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Manifestations of Seeman's theory of alienation in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991)

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This article examines how Seeman's theory of alienation (1959) and contemporary interpretations thereof in Geyer (1996), Kalekin-Fishman (1998), and Neal & Collas (2000) in particular, manifest in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* (1991). It is argued that *Regeneration*, Barker's best known novel, set at Craiglockhart War Hospital during the World War I, provides a specific perspective on alienation in times of war. The article discusses the ways in which Seeman's notions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social isolation manifest, and it is argued that the most prominent aspect of Seeman's alienation in this novel is powerlessness.

Manifestasies van Seeman se vervreemdingsteorie in Pat Barker se *Regeneration* (1991)

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die manifestasie van Seeman se teorie van vervreemding (1959), sowel as hedendaagse interpretasies daarvan, spesifiek Geyer (1996), Kalekin-Fishman (1998), en Neal & Collas (2000), in Pat Barker se *Regeneration* (1991). Barker se bekendste roman, *Regeneration* speel af by Craiglockhart War Hospital tydens die Eerste Wêreldoorlog. Daar word aangevoer dat die roman 'n spesifieke perspektief op vervreemding in 'n oorlogstydperk verskaf. Die artikel bespreek die maniere hoe Seeman se magteloosheid, betekenisloosheid, normloosheid en sosiale isolasie manifesteer, en daar word aangevoer dat die fokus op Seeman se aspek van magteloosheid is.

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Pat Barker's *Regeneration trilogy* comprises *Regeneration* (1991), *The eye in the door* (1993) and *The ghost road* (1995), but the first novel is her primary and best known work.[1] *Regeneration* is "... a wide-ranging study of the effects of war on individuals in terms of responsibility and identity" (Childs 2005: 59), in particular how society refuses to accept responsibility for the human cost of war, and the questioning of masculine identity. The novel is set at Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh, "the living museum of tics and twitches" (*R 206*),[2] where Rivers (who refers to Sassoon as Patient B in *Conflict and dream* (Harris 1998: 294)) is one of the many real-life characters; others include Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen. *Regeneration* primarily focuses on the relationship between Rivers and Sassoon at Craiglockhart, but the other two novels in the trilogy focus on Rivers and Prior, who is eventually killed in action alongside Wilfred Owen in the First World War.

Regeneration's title refers to Rivers's interest in the regeneration of nerves after injury, and "Barker expands the study to mental damage but also brings to the fore the conflict between generations that the war made manifest" (Childs 2005: 74). Rivers conducted experiments on nerve regeneration while working with Henry Head (*R* 46). In one experiment, Rivers severed Head's radial nerve and sutured it, documenting regeneration over a period of five years. The suggestion is that physical nerve regeneration can be paralleled with psychological "nerves" – also able to regenerate when the proper techniques are applied and sufficient time is given.

Rivers treats individual patients who suffer from amnesia (too little memory) or anamnesia (too much memory) as a result of the war (Brannigan 2003: 23). Memory plays an important role in the novel, and Barker herself has noted "Memory is my subject" (Kirk 1999: 606). Initially unable to speak, Second Lieutenant Billy Prior is an example of a patient suffering from amnesia, and he suggests hypnosis

1 This article originally formed part of an MA dissertation entitled *Alienation as a fictional construct in four contemporary British novels: a literary-theoretical study*, completed in 2008 at the Department of English and Classical Languages at the University of the Free State, South Africa, under supervision of Manuela Lovisa.

2 References to all quotations from the novel will be cited as *R* .

in an attempt to find the incident that led to his breakdown. When it turns out to be a relatively unremarkable event (compared to the experiences of some of the other patients), Prior is disappointed, but Rivers offers his theory of combat stress: "You're thinking of breakdown as a reaction to a single traumatic event, but it's not like that. It's more a matter of [...] *erosion*. Weeks and months of stress in a situation where you can't get away from it" (*R* 105) (original emphasis). Burns, another patient who had a particularly traumatic experience that haunts him, is an example of someone suffering from anamnesia:

> He'd been thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell and had landed, head-first, on a German corpse, whose gas-filled belly had ruptured on impact. Before Burns lost consciousness, he'd had time to realize that what filled his nose and mouth was decomposing human flesh. Now, whenever he tried to eat, that taste and smell recurred. Nightly, he relived the experience, and from every nightmare he awoke vomiting (*R* 19).

Barker is literally the product of war: she was conceived during a wartime fling, and her mother invented military explanations for who her father was, including a marine and an officer in the RAF (Kemp 2007). After her mother remarried, she stayed with her grandmother and step-grandfather, who sustained a bayonet wound during World War I. She remarks: "I chose the First World War because it's come to stand in for other wars [... I]t's come to stand for the pain of all wars" (Westman 2001: 16). Later she would set narratives during Sarajevo and Afghanistan (*Double vision* 2003), Iraq (*Subsidence* 2003) and then back during World War I in *Life class* (2007).

