintain a conflict with themselves and their cultures and so they become broken heroes. (cf. Hassan 21) The modern anti-hero’s passionate concern would be then “to become someone, to know who or what one is, to reach finally another human being with love...” (Hassan 22)

In this chapter, first, I am going to analyse what kind of hero or anti-hero Billy Prior is, then, I will focus on his relationship with Dr. Rivers and its implications such as the issue of authority, the generational confrontation and the acceptance or rejection of the given order of things; after that, I will look into Prior and the issue of war, how he deals with it, what it means for him and how it affects his vision of his country, his leaders and his fellow country men. Finally, I will analyse Prior's use and misuse of his sexual life and try to infer some kind of conclusion of it all.

Billy Prior is a figure situated at a time of great chaos and movement in the social, religious and moral fields: the beginning of the XXth century. He is a working class young man of twenty years of age, highly disappointed with the world. He expresses his anger in the use he makes of language, in his contempt for authority, his ironies and sarcasms, his mistrust of everyone, and his exacerbated sexual life. Nevertheless, at times, we can also see in him a young man asking to be understood, accepted and loved, someone who is going through great emotional suffering due to his participation in the war, a human being desperate for being listened to, for sharing his emotional pain with someone, a pain profound enough to keep him temporarily dumb:

He put his head in his hands, at first, it seemed, in bewilderment, but then after a few moments he began to cry. Rivers waited a while, then walked round the desk and offered his handkerchief. Instead of taking it, Prior seized Rivers by the arms, and began butting him in the chest, hard enough to hurt. This was not an attack, Rivers realized. It was the closest Prior could come to asking for physical contact. (*R.* 104)

Billy had an unhappy childhood, he was the only son of a man who worked for a shipping company and of a woman who worked as a maid for rich people. He did not love his father and hardly tolerated his mother. His father was a violent man who used to beat up his mother and hold long, destructive arguments with her after drinking too much at the pub. As a child, Billy used to sit on the steps of the stairs and listen to his parents quarrel endlessly. The ugliness of the whole situation made him try to escape from it. He noticed that he could look into the glass of a barometer on the wall and go into the shine of the glass dividing himself into two people in order to feel safe in the second self who did not participate in the family nightmare. This mental state he will repeat later on in life in the form of memory lapses to escape from the pressures of war reality.

Then, in 1914, the war broke out and Billy, together with many other young men of all social classes were asked to take part in the conflict to honour their King and country. Their manliness and courage would be tested in the battle fields. Indeed, they must have all experienced their portion of emotional excitement to be part of such enterprise. The generalised and well accepted discourse at the time was in favour of the war and “the threat of war didn’t evoke any horror because people were not aware or had any idea of what modern technological war would mean not only for individuals but for societies.” And: “When the crowds cheered the declaration of war in every European capital, did so not out of some collective urge, but out of ignorance.” (Bullock 62). For Billy in particular, there was nothing at home that he could sense as relatively stable. Neither could he find any reasons in his personal history, that might suggest a meaningful purpose for his life. On the contrary, he could only visualise anger and frustration in his past and boredom in his present. Parents, teachers, priests and many of the adults who could have guided him in his early years were, in his opinion, either good examples of failure or just not strong enough examples to follow. So the war appeared as a valid alternative.

Fraser Kennedy in his article “Ghost Writer” (2008), describes Prior as a “temporary gentleman with an aspirational working-class mother, a complex, amoral, seductive and knowing antihero: a man defiant of boundaries of class or sex.” (42) I would add that this “amoral knowing antihero” is a problematic character who has been so badly hurt by circumstances in life that he cannot help showing himself the way he does. He has got strong reasons to justify his anger but despite them, he manages to develop some redemptive attitudes that somehow balance the previous description.

The relation with his parents was far from placid and harmonious. His father did not think too much of him, on the contrary he thought he was “...too fussy to live” (*T.G.R.*7) and, of course, he disapproved of him being a homosexual. His ambitious mother would have preferred another girl for her son not the one he chose as his girl friend. Sarah Lumb, was a working class girl: “ ‘Marrying a factory girl not that it matters of course as long as you’re happy but I’d ve thought you could have done a bit better for yourself than that.’ ” (*T.G.R.* 84) Childhood and its emotional environment are of paramount importance in the life of humans and in Prior’s particular case, it was plagued by rather unhappy events. The family as pillar of society was not there, was broken, and this fact seems to have fostered ambiguity, suspicion and mistrust in the child, and also affected his future relationships.

Moreover, as a boy of eleven, he was regularly sexually abused by a priest. After going through that experience, he prostituted himself in order to obtain money and later on, already as a young adult, he became cynical about it all and practised his homosexuality freely, risking imprisonment as it was stipulated by law in those days. When he had the chance to have sex with a male from the upper classes, his attitude would be almost sadistic because, as a working class man, he detested them and would always try to humiliate them as a way of punishing them for being what they were. Apart from the fact that his homosexual practices provided him with the chance to give vent to his resentment regarding social hierarchies, it is also reasonable to think that it was the above mentioned painful sexual interaction with the minister that led him into the homosexual road. Father Mackenzie most surely contributed to the acquisition of a distorted vision of sex on the part of the boy as well as to nurturing feelings of anger towards the world and fostering his decision of making a habit out of this practice and there was no return. As a young adult at war, he would still remember father Mackenzie with disgust: “Years later, after witnessing the brutalities of trench warfare, he still thought: (of father Mackenzie) *Bastard.*” (*T.E.D.* 253)

Let us consider now Billy’s participation in the war. It has been admitted and documented that trench war was a destabilizing and highly disturbing experience for many, Billy Prior among them. Hallet, Prior’s friend and a member of his platoon, was sent back home with half his head blown off. All he managed to say to Dr. Rivers in his death bed was: “Shotvarfet, Shotvarfet.” “It’s not worth it.” translated Rivers (*T.G.R.* 274). Billy, out of his free decision, took part in the war and like everybody else saw and experienced things and events there which were tough enough to affect anybody’s psychological balance.

How could a healthy young person remain sane and balanced after witnessing the hell of war in the trenches, after watching his friends blow up into pieces, after losing faith in the reasons for which the fighting was being done? The questions that he and others began to ask were: why did the nation have to send his young men to die in a war that had turned from a “war of defence and liberation into one of conquest and aggression?” (*R.* 3). Why did authority punish those who did not agree with war and use great levels of pressure upon them, even imprisonment, to make them change their minds as they did with conscientious objectors? Why was the nation not prepared to listen to its members, the ones who were experiencing the hardest part of the whole event? “ ‘You must speak but I shall not listen to anything you have to say.’ ” (*R.* 231)

says Dr. Yealland, another real character in the novels, to one of his patients with whom he was trying the technique of electric shock to deliver him from his inability to speak, inability acquired at the front. This single event becomes the metaphor of what really happened between authorities and the ones below, namely private soldiers and officers.

For a clever and sensitive person like Billy Prior, these were all matters that did not leave him indifferent. He was angry for all these social and personal reasons and he was unable to find a way out of them. His anger made of him what we learn in the novels: a character that more than one reviewer has described as unlikeable and amoral, e.g. Fraser Kennedy.³⁵

After this brief introduction of Billy Prior to the reader and as we have named this chapter *The broken hero*, let us now look at Prior in the light of the concepts about heroes and anti-heroes developed by Northrop Frye, Juan Villegas Morales and Ihab Hassan anticipated in the first chapter.

What elements conform Billy Prior's life? We have just mentioned above: family violence, sexual abuse and war. These are three tough enough ingredients to shape a person's life without him having any control upon them, and to make of him an embittered character. Somehow, we could say he is a victim. If we look at his years as a child the temptation is to consider him as one of Northrop Frye's ironic heroes because we feel there is some "sense of arbitrariness" in him belonging to an unhappy family or being sexually abused and later on, in him participating in the war; because he deserves what happens to him no more than anyone else would (cf. Frye 41); also, because he does willingly get isolated from his society: he hates civilians for considering them unworthy of his own and his mates' efforts at the front and finally because we might say there is in him a certain degree of innocence as he goes to France to die for others, for his King and country. The following quote illustrates how bitter Prior felt towards civilians. Sarah, his girl friend, turned on one occasion, into the one who had to pay for everyone:

He felt quite callous towards her now even as he drew her towards him and matched his stride to hers. She belonged with the pleasure-seeking crowds. He both envied and despised her, and was quite coldly determined to *get* her. They owed him something, all of them and she should pay." (R. 128)

Summarizing, although we can see Billy Prior as a victim mainly during childhood, he does not reach the status of a genuine ironic hero in Northrop Frye's

³⁵ This amoral and unlikeable man is one of Barker's favourite characters. She openly declared during one of her interviews that she "loves the character" and that there is a lot of herself in him. (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 155)

terms. The flaws we have already pointed out in his personality prevent him from being counted as one of them.

Now, let us consider Juan Villegas Morales' ideas about heroes. He asserts that: "...the term and concept of hero have got a dynamic nature and they vary in accordance to the historical frame and to the axiological systems of a given epoch." (Villegas 66) According to this, we can argue that Billy Prior would be as much a hero as an antihero because on the one hand, in terms of what his society expected of him in those days, he was a hero: he took part in the apparently inevitable fact of war and fulfilled his duty to his fellow men and women. But, on the other hand he also disrespected other values that were highly recommended or considered as good in those days: he was bisexual and one deserved imprisonment if it could be proved that one had homosexual relations or if one was found soliciting on the street. He also became mentally upset at the front and very few, at the time, could understand that a soldier could suffer from mental distress due to the acts of war. He was expected to prove his manliness and his toughness there, to kill and die if necessary, not to get mentally sick. These two facts would make of him an anti-hero in the system of values pertaining to the context of the novels.

Billy was a very bright person, very much aware of himself and others, of his own and others' psychological life, his and others' strengths and weaknesses. Again, he could be described with Villegas' words about the XXth century hero: "...In a lesser or greater degree today's hero is aware of his psychological life and of the multiple aspects that form his subconscious. His freedom, therefore, is limited not only by society but by his own inner world..." (Villegas 66) Billy just like Villegas' hero has moved from the realm of the social to that of the historical and psychological. I believe that this clever young man was forced by the circumstances to abandon familiar grounds to go to war where he was expecting to find out more about himself as he once admitted to Dr. Rivers. He was very much willing, in the words of Villegas, "to find or join new ways of life: tempting, demonic or gentle" (12) and he saw the war as the great opportunity to do so.

To sum up Villegas' case, we could say that despite having great insight of himself, of other people and of events and despite having some personality traits which situate him within the axiological frame valued by his society, these are not strong enough merits to make a hero of him. Furthermore, the non-recommended characteristics of his personality, which situate him outside that same system, do not

seem to be sufficient or strong enough to turn him into a complete anti-hero either in Villegas' terms.

Finally, let us analyse Billy Prior in the light of Ihab Hassan's ideas about heroes. In *Radical Innocence* (1961) and drawing on Lionel's Trilling ideas, Hassan argues that for the last century and part of the XIXth century there has been a standing quarrel between the self and its culture and between the self with itself. (cf. Hassan 20) Literature responds to this fact creating characters who, like Billy Prior, maintain a conflict with themselves and with the society they belong to. In Billy's case, he is unhappy with many aspects of his personal life and he also despises many aspects of the society he was born into: English society at the beginning of the XXth century. His unfortunate childhood experience with Father Mackenzie, his fractured family ties, his participation in a brutal event such as WW I and his inability to carry a balanced sexual life are some aspects that would show him to us as one of these anti-heroes. Billy Prior would be part of the long and "gradual process of atrophy of the hero" Hassan speaks about, which "may have begun with Don Quixote, or perhaps even Job, Orestes and Christ." (Hassan 21)

Thus, the concept of hero has suffered an erosion through the years and the critic asserts that he has become almost an anti-hero but also, he is the one who, in the last one and a half century has become aware of the destructive elements in himself and in his life experiences. (cf. Hassan 20) We have already mentioned Billy Prior's gift of identifying the dark and luminous aspects of his inner self. He had a great ability for introspection and he knew what he and others felt and why. This ability was enhanced and enriched during his sessions with Dr. Rivers. Therefore, he was bound to maintain a struggle with himself and with his environment because he was not indifferent to what was happening within and around himself.

On the affirmative side, I argue that although Prior could act as a sadist at times, he could be rude and unpleasant with Rivers, he could use sex to humiliate others or to take revenge on them for some reason or other, he also showed redemptive attitudes such as, first: the fact itself of going to war for the sake of fighting and defending the values of his nation; secondly, the fact that he did not choose to stay safely back home when he was offered a comfortable job at the Ministry of Munitions during one of his sick leaves and he chose to go back to fight side by side with his men; he chose the victims' side which grants him some kind of nobility; thirdly, the fact that he tried to help Betty Roper, his childhood friend almost a second mother to him, when she was

imprisoned and did not hesitate to use the privileges of his position at the Ministry to do something for her. Finally, his sense of humour and his love for Sarah.

