Contemporary British fiction

edited by Richard Lane, Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew.

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General Introduction: Contemporary British Fiction

Rod Mengham

It is one of the central paradoxes of contemporary British fiction that much of it - much of the best of it - is concerned with other times and other places. During the last thirty years, the period covered by the essays in this book, the contemporary has been linked to a sense of endless change, to the rapid turnover of novelties, to the commodification of artistic experiment; attitudes to the past have been influenced by marketing, by a consumer demand for the retro, by an investment in history reproducible as style. British fiction has reflected this behaviour as mechanically as any other art form, but it has also recovered a quite different sense of direction, an alternative vocation, which is that of the historical novel. Perhaps rather surprisingly, the history of Britain and of the peoples inhabiting it, the temporal and spatial relationships that determine the margins of Britishness, have all been questioned and amended by the more ambitious fictional projects of a time in which the scale of history itself has been revised. The millennial shadow set a formal limit on an era whose own history had been dominated by political narratives that were either exhausted or under threat. Fiction concerned itself with the attempt to understand the individual's relationship to these narratives, with the extent to which individual experience confirmed or denied their meanings.

The fiction of Graham Swift and A. L. Kennedy, as read by Tamás Bényei and Philip Tew respectively, revolves constantly around the issues of historical meaning. Swift's writing construes the formation of the subject in terms of a process of malformation, of damage incurred by the failure to negotiate the gap between the movement of history and the rhythms of ordinary lives. Failing to participate, to

share in the collective agency that gives a pattern and meaning to events, the subject experiences the public world in terms of submission to control, more often than not of an economic variety, limiting human relationships to the scope of business agreements (as in Swift's novel The Sweet Shop Owner). For A. L. Kennedy, the separation of public and private does not protect individuals from the vicissitudes of history, but renders them invisible, without presence or effect in the world of social meanings; the characters in her stories arrive at an awareness that Bényei ascribes to the protagonist of Swift's Shuttlecock, a numbing realization of the emptiness of existence, of their utter dislocation from any means of interpreting their own lives and making them cohere. This rerouting of significance, away from the characters that provide a focus for reading, is made even more striking by appearing in narratives that take the form of a quest, as many of Kennedy's do. The suspicion that meaning follows a trajectory quite different from that being traced by the characters themselves is endemic to Kennedy's fiction; it is also an organizing characteristic of the elaborate compositions of Kazuo Ishiguro, explored in this volume by Mark Wormald.

Ishiguro concentrates on British history only rarely, but in his writing he probes patiently the action of memory that has both private and public dimensions. Personal memory intersects obliquely but powerfully with some of the most turbulent currents of twentiethcentury politics; Wormald considers the centrality of artists in Ishiguro's fictional world, figures whose work neighbours on moments of ideological crisis, sometimes encapsulating an historical episode, sometimes contributing to the form it takes. The history recorded by this fiction is mediated by distance, revised by a sensibility that is always in the process of selecting, framing, rearranging. This editing is exemplified in the points of view of several of Ishiguro's protagonists, but its manipulations and displacements are kept at a suitable distance, made the objects of enquiry in a narrative structure that engages its readers in a critique of the artistic imagination.

The relations between author, reader and character are controlled very subtly in Ishiguro's prose - their situations are parallel but demarcated by rational contemplation. This is far from being the case in Iain Sinclair's fiction, where all three are drawn inexorably into the same energy field. For Sinclair, history assails the present, but the pressure it exerts is always felt in particular places. Writing provides a means of investigating the constructions that have been placed, literally and metaphorically, on the urban landscape of past and present London. The most influential and widely disseminated versions of that history are rarely the most valuable or revealing, and

the unequal relationship between truth and power in the fashioning of rival versions is what motivates the urgency and momentum of Sinclair's investigations. His fiction searches for, and discloses, the hidden potency of ignored or suppressed or displaced accounts of what has determined the present contours of urban life; it takes the form of a quest, a project of decoding, in which every clue brings closer the realization that the past has scripted the present. The author's purpose is to sustain the work already begun by others, to articulate a collaborative project that echoes with reminders of other texts.