Barker has written eleven novels to date, namely *Union street* (1982), *Blow your house down* (1984), *The century's daughter* (1986) (republished as *Liza's England* in 1990), *The man who wasn't there* (1989), *Regeneration* (1991), *The eye in the door* (1993), *The ghost road* (1995), *Another world* (1998), *Border crossing* (2001), *Double vision* (2003), and *Life class* (2007). She was amply awarded for these novels: the Fawcett Society Book Prize for *Union street* in 1983; the Guardian Fiction Prize for *The eye in the door* in 1993; the Northern Electric Special Arts Prize for *The eye in the door* in 1994' the Booker Prize for Fiction for *The ghost road* in 1995; the Booksellers' Association Author of the Year Award in 1996, and finally a CBE in 2000.

1. Seeman's theory of alienation in *Regeneration*

The rise of postmodernism and the popularity of systems theory approaches required a reinterpretation of Seeman's alienation theory (1959) in the late 1990s.[3] This reinterpretation stems from a re-evaluation of identity-formation processes within these scientific discourses. From a systems theory perspective, interpersonal relations form an integral part of the "self", as Kenneth J Gergen explains (Augusto 1996: 189):

> In this era, self is redefined as no longer an essence in itself, but relational. In the post-modern world, selves may become the manifestations of relationship, thus placing relationships in the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history. [Thus ...] one's sense of individual autonomy gives way to a reality of immersed interdependence, in which it is relationship that constructs the self.

Seeman (1959) identifies five aspects of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. The following section discusses how these aspects manifest in Barker's *Regeneration.*

1.1 Powerlessness

Powerlessness refers to "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks" (Seeman 1959: 784). Seeman argues that this aspect originated in the Marxian view of alienation, where "the worker is alienated to the extent that the prerogative and means of decision are expropriated by the ruling entrepreneurs" (Seeman 1959: 784). But Seeman takes this further than Marx; Kalekin-Fishman (1996: 97) claims: "A person suffers from alienation in the form of 'powerlessness' when she[4] is conscious

3 The cursory discussion of alienation theory can only be introductory. For more information cf Geyer (1996), Kalekin-Fishman (1998), Neal & Collas (2000), and Senekal (2008).

4 Kalekin-Fishman uses the female personal pronoun, without suggesting that this is a gender-specific issue; 'she' in this context refers to 'an individual', any individual.

of the gap between what she would like to do and what she feels capable of doing". In a later article by Seeman (1966: 354), *Alienation, membership, and political knowledge: a comparative study*, he argues the value of the insights of the psychologist Julian Rotter (1954), who distinguishes between *internal control* and *external control*, which "points to differences (among persons or situations) in the degree to which success or failure is attributable to external factors such as luck, chance, or powerful others, as against success or failure that is seen as the outcome of one's personal skills or characteristics" (Seeman 1966: 355; cf also Neal & Collas (2000: 20).

Powerlessness thus relates to individuals' perspective on their environment, where they view themselves as

> ... dominated by an external rhythm and, instead of regulating their own time, are made into its victims. They no longer see themselves as building their life and their world. Rather, they feel susceptible to threats whose origins they cannot detect, and whose development they cannot control (Augusto 1996: 188).

The powerlessness of characters to escape from their memories in *Regeneration* is likened to the hallway in Craiglockhart that resembles "a trench without the sky" (*R* 17), indicating that the war has followed them to Scotland, for they carry it within themselves. Barker's early works provide a backdrop to *Regeneration* in this respect, for they depict violence done to women, whereas *Regeneration* only draws a parallel between the trauma experienced by women during peacetime and that experienced by men during war, without going into much detail about what the women experience during peacetime. Martin van Creveld (2008: 49) also notes the similarities between combat neurosis and mental health problems associated with women before the war, and this thread connects Barker's earlier works with her historical war novels, particularly in the depiction of trauma concerning the issue of powerlessness, as Rivers identifies it:

> Pilots, though they did indeed break down, did so less frequently and usually less severely than the men who manned observation balloons. They, floating helplessly above the battlefields, unable either to avoid attack or to defend themselves effectively against it, showed the highest incidence of breakdown of any service. Even including infantry officers. This reinforced Rivers's view that it was prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness that did the

> damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors that the patients themselves were inclined to point to as the explanation for their condition. That would help to account for the greater prevalence of anxiety neuroses and hysterical disorders in women in peacetime, since their relatively more confined lives gave them fewer opportunities of reacting to stress in active and constructive ways. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace (*R* 222).

