

SEEING INTO THE GREAT WAR PATRIARCHAL  
DISCOURSE AND PRACTICES THROUGH THE MALE GAZE:  
PAT BARKER'S *REGENERATION* TRILOGY

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RESUMEN

El canon inglés sobre la literatura de la primera guerra mundial ha estado configurado por la poesía de los poetas que lucharon en la contienda por considerar que su visión y su experiencia directa del combate garantizaban la inmediatez y la veracidad de la representación. Este criterio excluyó del canon la escritura de mujeres cuya participación y experiencia de la guerra eran obviamente muy distintas. La crítica feminista ha reequilibrado el canon gracias a una exhaustiva investigación sobre la abundante contribución literaria de escritoras a la representación de la contienda que cuestiona tal criterio. En este contexto, las novelas sobre la primera guerra mundial de autoras contemporáneas que eligen el protagonismo masculino sufren valoraciones negativas, acusadas de mimetismo con la mirada masculina. En este artículo me propongo demostrar cómo, lejos de ello, la trilogía *Regeneration* de Pat Barker, por el tercer volumen de la cual recibió el prestigioso premio Booker, se vale de la mirada masculina para denunciar y poner de relieve el discurso y las prácticas patriarcales imperantes en la contienda.

PALABRAS CLAVE: canon, primera guerra mundial, mirada masculina, discurso y prácticas patriarcales, género.

## ABSTRACT

The English literary canon of the Great War has been traditionally shaped by the poetry of the poets who fought the war on the basis of their having seen and experienced its full horror, which attested truthful representation. This premise excluded women writers, whose participation in and experience of the war was obviously very different. Feminist research on the literary contribution of female writers to the representation of the conflict based on the plurality of experiences of many women that challenge that assumption have effectively worked to redress the balance. In this context, the war novels of contemporary female writers with male protagonists are negatively judged for miming the male gaze. In this article I would like to show that far from it Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, whose third volume was awarded with the Booker Prize, uses the male gaze precisely to unveil and expose the war entrenched patriarchal discourse and practices.

KEY WORDS: canon, WWI, male gaze, patriarchal discourse and practices, gender.

In the *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* James Campbell (2005: 264) recalls in his article «Interpreting the War» the privileged place that «eyewitness poetry» enjoyed in the literary canon of the Great War in the first decade of Great War criticism due to its closeness to «raw experience». The poets, was argued, wrote not just what they saw but as they saw it at the spot «geographically and temporally», vision and immediacy eluding, or appearing to do so, the problematic workings of interpretation and thus of representation. The upsurge of feminist criticism since the 1960s would duly expose this exclusion of women both from histories of World War I or from writing the war on account of their not having been at the battlefield. In her excellent book review article «Women Writing World War One», Katharine Rodier (2000: 3) selects three indispensable volumes that refuse this polarity as well as open the path to substantially enlarge the heretofore narrow literary scope of the Great War canon: Sharon Ouditt's annotated bibliography *Women Writers of the First World War* gathering primary materials on the war, excluding drama or poetry, mostly written by British women from 1914-1939 (2000); Margaret R. Higson's *Lines Of Fire: Women Writers of World War I* (1999), an impressive anthology of the contribution of women from Europe, Central and East Europe, the United States, the Middle East, Africa, India, Australia, and New Zealand to the literary representation of the first world war; and *War Plays by Women: An International Anthology* edited by Claire M. Tylee, with Elaine Turner and Agnès Cardinal (1999). All three books make evident the interest in recovering the women's gaze, that is, their particular vision and specific experience of the Great War. A fourth one, aptly entitled *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*, by Jean Gallagher, covering also World War II might be well added to them.

In this context it is no wonder that after the considerable effort thrown into researching how women saw and experienced war, contemporary novels on the Great War by female novelists choosing to focus yet again on men's perspective have raised adverse criticism. In «Women and WWI – The Woman Writer: the Problem of Ventriloquism», Sara Martin (2009) directly points at Pat Barker's *Regeneration* Trilogy, which revolves around the poet Siegfried Sassoon, his Manifesto against the War and subsequent internment in Craiglockhart Hospital for shell shock treatment, «as

the most outstanding instance of this puzzling mimicry of the male voice.» ([http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/womenww1\\_five.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/womenww1_five.htm)).