Will Self's predominantly urban enquiries cover much of the same ground, physically and conceptually. In 'The North London Book of the Dead' (1996) and How the Dead Live (2000), the dead live side by side with the living, in a different part of London. Self's enthusiastically literal rendering of the idea that the past and the present are mutually permeating gives a peculiar immediacy to the historical dimension by mapping it onto physical space. The extension of the conceit is typical of a writer for whom the secret structures of contemporary culture must be teased into view by a method of literary estrangement. As Liorah Golomb shows, this can be achieved by the use of shock tactics like Kafka's, or by slowly acclimatizing the reader to a radically revised view of commonly held values and relationships. Fiction is a laboratory in which various experiments with consciousness are conducted with great deliberateness and precision.

For both Self and Sinclair, London lives are shadowed by an alternative order of experience. It requires literary cunning to decipher the relevant connections in Self's fiction, while in Sinclair's work, the debt owed to history triggers anxiety in author, character and reader alike. The presence of the past is registered through an encounter with revenants, for whom writing functions almost as a form of invocation. According to John Brannigan, commenting on Pat Barker's work, this textual equivalent of the experience of déjà vu is a structural principle of much twentieth-century writing; 'haunting', he says, 'is a constituent element of modernity.' Barker's fascination with the visitation of doubles should be seen as a reflection of the century's preoccupation with dissociated sensibility, with the dividing and fragmenting of selves conditioned by the disciplinary structures of modern society. The haunted self embodies a project of denial: it suggests how the construction of civic identity involves the repression of certain aspects of the self, the disavowal of memories that will nonetheless reassert themselves. These are ghosts that can never be exorcized or ignored, since the alternative to being haunted is to deny the history of one's own being. Both Barker and Swift allow their work to be

haunted by the memory of historical upheavals; for Barker, the First World War. for Swift, the Second. History figures in both oeuvres largely as trauma that needs to be acknowledged and worked through.

The use of psychological models to account for the pattern and significance of historical events is particularly well suited to the structure of the post-nineteenth-century novel, resulting in the especially compelling fictions of crisis and trauma that characterize the work of Barker, Swift, Ishiguro and Caryl Phillips. An alternative template, in which the organizing tensions of the writing are still primarily psychological in their mode of operation, comes from the cultural historical version of Oedipal conflict. The theory of the anxiety of influence, whereby contemporary writers work always in the shadow of, and with the ambition of superseding, their most influential forebears, is used by James Diedrick to examine the novels of Martin Amis. In Amis's case, the usually symbolic relationship with a literary father-figure is inescapably literal, and family rivalry is partly what lies behind the younger Amis's inclination towards the comedy of the grotesque, as opposed to Kingsley Amis's preference for the techniques of comic romance. According to Diedrick, every aspect of Amis's writing shows the far-reaching effects of this conflict. But despite its intensity, the complex ritual of dependence, antagonism and succession at the centre of Amis's work is far from being unique. Steve Baker has identified a similar dynamic operating in the career of Salman Rushdie, and in fact his essay begins with a reminder of the competitive nature of the relationship between Rushdie and Amis: friends whose every interaction seems to stem from and return to professional rivalry. Their brief dialogue provides an anecdotal index for the pervasiveness of this concept of literary and cultural history as a 'field of endless competitive conflict'.