This is echoed in the words of Lizzie, one of the minor female characters in *Regeneration*:

> Do you know what happened on August 4th 1914? [...] I'll tell you what happened. *Peace* broke out. The only bit of peace *I*'ve ever had. No, I don't want him back. I don't want him back on leave. I don't want him back when it's all over. As far as I'm concerned the Kaiser can keep him (*R* 110) (original emphasis).

Rivers highlights the prominent role played by powerlessness when noting that the soldiers who man observation balloons have the highest rate of psychological breakdowns, and he concludes that:

> [...] it was prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness that did the damage, and not the sudden shocks or bizarre horrors that the patients themselves were inclined to point to as the explanation for their condition. That would help to account for the greater prevalence of anxiety neuroses and hysterical disorders in women in peacetime, since their relatively more confined lives gave them fewer opportunities of reacting to stress in active and constructive ways. Any explanation of war neurosis must account for the fact that this apparently intensely masculine life of war and danger and hardship produced in men the same disorders that women suffered from in peace (*R* 222).

Anderson, another patient, illustrates how powerlessness can lead to psychological breakdown. When he gives reasons for having quit medicine, Rivers asks: "You still haven't told me when you said *enough*" (original emphasis), to which Anderson replies: "You make it sound like a decision. I don't know that lying on the floor in a pool of piss counts as a decision" (*R* 31). Experience of the war thus strips characters of their sense of control over their own living environments.

When Sarah exits the hospital and stumbles upon amputees, she is also unwittingly responsible for more harm to soldiers:

> Simply by being there, by being that inconsequential, infinitely powerful creature: *a pretty girl*, she had made everything worse. Her sense of her own helplessness, her being forced to play the role of Medusa when she meant no harm, merged with the anger she was beginning to feel at their being hidden away like that (*R* 160) (original emphasis).

In this instance Sarah stumbles upon the hidden casualties of the war, "... figures that were no longer the size and shape of adult men" (*R* 160), and many of them have limbs amputated; one even lost all his limbs. They are hidden from sight; at the front of the hospital "... their mutilations might have been seen by passers-by" (*R* 160). They look at her in a different manner from other patients, with a look of fear, "Fear of her looking at the empty trouser legs. Fear of her not looking at them" (*R* 160).

Sarah is angry that they are hidden away, thinking that "If the country demanded that price, then it should bloody well be prepared to look at the result" (*R* 160). Despite hundreds of thousands killed and maimed, England remained in the war, sending a million young men to be killed at the front (Keegan 2004: 365). Nevertheless, the reality of war was far from the imaginations of the general public (in contrast to wars such as Vietnam and Iraq where images were/are boomed into every living room). Improvements in medical facilities and logistics resulted in fewer deaths from sickness and a higher survival rate of wounded soldiers, but that only served to increase the number of mutilated veterans. The amputees brought the reality home, and had to be hidden away so the public would not be discouraged and start asking about the human cost of the war. This incident thus highlights the hypocrisy of the government and society, who ask the ultimate sacrifice, yet they do not wish to be confronted with the results, and as such this scene links with Seeman's notion of normlessness (see below). Nixon (2004 [1992]: 2) argues that this element of *Regeneration* is specifically relevant when reading from a post-9/11 perspective:

> Veterans comprise one-quarter of America's homeless men. In the wake of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, we can expect another wave of returning soldiers (men and women) touted as national heroes yet abandoned to the ravages of mental illness, emotional instability, physical disability, and social isolation. *Regeneration* takes up the issues of war trauma, recovery, and reintegration with a rare

> force that is visceral yet psychologically complex, and achieves a contemporary resonance.

In addition, powerlessness is illustrated in the juxtaposition of "male" and "female" approaches to curing war neurosis. As a counterweight to Rivers's "feminine" approach, Yealland embodies the "masculine" approach to curing patients. Yealland speaks in a "God-like tone" (*R* 226), and Rivers accompanies him as he cures mutism in a patient called Callan. From the beginning of this episode there is a clear parallel with Prior (*R* 226), and Rivers later acknowledges even a physical resemblance" "On the wards he'd been struck by a slight facial resemblance between Callan and Prior" (*R* 237). But Yealland and Rivers's approaches and methods differ greatly. Yealland favours electric shock treatment, which is so severe it borders on torture. In his approach, Yealland has no sympathy with his patients: "The last thing these patients need is a sympathetic audience" (*R* 228). He tells Callan: "Remember you must behave as becomes the hero I expect you to be [...]. A man who has been through so many battles should have a better control of himself" (*R* 230). He even echoes Rivers's father, who had helped Rivers with his stammer, when he tells Callan: "*You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say*" (*R* 231) (original emphasis). After visiting Yealland, Rivers dreams that he tries to force a horse's bit into a man's mouth (*R* 236). The symbolism is clear, but he explains it nevertheless:

> *A horse's bit*. Not an electrode, not a teaspoon. A bit. An instrument of control. Obviously he and Yealland were both in the business of controlling people. Each of them fitted young men back into the role of warrior, a role they have – however unconsciously – rejected (*R* 238) (original emphasis).