Yet, as I shall argue, it is not so much Sassoon the war poet that is at the core of Pat Barker's trilogy as his *seeing through* the official discourses of patriotism and war. This allows her an acute dissection of the deeply ingrained patriarchal discourses and practices that painfully oppressed both men and women. Thus, although his figure opens the first volume, it gradually recedes into the background while the import of his manifesto 'A Soldier's Declaration', which prefaces and ideologically frames the narrative, gathers momentum acting as an echo chamber until its full meaning explodes in the ending together with the blast that killed his fellow war poet Wilfred Owen. Indeed the fact that both poets have enjoyed an iconic place in the Great War poetry canon has surely contributed to the success the trilogy has enjoyed. Also the fact that both, particularly Sassoon, play a part in the trilogy may give the impression that the plot revolves around them, which is clearly not the case.

Barker draws thoroughly on historical facts and characters to back up the dissection of ideology and power at the heart of her narrative. Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, as well as Dr Rivers, the anthropologist and neurologist who treated Sassoon at Craiglockhart hospital in Scotland, feature largely in the novel. Various other contemporary writers, such as Robert Graves, and Robert Ross, also make brief appearances together with a number of politicians and a host of other less well-known personages and events whose historicity Barker duly acknowledges in each of the volumes. Yet she chooses a fictional character —Billy Prior— as protagonist, tellingly building him on many of the war feelings and attitudes of Owen and Sassoon, with whom he is made to share internment and psychological treatment at Craiglockhart hospital in Scotland for shell shock disorders. He is Sassoon's mouthpiece in giving full voice to the poet's indignation not just against politicians but also against churches for their support of the war, and civilians back at home for their glib pieties. Also, he is the focaliser of Owen's death on November 4th 1918 at the French front. It is through his eyes that we see the poet's body 'lifted off the ground by bullets describing a slow arc in the air as it fell' (Barker, 1995: 273) – the slow motion of the body being a visual effect of Prior's own fluttering into death by gas.

This fictional character, whose central role as focaliser grows in importance along the narrative, gives Barker the necessary freedom to explore in depth the more conflictive gender issues while fully in keeping with historical truth. According to Paul Ricoeur, the difference between historical and fictional narrative «rests on the differential intention that runs through it and that is nothing other than the meaning of its representation» (Ricoeur, 2006: 247). In this regard, for all the richness of the social and historical intertext, the aim of the novel is clearly not to cast certain personages and long forgotten aspects of the war in a new light and bring them closer to the reader, though it certainly does this, but rather to articulate a profound dissection of the network of patriarchal ideology and power under the maze of war discourses.

The trilogy exhibits a sober, muscular, manly prose setting up an horizon of expectations that will be artfully modified along the narrative. Focalisation is essential as regards the complexity Barker displays in her account of the conflict, particularly as related to gender issues. By privileging a masculine internal focalisation, she

unobtrusively provides the reader with a picture of the condition of women at the time of the war and the gender changes men feared the war would bring, and simultaneously of the heavy price patriarchy extolled from men. The narrative reveals the severe psychic and sexual maladjustment which are shown to be the result not so much of the tragedy of war as of a long established masculine training in the repression of emotion and tenderness which was identified as the essence of manliness. In this way Barker cleverly probes into the intricacy of a system that ensured its self-perpetuation through the socialisation of both men and women on rigid sexual grounds. Her choice of an overall masculine stance, voice, and predicament is a shrewd strategy to prevent a potential resistance at feminist denunciation from more self-conscious readers.

The subject of the Great War offers Barker the occasion to explore the fabric of the patriarchal grid underlying historical events. Before becoming a well-known novelist Barker had read History at the London School of Economics and the influence of Michel Foucault is all pervading throughout the trilogy. In his steps, she scrutinizes the nets of power, which, in Foucault's words, "are among the best hidden things in the social body" (in Kritzman, 1990: 118), well aware that if war is a powerful tool to push into the background social tensions in the face of a common enemy, it is also a catalyst that reveals conflicts liable to be better masked in more orderly times. Likewise, the ruthless discipline it exacts from the individual as well as from the social body unveils subjectifying procedures that may go unnoticed at other times. In *Surveiller et punir* (1975) Foucault explicitly links the notions of power and war, going beyond a metaphorical relationship to highlight the similarity of their mode of operation. Previously, in *Folie et déraison, Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961) he had explored the nature of madness pointing to the operations of institutionalised power in determining the concept of normality and deviancy, and consequently who is mad and who is sane, and its related discourse. The concepts would merge into one another so that what was proper according to the institutional powers was considered as reasonable and sane. Likewise, improper notions were likely to be classified as irresponsible or insane, in either case altogether erroneous and requiring to be eradicated. This is precisely what Barker does throughout the trilogy locating the issues of madness and sanity at its heart and showing how people who held what were labelled improper or irresponsible notions were liable to end up facing a court martial in war circumstances.