If we combine all these traits we could state, that indeed, Billy Prior was a victim in many ways: his childhood and the fact he had to participate in a terrible war testify to it. But we cannot affirm that this was so from the beginning to the end. Why do I say this? Because when he was sent back to England due to his asthma first, and for shell-shock later, he was faced with the alternative not to go back to France if he did not want to. Charles Manning, a sexual partner of his, offered him a job many would have liked to get but he declined and he chose to return. It was his free decision to go back. He wanted to be there, in the fighting fields sharing the same horrors with his men. Then, I argue that the fact that, out of free choice, he did go back and took the victims' side makes of him what Albert Camus, quoted in Hassan's book, calls the rebel-victim. When Billy writes in his diary: "what an utter bloody fool I would have been not to come back" (*T.G.R.* 258) despite the desolate picture around him, Dr. Rieux's words in *The Plague* resound in our minds:

"There are pestilences on this earth. This is all I maintain, and there are victims, and it's up to us, as far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences... I decided to take the victim's side so as to reduce the damage done. Among them, I can at least try to understand how one attains to the third category, in other words : to peace." (Camus qtd in Hassan 30)

Hassan throws some light on the concept of rebellion. He states that "to join the victims' side (in Billy's case, the fighting soldiers) is an act of rebellion against and alienation from the prevalent norm." (Hassan 30) Rebellion, according to the French author quoted in *Radical Innocence*, "though apparently negative since it creates nothing, is profoundly positive in that it reveals the part of man which must always be defended." (Camus qtd in Hassan 30) For the rebel victim the Cartesian argument is: I rebel – therefore *we* exist. So, I argue that despite all the flaws in his personality, Billy Prior is somehow near this kind of rebel-victim Camus speaks about. I could assert that Billy Prior managed to find some sort of peace by taking the side of the victims and fighting till the end. I can prove that there was a degree of evolution in his personality when, for example, I read in his personal diary some time before the end, that he himself had to admit that words seemed to have acquired a "new" meaning, a meaning he "denied" them before out of bitterness: "Little words that strip through sentences unregarded: us, them, we, they, here, there. These are the words of power and long after

we are gone they'll lie about in the language, like the unexploded grenades in these fields ...” (T.G.R. 257)

Hassan states that the problem of the modern hero / anti-hero is essentially one of identity. His search is for existential fulfillment, that is for freedom and self definition. (Hassan 31) Perhaps Billy Prior did not have the chance to find existential fulfillment because he died at war at a very early age when he had not achieved much yet, in terms of a well rounded personality. What we know of him is broken, is incomplete, is dual, is ambivalent; he is not a hero in the traditional sense but he is not a swine either; he can show himself as an unlikeable character but he can also show himself as a very humane, compassionate, sympathetic and unselfish being.

In reference again to Billy's return to war, we must say that this aspect in Billy's life is of great value and one should not underestimate it or deny it the value it had. Billy chose to go back and risk his life which he finally lost. He was so happy to go back that we are made to think that he probably inwardly was capable of partly overcoming “the contradictions of his experience, its destructive or demonic element by assuming the role of the rebel-victim” (Hassan 31)

In order to complete this section let us say that what Barker actually does in the novels is to re-construct the concepts of war and war heroes from a new and different point of view. WWI was a war of nerves; in the confined space of trenches, soldiers and officers experienced passivity, immobility, helplessness, and constant danger that they could do nothing to avert, the living conditions were appalling and they did not have the chance to prove any manliness there, on the contrary, they ended up caring for each other like mothers would do. Ironically, the manly characteristics gave way to more feminine ones such as looking after each other to which they were forced by the ugliness of the circumstances themselves. These men, Billy Prior included, probably did have all the features that are likely to be found in traditional war heroes such as heroism, manliness, courage, sacrifice, fighting spirit, unselfishness and the ability to put the common good above personal interests. The point is that Barker chooses not to put the emphasis upon these aspects and to write just one more novel that glorifies war. On the contrary, as I said before, she makes a re-construction of war and war heroes and shows them under a different light which gives us a new, perhaps more complete, picture of how things really were. The immobility soldiers had to endure in the trenches, the nervous breakdowns sometimes caused by their inability to express their emotions, the terrible living conditions, the emotional distress of seeing your friends die and of

having death around you all the time, are all aspects that show war under a particular and more realistic light. We acquire a larger picture of it and of its futility, perversity and cruelty.

So, what is the conclusion regarding Prior being or not being a hero? Let us say that Billy Prior was a young man who maintained a struggle with himself and his environment, a young man divided between the basic forces of good and evil that act within all of us; he was an ambivalent, incomplete, fragmented man, with lots of doubts and questions without answers, but he was also a human being who at a given time in life was capable of making decisions that strengthened and dignified him.

We may affirm then that Billy Prior was not one of Northrop Frye's ironic heroes or a complete hero in the traditional sense, that Villegas Morales' ideas regarding the dependence on the axiological system of a given culture cannot be disregarded and can easily be applied to Prior but that it does not provide us with a complete description of the character either, and finally that the name and description of Hassan's "broken hero" seems to be the most adequate for him for all the reasons we have just outlined. In the following sections we will devote our research effort to analyse this character in greater depth and detail.

3.2 Prior and dr. Rivers

After introducing Billy Prior as our controversial hero, I would now like to look into his relationship with Dr. Rivers, the well-known British scientist, and try to prove that the systematic opposition Prior made manifest while interacting with the doctor shows the conflict that Billy maintains with authority and the established norm which, at the same time becomes a metaphor of what is happening outside the therapy room in the world they both belong to. In the West, at the beginning of the XXth century, seeds of discontent were slowly emerging that affected the beliefs and traditions that had underpinned life until then.

Prior came under Dr. Rivers' care when he was sent to Craiglockhart hospital in Edinburgh, to be cured of his mutism, his own particular symptom of shell-shock. I have already described Prior as a transgressor, a man who does not know any boundaries, shrewdly complicated, clever and well informed about politics, human

behaviour and even psychology, very much aware of his own and others' inner world, at times hedonistic and non-disciplined but also, a man in need of affection, capable of loving and certainly resolute and unselfish at war. He is the one character that shakes the accepted values of his own time which, to a certain extent, are represented by Rivers.

Dr. Rivers, in turn, the real character Barker chose to clash with Billy, was born in 1864 and died in 1922. He had a unique career: he was a medical doctor, a psychiatrist and an anthropologist. He contributed greatly to all three fields and Pat Barker draws on all of them to write her novels. In 1906-07, Rivers spent six months among natives from a Melanesian tribe in the Solomon Islands in the SW Pacific and this ended up being a most meaningful experience which left a lasting impression upon him as a scientist and as a human being. Although I agree with Patricia Johnson's description of Dr. Rivers which we find in her article "Embodying Losses" from *Critique* magazine (2005), and which says that Rivers functions in the trilogy "as an early twentieth century Renaissance man and a symbol of Western civilization." (307) and although we know that Rivers had a "rock-solid sense of his own identity" in the words of Pat Barker herself, (*Contemporary British and Irish Fiction: Novelists in Interview* 23) in the novels, he was also described as a man who had enough intellectual honesty to admit all along the way, that certain things in his culture and within himself were starting to shake and needed a change. After he travelled to the islands and during the time he worked with soldiers suffering from war neuroses or shell-shock at Craiglockhart, he began to experience doubts he could not unravel and to ask himself questions he could not confidently answer. The soundness of his spirit was put to the test.

Indeed, Pat Barker gives us her own version of Dr. Rivers, she carefully lays down the facts and then she eviscerates them in order to free the soul of her chosen personage. (cf. Casey 2009) She just puts words in his mouth and feelings in his heart and writes about them; she gives him a soul but I dare say she remains within the limits that historiography offers her. Barker herself has stated: "I always try to stick to historical facts." (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 177) As I have already mentioned in the section "Barker interrogates history and its actors" (39) Dr. Rivers is not relegated to a secondary role and he is not deployed only to "validate or authenticate the fictional world with his presence..." (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 144) His role within the novel is of paramount importance and at times you almost feel he is more central than anybody

else. He is Pat Barker's sui-generis version of the real Rivers and it is him, Barker uses to establish a dialogue between epochs and generations, as he holds most fruitful and valuable conversations not only with Prior but with his other patients.

What happens when these two personages are put together? Barker herself stated during an interview given to *The Guardian Supplement* in 1995, that Prior as a character was constructed to "get up Rivers' nose" (Spufford qtd in *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 155). He acts as the Devil's Advocate who does not only challenge concepts of authority, the doctor's treatment of his patients, issues of gender, issues of class and certainly the war, but who also manages to engender doubts about all of those matters in the scientist himself.

I argue that besides the topics of class, gender and collective violence which are clearly identified by many of the trilogy's reviewers that have been consulted, another big theme in the novels, is the one referred to the possibility of establishing meaningful cross-generational dialogue. Dr. Rivers, a well rounded, though complex character, suddenly sees his innermost convictions challenged, he is a "man at odds within himself about the war." (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 166) In Barker's opinion, he belongs to the *avant-garde* of his time, a reflective person, flexible enough to foster dialogue with his fellow men, "a doctor who wonders if he can fulfill his duty as an officer" (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 166/67) because on the one hand, he is required to help these soldiers to become mentally healthy but, on the other hand, he knows that after their recovery, they will be returning to the same situation that made them sick in the first place.

After introducing the two characters in question, I will consider some specific situations to back up the above expressed ideas.

Billy Prior, this "little, spitting, sharp-boned alley cat" (*R.* 49) sitting opposite Rivers in his therapy room, could not relate freely and confidently to his doctor because of the complex character he was in the first place, and also, because he was not prepared to admit or accept any of the things Rivers could say or offer from his position as a doctor e.g. an authoritative word about his infirmity, his words of advice, his experience, his friendliness. Besides, Rivers belonged to the upper classes and Prior maintained a resentful attitude towards these people. Neither was he prepared to accept that he was the sick person in the therapy room and that Rivers was the healer, the one with authority, the one in command of the situation. In his opinion, he had the right to learn about Rivers as much as the doctor wanted to learn about him:

‘What did you do before the war?’ (Rivers’ question)
 ‘I was a clerk in a shipping office.’
 ‘Did you like it?’
 ‘No. It was *boring*. (...) What did *you* do?’
 ‘Research. Teaching.’
 ‘Did *you* like it?’
 ‘Yes, very much. Research more than teaching probably (...)’ (R. 49)

Or:

‘I don’t see why it has to *be* like this anyway.’
 ‘Like what?’
 ‘All the questions from *you*, all the answers from *me*. Why can’t it be both ways?’
 (...)
 ‘(...) if I went to my doctor *in despair*, it might help to know he at least understood the *meaning*³⁶ of the word.’
 (...)
 ‘Well, all I can say is I’d rather talk to a real person than a strip of empathic wallpaper.’
 Rivers smiled. ‘I like that.’ (R. 50/51)

He was adamant about the fact that he was not the only sick person in the room as if he wanted to remind Rivers that he was not the perfect, untroubled wise person he might have thought he was. Rivers had a stammer since childhood and during one of their sessions Prior drew the doctor’s attention to it and said:

‘Because if your stammer *was* the same as theirs – you might actually have to sit down and work out what it is you’ve spent fifty years trying not to say.’
 (...)
 ‘You know one day you’re going to have to accept the fact that you’re in this hospital because you’re ill. Not me. Not the CO. Not the kitchen porter. *You*.’ (R. 97)

Their meetings were tense and stressful for both of them; Prior was good at making ironic comments or jokes and Rivers at showing patience, compassion and good disposition. Prior probed Rivers all the time, for example he would say things like: “‘You know, you do a wonderful imitation of a stuffed shirt. And you’re not like that at all, really, are you?’ ” (R. 66) Or he adopted a flirtatious attitude to push Rivers into difficult grounds and challenge his principles regarding the practice of sexuality:

‘You know, I think I ought to have a look at that chest.’ (Rivers’ words)
 Prior managed a ghostly imitation of his usual manner.
 ‘Your room or mine?’
 ‘The sick bay’ replied Rivers. (R. 61)

³⁶ All in italics in the original

In turn, Rivers had to deal with a contradictory and unhelpful patient “...to the point where normal conversation became almost impossible.” (R. 65) The antagonism between them was ever present and the omniscient narrator points it out to the reader:

‘You know, you once told me I had to win.’ He shook his head (Prior) ‘You are the one who has to win.’

‘This may come as a shock, Mr Prior but I had been rather assuming that we were on the same side.’