Rivers thought that "nothing Callan could say could have been more powerful than his silence", and thus, "Rivers felt that he was witnessing the *silencing* of a human being" (*R* 238) (original emphasis), in the same way that he had silenced Billy Prior:

> Just as Yealland silenced the unconscious protests of *his* patients by removing the paralysis, the deafness, the blindness, the muteness that stood between them and the war, so, in an infinitely more gentle way, *he* silenced *his* patients; for the stammerings, the nightmares, the tremors, the memory lapses, of officers were just

> as much unwitting protest as the grosser maladies of the men (*R* 238) (original emphasis).

Sassoon is, of course, the primary voice of protest against the war. His opposition to the war is not based on religious grounds, neither is it an issue of pacifism nor simply avoiding his duty (cowardice). He states: "I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest" (*R* 3). The difficulty he faces is conveying his message without being classified as a coward or as suffering from mental breakdown, for that would silence his protest.

Rivers's job is not only to silence Sassoon's protest, but also to rehabilitate Prior. Sassoon and the others are all protesting against the war in their own way, and being silenced by Rivers, Yealland and others do similar work – their power to protest taken away. Barker (Nixon 2004 [1992]: 21) mentions that Rivers is "... restoring them to something he hates. He acknowledges that he's doing what Yealland does. He's doing it more gently, and more effectively in the long term, but that's what he's doing". In this sense, Sassoon is not as socially isolated as he had thought, but he never fully realises this parallel between him and the others. In rehabilitating his patients, Rivers silences their protests, as he does with Sassoon, but by donning his uniform, Rivers is also powerless to do anything else.

Powerless is thus a primary issue in *Regeneration*, both because patients end up in Craiglockhart because of the psychological issues induced by their sense of powerlessness at the front, and by situating them in an institution that aspires to take away their only forms of empowerment – silence and Sassoon's protest.

1.2 Meaninglessness

Meaninglessness refers to "... the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged" (Seeman 1959: 786). Seeman (1959: 786) argues that meaninglessness occurs when "... the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe – when the individual's minimum standards for clarity in decision making are not met". The postmodern world presents the individual with a vastly confusing

world of opposing views, bewildering options and even a history that appears to be constantly rewritten. Seeman (1959: 786) writes:

> [Meaninglessness] is characterized by a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about the future outcomes of behaviour can be made. Put more simply, where the first meaning of alienation refers to the sensed ability to control outcomes, this second meaning refers essentially to the sensed ability to predict behavioural outcomes.

As such, meaninglessness is directly linked to control as discussed under *powerlessness*. Seeman (1959: 786) argues:

> the view that one lives in an intelligible world might be a prerequisite to expectancies for control; and the unintelligibility of complex affairs is presumably conducive to the development of high expectancies for external control (that is, high powerlessness).

With accurate and trustworthy information, decisions can be made confidently and it is much easier to believe that one has control. In the absence or in the perceived absence of such accurate information, control is surrendered.

In *Regeneration*, characters often struggle to make sense of their memories and their roles in society, but the characters' (Sassoon's, in particular) questioning of the validity of the war aims and strategies in particular is a manifestation of Seeman's notion of meaninglessness. When he finds Burns who had run away in the middle of the night, Rivers thinks: "*Nothing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing*" (*R* 180) (original emphasis). This crisis of meaning alienates them not only from the army, but also from society at large, partly because it is society at large that has to bear the responsibility, not only the military. Rivers notes:

> [...] the two bloody bargains on which a civilization claims to be based. *The* bargain, Rivers thought, looking at Abraham and Isaac. The one on which all patriarchal societies are founded. If you, who are young and strong, will obey me, who am old and weak, even to the extent of being prepared to sacrifice your life, then in the course of time you will peacefully inherit, and be able to exact the same obedience from your sons. Only we're breaking the bargain, Rivers thought. All over northern France, at this very moment, in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together and sang hymns (*R* 149).

The questioning of war aims and strategies is noted most vividly in Prior's retelling of a battle in *Regeneration*:

> You blow the whistle. You climb the ladder. Then you double through a gap in the wire, lie flat, wait for everybody else to get out – those that are left, there's already a heavy toll – and then you stand up. And you start walking. *Not* at the double. Normal walking speed. [...] In a straight line. Across open country. In broad daylight. Towards a line of machine guns. [...] Oh, and of course you're being shelled all the way (*R* 78) (original emphasis).