As Elaine Showalter shows in *The Female Malady*, the neurasthenia suffered by soldiers in alarming numbers forced military and health authorities to turn their attention to a psychic disorder until then held as typically female. Soldiers suffering from severe nervous disorders under the syndrome of shell shock had to endure the additional stigma of an illness commonly attributed to women. The symptoms soldiers showed—inability to speak or walk, weeping crises, hallucinations, and nightmares—were those traditionally associated with hysteria. Weakness and/or effeminacy thus compounded the cultural prejudice society at large was prone to hold and to which general practitioners were not, of course, immune. Dr Rivers' pioneer clinical methods are contrasted in the first volume of the trilogy with the brutal practices of one of his colleagues who coldly applies successive electrodes to a patient's tongue not just until he gradually recovers his voice, but until he says what the practitioner wants him to say, in the appropriate tone and with the appropriate facial expression (Barker 1992: 232,

233) at which point the soldier would be declared recovered and sent directly to the front. Pointedly, electrodes appear to Rivers as a technological variety of the horse's bit, «the scold's bridle used to silence recalcitrant women in the Middle Ages. More recently, on American slaves» (Barker, 1992: 238). Yet, his own more humane practice helping patients to recover their voice through awakening memories that would remove the trauma in the origin of the illness cannot obscure to him the fact that both he and his colleague were perpetrating the same brutality and with the same ultimate purpose. Paradoxically, making men able to speak was in both cases a repressive act since patients who had recovered speech could clinically be «discharged to duty», a convenient euphemism to make them resume fighting. In keeping with Foucault's denunciation of psychiatric practices Rivers uncomfortably comes to admit his complicity with an exercise of power he despised. Gradually the truth comes to him that «in a war nobody is a free agent. He and Yealland were both locked in, every bit as much as their patients were» (Barker, 1992: 238). The chain of associations makes quite evident to the reader that war circumstances enforce subjection under the pressure of national welfare just as slavery laws were justified in their time by related social and states' discourses, and women, on the grounds of their specific nature, had historically been relegated to a subordinate position which excluded them from the public realm.

In a paper delivered before the Section of Psychiatry of the Royal Society of Medicine on December 4th 1917, Rivers held that many of the symptoms suffered by soldiers affected by war neurosis were not «the necessary result of the strains and shocks to which they [had] been exposed in warfare, but [were] due to the attempt to banish from the mind distressing memories of warfare or painful affective states which [had] come into being as the result of their war experience» (W. H. R. Rivers, 1918). The tenor of Barker's analysis is to bring to light the fact that his clinical experience with these cases would eventually lead him to realize that their actual cause did not rest with war events, painful as they might have been, but with earlier experiences usually connected with childhood traumas that were in one way or another associated with the shock episode. As such, only by allowing suppressed painful childhood memories of parental violence come to light in the course of an extended period of therapy is the protagonist, Billy Prior, able to recover from his split personality conflict. And by his provoking Rivers into a similar introspection through the transference process is the psychiatrist able to discover the source of his own stammer, located too in early childhood in the crucial period of gender role formation and connected as well to the relationship with his father. Barker seems to have taken cue from an episode in Foucault's early life. According to his biographer James E. Miller, he was forced by his father — a successful surgeon who wanted his son to also enter the medical profession— to witness an amputation, an experience at the source of an ever since strained relationship (Miller, 1993: 366). In the same vein, she has Rivers recall a similar experience when as a small child, after crying at the barber's for having his hair cut, his father had sternly hold him up to watch the portrait of a family hero after whom he had been named — a certain William Rivers said to have shot the man who shot Lord Nelson. The picture showed the old uncle while having his leg cut off without an anaesthetic, with a cauldron of hot tar close by waiting to be used to cauterize the stump (Barker, 1995: 94).