For both Rushdie and Angela Carter, writing proceeds by contradiction: through conflict with, and revision of, the cultural dominants. Rushdie shares with Amis a tendency to combat the power of charismatic forefathers, but he also shares with Carter the impulse to challenge traditional forms and methods of narration. While the two male authors seem locked into desperate struggle with other male antagonists, Carter's revisionism has a much less aggressive focus, although its scope is potentially extremely wide; as Robert Eaglestone explains, 'she reworks and repatterns the culture of (mainly) the European past in all its forms'. If there is a mêlée of styles and motifs and mythographic traditions in Carter's work, its eclecticism is suggestive of a freely ranging authorial imagination that is less restricted than the narratorial points of view in Rushdie's fiction, which returns

repeatedly to the problem of adjudicating between radically different cultural traditions. If Carter's resources are all European, she can draw on them more variously than Rushdie's author-surrogates, who must concentrate to a degree on the points of overlap between European and Eastern cultures, and specifically between English, Indian and Pakistani variants.

Rushdie's work epitomizes the issues of cultural hybridity, which have had a decisive importance in British fiction in the two decades since publication of Midnight's Children in 1981. It is the largest single preoccupation of the essays in this volume, affecting several which have been placed in different categories, according to their proportional emphases. Although the sections into which this book is divided are valuable for organization and useful for identifying certain key themes, they should not be regarded as an attempt at a final categorization of the authors or texts concerned. In almost every case, individual chapters could easily have been included in more than one of the chosen sections. The position in which we have left each chapter is intended to alert the reader to issues central both to the understanding of the individual works and to the ways in which they have helped to compose a post-1979 sensibility. Jeanette Winterson's novels form a crossing-place for different strains in the British cultural tradition, unsettling the familiar patterns of disempowerment by mixing male and female stereotypes and reconfiguring the historical landscapes of class and religion. They achieve this through a blend of fantasy and realism, implicating history in the procedures of fiction, and vice versa. Their objective is summarized by Kim Middleton Meyer as an attempt to generate a culturally hybridized identity: 'each novel grapples with the task of narrating multiplicity'.

For Hanif Kureishi, Caryl Phillips and Zadie Smith, multiple identities could only ever be ambiguated in the British context by an awareness of the history of immigration, which gives a special urgency to their examinations of the grounds for cultural hybridity. Kureishi's personal experience of life in the Pakistani immigrant community has sharpened his focus on the parameters of national identity. Tony Ilona argues that Kureishi presses against both essentialist and relationist conceptions of nationality: against the assertion of a set of traits that are counted as intrinsically British, as well as against the assumption that an ensemble of differences from Britishness will mark it out by default. His novels and screenplays work to unfix the conventional proofs of belonging, and hence the criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

Brad Buchanan's essay on Caryl Phillips historicizes the evolution of hybridity as a social category. He points out that the reasons hybridity

was regarded as catastrophic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are identical to the advantages it offers now as a means of destabilizing racial hierarchies. However, he is also cautious about the degree to which hybridity could ever be realized in practice, and sees its allure chiefly in terms of its marketability as an aspiration. For post-colonial societies emerging from the historical domination of British values, the project of grafting an emergent national culture onto the residue of empire may be little more than an aesthetic gesturing, a distraction from the underlying process of Americanization.

Dominic Head develops the analysis in his discussion of Zadie Smith. He periodizes the changing fortunes of the notion of multiculturalism according to the altered conditions of successive generations of migrants. What was once figured as an imperilled, defensive position does not correspond to the situation of a younger generation for whom the dislocating of culture from geography has not been a defining issue. If multiculturalism once meant creeping assimilation, a form of gradual homogenization in which the pressure came from one direction only, it can now be grasped as an opportunity to activate the contradictions in British culture as a whole. Fiction provides a model for the coincidence of traditions, for the mutual adaptation of different points of view; the construction of narrative in which various characters share in what Head refers to as 'the joint construction of their history' allows the reader to imagine the grounds for a genuinely polyvocal culture.