To this, Rivers replies:

> 'You're describing this attack as if it were a – a slightly ridiculous event in – '
>
> 'Not 'slightly'. Slightly, I did not say.'
>
> 'All right, an *extremely* ridiculous event – in someone else's life'.
>
> 'Perhaps that's how it felt' (*R* 78) (original emphasis).

Nieraad (2003: 1029) argues that "... since World War I contemporary conflict between states no longer displays any simply narratable experiential reality, but has rather made 'true experience' impossible" because the modern battlefield's emphasis on overwhelming firepower renders the individual powerless to control his fate. In *Regeneration*, being unable to control even the strategies that lead men into combat is supported by their questioning of it, but not finding answers creates a crisis of meaning. Meaninglessness is thus subordinated to powerlessness in terms of importance in the novel, but clearly manifests as well, and as Seeman had conceived of meaninglessness and powerlessness, they are also closely entwined in the novel.

1.3 Normlessness

Normlessness or anomie (a term from Durkheim) "... denotes the situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behaviour" (Seeman 1959: 787). In the postmodern world, with changing gender roles and material circumstances,

> [n]ormlessness derives partly from conditions of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may

> no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct (Neal & Collas 2000: 122).

Sassoon highlights normlessness in his society when he accuses commanders and politicians of only looking after themselves:

> ... the people who're keeping this war going don't give a damn about the 'Bobbies' and the 'Tommies'. And they don't let 'gentlemanly behaviour' stand in the way either when it comes to feathering their own nests (*R* 198).

Most importantly, however, is questioning the norm of patriarchal society and the Abraham/Isaac sacrifice, called "the bargain" in the novel (*R* 149). This motif was used by Owen himself in his poetry, and "Used as a fitting parable for the apparent conspiracy of the old against the young, the story of Abraham became a *topos* of the period [WWI]" (Lanone 1999: 260). Lanone argues that this motif was better suited than that of crucifixion for describing the slaughter of World War I, for "... the son is not simply abandoned but sacrificed like an animal."

Questioning this norm that demands the sacrifice of millions of young men is illustrated most vividly in the juxtaposition of war and abortion. When one of Sarah Lumb's co-workers, Betty, attempts to give herself an abortion, the doctor tells her: "It's not just an inconvenience you've got in there. It's a human being". Yet, in the next paragraph, the women are seen manufacturing more munitions (*R* 202). Although Sarah calls her mother a war profiteer, "... in a small way" (*R* 196), she herself is profiting from the mass slaughter. Sarah "... was earning ten bob before the war" (*R* 89), but the job in the munitions factory was earning her "[f]ifty bob a week". Keegan (2004: 309) notes the importance and scale of the home front contribution:

> [I]n the week before the opening of the battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, British artillery fired 1,000,000 rounds, a total weight of some 20,000 tons of metal and explosive. The demand for quantities of that sort caused a 'shell crisis' in 1915, but the famine was staunched by a programme of emergency industrialisation in Britain and the placing of large contracts with factories working at under-capacity elsewhere.

Thus, even the women take part in "breaking the bargain", for "... in trenches and dugouts and flooded shell-holes, the inheritors were dying, not one by one, while old men, and women of all ages, gathered together and sang hymns" (*R* 149). Society in general thus stands accused, not merely the military or the men – all take part in the killing.

Rivers himself is highly critical of Western civilisation in general and the war in particular. In the context of his anthropological visits to the Solomon Islands, he speaks of the "... *Great White God* de-throned" when he recognises that "... their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs" (*R* 242). Elsewhere, Rivers notes: "A society that devours its own young deserves no automatic or unquestioning allegiance" (*R* 249). This questioning of metanarratives is familiar terrain in the postmodern context, since

> The teleological narratives of historical progress, cultural superiority and technological prowess, which underpinned notions of European civilization, and which ultimately led to the 'Great War', produced the most savage, regressive and irrational conflict the world had yet known (Brannigan 2003: 21).

A critique of masculine society lies at the heart of *Regeneration*. For Mosher & Tomkins (1988: 64) the ideology of *machismo* (meaning the essence of man in Spanish) is

> ... a system of ideas forming a world view that chauvinistically exalts male dominance by assuming masculinity, virility, and physicality to be the ideal essence of real men who are adversarial warriors competing for scarce resources (including women as chattel) in a dangerous world.