Led into remembering his childhood, Rivers comes to admit his emotional deprivation, which had run parallel to his younger sister's lack of intellectual nourishment and opportunities for personal advancement. The recollection of her sister's deterioration from a bright lively girl to a bed-ridden invalid after a life constricted into an ever smaller intellectual and physical space by the narrowness of family and social decorum would lead him to observe that men broke down when submitted to the long periods of strain, immobility, enforced passivity and helplessness that trench warfare imposed, showing the «anxiety neurosis and hysterical disorders in women in peacetime» (Barker, 1992: 222).

By reflections such as these on the real nature of what was considered as mental normalisation of individuals, Barker exposes along Foucault's lines the discourse and related practices of patriarchal subjection. The «micro-physics» of power (*Discipline and Punish*, 26) —Foucault's coinage for the network of relations constantly in tension with mobile and transitory points of struggle, the fracturing of allegiances and their regrouping on the basis of temporary interests and alliances— is clearly seen in the field of sexual and gender issues within the patriarchal family. Brutal non-equality prevails in the relationship between Billy Prior's parents, who end up destroying each other and hampering the child's psychic maturity. Torn between emotional loyalty towards his mother and exasperation at her mixture of stubborn nagging and whining which would unflinchingly infuriate his father and precipitate routine abuse, he grows to fear and hate his father while hating himself for failing to defend his mother. Yet he quickly learns as a child the advantage of male bonding guiltily allowing himself to join his father in «the great conspiracy» of gender (Barker, 1994: 188).

Gender issues crop up unobtrusively but eloquently throughout the trilogy, laying bare the grid of an all-powerful patriarchal gender role formation and the subsequent conflicts at the heart of the social fabric. In *The Eye in the Door*, the second volume of the trilogy, the architectural design of the women's block at Aylesbury Prison bears a haunting similitude to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, whose structure procured Foucault with the paradigm for the workings of a new self-proclaimed more «humane» society that had replaced physical punishment with surveillance as a way to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body. Barker's description closely resembles that of Foucault's: «A pit surrounded by high walls ringed with three tiers of iron landings, studded by iron doors, linked by iron staircases' with a wardress, sat in the centre, who 'simply by looking up could observe every door» (Barker, 1994: 29). Prior, temporarily ascribed to the Intelligence Unit at the Ministry of Munitions, wonders what sort of women needed to be kept in such a place. Appalled at the «brutal» façade and shabby interior of the prison, and confronted by the obscene mocking gesture of a crazy old woman, he conjectures on the nature of their crimes: prostitution, abortion, petty theft, largely that of the vagrant population which, as Foucault shows in *Madness and Civilisation*, had been the subject of the «great confinement» in the Age of Reason. Later on, when visiting his old childhood friend Hettie whose mother he had interrogated at Aylsbury Prison, Prior winces at hearing her report on her mother's trial and her disparagement at the hypocrisy of a social system that would judge a terrible crime «killing a baby when its mother's two months gone. But [to] wait twenty years and blow the same kid's head off, that's all right» (Barker, 1994: 102).

Likewise, Barker suggests that the treatment received by male conscientious objectors, isolated in bare cells stripped naked with the uniform folded beside them and ever watched by an elaborately painted eye in the door with the pupil as spy hole, responded to a feminization strategy which contributed to exact from them docility and submission. Besides the torture of exposure to freezing cold, the nakedness of the male war objector in front of the painted eye triggered a process of feminisation that rendered him passive and vulnerable forcing him into compliance by its signifying power.

What Foucault suggests by what he calls the «eye» of power is that authority aspires to enforce conformity on its subjects by means of both law and morality, and that society itself may become an extended prison through its institutional agents —educators, legislators, doctors. Also, and this is all the more disturbing, through the connivance of all individuals, each one of them enmeshed in a tissue of competing interests. This is the significance of *The Eye in the Door*, title and cover design of the second volume of the trilogy. The clearest instance is Billy Prior himself who, while on duty in a mission as agent of the State Intelligence Service, is haunted by the same fantasy of being ever watched. An eye under various forms and in different guises features prominently in his hallucinations and nightmares. It is an eye suddenly found in his hand, picked up from the floor while putting together the body of one of his men blown apart by a grenade that triggers his war neurosis. Eventually, the eye will be related to childhood conflicting experiences in which gender and class issues are inextricably enmeshed. 'Eye' and 'I' significantly blend in the workings of the subconscious, as his therapy with Rivers reveals, showing Prior's internalisation of the dynamics of alternately being controlled and controlling others, surveying and being surveyed, as an effective result of the operations of power.