‘This may come as a shock dr. Rivers, but I had been *rather assuming* that we were not.’

(...)

The antagonism was startling. They might’ve been back at the beginning, when it had been almost impossible to get a civil word out of him. (R. 80)

During their sessions, no matter what topic they were dealing with, we can appreciate how Prior confronted with Rivers and questioned his stable world. For example, Prior was exceedingly sensitive on the issue of class difference in England. He originally belonged to the working classes but his mother dreamed of a better future for him and did all that was necessary in terms of education to make him different from his natural friends. When he became an officer in the British army because of his merits at war, he had the chance to turn into a “temporary gentleman”. Nevertheless, he felt divided within himself and his attitude always remained one of love and hatred towards the members of the upper classes.

One of the ways he felt different from his brother officers, one of the many, was that *their* England was a pastoral place: fields, streams, wooded valleys, medieval churches surrounded by ancient elms. They couldn’t grasp that for him, and for the vast majority of the men, the Front, with its mechanization, its reduction of the individual to a cog in a machine, its blasted landscape, was not a contrast with the life they’d known at home, in Birmingham, Manchester or Glasgow or the Welsh pit villages, but a nightmarish culmination. “Equality not at home in either.” Mac had said. He was right. (T.E.D. 115/116)

Billy described the matter to Dr. Rivers in these terms:

‘Yes, it’s made perfectly clear when you arrive that some people are more welcome than others. It helps if you’ve been to the right school. It helps if you hunt, it helps if your shirts are the right colour. Which is a deep shade of khaki, by the way.’ (R. 66)

Or:

‘(...) Look, *you* might like to think it’s one big happy family out there, but it’s not. They *despise* each other.’ (R. 53)

I can find another example of this kind of bitterness on Prior’s side when I consider his arrival at Craiglockhart hospital. At that moment, he was unable to speak and Rivers could not find a better explanation for it than saying that it was mainly

private soldiers and not officers who suffered from mutism because they, officers, had a more complex mental life. For private soldiers mutism sprang from a conflict between wanting to say something and knowing that if you did the consequences would be disastrous. (R. 96) There was much more to lose for them than for those of higher rank.

When he heard this comment, Prior got enraged and reacted bitterly:

Prior reacted as if he'd been stung. 'Are you serious? You honestly believe that that gaggle of noodle-brained half-wits down there has a complex mental life? Oh, Rivers.'

'I'm not saying it's *universally* true, only that it's *generally* true. Simply as a result of officers receiving a different and more prolonged education.'

'*The public schools.*'

'Yes. The public schools.' (R. 97)

Both Rivers and Prior belonged to a "society governed by class distinction, with undisguised inequality between rich and poor" where the poor, were just a "lower order of humanity and treated as such, valued only as the vast pool of surplus labour on which the social as well as the economic system depended." (Bradbury and McFarlane 60/61) I have already mentioned Prior's position on this matter but how did Rivers respond to the problem? He was forced, by the young man, first to identify and then to reconsider his prejudice about the working classes:

'I suppose most of them (other patients) turn you into Daddy, don't they? Well, I'm a bit too old to be sitting on *Daddy's* knee.'

'Kicking him on the shins every time you meet him isn't generally considered more mature.'

'I *see*. A negative transference. Is *that* what you think we've got?

'I hope not.' Rivers couldn't altogether conceal his surprise. 'Where did you learn that term?'

'I can *read*.'

Well yes, I know, but it's --

'Not popular science? No, but then neither is this.'

He reached for the book beside the bed and held it out to Rivers. Rivers found himself holding a copy of *The Todas*.³⁷ He stared for a moment at his own name on the spine. He told himself there was no reason why Prior shouldn't read one of his books or all of them for that matter. There was no rational reason for him to feel uneasy. (R. 65)

How could a young, working class person talk with him about these issues? Freud, psychology, anthropology? What was happening? Thus, Rivers had to admit that Prior did not fit any ordinary pattern, he did not want to either. Barker's Dr. Rivers was an understanding and open-minded character prepared to accept that his way of looking at things might not be the only one or the final one. He was clever and sensitive enough to notice that the system within which he had been brought up was starting to show some cracks.

³⁷ *The Todas* was an anthropology book about a Melanesian tribe written by Dr. Rivers

But it got to the point when Rivers found the situation disconcerting:

The antagonism was startling. They might have been back at Craiglockhart at the beginning of Prior's treatment.

(...)

'I'm sorry.'

'Don't be, there's no need. Suddenly Rivers leant across the desk. 'I'm not here to be liked.'

'I *am* sorry. Prior said his face and voice hardening. 'I thought I was supposed to be accepting my emotions.? Well my emotion is that I'm sorry.'

'In that case I accept your apology. (*T.E.D* 133/4)

And Prior succeeded at making Dr. Rivers lose his self-confidence.

"He tried to go on with what he'd been going to say and realized that he'd lost the train of thought. After so many hours of probing, manipulating, speculating, provoking, teasing, Prior had finally – and almost casually – succeeded. (*T.E.D.* 136)

Let me now look into the medical aspect. The kind of treatment Dr. Rivers practised with the soldiers and its objective was also a cause of friction between them because Rivers' task was to help his patients to recover their psychological stability so that they might go back to war in the emotional conditions necessary to face the strain and terror of fighting. Dr. Rivers tried to get his patients to remember traumatic situations and talk about them, to face their fears and accept their emotions. He got them to speak about their dreams and nightmares which would normally evoke horrible events experienced at the front line, events that would later provoke physical and / or mental damage. He did a tremendous job with them but his pursuit was a controversial and almost cruel one: helping someone to recover so that he can go back to experience the same situations that brought him to hospital in the first place is rather difficult to understand to say the least. Dr. Rivers knew it and he was troubled by it. Prior puts the dilemma into words for Rivers:

'...all this face your emotions, own up to fear, let yourself feel grief... works wonders. *Here.*' (...) But what about *there*? Do you think it helps *there*? Or do they just go mad quicker?'

'Nobody's ever done a follow-up (...) Obviously, the patients who stay in touch are a self-selected group, and such evidence as they provide is anecdotal, and therefore almost useless.'

'My God Rivers you are a cold bugger.'

'You asked me a scientific question. You got a scientific answer.'

Prior sat down. 'Well dodged.' (*T.E.D.* 205)

Although their relationship was far from smooth it can be said that they both reached some kind of understanding of each other after some time and were capable of experiencing mutual respect and affection. From the very beginning Rivers is the one who cares:

Perhaps because he'd recently been thinking about his own father Rivers was more than usually aware of the strong father-son element in his relationship with Prior. He had no son; Prior utterly rejected his natural father. (*T.G.R.* 98)

It took Billy a longer time and much more thinking to recognize Rivers as a valuable human being:

(...) his power over people, the power to heal, if you like, springs directly from some sort of wound or deformation in him. He has got a lot of strengths, but he isn't working from this strength (...) For me it's the best thing about him - Well the only thing that makes him tolerable, actually - that he *doesn't* sit behind the desk implicitly setting himself up as some sort of standard of mental health. He once said to me that half of the world's work is done by hopeless neurotics, and I think he had himself in mind. And me. (*T.G.R.* 111)

Although Prior insists on showing the worst part of himself to the world and antagonises Rivers as much and as often as he can because he rebels against the doctors' aspirations of truth, he is also a vulnerable human being in need of love and support like everybody else and he identifies Rivers as one who can fulfill that need.

'What did you call me?'

'Billy, do you mind? I - '

'No, it's just that it's the first time. Did you know that? Sassoon was Siegfried, Anderson was Ralph. I noticed the other day you called Manning Charles. I was always "Prior". In moments of exasperation I was *Mister* Prior.'

'I'm sorry, I - ' (...) 'I'd no idea you minded.'

'No, well, you're not very perceptive, are you? Anyway, it doesn't matter.' (*T.E.D.* 243)

On another occasion, after a session of hypnosis thanks to which Billy could finally speak about what was provoking first, his mutism and later his nightmares, the young man broke down completely:

He put his head in his hands, at first, it seemed, in bewilderment, but then after a few moments he began to cry. Rivers waited a while, then walked round the desk and offered his handkerchief. Instead of taking it, Prior seized Rivers by the arms, and began butting him in the chest, hard enough to hurt. This was not an attack, Rivers realized. It was the closest Prior could come to asking for physical contact. (*R.* 104)

By creating this kind of frame between the two characters, Barker manages to generate some hope, because in it, we can see that the possibility of dialogue between and within generations is real. Prior's demands and antagonism show the expected rebellious reaction of youth, which together with Rivers' dilemmas and doubts

incorporate positive expectancy for their future as characters and for the culture they belong to. With anger on one side and compassion on the other side Prior and Rivers establish fruitful exchange and dialogue instead of remaining entrenched in their beliefs and monologic view of the world.

Let me consider a few more aspects of the relationship between these two men before we finish this section. In her article “Embodying Losses in Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* Trilogy” (2005), Patricia Johnson asserts that there was a part of Rivers that was “a disembodied anthropological intelligence,” (*T.G.R.*117) a representative of the scientific, superior West, but later in life, when he came in contact with so many young men in pain, he realised that he had not gone through all his experiences in Melanesia as a “disembodied anthropological intelligence but as a man, and as a man he had to make some sense of them.” (*T.G.R.* 117) He found that his views about what was happening in the West at that moment were profoundly affected by his contact with the islanders. Johnson also states: “His trip to Melanesia points toward a transformation in his personality that would fully emerge only during his psychiatric work with soldiers during the war.” (307) Barker shows us a Dr. Rivers who was susceptible to change and prepared to reassess his own values and although in the trilogy, he may function as a representative of Western Rationalism, this is never shown as the end of the story. Rivers himself admitted that while staying in Melanesia he had experienced a: “moment of the most amazing freedom.” He had seen: “...the Great White God de-throned...” Suddenly he saw “not only that we were not the measure of all things but that there was no measure.” (*R.* 242) This can only mean that the values of the West were no longer unique. Neither did they completely explain the world any more.

To make things worse, Rivers was a healer *and* a supporter of war. Although his support of war was an ambivalent one, as we have already mentioned, he did feel implicated in the legacy of the West’s destructiveness. When his flashbacks from Melanesia reminded him of a sacrificial rite of the natives that ended with the death of a young boy offered in sacrifice by his adoptive father, almost automatically, he tried to retreat into claims of Western superiority but, in the midst of World War I, Dr. Rivers could not comfortably retreat behind notions of his own culture’s superiority any more. He was fully aware of the fact that he rehabilitated young men so that they could be sent back to the front where they would most certainly be slain just like the Melanesian boy. Moreover, he managed to develop a very particular father-son relationship with all his patients, Prior included. While considering Abraham and Isaac’s bible story, Dr. Rivers

initially believed that the difference between civilization and savagery lay in the fact that Abraham was eventually stopped by the angel who ordered him not to kill his son, whereas the native boy was actually killed by his own father. He drew a parallel between Western civilization and Abraham's attitude but he could not possibly sustain his theory for too long after the war started and after treating his young patients. Older generations were sending their young ones to be killed without thinking too much about it and apparently Abraham was not prepared to obey the angel because "(...)at this very moment in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together to sing hymns." (R. 149) There is one poem by Wilfred Owen, one more of the real historical characters that appear in the trilogy, called "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" which, even if it does not appear as an intertext in the novels, is worth mentioning here because in it, Owen re-creates Abraham's story to better describe the situation I was making reference to:

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.(...)

Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps(...)
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,(...)

Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

The story about the old sending the young ones to be killed seems to come from long ago says the narrator in José Saramago's *The Gospel according to Jesus Christ* (1991) and it "promises not to have an end: the war between fathers and sons, the inheritance of blame, the denial of your own blood and the sacrifice of innocence." (Saramago 81)

Nevertheless, as I said before, Barker's vision is one of hope and so states Karin Westman in her paper "Generation not Regeneration" from 2005. She argues that there are on Barker's part "repeated efforts to show continuity between the young and the old." (*Critical perspectives on Pat Barker* 171) Also, that the writer encourages us to have "sufficient imagination to realize that the official and traditional view of war is not

the only one and that cultural patterns are open to change.” (*Critical perspectives on Pat Barker* 171) Westman suggests that for Barker, the familiar “cultural parable of fathers and sons and the inevitability of war” is not such, is not so definite or closed and that she has a vision of “cautious optimism for the future of the characters in the novels and of their culture.” Therefore, “the old fathers will not always and without consideration sacrifice their sons.” (*Critical perspectives on Pat Barker* 173). The novels offer us a “back door into the present by encouraging us to consider those social and imaginative forces which shape our cultural experiences” (*Critical perspectives on Pat Barker* 173) and they are also a “living critique of a society that has fractures within as well as between generations” (*Critical perspectives on Pat Barker* 173) and this we find out thanks to the imaginative and regenerative dialogue the characters hold. In the end, the message would be one of hope and not of despair.