The risk, of course, is that fiction will provide a merely spectacular version of purposeful dissidence. Drew Milne considers the likelihood of this outcome in his essay comparing the fictional languages of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh. The latter's work is in danger of commodifying protest against social conditions in a way that actually obscures the necessity for political analysis. Kelman's scrupulous attention to the spoken language of a particular locale (Glasgow) ties the justification of protest down to a specific historical moment in a specific place. The friction between spoken and written, which theory is so fond of generalizing, needs historical content in order to serve any purpose that could not be achieved equally well by other discourses and other media. That content will mean different things to different audiences, particularly Scottish and English; Kelman's work makes it impossible to posit an universal subject at the point of reception of the work; his readers are unavoidably the products of the specific histories that the business of reading his texts will evoke.

In this connection, it is no coincidence that at least four of the essays in this volume include either explicit or implicit references to Walter Benjamin's meditation on the relations between text and audience in his essay 'The Storyteller'. Richard Lane uses Benjamin's distinction between the situations of storyteller and novelist to explore the organizing tensions of Jim Crace's work. The storyteller operates from within a knowable community, speaking on its behalf and addressing it in familiar terms; the novelist works in isolation, cut off from his audience, and the exchange between them is conducted in silence. Contemporary British fiction, in its most ambitious varieties, re-engages with history in a way that amalgamates the methods and modes of address of both novelist and storyteller. It draws on the resources of literary modernism, on the technical experiments developed by a tradition of writing from the margins of the dominant culture, but uses them to present an array of different constituencies, to bring together in one place fragments of the history of various communities, and to give them voice; it is this articulation of a 'participative generation of history', as Dominic Head describes it, which is the 'narrative lifeblood of all post-colonial futures'.

Part I

Myth and History

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Part I Introduction

After 1979 Britain seemed tentatively aware that a new phase of history might well have begun, which if acknowledged, separated it from the earlier post-war period. A new generation of writers, responding to their literary antecedents, developed a newly focused literary consciousness. This was not simply a matter of reflecting historical events or trends. In politics, the reality and myth of Margaret Thatcher and an attendant concept of history were dominant. The themes of myth and history long considered by literature acquired a currency in the public sphere. Novelists responded to both the contemporaneous political domain and their literary predecessors. The place of history in our everyday lives, its literary recovery and the question of its status recur in a variety of contemporary British fictional texts.

The following chapters consider what might be regarded as a new phase of the historical novel. The writers selected are part of a wider literary commitment to reworking the past as fiction. The novels and other texts featured in this section consider the creation of myth within a perspective framed almost entirely by recognizable everyday events.

Jim Crace's fiction is typical in this respect. In Quarantine the culturally resonant contexts of Christ's experience in the desert are stripped of religious significance and made prosaic. In another work, Signals of Distress, Crace creates a setting where slavery and its trade in human life serve as a moral backdrop to a very human story of sexual desire and temptation. The effect of Crace's almost lyrical prose is determined both by his use of repetition and by his constant undermining of the parabolic force of narrative. History in

contemporary fiction reaches for an extended sense of its interpretative possibilities (in myth, and in the placing of signification or meaning), drawing themes from the present, such as sexual orientation and gender that Pat Barker, for example, makes central to the social reading of war and its effects in the Regeneration trilogy.

Graham Swift addresses the act of reading history when Thatcher's state appears to distort the communal values prized by an older generation. For many of this new generation of writers the perceived crisis of values in the present, so publicly declared by successive Conservative administrations, helped define their need for retrieving the human, the domestic and social patterns of the past. Waterland meanders through a social history of family intrigue and illicit sexuality in an attempt to search for some sense of personal identity in a world of flux, as fluid, protean and elusive as the water and eels flowing through the fens of its settings.

Iain Sinclair weaves a mythopoetic account of the rhythms of modern urban life to reveal that the present is integrated into our sense of an almost magical, often turbulent past. Crime, politics, struggle and the mundane lives of ordinary people converge in an incantatory and yet elusive cartography of urban existence. In buildings, hidden links are suggested, a mapping of a symbolic order of history. There is something innately transitional in this sense of history. As Bergson reminds us in *Creative Evolution*: 'Change is far more radical than we are at first inclined to suppose.' So is history in the eyes of these novelists. Throughout contemporary fiction the adjacency of past and present becomes an aesthetic dynamic, a motive force for narrative, self-identifications and cultural models in a changing society. History is both interrogated and becomes interrogative.