The male focalization makes the treatment of gender all the more interesting since it replicates the Great War factual narrative and literary canon, until very recently the work of exclusively male historians and, in the field of literature, constituted —as mentioned above— by the War Poets, all of them men giving men's vision. However, despite keeping a full masculine stance, Barker incorporates into the narrative the re-examination of women's experience and vision of the war as well as the profound changes it brought about. The most significant, leaving aside those of bereavement and loss, had to do with sexual mores, employment patterns, civil and economic responsibilities and the development of political consciousness, all of which fostered new gender awareness. The masculine stance allows her to disclose in a clever unobtrusive way the sexual predicament affecting the two sexes in radically opposite ways. In *The Eye in the Door*, for example, she has Billy Prior curtly responding to his childhood friend Hettie's excited comments on the way that for some women the war represented «the first day in the history of the world» since it allowed them to do things forbidden them «in a million years» such as wearing «short hair, breeches and driving an ambulance», that it was «the last for a lot of men» (Barker, 1994: 101).

Class and gender issues are shown to intersect unveiling their clashing interests and the specific points of rupture and/or temporary alliance at their base. Billy Prior reflects that for all his father's allegiance to the working class «as a whole» he was «still more determined to maintain distinctions within it», these having to do with the rising menace of women entering the labour market. «The missus'll be going to work, and the man'll be sat at home minding the bairn», he recalls him grumbling (Barker, 1992:

93). On the other hand, from childhood Billy was clear-sighted enough to perceive his mother's superciliousness towards women regarded as slightly less respectable on social or political grounds, such as upholding working class values or suffragist views, despite her indebtedness to them for past favours. For his part, Rivers wonders at the class-hatred Sister Walters exudes against members of her own sex, mainly VADs, from a similar social background as her officer patients whom she loved. Barker shows the sheer difficulty of establishing stable alliances among women that would help them to effectively confront the gender grid within a patriarchal system that succeeds in no small part by trusting women with the socialisation of children. These are conveniently made use of for a vicarious meagre share of the power women are denied to achieve by themselves. Billy and his girl friend Sarah are conspicuous cases, used by their respective mothers to rise socially by the means available to each according to their gender: Billy through education; Sarah through «prettiness, pliability —at least the appearance of it— all the arts of pleasing. This was how women got on in the world and Ada had made sure her daughters knew it» (Barker, 1992: 195).

The change in social mores the war brought about is revealed in the sight of both single and married women having a drink in a pub, showing purpose, a new sexual freedom and a more frank expression because while war entailed for many women the experience of loss and grief, for many others it opened the door to liberty. They would no longer be bothered by their men. No drunk man to come home either quarrelsome or sulky, no more abuse. Paradoxically, for some of them, literally, the war meant peace «On August 4th peace broke out», we are told, (Barker, 1992: 110). No wonder men felt anxious at the perceptible and unfamiliar changes the implications of which did not escape them. When meeting Sarah for the first time, Prior felt he was «out of touch with women. They 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» (Barker 1992: 90).

Barker chooses highly individualised female characters. Some are quite representative, such as Sarah, Billy Prior's girl friend, one of the women who in large numbers entered the industrial market place as munitions workers. A million and a half women were employed in munitions production in 1918, a job which would free them from hated home service while offering them five times its salary (Goldman, 1995: 15). On the other hand, it raised a number of conflicting issues. Feminists and suffragists, represented by Hettie and her mother, usually opposed the war which they regarded as deeply entrenched in patriarchal issues and attitudes, a view implicit in some of Owen and Sassoon's poems and explicit in Graves' war memoir *Goodbye to All That*. On the other hand, the war provided them with unforeseen possibilities for advancement. A third group of women played an important role in the war. Mothers and sweethearts were the target of war propaganda encouraging them to urge their men to enlist. Many women played to the full this role of supporters of the national cause and the defence of Western humanist values even if the campaign registered quite unbearable quotas of inhumanity. Yet Barker chooses to disclose disturbing submerged cases showing the twisted outlets of a female power socially and institutionally repressed. Sarah's mother is one such instance giving the lie to the much glamorised portrait of the 'Little Mother' who «in the name of the women of the British race», was ready to give the life of her son in order to «uphold

the honour and traditions not only of our Empire but of the whole civilized world» as Robert Graves would put it in *Goodbye to All That* (1983:189). And Prior's mother is yet another example of the thwarting effects on their men folk of women with no outlet for their ambitions which were therefore projected in distorted ways onto them.