In this section we have focused on how a younger person (Billy Prior) could challenge the world of concepts and the authority represented by an older one (Dr. Rivers). At the time, traditions and established beliefs began to be questioned and Rivers and Prior’s conversations are a good metaphor of this situation. The wider picture we can sense, while reading about these two characters, is that we are being faced with a sense of breakup, a lack of certitude and certain dissatisfaction with the world as it was, all of which paved the way for further social developments and changes that consolidated as time went by and found its culmination in postmodern times.

3.3 Prior and sex

I would like to start this section with some thoughts by Harvey Cox. In his book *The Secular City* (1965), he asserts that: “no aspect of human life seethes with so many unexorcised demons as does sex. No human activity is so hexed by superstition, so haunted by residual tribal lore, and so harassed by socially induced fear.” (202) Sexuality is deeply seated in humans. It is a central aspect of any meaningful relationship and in it, we give ourselves to another person with all we have and all we are and therein lies its terror and its power. Nevertheless, the erosion of traditional

values and the disappearance of accepted modes of behaviour have left modern man rudderless in this area of life as well. (cf. Cox 202)

Cox quotes the Swiss theologian Karl Barth who called this basic relational form in man's life *mitmensch* (German for co-humanity). This would mean that becoming fully human requires not having the other totally exposed to me and my purposes - while I remain uncommitted - but exposing myself to the risk of encounter with the other by reciprocal self-exposure. Man sometimes refuses to be so exposed and this refusal goes back to the story of Eden and is expressed by man's desire to control the other rather than *be with* the other. It is basically the fear to be one's self, a lack of the "courage to be." (Cox 214) This may sound a strange introduction for what comes after because Prior's sex life was far from all these concepts. But it is because Prior's sex life was so complex that it needs to be confronted with this other picture in order to understand it and situate it within some kind of frame.

In his book *Introducción a la novela Contemporánea* (1985), Andrés Amorós asserts that the presence of people's sexual lives in the contemporary novel means something deeper and more important than one would dare to think. In order to expand his idea he quotes Ernesto Sábato when he states: "For the first time in the history of literature, sex acquires a metaphysical dimension; thus, in opposition with what used to happen in the old novel where love was mundane, pornographic or sentimental, now it assumes a sacred character."³⁸ (Amorós 148) In the contemporary novel, besides claiming its fundamental or intrinsic importance, sex is a tool used to explain, to bring up the big themes that partly underlie human life: loneliness, existential anguish, the difficulty to achieve meaningful and authentic communication, the desire to break barriers, the nostalgia for a happier life, the collision with established norms in society, self-fulfilment, etc. (cf. Amorós 148)

The trilogy is so highly sexed one cannot overlook the topic. Billy Prior had an exacerbated sexual life and if we agree with Amorós we might speculate that it is in sex where Prior was searching himself and trying to heal his "loneliness and existential anguish" (Amorós 148) In this section, we will analyse this aspect of the novels having as a starting point the conviction that there was in Prior's sexual practices a basic lack of balance which, at times, makes readers feel disgruntled and perplex.

Having said this, let us now consider the link between Prior and sex, how he views it, what use he makes of it and finally decide how this understanding helps us

³⁸ My own translation

prove the assumption that in this area too, Billy Prior is first, confronting the norm and secondly, announcing some kind of change or at least, he is bringing the matter to the foreground and forcing us to talk about it.

Sex for this young man was more than one thing: it was a way of seeking pleasure, a hedonistic activity he would carry out with whoever was prepared to follow him. It was an expression of certain amount of sadism Prior was capable of producing too. It was a way of exercising power upon others to take some kind of revenge and finally it was also a way of expressing sincere love. Before I provide some examples, it must be made clear that whatever I may say about Billy's sex life, it is always preceded and marked by a most unfortunate event.

As a child of eleven, Billy was repeatedly abused by a priest and it could be said that this fact conditioned his whole sexual life from an early stage. Had the priest not forced Billy, he would have probably not indulged in homosexual practices later on. Under the risk of falling into psychological speculations I could assume that his childhood experience had something to do with the lack of balance of his sexual life as an adult, already mentioned above.

'I was raped in -a vicarage once.' (...)

(...) 'How old were you?' (...)

'Eleven,' (...) 'I was receiving extra tuition. (...) From the parish priest, Father Mackenzie. My mother offered him a shilling a week. (...) Don't look so shocked, Rivers.'

'I am shocked.' (*T.E.D.* 137/138)

Father Mackenzie initiated him into an activity he later on pursued to obtain money: "Later – though not much later, he'd been a forward child – he'd began to charge, not so much resorting to prostitution as inventing it, for he knew of nobody else who got money that way." (*T.G.R.* 41)

In his article "What is Prior? Working Class Masculinity in Pat Barker's Trilogy" published in the *Gender's Journal* (2002), Peter Hitchcock argues that Barker has always been forthright to the point of bluntness about sex, but this is because she attends to violence and misogyny in some of its forms and not because she seeks lurid titillation in the description of the sex act itself. In the case of the trilogy at least, I argue there is no misogyny but there is certainly psychological violence in Prior's pursuit of sex, mainly when he has sex with men who belong to a superior class. I have already mentioned that class distinction was one of Prior's concerns. He felt bitter about it and having sex with men from the upper classes was an opportunity for him to express this

resentment. On one occasion when he met Robert Ross, a well-known sodomite from London, he was also introduced to one of his friends, a certain Birtwhistle who had been stood up by his boy friend, a working class man from Leeds. Birtwhistle said of him in anger: “Of course one can’t rely on them. Their values are totally different from ours. They’re different species, really. The WCs.” Blinded with anger Prior made the following comment to Rivers: “Working classes. Water-closets. The men who’re getting their ballocks shot off so he can go on being the lilly on the dung heap. God, they make me sick.” (*T.G.R.* 100) Billy took revenge on him in his own way:

‘Anyway I decided to give this prat a run for his money so we adjourned upstairs afterwards.’

‘You and Manning?’

‘No. Me and Birtwhistle. Birtwhistle and I.’

‘It doesn’t sound much like a punishment.’

‘Oh, it was. Nothing like *sexual* humiliation Rivers. Nobody ever forgets that.’

Rivers looked into the trustless eyes, and thought, My God I wouldn’t want to cross you.’ (*T.G.R.* 100)

Class distinction permeated all aspects of Billy’s life, sex included. On one occasion, when “he needed sex, and he needed it badly.” (*T.E.D.* 7) and he was not prepared to pay a prostitute for it because “once, some years ago, he had been paid, and he knew exactly how the payer looks to the one he’s paying” (*T.E.D.* 8), he met Charles Manning, an officer in the army, who also carried a double life. As they were having a drink before a session of sex and the chat was dragging on a bit too long, Prior began to “suspect Manning might be one of those who cannot – simply cannot – let go sexually with a social equal.” (*T.E.D.* 11) Let us remember that Prior was also an officer and at that moment, he was wearing his officer’s uniform therefore, Manning believed he was his equal. So, Billy “transformed himself into the sort of working-class boy Manning would think it was all right to fuck. A sort of seminal spittoon. And it worked.” (*T.E.D.* 11) After succeeding at making Manning give in, Prior thought “he’d probably never felt a spurt of purer class antagonism than he felt at that moment.” (*T.E.D.* 11)

Billy was bisexual and he felt quite comfortable about it. He did not feel embarrassed or guilty at a time when such a condition was a good enough reason to be discriminated by the rest of society or to be imprisoned. He was also very much aware of himself and of his capability for being sadistic:

One of the things I like sexually (...) is simply being fully dressed with a naked lover, holding him or her from behind. And what I feel (apart from the obvious) is great tenderness – the sort of tenderness that depends on being more powerful, and that is really, I suppose, the acceptable face of sadism. (*T.G.R.* 175)

There is evidence in the novels that Billy Prior saw women as instruments to satisfy his sexual desire, so we get comments such as: “Louie’s knees were by no means glued together, (...) with that fag stuck in her mouth she did look common. Gloriously, devastatingly, *fuckably* common.” (*T.G.R.* 5) Or:

They made a romantic picture, he supposed. The girl, young and pretty clinging to the arm of a man in uniform, a man, moreover, wearing a greatcoat so stained and battered it had obviously seen a good deal of active service. As indeed it had, and was about to see more, if only he could persuade the silly bitch to lie on it. (*T.E.D.* 3)

He showed few misgivings or scruples when it came down to sex. For example, he had sex with Lizzie MacDowell, Mac’s mother. Mac was his best childhood friend, a friend he had loved dearly and with whom he had shared unforgettable moments in the past. It was never “at the fore front of his mind” who Lizzie was when “they’d lain together on the sagging bed, while the bedbugs feasted...” (*T.G.R.* 36) Neither did he hold any prejudice to stop him from having sex with Mrs. Riley, the woman who breastfed him when he was a little baby to help out his mother who was unable to do it. (*T.E.D.* 118)

After considering these less fortunate aspects of Prior’s sex life, there is finally sex with Sarah, his girl friend, which was the most natural and healthiest expression of sex Prior could produce. Sarah is the only person in the trilogy that brings some kind of peace to Billy’s life. In her article “Generation not Regeneration”, Karin Westman argues that Sarah might connect three facets in herself at the same time. “She can be one of the working class whom Prior feels comfortable with (...) she can be an ignorant civilian, she can be a female inhabitant a feminine space apart from worldly pain.” (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 171) The three aspects combine well to make their relationship work.

He met Sarah Lumb in a pub in Edinburgh. She was a young, attractive, red haired munitions worker who had lost her boy friend Johnny at the battle of Loos. At first, he was only interested in lying down with her and in making her pay what he thought she owed him as a member of the “pleasure seeking crowds.” (*R.* 128) According to him, they all owed him something because he was fighting in France for them and Sarah was the chosen one, at the time, to pay for it. Later on, his feelings grew deeper and a more stable relationship with some kind of expectations for the future developed. In a declaration of what true love is, Billy admits that even if he needed Sarah’s ignorance about the war so that she could go on “being a haven for him.” he also “wanted to know and be known as deeply as possible.” (*R.* 216)

‘I love you Sarah Lumb.’

‘I love you Billy Prior.’

(...) And all he wanted at that moment was to hide his face between her breasts and shut out the relentless ticking of the clock.” (*T.G.R.* 74)

It got to the point when Sarah really meant a lot to him:

Sarah left early on the Monday morning. They clung together by the barrier at King’s Cross, breathing in coke fumes, and did not say goodbye.

He worked late putting off the moment when he’d have to face the empty flat. On his way home he kept telling himself it wouldn’t be too bad. Or at least it wouldn’t be so bad as he expected. It was worse. He wandered from room to room searching for traces of her (...) It will get better he told himself. It didn’t. (*T.E.D.* 192)

On November 2nd 1918, just before he died, Prior wrote the last entry in his diary and perhaps as a premonition, he made a comment about a letter he had just written to Rivers and ended with a few words for Sarah:

A chilly note to send someone who’s done so much for me. Wrong tone completely, but there isn’t much time to get it right.

I daren’t think about Sarah. (*T.G.R.* 255)

He found in Sarah Lumb the person with whom he was prepared to build something meaningful and he proved to us readers that sex could also be for him an expression of true love closer to Harvey Cox’s idea of it.

Summarizing, it could be asserted that Prior’s practice of sex was much freer and disrespectful than it would have been expected during his own time by his own society. He practised his homosexuality freely and with no sense of guilt; he practised his heterosexuality freely and with no sense of guilt. No taboo stopped him from exercising his sexual drive: “he kissed her mouth, her nose, her hair, and then, lowering his head in pure delight, feeling every taboo in the whole fucking country crash round his ears, he sucked Mrs Riley’s breasts.” (*T.E.D.* 118) We already know who Mrs. Riley was. His attitude regarding sex could be seen, once again, as a way of confronting the norm established by his own environment, as a sign of rebellion against its inner laws and generally accepted rules on this area of human behaviour, be it as a homosexual or as a heterosexual.

Let us bear in mind that we are at the beginning of the XXth century. Society in general could be described as patriarchal, repressive and traditionalist. Sexual life was entirely private, heterosexual relations were not to be practised out of wedlock, Victorian attitudes and hypocrisy still prevailed, homosexuals were not well seen, and it was not yet decided how to consider the whole event of homosexuality. Billy Prior went

beyond all these limits and he even admitted he was unable to experience sexual guilt. (*T.E.D.* 73)

The reader would perhaps expect that Prior's sexual behaviour would become more balanced after we described him as Albert Camus' rebel victim and as the trilogy moves toward the end, but it is not so; his attitude in this area of life never changed, at least there are no signs of any change in the novels. Nevertheless, I still argue that there are enough elements in other areas of demeanour that justify my choice of situating him close to the image created by the French author quoted by Hassan in his reflections about modern anti-heroes.