Note

1 Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell, (London: Macmillan, 1954), p. 1.

1 Pat Barker's Regeneration Trilogy: History and the Hauntological Imagination

John Brannigan

Only the conscious horror of destruction creates the correct relationship with the dead: unity with them because we, like them, are the victims of the same condition and the same disappointed hope.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment

In a footnote to his essay 'The Uncanny', Freud offers an anecdote of his own encounter with the deceptive elision of the real and the imagined, of the living and the dead, which might illustrate the experience of the uncanny:

I was sitting alone in my wagon-lit compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. ¹

Freud insists that this incident did not *frighten* him, but served merely to register his failure to recognize his own image. The anecdote is offered in the context of a distinction between 'primitive' beliefs in the return of the dead, or the power to translate thoughts and wishes into

reality, and the 'modern' incredulity to such superstition and myth. Freud's lack of fear, confronted with the ghostly reflection of himself, certifies his modernity, his rational distrust of 'animistic beliefs'. There is some room for doubt in Freud's mind, however. Is it not possible, he asks, that his dislike of his double 'was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the "double" to be something uncanny?'

Freud's concern is that the archaic might seep into the modern, that the boundaries between primitive superstition and modern rationality are more permeable than he imagines. He insists that 'anyone who has completely and finally rid himself of animistic beliefs will be insensible to this type of the uncanny', and yet, for a moment, disoriented by the jolt of the train, perhaps, Freud too has seen the fiction of another being, 'an elderly gentleman'. The 'double', experienced as a kind of ghostly apparition, threatens to undermine the teleological distinction between superstition and rationality, primitive and civilized, reality and fiction, and so, as Avery Gordon argues, it is inevitable that Freud 'simply refutes the reality of haunting by treating it as a matter of lingering superstition'.2 The primitive belief in the 'uncanny' or ghostly appearance of the double, for Freud then, is the anachronistic trace of a different mode of knowing, a different way of seeing the

world, which he experiences, if only briefly.

Freud's anecdote recounts an experience which recurs consistently in the novels of Pat Barker. Barker's characters, from Union Street (1982) to Border Crossing (2001), frequently see themselves in others, mistake their own image for others, encounter the ghosts of past lives, experience visions of ghostly visitations, and are haunted by the uncanny doubling of time and space. In the Regeneration trilogy (1991-5), in particular, these experiences of the uncanny occur in the context of a confrontation between the modern rationalism of psychoanalysis and the disorienting, traumatizing effects of war. Regeneration (1991) constructs a fictional account of the treatment of the poet, Siegfried Sassoon, by the anthropologist and psychoanalvst, W. H. R. Rivers. Sassoon is sent to Rivers to be 'cured', because of his supposedly irrational protest against the war. Rivers is certain that Sassoon's protest is a great deal more rational than the war, but it is nevertheless his duty to restore Sassoon to psychological fitness so that he can return to the front. The Eye in the Door (1993) takes up the story of a fictional patient of Rivers, Billy Prior, who develops a dangerous split in his psychic life, which magnifies Freud's experience of his 'double' to 'Jekyll and Hyde' proportions. The final volume of the trilogy, The Ghost Road (1995), shifts between Prior's account of his fateful return to the war in France, and Rivers's own psychological crisis, as he wrestles with his own demons and ghosts. Barker's historiographic trilogy, I will argue in this essay, examines figures of psychic disturbance - doubling, hallucinations, ghosts - as signs of crisis in scientific (or more accurately psychoanalytic) modes of knowledge. Moreover, Barker's novels suggest that haunting - or what I will call here the hauntological, the logic of haunted being - is a constituent element of modernity.