The trilogy explores in depth the masculine malaise brought into being by the patriarchal educational patterns fostered by social institutions such as the family, schools, or the army. Robert Graves had no qualms about ascribing homosexuality to the public school system and to the social demeaning of women: «In English preparatory and public schools romance is necessarily homosexual. The opposite sex is despised and treated as something obscene... For every one born homosexual, at least ten permanent pseudo-homosexuals are made by the public school system», he wrote in his war memoir *Goodbye to All That* (Graves, 1983: 23). Barker goes further and exposes the power tensions at the fabric of homosexual relations which show class and gender role conflicts not too different from the heterosexual ones. The army tended to replicate public school fagging and so it fostered feminisation of a kind. Officers had as their duty the responsibility of seeing to the well-being of their men, both physically and emotionally. In a sense, as Rivers reflects, «the war had set a peculiar 'domestic' relationship between them, a sort of male mothering, further complicated by the enforced passivity of life at the dugouts so that the war «that had promised so much in the way of 'manly' activity had actually delivered 'feminine' passivity» (Barker, 1992: 108).

*The Ghost Road*, the last volume in the trilogy, connects two moments in History which defy the idea of uninterrupted continuity and ideal significations, emphasising the contrary notion that should we look for a linearity we must per force find it in «an endlessly repeated play of dominations» (Foucault, 1991: 85). Two stages of such a sequence are shown, connected by Dr Rivers, who prior to his war clinical practice had taken part in an anthropological expedition to Melanesia, a spot at several removes from the civilised centre of the Empire. Under the combination of stress and fever due to the conditions of war work, he relives the impressions of his experience in front of the divide of cultural difference and widely separated 'stages of civilisation'. Focalisation again plays an important interpretative role. The focus shifts from the Melanesian people and culture to the British. The picture we are shown of the former through Rivers' memory and feelings —their baffling rituals, their startling social and sexual mores— are interspersed with dubious "civilising" practices and punishment for their savagery that didn't make Rivers feel proud to be British. The episodes are skilfully interweaved with the contemporary war narrative so that any preconception we might have regarding the uncivilised and therefore barbarous nature of some of the practices involved is soon dispelled by the exhibition of similar current practices under the justification of the defence of Western civilisation. Rivers' conclusion is in line with the anti-metaphysical thrust of History which seeks to purify Western «humanism» of its illusions of centrality and truth. In this context, gender is once again unobtrusively brought to the fore. In a nightmare suffered by Rivers, the dead chief's wife, forced to mourn him into a cramped position her back curled down, hands resting on her feet, is connected to his sister Kath, likewise confined into a cramped life by the petty conventions and rituals of social mores.

Subtly though unmistakably it is the patriarchal father figure that looms the largest in the overall responsibility for the social malaise Barker explores, the main victims of which,

tellingly, are the sons. There are several allusions in the trilogy to Abraham's sacrifice of his son. At one point in the narrative, during a Sunday service, Rivers ruminates on its symbolism as the foundation stone of all patriarchal societies: the sons securing the father's full inheritance and privileges through obedience to his Law and readiness to sacrifice their life at his command. Yet —he considers— the sons were being unmercifully betrayed because the sacrifice was actually taking place with no ram as symbolic last minute substitute. Though Rivers self-righteously reflects that «a society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioned allegiance» (Barker, 1992: 249), he will be eventually led to realise the measure of his own implication in what he sees as wrong. The sacrificial scene will come to his mind while watching Prior, his former patient, out of the window, his head bobbing along, having just been «discharged to duty» —meaning, as he well knows, being sent to the front to a sure death. At this point, recalling the father-son relation knit between them along the therapy he is reminded of a ritual he had attended to in Melanesia in which adopted boys, after having been brought up surrounded by love and care, were sacrificed —their heads crushed open by their surrogate fathers. The picture is connected in his mind with the scene of Abraham with the knife raised to slay his son and, although he reflects that the two scenes represented the difference between savagery and civilisation (Barker 1995: 103), the discomfort he feels at the associations makes the reader realise how «the bargain on which all patriarchal societies are founded» (Barker, 1992: 149) is not symbolically but all too literally reenacted.

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