One important aspect of assuming the male role is aggressiveness and violence; research has widely shown that males commit more violence than females. Another aspect that is part-and-parcel of masculinity is fortitude. Reidy *et al* (2009: 423) argue for instance that "... conformity to masculine gender role appears to be positively related to reported pain tolerance and the perpetration of aggression" because patriarchal society views these characteristics as manly. Men are taught not to show fear or other emotions, not to show pain or discomfort, be competitive and aggressive, as Frank J Barrett argues

(Hutchings (2008: 392): "The hegemonic ideal of masculinity in current Western culture is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual and rational." War supposedly provides "... a particularly effective theatre in which to articulate masculinity" (Adelman 2009: 261), but in Barker's novel, the psychological breakdowns of patients, homosexuality and fluid gender roles alienate the characters from the mainstream, masculine ideologies embedded in patriarchal society.

This alienation from patriarchal society is embodied in Rivers, who is older than his patients and "... used to being adopted as a father figure" (*R* 34). Sassoon "... joked once or twice to Rivers about his being his father confessor, but only now, faced with this second abandonment, did he realize how completely Rivers had come to take his father's place" (*R* 145). Prior also picks up on this, first noting: "I find myself wanting to impress you. Pathetic, isn't it?" (*R* 64), and then stating directly: "I suppose most of them turn you into Daddy, don't they?" (*R* 65). However, John Layard, one of Rivers's previous patients, claims that he did not regard Rivers as a father, but more as a male mother (*R* 107). When Prior wants to return to the front, he reckons that Rivers is inhibiting his attempts, despite Rivers's claims, and then aligns Rivers with his mother:

> My mother was always pulling the other way. Trying to keep me in. [...] She wanted me in the house away from all the *nasty rough boys*. And then suddenly here *you* are [...]. Doing exactly the same thing. [...] Probably why I never wanted you to be *Daddy*. I'd got you lined up for a worse fate" (*R* 210) (original emphasis).

Rivers notes the feminisation of men in the war: "One of the paradoxes of the war [...] was that this most brutal of conflicts should set up a relationship between officers and men that was [...] domestic. Caring. As Layard would undoubtedly have said, maternal". As the narrator relates:

> 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 harried expression of theirs. Rivers had only ever seen that look in one other place: in the public wards of hospitals, on the faces of women who were bringing up large families on very low incomes,

> women who, in their early thirties, could easily be taken for fifty or more. It was the look of people who are totally responsible for lives they have no power to save (*R* 107) (original emphasis).

When Prior makes a joke about his previous problems with headaches at the front, he places himself in a female role: "Headaches. [...] It's hardly a reason to stay out of the trenches, is it? '*Not tonight, Wilhelm. I've got a headache*'?" (*R* 50) (original emphasis). Rivers suggests that his therapy implies a change in how society views itself and defines gender roles:

> The change [Rivers] demanded of them – and by implication of himself – was not trivial. Fear, tenderness – these emotions were so despised that they could be admitted into consciousness only at the cost of redefining what it meant to be a man (*R* 48).

This is a process of transformation, and as Rivers notes: "... the process of transformation consists almost entirely of decay" (*R* 184), as the patients' psyches are broken down and rebuilt.

The format of the war also emasculates the soldiers:

> Mobilization. The Great Adventure. They'd been *mobilized* into holes in the ground so constricted they could hardly move. And the Great Adventure – the real life equivalent of all the adventure stories they'd devoured as boys – 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 that their mothers and sisters had scarcely known. No wonder they broke down (*R* 107) (original emphasis).

Harris (1998: 303) notes that Barker separates men from masculinity in this novel, as well as from patriarchal society, emphasising not the exploding shells of combat but "... on the men who *imploded* under the strains of living up to the 'manly' ideals of self-control in the face of the senseless slaughter of trench warfare."

In Seeman's original conception of alienation, normlessness was closely tied with social isolation, and in *Regeneration*, the characters' reformulation of the norms of their society, in particular masculine ideals, is just as closely linked with social isolation.

1.4 Social isolation

Social isolation refers to "... [t]he feeling of being segregated from one's community" (Kalekin-Fishman 1996: 97). It is from the community that meaning is constructed, and therefore social isolation will lead to powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness. The very foundation of the self (even the very concept of the self), thinking patterns and language are all constructed through interaction with the community. Ulvinen (1998: 247) defines culture as "... a system of meanings that exists, is mediated, and reproduced through individual, subjective actors". Since culture provides the framework from which meaning is created, "... experiences are always contextual, immediately connected to the interpretation of the world around us" (Ulvinene 1998: 247). Social isolation therefore deprives the individual of this "social meaning structure", contributing to meaninglessness, normlessness, and powerlessness.