Like Freud. Rivers seems certain that the ghosts who haunt his patients are not 'real', but he is nevertheless compelled to acknowledge that his patients are haunted. Haunting, in this sense, as Gordon argues, 'describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with takenfor-granted realities'. Sassoon in Regeneration sees corpses lying all around the streets of London,4 and in Craiglockhart hospital he wakes to find the ghosts of dead soldiers in his room. 5 Burns, another of Rivers's patients in the same novel, continually relives the smells and tastes of finding his nose and mouth filled with the decomposing flesh of a German corpse. So, too, in The Ghost Road, Wansbeck is visited in hospital by the ghost of the German prisoner he murdered, who becomes, visibly and olfactorily, more and more decomposed with every visit. Prior in The Eye in the Door becomes his own ghost, by splitting into two opposing personalities, one of whom, as Prior's demonic alter ego, commits the betrayals and deceptions which the 'real' Prior finds unpalatable. Prior's demon even visits Rivers, where he demonstrates, by his oblivion to pain, that he has a physiological reality distinct from his double. 8 Rivers is left in no doubt of the 'reality' of Prior's demonic other, which is to say that he knows that Prior is not just pretending, but lives, remembers, feels and thinks differently from his alter ego. These examples from the novels are all manifestations of things which are verifiably 'not there', and yet which exercise a disturbing, sometimes dangerous, effect on Rivers's patients.

Rivers responds to these ghostly manifestations with an impressive array of psychoanalytic and rational explanations. Sassoon's ghosts are simple - his guilt for being absent from the front takes the form of hallucinated images of his dead comrades come to beckon him to return. Wansbeck's apparitions perform the same function, in exercising his feelings of guilt and regret. In both these cases, ghosts appear as the visible forms of feelings which both Sassoon and Wansbeck think they should have, or indeed desire to have. Burns is a more difficult case, and Rivers entertains the simple notion that Burns's experience of finding his mouth and nostrils filled with rotting human

flesh might just be so disgusting and vile to warrant his traumatic recurrences of nausea, and the 'complete disintegration of personality' which such recurrences have produced. However, when Burns begins to put his experience into perspective, the first stage of recovery, Rivers finds that 'his own sense of the horror of the event seemed actually to have increased'. A persistent theme of the trilogy is the effect that the war is having on Rivers, as the psychoanalyst who must encounter and make sense of the horrific experiences of his patients. Burns, like Sassoon, Prior, and others, serve to transform Rivers's sense of himself, and his conception of the war, science, psychology and modernity.

Prior's demonic double is, for Rivers, an all too transparent manifestation of the dissociation of self required under the disciplinary structures of modern society. Prior works for the intelligence services of the Ministry for Munitions, and finds himself tasked with destroying a group of anti-war protestors with whom he is already familiar from childhood friendships. While Prior works subtly to help the protestors, his demonic alter ego carries out the acts of subterfuge required to ensure their destruction. Rivers suggests, in other words, that Prior is generating his own monster, precisely to conduct the tasks he finds himself unable to do. Thus, his alter ego appears as a kind of exaggerated parody of an arch-villain, the self-conscious product of Prior's imagination, whom Prior even describes as his 'Hyde' figure.

Prior experiences the 'uncanny' effect of an alienated self, the substance of Freud's anecdote, in a violent, magnified form. But The Eye in the Door seems at the same time to represent continually the scene which Freud describes. When Prior is 'puzzled by something unfamiliar' in his office, he realizes 'that the change was in himself'. 10 Later, when his train enters a tunnel, Prior 'turned to face his doubled reflection in the window and thought he didn't like himself very much'. 11 And again, on a boat, Prior sees himself going up to a man and tapping him on the shoulder, 'and the face that turned towards him... was his own'. 12 Like Freud, Prior sees himself as an other, as an alien self, and constantly encounters himself as a stranger. Rivers finds that Prior invents this dissociated self, or rather, hypnotizes himself into a dissociated state, in order to escape from traumatic situations. The originary childhood scene, which Rivers helps Prior to remember, is of domestic violence, in which the child Prior was torn between obedience to and fear of his father and empathy with and fear for his mother. In order to resolve the conflict, Prior would sit on the staircase and hypnotize himself into the reflection on the glass of a barometer. 13 Prior's invented other is thus a kind of psychic safety valve, which enables him to cope with conflicting demands or situations.