Therefore, we can conclude that in this area too, Billy Prior is the one who plays the role of the Devil's Advocate. He is the character that makes us face this most central and complex matter and forces us to open it up to discussion. Not only this, but also it is one more aspect of his personality that, being the way it is, extreme and unbalanced, supports our idea of the broken hero, the one who is not in control of his impulses and who is unsure about the reasons for a lot of the things he does; the fragmented, incomplete personage who finds in sex a temporary relief for his existential anguish.

I could add the following thoughts to this discussion in order to finish. If I make an attempt to draw a parallel between those days and the present of Barker's writing, it could be said that by having us look at how sex was viewed, what it meant for people, how they dealt with it then, Barker forces *us* to reassess how *we* view it and how *we* deal with it nowadays in our postmodern times, as individuals and as organized societies.

3.3 Prior and the war

In this section, I am going to focus on Billy Prior's life as a member of the British Army during First World I: his reasons for going to war and the reasons for the war itself, his performance at war, his ideas about the conflict and how they developed as it went by and the final outcome of his great life adventure. It is in this part of the work where I can find enough arguments to justify my description of Billy as an example of the figure of the rebel victim mentioned previously under the title "The broken hero".

In order to do this analysis, let me begin by mentioning the article “Sin buffer” from *Perfil* newspaper (2011) by Jorge Fontevecchia. In it, the Argentinian journalist quotes Miguel Wiñazki’s definition of insanity found in his book *La locura de los argentinos* (2011) According to Wiñazki: “madness seduces, fascinates, captivates, moves us and wins our hearts. Shouting, mistreating, hitting, killing are powerful and suicidal temptations.”³⁹ Fontevecchia also quotes Erasmus of Rotterdam in his book *The Praise of Folly* (1509), when he says: “...life is made in such a way that the more folly we put in it, the more meaningful our lives appear to be. (...) Is there greater folly than getting involved in combats without really knowing why, even though it is well admitted that both sides are going to lose more than they are going to win?”⁴⁰ These thoughts about the inherent madness of violence and war underlie all our discussions about Prior in this section. Violence does not dignify humans, on the contrary, it debases them and any armed conflict is the right place to demonstrate it. When governments decide that war is necessary for whatever reasons they may find plausible, they have to nurture and produce men and women who will fall within the above mentioned frame of mind, a frame of insanity that will facilitate their intervention in the fighting directly or as supporters at home. Quoted by Fontevecchia, Wiñazki also argues that: “public administration of anger is the opposite side of the inner panic experienced by a given society. The greater the fear the bigger the repressed anger and the official strategy (...) will normally be to decide, from their position of power, whom it is convenient to hate. The art of governing is the art of convincing everybody else whom they should detest.”⁴¹ Barker’s trilogy, with its stories of nervous breakdowns, psychological disorders, physical mutilations and distress of private soldiers and officers in the British Army, makes us aware of the insanity that hides within the fact of war which we get not only to know but also to feel while reading the novels.

First, why did Billy Prior go to war? Billy Prior lived at the beginning of the XXth century when the spirit of Humanism and the Enlightenment was still at work in all aspects of societies’ endeavours. This spirit was fundamentally about rationality and the creation of order out of chaos; the more ordered a society, the better it could function. Order in Britain those days meant class divisions, huge incomes for capitalists at the expense of the working classes and women’s lives reduced to the home and

³⁹ My own translation

⁴⁰ My own translation

⁴¹ My own translation

upbringing of their children without any meaningful political participation. The vast majority of the population in Britain was still apparently prepared to abide by these rules or ideas. Nevertheless, some were starting to think in terms of socialism, power for the working classes, republicanism and women's vote and when the war broke out, it somehow accelerated many of the desired changes. Most people really believed that the war was necessary and that men had the chance to show their courage and manliness by taking part in it; fighting for King and country was one of the highest ideal one could live for in those days and if you did not participate you were considered a coward. Billy Prior was not the exception. He accepted to be part of the conflict leaving behind a boring job at a shipping company and a frustrating family life.

Let us contemplate in greater depth this initial aspect. Why would young men in Britain, like Billy, want to go to war? Drawing on ideas about identity taken from the book *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (1996) by Madan Sarup and edited by Tasneem Raja soon after Sarup's death, one could say that the answer was, among others, a question of identity. These young men all belonged in Britain and it was part of their identity to fulfil their duty to King and country. National identities are very often constructs fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a particular time in history. In different historical periods, powerful groups have constructed a different national identity for their own purposes and to do so, they value certain elements and devalue others.

Now national identity is like 'social cement'; an effective form of ideological 'binding' and control. Like all successful ideologies, it works much less by explicit concepts or formulated doctrines than by image, symbols, habit, ritual and mythology. It is affective and experiential, entwining itself with the deepest unconscious roots of the human subject. (Raja 136)

The general public, either in favour or against the war, and the fighting men at the front, might have been unaware of the fact that:

Those who have the power to create and rule a nation-state, have the most influence in defining the 'national character'. The definition may embody abstract ideals ('liberty – equality – fraternity', for example), and it might satisfy a popular desire to 'belong'; but it is linked just as much to the economic and political interests of the definers. (Raja 140)

Therefore, in the case of our novels, how can one expect these men to be against the war, not to want to go and fight for justice and freedom, not to want to 'belong'?

Soldiers and officers were made to think that they were defending their own national identity, that they were fighting for Belgian self determination and French independence, when in fact the real story might have been a bit more complex than that, for example, that the war was being fought over the redistribution of forces in colonial territories or to suffocate the fires of social unrest provoked by new republican ideas, demands of women and demands of the working classes. Under these conditions the war becomes all the more terrible, all the more evil.

Everyone was fascinated by the sole idea of going to France and not doing it was considered cowardice. Those who preached peace and refused to participate were given a derogatory name: “conchies” (conscientious objectors) and were not well seen, almost despised, by the rest of society.

Nevertheless, as the war developed and time passed, the loss of life grew tremendously, almost out of control, the conditions in the trenches were unbearable, private soldiers as well as officers, of whom Prior, Sassoon and Owen were good examples, started to break down, to feel uncomfortable about a war which was taking so many lives and in which they experienced utterly inhuman conditions. They began to wonder where true compromise was, what they were really fighting for, where real order was:

He (Prior) began to walk towards the Achilles Monument. (...) its heroic grandeur both attracted and repelled him. It seemed to embody the same unreflecting admiration of courage that he found in “The Charge of the Light Brigade” a poem that had meant a great deal to him as a boy, and still did, though what it meant had become considerably more complex. He stared up (...) and thought, not for the first time, that he was looking at the representation of an ideal that no longer had validity. (*T.E.D.* 127)

In his article “What is Prior? Working class masculinity” (2002), Peter Hitchcock reports that on the first day of the battle of the Somme 60.000 British soldiers died and by the end of the war a whole generation of men under 30 had been destroyed. He adds: “if the industrialists had lined their pockets, this was small recompense for their sons buried at Passchendaele.”⁴² And that: “for the working class no amount of patriotism or promises of a land ‘fit for heroes’ would make up for the obscene numbers of dead and wounded.” He concludes that: “Something would have to change and the

⁴² The Somme and Passchendaele were two major battles of World War I. They both took place between July and November 1916 and 1917 respectively.

rise of the Labour party and of socialism were just two of many such indications.” (Hitchcock 2002)

What were the reasons for fighting the war? The different answers to this question will show either the adherence to or the questioning of the official story. According to Hallet and Potts, two of Prior’s fellow soldiers, the war was being fought: a) to safeguard access to the oil wells of Mesopotamia and b) in defence of Belgian neutrality which had been violated by the Germans. After being out in France two or three years, Prior’s attitude grew sceptical about the real reasons of the fighting and his answer was much blunter:

“I think things are much worse than you actually think because there isn’t any kind of rational justification left. It’s become a self-perpetuating system. Nobody benefits. Nobody’s in control. Nobody knows how to stop.” (T.G.R. 144)

Private Hallet, a soldier born to an old army family and who had been “well and expensively educated to think as little as possible” (T.G.R.143) objected to these arguments by formulating beliefs he had hitherto assumed everybody shared. He was a complete believer in the war. The war was good, necessary and utterly justified. His was the discourse created by authorities, the government and those who held positions of power. He could not even consider that the story might be different and although he went out to France almost at the end of the war, after four years of the same thing, he was still fascinated by the idea of a just war:

Hallet looked from one to the other. ‘Look, all this just ins’t *true*. You’re – no, not you-*people* are letting themselves get demoralized because they are having to pay a higher price than they thought they were going to have to pay. But it doesn’t alter the basic facts. *We are* fighting for the legitimate interests of our own country. *We are* fighting in defence of Belgian neutrality. *We are* fighting for French independence. *We* aren’t in Germany. *They are* in France.’ He looked around the table and, like a little boy, said pleadingly, ‘This is still a just war.’ (T.G.R. 144)

Almost a century later, Jean Baudrillard, the French philosopher, answers a journalist from the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, on the subject of war at the time of the Gulf War (1990 – 91):

Spiegel: So there is no such thing as a just war?

Baudrillard: No, there's always too much ambivalence. Wars are often begun in the name of justice, indeed this is almost always the official justification. Yet, while wars want to be so justified and are undertaken with the best of intentions, they normally don't end in the manner in which their instigators had imagined.⁴³

The dilemma of whether they were fighting for the right reasons or not was experienced almost painfully, not only by Prior but by other characters in the novels i.e. Siegfried Sassoon and Dr. Rivers. The discontent about this brutal event and about the political order that allowed it arose everywhere and it was difficult to hide or underestimate. Siegfried Sassoon's famous "Soldier's Declaration", which opens the first book of the trilogy, is a statement of the sense of dissatisfaction experienced by many. In it, the poet decided to make it public that a war that began as a "war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest" and that although he was not protesting against the conduct of the war he was certainly protesting "against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed." He did not save criticism for those at home who regard with complacency "the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize." (R. 3)

In Rivers' case, at first, he was in favour of the war but, at some stage, as a witness of so much suffering, he also gave in and admitted that: "*Nothing justifies this. Nothing, nothing, nothing.*"⁴⁴(R. 180) Or: "A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance." (R. 249)

Prior, Sassoon and Rivers, they all mistrusted, with more or less conviction, the decisions of the state, the decisions of those in power, of those in charge of keeping law and order. Was it a just war? Too many men were dying, the insincerities and errors were too obvious. Was the young male population not paying too high a price for the adventure of war? Was it fair to continue?' The system was being challenged from within. What had happened to reason and its alleged capability to solve all of humanity's problems?

Almost one hundred and ten years later, we are still struggling with Reason, trying to decide what role we would like it to play and what influence we would like it to have upon human life. Esteban Peicovich, Argentinian journalist and writer, states in a Sunday edition of *Perfil* newspaper from the year 2010:

⁴³ *Der Spiegel* Vol. 6, 1991 pp. 220-221

⁴⁴ In italics in the original

For the time being, Reason is still waiting. Naked. I think and I still do not manage to exist entirely. I hope, then I survive; nowadays, this is the true formula and the closest one to the fragility of the species. Hoping means to believe that another reality is possible. It is thanks to hope that we survive Mondays, wars, earthquakes, corruption, gods, whatever.⁴⁵

After jumping into the great adventure of war for many and varied reasons as we have seen, men saw themselves in a situation which had nothing to do with their initial expectations and they had to adapt to a very stressful and cruel reality. No matter how manly you were, I suspect, and the novels bear witness to this, that they must have gone through enormous emotional pressure. If they did not find their own deaths on the battle fields of France, they took back home images of hell which followed them for the rest of their lives. So believes Pat Barker and she states that "...however well the veterans have coped, at the end of their lives there tends to be this enormous resurgence of buried war memories. This is the final insult of war." (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 179) This she said in reference to her husband's father, a war veteran who would attack his wife thinking she was the German soldier who had killed his brother.