Siegfried Sassoon indicates his lack of belonging when he explains the origin of his name: "I'm called Siegfried because my mother liked Wagner. And the only thing I have in common with orthodox Jews is that I do profoundly thank God I was born a man and not a woman. If I were a woman, I'd be called Brünnhilde" (*R* 217). This naming illustrates his role as outsider, for he is neither Jew nor Gentile, a Jew with a thoroughly German name. He maintains this role throughout the novel, from his arrival at Craiglockhart: "Sassoon turned to look out of the window, hunching his shoulder against them all" (*R* 5). He is the only patient of sound mind in a mental institution, as Rivers realises early on: "He doesn't *sound* as if he's gibbering, does he?" (*R* 4).

Sassoon thinks of the army as "... probably the only place I've ever really belonged" (*R* 36). When going into town, he feels out of place; Sassoon

> ... hated everybody, giggling girls, portly middle-aged men, women whose eyes settled on his wound stripe like flies. Only the young soldier home on leave, staggering out of a pub, dazed and vacant-eyed, escaped his disgust (*R* 44).

It is Rivers's job to return Sassoon to the front, to reintegrate him into the army, and he does so by focussing on this identification:

> If you maintain your protest, you can expect to spend the remainder of the war in a state of Complete. Personal. Safety.
>
> Sassoon shifted in his seat. "I'm not responsible for other people's decisions." "You don't think you might find being safe while other people *die* rather difficult?" A flash of anger. "Nobody else in this *stinking* country seems to find it difficult. I expect I'll just learn to live with it. Like everybody else" (*R* 36) (original emphasis).

This is of course part of the reason why Sassoon ultimately returns to France. His decision is helped by the spectral appearance of fallen comrades by his bedside, in particular Orme (*R* 143). The importance of identification and shared experiences is highlighted by the fact that Sassoon only relates this experience after Rivers discloses *his* experiences in the Solomon Islands (*R* 188), where Rivers had seen a soul being taken across the river by the dead. When Rivers asks" "Do they look reproachful?" Sassoon replies: "No. They just look puzzled. They can't understand why I'm here" (*R* 189). The problem is that although Sassoon identifies with the military, he cannot fully condone the way the war is conducted (as his declaration makes clear). He is very critical of the war, for example where Rivers notes: "Taking *unnecessary* risks is one of the first signs of war neurosis". To this, Sassoon replies, "What is an 'unnecessary risk' anyway? The maddest thing I ever did was done under orders" (*R* 12).

Throughout her oeuvre, Barker "... is insistent on exploring and recording how gendered experience is inevitably informed and shaped by the objective determinants of class position" (Kirk 1999: 605). The character of Billy Prior highlights some of the main issues of the text, namely class and the immorality of the war. But his relationship with Rivers is different, as Westman (2001: 50) notes:

> Sassoon associates with members of the aristocracy [...] 'Second-Lieutenant Sassoon' soon becomes 'Siegfried' during his appointments with Rivers [...]. By contrast, 'Second-Lieutenant Prior' remains 'Mr Prior'.

This happens because Prior is of a lower class and is not privy to the advantages available to the officer's class; Sassoon certainly receives preferential treatment because he is the only patient who is not deranged.

Billy Prior comes to the reader's attention while he suffers from mutism. Initially he writes on a notepad, but his speech later returns. When his parents visit, he loses the ability to speak once again, indicating his protest against the society in which he was raised as an extension of his hostility towards the war. Prior comes from a working-class background, but although he has risen beyond it to become an officer, it still provides him with many obstacles: "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) (original emphasis). His position as outsider is sketched clearly in the context of his condition:

> Mutism seems to spring from a conflict between *wanting* to say something, and knowing that if you *do* say it the consequences will be disastrous. So you resolve it by making it physically impossible for yourself to speak. And for the private soldier the consequences of speaking his mind are always going to be far worse than they would be for an officer. What you tend to get in officers is stammering. And it's not just mutism. All the physical symptoms: paralysis, blindness, deafness. They're all common in private soldiers and rare in officers (*R* 96) (original emphasis).

Part of Prior's problem is identification. He is "... neither fish nor fowl" (*R* 57) and cannot identify with the community of the working class or the upper class. Prior's critique of the officer's class is relentless, for instance: "Do you know, for the first time I realized that somewhere in the back of their [...] *tiny tiny* minds they really do believe the whole thing's going to end in one big glorious *cavalry charge*" (*R* 66) (original emphasis). He then quotes Tennyson's poem about the infamous charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War: "'Stormed at with shot and shell, / Boldly they rode and well, / Into the jaws of death, / Into the mouth of hell ...' And all. That. Rubbish" (*R* 66).