An aspect to look into, which can give us an insight into the distress soldiers experienced at war, is shell-shock. One of the three times Billy Prior returned home was because he was affected by this psychological disorder. I have already mentioned that this state of mental unbalance was hardly recognized among physicians in those days but those who went through it surely could have identified with the description that Siegfried Sassoon made of it in *Sherston's Progress* (1936), quoted by Ben Shepard in *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the XXth century*, (2000):

Shell-shock. How many a brief bombardment had its long-delayed after-effect in the minds of these survivors, many of whom had looked at their companions and laughed while the inferno did its best to destroy them. Not then was their evil hour but now; now in the sweating, suffocation of nightmare, paralysis of limbs, in the stammering of dislocated speech. Worst of all in the disintegration of those qualities through which they had been so gallant and selfless and uncomplaining – this, in the finer types of men, was the unspeakable tragedy of shell-shock. (89)

In his "Memorandum on the Electrical Treatment of war neurotics" (1920), Sigmund Freud outlined the causes of shell-shock or war neuroses. He argued that soldiers got to the point of being overwhelmed by unconsciously operated motives such as fear of losing their own lives, opposition to the command to kill other people and rebellion against the ruthless suppression of their own personality by their superiors. All

⁴⁵ My own translation

these motives clashed with other more powerful ones such as ambition, self-esteem, patriotism, the habit of obedience and the example of others, causing in this way a state of mental breakdown whose symptoms were mutism, vomiting, paralysis, stammering, nightmares, hallucinations, etc.

Indeed, war meant, at an individual level, much more than many officers and authorities back home would admit. On this matter it seems pertinent to quote Patricia Johnson's article "Embodying Losses" published in *Critique* (2005), where she states:

Military language distorts and justifies warfare by presenting it as a rational act. In the battle phase, it ignores mangled bodies, and replaces them with discussions of strategy, gains and losses. In the aftermath of battle, it idealizes warfare with words such as honour, duty and sacrifice. To achieve these definitions, military language must, above all, erase the body and its destruction and replace it by abstract concepts. (307-19)

For the fighting men it was something else. Prior and his fellow soldiers were supposedly going to prove their manliness and make real all their childhood's adventure stories during combat, but ironically, in the trenches, they found themselves in a state of immobility and passivity, waiting for something to happen, where no one could prove anything:

And the Great Adventure (...) consisted of crouching in a dugout, waiting to be killed. The war that had promised so much in the way of 'manly' activity had actually delivered 'feminine' passivity, and on a scale their mothers and sisters had scarcely known. No wonder they broke down. (R. 108)

In Peter Hitchcock's article, which we have already mentioned, we find arguments to support the paradox of war. The disciplined, patriotic and aggressive male Britain was supposed to generate in accordance with its war aims, disintegrates and the war itself undermines every formula of masculinity and class. The immobility of trench warfare, constant fear and huge numbers of casualties caused hysteria, a veritable emasculation of epidemic proportions that before the war had been considered a "female malady". (cf. Hitchcock 2002)

There are some conclusions we can already draw: Billy Prior was unable to go through the experience of war without feeling the blow. The way things were going were the cause of moral and physical pain for many and he was one of those who started to doubt of the veracity of the whole story of war. However, he wanted to be part of it and to return to France more than anything on this earth every time he was sent back for health reasons, because he admitted that it still seemed the only *clean* place to be. But

he also conceded that he “did Not Believe in the War, did Not Have Faith in their Generals”⁴⁶ (*T.E.D.* 275) any more.

Billy’s whole life seemed to be the place you want to run away from as we already know, and suddenly the war gave him a reason to escape and to believe that there was a higher reason to live for. However, it all seemed to crumble down rather soon: what might have appeared as good turned into a nightmare. Perhaps he embarked in a personal quest by going to war, but he only found out: “...that words didn’t mean anything any more. Patriotism, honour courage, vomit vomit vomit.” (*T.G.R.* 257).

Nevertheless, and although it will sound contradictory, there is a positive side to all this. We began to discuss the matter in the section “The broken hero”. Prior did find some kind of existential relief in his life as a soldier in the British Army. In that particular environment, he was capable of showing basic signs of selflessness and compassion towards his fellow soldiers, which somehow, partly healed the bitterness and pain of previous instances of his life. In his personal diary, not long before his own end and after reaching his own conclusions about events, he is capable of writing things like this:

...now, I look round this cellar with the candles burning on the tables and our linked shadows leaping on the walls, and I realize there’s another group of words that still mean something. Little words that trip through sentences unregarded: us, them, we, they, here. These are the words of power, and long after we’re gone, they’ll lie about in the language, like the unexploded grenades in these fields, ... (*T.G.R.* 257)

Men at war, mainly those who had other soldiers in charge like Prior, developed a domestic, almost maternal relationship with them. They learned to really care for their subordinates just like mothers do. Prior surprised Rivers by telling him about this attitude.

Rivers had often been touched by the way in which young men, some of them not yet twenty, spoke about feeling like fathers to their men. Though when you looked at what they *did*. Worrying about socks, boots, blisters, food, hot drinks. And that perpetually hurried expression of theirs. Rivers had only seen that look (...) on the faces of women who were bringing up very large families on very low income(..) It was the look of people who are totally responsible for lives they have no power to save. (*R.* 107)

Here, I will open a parenthesis and say that regarding this particular side of things, it could be said that this was one of the many tricks war played on men. They ended up performing women’s roles. At a time when gender roles were so well defined, this must have been quite confusing for them.

⁴⁶ With capitals in the original

Let us go back to Prior now. I will look again into the fact that Billy returned to war four times and in the last opportunity, he could have stayed comfortably back home because he was offered a job he could have accepted without remorse. I argue that this is a turning point in Prior's life. After four years at war, he began to create and nurture loyalties out there which meant so much to him that they not only blurred all his previous negative life experiences but also healed them in a way. This is why he can write things like these in his diary:

Alone that night, the smell of snuffed-out candles still lingering in the air, Prior remembered the bowl of pink and gold and white roses, (...) This house they shared was so strange in terms of what the war had hitherto meant, that he wanted to fix the particular sights and sounds and smells in his mind. He felt enchanted, cocooned from anything that could possibly cause pain,... (T.G.R. 145)

Despite not believing in the war and its Generals any more, he admitted it was the only sane place to be, at least for him. At the front he developed sides of himself that made him stronger as a human being. For example, he began to sincerely care for others: "Oakshott decided to have a panic attack. I crawled along to him, not past people, over them, an eel wriggling across the others in the tank, and tried to calm him down." (T.G.R. 193)

He learned to show compassion. Prior was an asthmatic himself and on one occasion, while marching from one military destination to the next, and as the officer in charge, he was faced with another young man who suffered from the same condition. The diary entry goes like this:

"I turned on one man, mouth open to give him a really good blast, and then I saw his face. He was asthmatic. That tight, pale, worried look. (...) I fell in beside him and tried to talk to him but he couldn't talk and march at once or creep rather - he certainly wasn't marching. (...) I got him into the horse ambulance, well propped up, gripped his wrist and said goodbye. (T.G.R. 243)

Another detail: the mere fact of deciding to write a diary the fourth time he went out to France is very telling as well. He had bought the diary long before that without really believing there was something valuable *he* could write. However, on August 29th 1928, the date of his first diary entry, the spirit was: "Feel a great need at the moment to concentrate on small pleasures." (T.G.R. 107) His life was worthy. He could say something about it. This is not a minor event or fact for a sceptical character like him and rather ironically, we must say he gained this confidence at war.

During combat, he showed courage and even risked his own life when necessary. Once, he went out to bring Hallet, a younger soldier, back into the trenches

from the fighting fields where there was still gunfire going on. He rescued him but Hallet died in hospital back home in England a few days later. For this action, he was recommended for the MC, a medal you get for brave actions in battle.

As a person, he allowed himself to be sensitive which is quite meaningful if we consider we introduced Prior as a sarcastic and rather sceptical kind of person:

“I’ve actually got a bed in a room with roses in the wall paper and a few left in the garden too. Went out and picked some and put them in a bowl on the kitchen table in memory of Amiens. Big blowsy roses well past their best, but we move on again today so I won’t be here to see the petals fall.” (*T.G.R.* 249)

After considering all these aspects, we can argue that although it may sound contradictory the war meant a lot to Prior. No wonder he wanted to go back, to be there. I argue that he is somehow redeemed by it and in it.

In order to complete this picture and to support my argument, I will bring back the figure of the “rebel victim” which I mentioned in the section “The Broken Hero”. It seems an appropriate figure to describe Prior, this young soldier who decided to stay on the victims’ side and for that, he gained in humanity, and like Dr. Rieux in *The Plague* he tried to “understand how one attains to the third category: in other words, to peace.” (Camus qtd in Hassan 30)

To sum up, I will assert that in this case as well as in previous sections, it is rather evident that Billy Prior was a man at odds with the reality of war as well as with sex, with authority and with himself. He went out to France in a given frame of mind which he had to change as time went by. Nevertheless, the war gave him the chance to gain in some kind of wisdom and kindness he had been lacking till then.

I would like to finish this section mentioning a few general thoughts. Humans have for ever oscilated between the extremes of good and evil, of love and death, in Freud’s words. War is one of the consequences of evil, therefore, unfortunately and perhaps a bit cynically, we may say that wars are here to stay. Men have always fought wars for territory, for energy, for food, for power, and perhaps in the future, they will fight for information or water or any other cause; history is plagued by accounts of armed confrontations. There is apparently no way out of this. There will always be wars. History seems to give us testimony of this conclusion so far.

Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist and writer, in his book *Los Mitos. Su impacto en el mundo actual* (1972), argues that in human experience, conflict between groups has always been normal and that there is an element of cruelty which is

part of life which has to be recognized in us humans and which tells us that killing is the condition prior to all that exists. He also states that for ever in history war has been considered not only inevitable and good but also as the most normal and stimulating way of social action carried out by humans.⁴⁷ (197)

Campbell's viewpoint and the fact that wars seem to be part of human life ever since history started, do not make armed confrontations less demonic and nothing intelligent or rational can be said or written about them. Human language becomes almost unsuited, insufficient, incompetent to speak of war and so we are told in *Slaughter House-Five* (1966) by Kurt Vonnegut:

(...) because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like "Poo-tee-weet?"(19)

In *The Ghost Road* (1995), Billy Prior adds:

I honestly think if the war went on for a hundred years another language would evolve, one that was capable of describing the sound of a bombardment or the buzzing of the flies on a hot August day on the Somme. There are no words. There are no words for what I felt when I saw the setting sun RISE. (*T.G.R.*198)

On October 5th 1918, Billy Prior scribbled the thoughts above in his diary and a month later he died during a military manoeuvre whose objective was to cover the sappers who were supposed to build a pontoon bridge over a river in the battle fields of France. On 11th November 1918, at 11:00 a.m. — the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month — a ceasefire came into effect putting an end to World War I. Opposing armies on the Western Front began to withdraw from their positions.

⁴⁷ My own translation

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis developed three main issues: the central character seen as a broken hero, the exploration of the trilogy as an example of the genre historical novel and the connection or dialogue between Modernism and Postmodernism, the cultural context when the novels are set and written respectively.

The questions I posed myself were: a) What kind of hero is Billy Prior our main fictional character? b) What kind of historical novels are we dealing with? What are their features and how do they help us classify the trilogy within the genre? c) Is there any connection between Billy Prior's experiences and the present times? Can we assert that in the novels there are signs of what is to come later on in the XXth century? d) What part do intertextuality and fictionalisation of real characters play in the construction of the text?

Let us begin then, considering Billy Prior as a broken hero. I analysed this personage drawing on concepts by Northrop Frye, Juan Villegas Morales and Ihab Hassan and the conclusions are as follows. Billy Prior is: "a temporary gentleman with an aspirational working-class mother, a complex, amoral, seductive and knowing antihero: a man defiant of boundaries of class or sex." (Kennedy 42) but also a

problematic and multifaceted character who was so badly hurt by circumstances in life that he cannot help showing himself the way he does which leads me to consider him as one of Ihab Hassan's broken heroes. He would be part of the long and "gradual process of atrophy of the hero" Hassan speaks about, which "may have begun with Don Quixote, or perhaps even Job, Orestes and Christ." (Hassan 21)

In her thesis work, María José Morchio asserts that in the modern microcosmos the "hero is not absent although he no longer represents the paragon of virtues, moral values and righteousness he used to represent in previous times, but rather stands for the contemporary spiritual barrenness, the acute feeling of nonsensical existence and the general estrangement of the modern self." (Morchio 9) After the claims made in philosophy by Sartre and Nietzsche about the death of God many radical changes have come about, a new order has emerged where life seems meaningless and anxiety the only possible mood: therefore the heroic themes move into a new and different direction and the hero feels divided, lonely, insecure without a rudder, and lacking in strong values. Billy Prior's story is an example of this.

Billy Prior can be described as a broken hero for various reasons. He is unable to accept wholeheartedly the paradigm of authority and order of his time represented by Dr. Rivers perhaps because the established norm itself was shaken by the historical changes that were affecting what had been the credos, beliefs, religious standpoints and society's core foundations ever since the beginning of the XXth century. Consequently, the hero feels unsure and does not know where his loyalties are any more.

Prior's family and father Mackenzie contributed to an early acquisition of broken values and of an incomplete vision of the world on the part of the young boy. Our hero no longer has the capacity to control his emotions and impulses in the line of Max Scheler's Saint, Genius and Hero. Scheler's concept of hero represented a moment in history when he was the central character in fictive works and readers could learn moral lessons from him. (cf. Scheler 55, 58, 135) We cannot learn moral lessons from a character who is not in good terms with himself or with the world, who is not sure of his own beliefs, and does not know the reasons for almost anything.

When Prior goes to war, his enthusiasm prevails at first but then, he can perceive that fighting for King and country are no longer sufficient reasons to support the amount of personal, and collective destruction. Furthermore, those who are supposed to be political or military leaders, are not always an affirmative inspiration for life and this

undermines his confidence and nurtures his scepticism which again makes of him a broken individual, one who is not sure of the things he was told and asked to abide by.

Due to his unfortunate experience with father Mackenzie, it is almost impossible to expect from him some degree of identification with the kind of values that church people are supposed to promote. He lacks all religious inclination, and like many contemporary heroes, he finds himself alone in his search for wholeness, the goal of human life on earth. Drawing on concepts by Mircea Eliade, the Romanian philosopher, María José Morchio asserts that this kind of hero has “desacralised his existence, he has rationalised every god and every demon. He does not have the spiritual support that previous generations had.” (Morchio 30)

His sexual life also shows him as a broken individual. He is divided between lust and real meaning and cannot find the difference between the two, he is not even interested in finding it, because he does not have powerful answers to justify any position, and he cannot believe any more in the traditional explanations for this area of demeanour either, he is broken in fact.

In many ways Prior was a victim mainly due to the events that marked his childhood and to the fact that he took part in a conflict upon whose beginning, continuation and ending he had no influence or decision power. In Northrop Frye’s words we can identify in his life a certain “sense of arbitrariness” marking him, for instance, in his having to take part in the war, in his belonging to an unhappy family or being an abused child; he deserves what happens to him no more than anyone else would. We notice that he willingly gets isolated from his society for considering its members unworthy of his efforts at war and that there is in him a certain degree of innocence as he goes to France to die for others, for King and country. (cf. Frye 41) All of these aspects tempt us to consider him one of Frye’s tragic ironic heroes. Nevertheless, he cannot be considered one because there are flaws in his personality that prevent us from doing so. Unfortunately, the ways Prior chooses to channel the anger and disappointment that the world meant for him, are not the most constructive or creative ones. He does not hesitate to hurt people so that they may pay for his own suffering and this does not show a noble character, on the contrary it shows the vindictive side of it:

He felt quite callous towards her (Sarah) now even as he drew her towards him and matched his stride to hers. She belonged with the pleasure-seeking crowds. He both envied and despised her, and was quite coldly determined to *get* her. They owed him something, all of them and she should pay. (R. 128)

Nothing stopped him from humiliating others to take some kind of revenge for all the reasons he could think of. Class division in England at the time was the cause for Prior's anger and resentment and having sex with people from the upper classes was a good occasion to show this negative feeling and make them pay for what they were:

‘Anyway I decided to give this prat a run for his money so we adjourned upstairs afterwards.’

‘You and Manning?’

‘No. Me and Birtwhistle. Birtwhistle and I.’

‘It doesn't sound much like a punishment.’

‘Oh, it was. Nothing like *sexual* humiliation Rivers. Nobody ever forgets that.’

Rivers looked into the trustless eyes, and thought, My God I wouldn't want to cross you.’ (T.G.R. 100)

For all these reasons, we can confidently assert then, that Billy Prior does not fully reach the status of the classical, traditional, noble, tragic ironic hero Northrop Frye writes about.

Villegas Morales' concepts about heroes and anti-heroes based on the axiological systems of any given society are of great assistance to analyse Billy Prior. The Spanish theorist states that if a character meets the moral and practical expectations of the communitary group he belongs to, then he is a hero, otherwise he is not. Billy Prior is a hero for his society because he embodies some of its expected values such as becoming a soldier and participating in the war, but he betrays other values when he becomes emotionally unbalanced in France and when he freely practises his homosexuality, a censored practice in that society at the time. Because of this, he turns into an anti-hero. Villegas also ponders on how frequently one finds, among the features of contemporary heroes, a very important one which is the awareness that they have of their inner worlds. Prior is certainly very much aware of his inner world and very much willing “to find or join new ways of life: tempting, demonic or gentle,” (Villegas 12) and the war is the great opportunity to do so. All these aspects contribute to describe Prior but they are not sufficient to provide us with a complete and finished image of him. So let us go a step further.

Ihab Hassan's concepts about the modern literary hero become the most convenient ones to use with Billy Prior. His concepts about heroes draw on the fields of psychology, philosophy and sociology and he manages to give us a wide picture of the social environments heroes have been faced with since the end of the XIXth century and of the influence these surroundings have had in turning the hero from the brave, noble,

magnanimous and all powerful figure of the past, society's role model, into a weak clown, the grotesque plaything of contemporary times, into a broken figure. At the same time his vision is one of compassion and understanding for the heroes of today which somehow balances the picture.

Billy Prior, our young man is highly insightful indeed, aware of the destructive elements within himself and in his life experiences, (cf. Hassan 20) he is clever and shrewd. He is a transgressor, at times hedonistic and non-disciplined but he is also a man in need of affection, capable of giving love and certainly resolute and unselfish at war. I say he is a victim but this is not so from the beginning to the end and we will see why. He maintains a struggle with himself and his environment, (cf Hassan 21) he is an ambivalent, incomplete, fragmented man with lots of questions and very few answers but he is also capable of making decisions that in the end dignify him. Regarding sex, he knows no boundaries, regarding authority and the given norm, he is not prepared to accept them so easily, regarding the war, although he admits that nobody seems to be in control and that it has become a self perpetuating system where nobody benefits, he finds that it was the only *clean* place to be. It is there where he creates his most deeply felt loyalties.

In this thesis, I have given great importance to the image of the rebel victim designed by Albert Camus and used by Ihab Hassan to speak about the modern hero. This is so because I argue that this image comes to complete Prior's description. "The rebel denies without saying No to life, the victim succumbs without saying Yes to oppression. Both acts (...) affirm the human against the non-human." (Hassan 31) Camus's rebel victim is someone like Dr. Rieux in *The Plague*, who is prepared to take the victim's side becoming then a victim with the degree of a rebel too. For him the Cartesian formula becomes: "I rebel, therefore *we* exist". Rebellion becomes then "an aspiration to order, a means of lifting pain and evil from a personal to a collective experience." (Hassan 30) When I said that Prior is a victim only partially, I meant the following: it is almost the end of the war and Prior, who is at home with sick leave for the fourth time, can finally make a free decision for his life. When he is faced to the alternative of returning to the front to the battle fields of France or staying at home in England doing an office job at the Ministry of Munitions offered to him by Charles Manning an occasional sexual partner of his, what does he do? He chooses to go back to France and continue the fighting, side by side with his men. Therefore, I argue that this is the one event in Billy's life that redeems the many flaws we could find in him. He

chooses the victim's side and that situates him near Camus's rebel-victim which provides us with a more finished picture of him. He himself admits: "what an utter bloody fool I would have been not to come back" (*T.G.R.* 258) and this leads us to think that, even without making it explicit, his decision to be near the fighting men might at least have helped him to "try to understand how one attains to the third category, in other words: to peace." (Camus qtd in Hassan 30) He is so happy to go back that we are made to think that, inwardly, he is probably capable of partly overcoming "the contradictions of his experience, its destructive or demonic element by assuming the role of the rebel-victim" (Hassan 31)

Ironically, it is at the front that he manages to develop some basic positive and redeeming aspects. In his personal diary, not long before his own end and after reaching his own conclusions about events, he is capable of writing things like this:

...now, I look round this cellar with the candles burning on the tables and our linked shadows leaping on the walls, and I realize there's another group of words that still mean something. Little words that trip through sentences unregarded: us, them, we, they, here. These are the words of power, and long after we're gone, they'll lie about in the language, like the unexploded grenades in these fields, ... (*T.G.R.* 257)

There is a place on earth he cares for, there are people he can feel well with and loyal to:

Alone that night, the smell of snuffed-out candles still lingering in the air, Prior remembered the bowl of pink and gold and white roses, (...) This house they shared was so strange in terms of what the war had hitherto meant, that he wanted to fix the particular sights and sounds and smells in his mind. He felt enchanted, cocooned from anything that could possibly cause pain,... (*T.G.R.* 145)

At war, he learns to sincerely care for others: "Oakshott decided to have a panic attack. I crowded along to him, not past people, over them, an eel wriggling across the others in the tank, and tried to calm him down." (*T.G.R.* 193)

He learns to show compassion:

"I turned on one man, mouth open to give him a really good blast, and then I saw his face. He was asthmatic. That tight, pale, worried look. (...) I fell in beside him and tried to talk to him but he couldn't talk and march at once or creep rather - he certainly wasn't marching. (...) I got him into the horse ambulance, well propped up, gripped his wrist and said goodbye. (*T.G.R.* 243)

After postponing it more than once, he begins to write his personal diary. He feels that the time is right for it, he feels he needs to find refuge, solace and meaning in writing: "Feel a great need at the moment to concentrate on small pleasures." (*T.G.R.* 107) His life is worthy. He can say something about it. This is not a minor fact for a

character like him who could, not only but mainly, identify tragedy in his life. We have already said that, although it may sound contradictory, he gains this confidence at war.

During combat, he shows courage and even risks his own life when necessary for which he is recommended for the MC, a medal you get for brave actions in battle.

At a personal level, he allows himself to be sensitive, quite a meaningful detail if we consider that Prior almost always showed himself as a sarcastic and rather sceptical kind of person:

“I’ve actually got a bed in a room with roses in the wall paper and a few left in the garden too. Went out and picked some and put them in a bowl on the kitchen table in memory of Amiens. Big blowsy roses well past their best, but we move on again today so I won’t be here to see the petals fall.” (*T.G.R.* 249)

All these elements give us a more finished idea of Billy Prior; therefore, I can assert that because he is aware of the destructive elements within himself, because he has the basic problem of the modern hero which is essentially one of identity, (Hassan 21) because in his own way, his search is for existential fulfilment, because he is dual, incomplete and fragmented but also in need of love and acceptance and because despite all the flaws in his personality he still managed to develop a few redeeming aspects, ironically when he goes to war, I can affirm that he is best described as one of Ihab Hassan’s anti-heroes whom in “hope and charity” (Hassan 20) the American critic just calls hero, a “broken hero” in fact.

Next, let me consider my conclusions regarding the trilogy as a historical novel. The three books are set at the time of World War I, the Great War (1914-1918). The end of the trilogy is marked by the death of Billy Prior just six days before Armistice Day, November 11th 1918. On that day, a ceasefire was agreed between the parties and opposing armies on the Western Front began to withdraw from their positions.

I analysed Pat Barker’s trilogy drawing on concepts by Georg Lukács, Cristina Martini, Lukasz Grützmacher, Elzbieta Sklodowska, William Ospina, Massimo Manfredi, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Linda Hutcheon and Fernando Aínsa. They all contributed to our better understanding of the novels and to give them a place within the genre.

The shaping force that motivates the writing of the trilogy is certainly history and while doing it, Pat Barker makes the effort to look at her country’s past not in black and white but bringing into our attention things, people and events not so frequently dealt with in war novels such as the psychological suffering and traumas of soldiers, the

incompetence of officers, the dilemmas that many had when faced with the obligation to kill, the unresolved question of why they were fighting and so on.

Barker seems to be driven by the desire to re-construct her country's history and the novels open for their readers a "back door into the present" (*Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 163) which means that the author is opening the past to the consideration of her contemporaries so that they may understand themselves better and more deeply as a nation and perhaps, so that they may try to avoid similar situations in the future. Thus, there is an "irruption of the past into the present" which becomes that about it, that will perhaps conform "together with the present a new constellation of meaning" in the words of Walter Benjamin. (qtd. in Reyes Mate 143)

The novels establish "*das Zitat*", (the German for date) in Benjamin's words, between those who died at war and us. *Das Zitat* is the "secret reunion between past and present. It is as if those who have departed were waiting for us." (Reyes Mate 142) Even more, there is a "secret complicity between the historical subject that attempts to know the past (Barker) and the object of knowledge that strives to become present (the war and its actors)." (Reyes Mate 141) The knowledge of history we get from wherever, in this case the *Regeneration* trilogy, should turn, according to Benjamin, into self-knowledge for the knowing subjects be it Barker or her readers. (Reyes Mate 141) Thus, we go back in a circle to the question of identity.