Like Sassoon, Prior does not identify with the other inmates at Craiglockhart. Rivers asks: "Don't you have any sympathy for anybody else?" To which Prior replies: "Are you suggesting I have any for myself?" (*R* 133). His motivation for wanting to return to the front is also based on wanting to belong: "When all this is over,

people who didn't go to France, or didn't do well in France – people of my generation, I mean – aren't going to count for anything. This is the Club to end all Clubs" (*R* 135). However, the doctor's report denies him this. He thus manifests social isolation in not being able to integrate with a particular community, but nevertheless retaining such a connection with it that he can be said to be alienated from it.

In addition, Prior seems incapable of identifying with civilians in general:

> You can't talk to anybody here. [...] Everybody's either lost somebody, or knows somebody who has. They don't want the truth. It's like letters of condolence. 'Dear Mrs Bloggs, Your son had the side of his head blown off by a shell and took five hours to die. We did manage to give him a decent Christian burial. Unfortunately that particular stretch of ground came under heavy bombardment the day after, so George has been back to see us five or six times since then'. They don't want that' (*R* 134).

He associates Sarah with "... the pleasure-seeking crowds" and "... was quite coldly determined to *get* her. They owed him something, all of them, and she should pay" (*R* 128) (original emphasis). After having sex with her, he deliberately alienates her by adopting a public school accent, because "... she was only too clearly beginning to think that something had happened that mattered" (*R* 131). Prior's social isolation manifests in his relationship with Sarah, as Neal & Collas (2000: 97) remark:

> Emotional intimacy is both the prize and the penalty of deep involvement in a relationship with another person. It is a prize in the sense that it facilitates the sharing of the innermost parts of one's life and establishes a framework for expressing and listening to each other's thoughts and feelings, desires and doubts, joys and fears. Through emotional intimacy, individuals tend to each other's needs and try to understand and accept the uniqueness of each personality involved. But emotional involvement also contains the ingredients of vulnerability and penetration of one's ego boundaries. Difficulties and disappointment develop out of an inability of a spouse or a partner to go to the other person with a serious problem or to discuss such feelings as being depressed, nervous, or anxious.

Prior cannot share "... the innermost parts" of his life, namely his experiences of the war, with her: "Somehow if she'd known the worst parts,

she couldn't have gone on being a haven for him. [...] He needed her ignorance to hide in" (*R* 216). The war is thus a wedge between them, prohibiting emotional intimacy. Whereas the other patients at Craiglockhart have been initiated into the realities of the war, she is not. This implies that she can never identify with him properly.

Prior and Sassoon's alienation from civilian society and from particular groups and classes is emblematic of a greater alienation from patriarchal society, as discussed earlier. Since norms are constructed within the framework of a society, normlessness and social isolation are inextricably linked. In terms of the novel, although both aspects of alienation manifest, normlessness is emphasised through the critique of patriarchal society and masculine ideology, while social isolation serves to underscore this manifestation of alienation.

1.5 Self-estrangement

Self-estrangement is "... the psychological state of denying one's own interests – of seeking out extrinsically satisfying, rather than intrinsically satisfying, activities" (Kalekin-Fishman 1998: 97). Neal & Collas (2000: 22) omit self-estrangement from their discussion, for two reasons. First, they argue that self-estrangement is derived from the other forms of alienation. Secondly, they refrain from discussing the fifth dimension "... in part from the conceptual difficulty of specifying the nature of the 'self' from which one may be estranged". As Geyer (1996: xxvii) contends: "The age-old and, for many, frustrating question 'Who am I?' cannot be answered anymore, although many still try; or rather, it should be answered differently from one day to the next, and especially from one context to another". This article follows Neal & Collas's approach in omitting Seeman's final dimension of alienation.

2. Conclusion

Regeneration depicts the effects of the horrors of World War I, questions the norms of patriarchal society, claims that the war was unjustified, and argues that whereas society was supposed to protect its

citizens, the war was a wholesale sacrifice of its young men for the benefit of the few.

Seeman's aspects of alienation manifest in *Regeneration* in various ways. Mainly, the powerlessness of men and women caught in the war and the society that fuels it dominates the narrative, and this aspects manifests in particular through Rivers's hypothesis that war neurosis is tied with powerlessness. Meaninglessness is tied to powerlessness in that the objectives and methods of the war have been obscured, and the characters cannot identify with the justifications for the war as propagated by politicians and commanders. In terms of questioning existing norms regarding masculinity, normlessness also plays a pivotal role in the novel, specifically as men are emasculated by their experiences in the trenches and at Craiglockhart. Social isolation in terms of class and the civilian/soldier distinction also plays a role, often underlining patients' critique of masculine norms and the ultimate sacrifice asked of the soldiers by a seemingly indifferent society. Since powerlessness seems to initiate war neurosis and meaninglessness is constantly accentuated (in particular in Sassoon's criticism of the war, as he is the central character), these two aspects of Seeman's conception of alienation are central to the novel.

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