After these considerations that have to do more with the spirit of the novels, let me now focus on my conclusions regarding their generic typology, their classification within the genre. For this, I used the concepts designed by Fernando Aínsa, Uruguayan critic, who speaks of two poles of significance when trying to classify historical novels. His two poles of significance coincide with the centrifugal and centripetal forces Elzbieta Sklodowska speaks about. According to the Polish critic, those authors who are driven by the first force will produce novels that will be clearly situated near Aínsa's metafictional pole, whereas those who are driven by the second force will produce works that will move closer to the pole where traditional historical novels are found.

Then and even though it is not a simple task to exactly classify any literary work of art, I can affirm that the trilogy can be seen as an in-between example of the traditional historical novel and of the historiographic metafictional novel.

The reasons for this are as follows. The trilogy can be considered an example of the classical tradition from the formal point of view and from the point of view of language because: the underlying epistemology in the trilogy is basically "positivist,

the text is considered a reflection of reality and the problem of representation is not dealt with. The real existence of the represented reality is not questioned ...; there is also an implicit trust in the ability of language to speak about this reality.” (Martini 98) The trilogy does not make use of auto-representational or auto-referential resources in a historiographic metafictional style. Neither does the author introduce supernatural occurrences or historically inaccurate elements in the way historiographic metafiction does. Barker uses available historiographic sources and sticks to them. (cf. *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* 177) She does a faithful and coherent reconstruction of the past, thus, the reader does not lose total faith in the possibility of retrieving this past as it happens in historiographic metafiction where the attention of the reader is directed to the fact that history cannot be faithfully recovered and that any aspirations of truly representing the past and its actors are vain.

However, it can also be seen as an example of historiographic metafiction because there are some elements in the novels that distance them from the classical pole. They are: a) real characters namely, Siegfried Sassoon and Dr. Rivers are given an importance and visibility that is at odds with the role Lukács gives real characters in traditional historical novels, b) the novels are written from the point of view of the victims (the fighting soldiers) such as historiographic metafiction usually does and finally but most importantly c) Barker uses intertextuality and fictionalisation of characters as writing strategies which grants all three texts a certain heterogeneity that distances them from the classical pole of significance and brings them closer to the opposite one, the metafictional pole of significance where more experimental or centrifugal novels are found.

Let us consider now my last question. Can I assert that there are in the novels signs of a general unrest that goes beyond Billy Prior and Dr. Rivers’ lives, that is larger than just them? Can I say that this discontent is the connection between their times and the times of production of the novels?

First I will reconfirm that the link between Modernism and Postmodernism is undeniable because as we all know, historical times have to be understood in terms of change, certainly, but also in terms of continuity because one epoch is the reason for the next one and definitely nurtures it. This is indeed the case between Modernism and Postmodernism, the times of the novel and the writer’s historical times. Matei Calinescu, the Romanian author, asserts in *Five Faces of Modernity* (1987) that “Postmodernism is a face of Modernism. It reveals some striking likeness with

Modernism, (...) particularly its opposition to the principle of authority.” (312) Bradbury and MacFarlane describe as blood cousins of much earlier tendencies many aspects we identify today in Postmodernism such as the fragmented subject, the loss of faith in the narratives of the past, an art of the random and much more. They speak of a “new disposition of old forces.” (cf. Bradbury and MacFarlane 35)

After reminding ourselves of this idea, I can continue saying that there are enough elements in the trilogy that allow us to affirm that seeds of dissatisfaction connected with the concepts that had guided life until then, were emerging in various areas of society’s endeavours at the beginning of the century. Where lies authority, who holds it, what norms and practices we should respect and which we should disregard, is there now a God? Is war justified? Are we the only masters of truth? Are reason and technological advancement in themselves enough to lead us to happiness and fulfilment on this earth?

Looking at things from our present position and times, I can say that this initial unrest consolidated as the century went by. Those first cracks and fractures that many were already able to see and that we can sense through Prior’s conflicts and his reaction to them, have in a way intensified, and I dare say they have not found a resolution yet. Thus, we get to our present days when, according to Terry Eagleton, the general attitude is one of disbelief in the “classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity.” Many of us are tempted to see the world as “contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures and interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities.” (Eagleton vii)

Alan Bullock, English historian, asserts that “the great age of imperialism based on material superiority but also on the widespread belief on the racial and cultural superiority of the white races of European stock” was coming to an end in those days and the self confidence and sense of order that Western societies had enjoyed of until then had begun to waver. (Bradbury and MacFarlane 60) The generations of the fin-de-siècle and of World War I gave a uniquely influential role to Nietzsche’s ideas about the revaluation of all values and about his conviction that history of man had arrived at a point of destiny. (cf. Bradbury and MacFarlane 79)

According to Arthur Marwick in *Britain in the Century of Total War* (1968), “that horrible Ogre tradition lies in the dust” and even worse: “from the trenches, the

prisoners' camp, the hospital and the home, the question has been put in the stark brevity of mortal anguish: "is there now a God?" (Marwick 111)

The above described picture was the beginning of a long road that brings us to what we have today: "the ontological uncertainty" that rises from the "awareness of the absence of centres, privileged languages or higher discourses" with a postmodern self which is "no longer a coherent entity that has power to impose order upon the environment. It has become decentered." (Bertens qtd in Natoli and Hutcheon 3)

Consequently, when we read about this young man who is incapable of accepting the authority represented by Dr. Rivers and when we see him questioning and probing the scientist to make him doubt about his most cherished convictions regarding sex, the war and its reasons, the treatment he gives to his patients, his role as a doctor within the British Army, his religious beliefs, his loyalty to his government and to his political leaders and his moral principles, I can only infer that these are signs in the novels that bear witness to the unrest and discontent I was describing above. These signs are clearly identified in the confrontation between the old and the young and in the dissatisfaction experienced by many regarding the given order of things.

The idea of a world led by the White God and by white men where everything could be explained through reason and where any degree of development could be reached thanks to technology began to find its detractors.

Rivers himself ponders on the fact that the God who "moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform" (*R.* 149) began to lose followers vis-à-vis of the horrible experience of trench war, the great number of casualties and the general suffering.

'I wanted to ask if you believe in life after death?' (Rivers' question)

A groan followed by silence.

It is difficult, Rivers thought.(...)It was almost easier now to ask a man about his private life than to ask what beliefs he lived by. (...) The change had started years before the war.

'No' Wansbeck said at last.

'You had to think'.

'Yes, well, I used to believe in it. I was brought up to. I suppose one doesn't like to admit it's gone. Faith.'

'What changed your mind?'

(...)

'Corpses, Especially in cold weather when they couldn't be buried. And in summer in No Man's Land. The flies buzzing.' (T.G.R. 225)

Support to the war and its leaders began to dissolve because in the words of Dr. Rivers: "A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic allegiance." (*R.* 249) The doctor becomes then, the one in the trilogy who shows enough flexibility and

intellectual honesty to be able to reconsider traditional and well accepted notions of power, politics, moral behaviour and authority.

Billy Prior can also sense that something is crumbling down and, at the sight of ruined French villages, he meditates:

Solid bourgeois houses they must have been in peace-time, the homes of men making their way in the world, men who'd been sure that certain things would never change, and where were they now? Every house in the road was damaged, some ruined. The ruins stood out starkly, black jagged edges in the white gulf of moonlight. (*T.G.R.* 140)

These thoughts seem to herald a larger destruction, that of beliefs and old certainties of which Prior seems to be well aware. Until then, men had been sure of so many things and from then on, what lay ahead?

Billy Prior is very clear about the war. He denies it any rational explanation, he does not believe in the war or have any faith in its Generals. (*T.E.D.* 275) "I think things are actually much worse than you think because there isn't any kind of rational justification left. It's become a self-perpetuating system. Nobody benefits. Nobody is in control. Nobody knows how to stop." (*T.G.R.* 144) Despite that, his decision is to be part of it, to stay there at the front with his men.

Rivers reconfirms the irrationality of a war fought in the name of big concepts such as King and country at such a high price: "*Nothing justifies this. Nothing, nothing, nothing.*"⁴⁸ (*R.* 180)

The big words of the past began to lose their strength and attraction for Rivers, Prior and many more. So, even if when Prior first goes to war, a certain amount of expectancy for living the great adventure of his life accompanies him, soon what might have appeared as exciting and meaningful turned into a nightmare and he only found out that "words didn't mean anything any more. Patriotism, honour, courage, vomit vomit vomit." (*T.G.R.* 257)

Class division in England was badly resented by Prior. His feelings go in the following direction: " 'Working classes. Water closets. The men who're getting their ballocks shot off so he can go on being the lily on the dung heap. God they make me sick.' " (*T.G.R.* 100) The class system is one of the underlying big themes in the trilogy and a matter not only Prior had problems with. Rivers also felt he had to adjust and reconsider this issue, as well as many others:

'I see. A negative transference. Is *that* what you think we've got? (Prior's words)

⁴⁸ In italics in the original

‘I hope not.’ Rivers couldn’t altogether conceal his surprise. ‘Where did you learn that term?’

‘I can *read*.’

Well yes, I know, but it’s --

‘Not popular science? No, but then neither is this.’

He reached for the book beside the bed and held it out to Rivers. Rivers found himself holding a copy of *The Todas*.⁴⁹ He stared for a moment at his own name on the spine. He told himself there was no reason why Prior shouldn’t read one of his books or all of them for that matter. There was no rational reason for him to feel uneasy. (R. 65)

Genders’ roles were also a war casualty. Men caring for other men at the front as if they were their mothers and women at home taking up the tasks that would normally be done by men became the picture that imposed itself upon society. And so: “One of the great paradoxes of the war was that this most brutal of conflicts should set up a relationship between officers and men that was... domestic. Caring.” (R. 107) Or, in Billy Prior’s description: “They (women) seemed to have changed so much during the war, to have expanded in all kinds of ways, whereas men over the same period had shrunk into a smaller and smaller space.” (R. 90)

These are all snapshots of a wider picture of life at the beginning of the century. The various situations that are dealt with in the books, apart from describing what the past was like, allow us to think in terms of present times and to consider what our experience of them is, what they mean for us today.

The seeds of discontent that started to emerge at Prior’s time somehow grew deeper and what is worse, were not resolved as the century went by, on the contrary, they consolidated and sedimented until getting to what we have now: a time of total indeterminacy, without any all-encompassing or totalizing ideas that may explain the world and ourselves any more, a time of relativism and individualism devoid of any patterns of behaviour in the various areas of life, a time when many feel lost and hopeless.

At this point, I must include in our conclusions the role played by intertextuality in the novels. The fact that Barker uses explicit intertextuality from the beginning to the end, does not only strengthen the story line, improve or complete her description of the characters or give us a better picture of the cultural atmosphere at the time, but it also reconfirms the belief that dialogue between present and past times is possible and unavoidable, that books are about books, that one epoch influences the next and that

⁴⁹ *The Todas* was an anthropology book about a Melanesian tribe written by Dr. Rivers

history is a continuum of which we are all part and that we all construe by action or by omission.

The texts chosen by the English author, be it poems, verses from Shakespeare's plays, biblical allusions or hymns, apart from reinforcing the story-line itself, the dialogues and the characters' actions and decisions, they also contribute to establish a tension between people's ideals and high expectations at the time, and the awful consequences of the war. They come to reconfirm the anti-war ideology of the novels, the decline of values that were traditionally cherished such as courage and heroism as well as the changes in the male image. This image, once close to that of a warrior, started to be undermined in modern times, specifically during the war period, and its critique became more accentuated and evident in postmodern times.

In order to close these final notes, let us consider the following. If the past is allowed to enter the present through its back door, it will always bring good as well as bad news as it happens in the novels. While it is true that not everything had turned out to be so ideal and fantastic as Europeans might have expected, Barker feels that there is still hope. The trilogy gives proof that the old can speak to the young such as Dr. Rivers did with his young patients and was prepared to learn from them; the old will not always send their young to die in senseless wars; people can remain open and honest to themselves and admit their errors; there are possibilities of change and moral advancement; people can make choices at the risk of losing their lives that will, in the end, dignify them. *Regeneration* is possible. Even if it must be said that no magic solutions for anything are given in the novels and I dare say that the questions outnumber the answers, still, the choice of the trilogy's name is not purposeless. The hidden message is a positive one. Barker herself states "You cannot create out of despair, which is why it is important for the writer not to offer a completely despairing response to the universe. (...) If you are creating you have hope." (*Contemporary British and Irish Fiction: Novelists in Interview* 34)

Finally, I must say that while reading and analysing the novels, I had the feeling that there was great emotional power in them and I may well affirm that the intensely and purely human issues the author looks into make of the trilogy a profound, utterly meaningful and completely significant work of art.

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