Here again. Rivers solves the mysterious appearance of a psychic double, or a troublesome ghost, with skilful rational examination. Prior turns out not to have a monstrous alter ego, after all, just a rather mischievous coping mechanism. Prior is cured of his split personality and, in The Ghost Road, is sufficiently stable to return to the front line, where, with tragic but inevitable irony, he joins the ranks of the dead in one last senseless assault. Rivers, in the same novel, is forced to confront his own ghosts. He can explain the ghosts of his patients away, but his own return to haunt him. In Regeneration, in order to assuage Sassoon's anxieties about confessing to seeing apparitions, Rivers confesses to his own encounter with ghosts on an anthropological mission in the Melanesian islands. At a wake, at which the mourners await the sound of the spirits coming in canoes to collect the soul of the dead, Rivers hears not the paddles, which he has been told he might hear, but instead a sudden gust of 'whistling sounds':

Nobody was making those sounds, and yet we all heard them. You see. the rational explanation for that is that we'd allowed ourselves to be dragged into an experience of mass hypnosis, and I don't for a moment deny that that's possible. But what we'd been told to expect was the swish of paddles. Nobody'd said anything about whistling. That doesn't mean there isn't a rational explanation. Only I don't think that particular rational explanation fits all the facts. 14

In The Ghost Road, Rivers becomes obsessed by this scene, and the events surrounding it, and the novel concludes with Rivers being visited in hospital by the 'not in any way ghostly' apparition of Njiru, the witch doctor in Melanesia. 15 Rivers must distinguish between the irrational visions and healthy realities of his patients constantly and unequivocally. Yet his own experiences of the hauntological in Melanesia defy his attempts at rational explanation, and serve to disturb the stability of his distinctions between appearance and reality, illness and sanity, superstition and reason. If he must deal with the effects of his patients' haunted memories routinely, Rivers cannot finally dismiss the reality of ghosts either.

Barker's trilogy represents the crisis for modern rationality principally through conflicting modes of visibility and vocality. Rivers's patients suffer from a variety of speech impediments and hallucinations, which it is his duty to observe and cure. Rivers must teach his patients to see or to speak again, by encouraging them to put their repressed experiences into perspective, and to recover absent, traumatic memories through introspection. As Anne Whitehead argues, Regeneration shifts from 'a series of ghost stories, in which Rivers's patients are haunted by their pasts and by the recent dead, to a detective story', in which Rivers must uncover the missing fragments of memory which will enable his patients to see or speak clearly again. 16 In this sense, Rivers is cast as the agent of salvation for his patients, the medium through which they will achieve sanity and perspective. But, he is also perceived, chiefly in his treatments of Prior and Sassoon, as an agent of social discipline.

Regeneration begins with Sassoon being sent to Rivers for 'speaking out' against the war, and for seeing corpses in the streets of central London. Rivers 'can't pretend to be neutral', and must induce Sassoon to change his view. 17 Rivers concedes that Sassoon's protest against the war is far from irrational and, through his increasing despair at the severity of some of his patients' mental traumas, comes to share Sassoon's belief that 'Nothing justifies this'. 18 Rivers can explain away Sassoon's visions of corpses and ghosts. They are simply the return of his repressed feelings of horror and guilt. But Sassoon's protest provokes a crisis for Rivers in his conception of the function of psychoanalysis. Towards the end of Regeneration, Rivers has a nightmare, which fuses his recent experiences of observing Dr Yealland using electric shocks to 'cure' a patient's silence with his own influence on Sassoon's decision to return to the front. When he analyses the nightmare, he comes to recognize that both he and Yealland 'were both in the business of controlling people', and, more disturbingly, in silencing them:

Just as Yealland silenced the unconscious protest 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. 19

The image of an open mouth recurs throughout Barker's trilogy (and indeed many of her other novels), but has particular significance in Regeneration for notions of protest and control. Rivers's nightmare revolves around 'the tortured mouth' of Yealland's patient, and figures his treatment of Sassoon as 'uncomfortably like an oral rape'. 20 Rivers thus reconsiders his relationship with Sassoon, who has 'spoken out', and with Prior, who has been unable to speak, as a form of domination rather than healing. His methods may be 'infinitely more gentle' than Yealland's, but he has still functioned effectively as an instrument of control and authority over his patients.

If Regeneration is a novel about violence and protest, figured through tropes of speech and silence, The Eye in the Door, as its title suggests, is a novel about visibility as a mode of knowing. The novel's dominant image is the panopticon, the ideal architectural technology for correctional surveillance, which Foucault studies as a model of modern authority and control.²¹ The panopticon prison appears just briefly in the novel, when Prior visits an old friend who is incarcerated for plotting to kill Lloyd George.²² In the prison, Prior is disturbed by the 'eye' hole in the cell door, particularly as it reminds him of his traumatic experience of finding nothing of his dead comrade but an eyeball in a trench in France. The recovered eyeball (which Prior thinks of as a 'gob-stopper', thus prompting him to 'stop' his 'gob', to become silent) is the source of Prior's psychological breakdown in Regeneration. In The Eye in the Door, the 'eye' replaces the 'mouth' as the instrument of control and resistance.

Panopticism pervades the novel as a mode of social control. Prior is aware of the scrutinizing gaze of others from the beginning of the novel, when he considers self-consciously how he must look to passing strangers.²³ His suspicion that he is watched intensifies considerably in the prison, and thereafter the novel shows Prior encountering his own uncanny image repeatedly as the object of scrutiny. This develops into his extreme dissociated state, in which he lapses out of consciousness for hours at a time, during which his double conducts the tasks to which Prior remains blind. In this schema, Rivers is just one 'eye' in the surveillance net in which Prior is caught, observed and monitored constantly, not least by his demonic double. Rivers, as a psychoanalyst, must subject Prior to observation and objectification, and so becomes part of the disciplinary apparatus which defines and controls Prior.

The trouble for Rivers is that Prior is capable of subjecting him to the same objective gaze. Rivers reveals to Prior during one of their sessions that he has no visual memory after the age of five, which is too tempting a 'blind spot' in Rivers's psyche for Prior to leave unexamined. Rivers and Prior change places, and Prior probes Rivers's memory of a childhood experience in which something so terrible happened that his mind 'suppressed not just the one memory, but the capacity to remember things visually at all'.24 Prior's diagnosis is emphatic, and troubles Rivers afterwards: 'Whatever it was, you blinded yourself so you wouldn't have to go on seeing it ... You put your mind's eye out.'25 Rivers is sufficiently self-conscious to realize that he has his own psychological problems and repressed memories,

and hallucinations.

Neither Rivers's ghostly visions nor his paralytic stammer undermine his authority as a psychoanalyst. In fact, Rivers's vulnerability appears to earn him greater credit with Prior. The return of Rivers's spectres and repressed memories illustrates instead the inseparability of the epicritic and the protopathic or, to put it another way, it shows that the rational is thoroughly infiltrated by the irrational. This is an argument which Michel de Certeau makes in relation to haunting more generally:

There is an 'uncanniness' about this past that a present occupant has expelled (or thinks it has) in an effort to take its place. The dead haunt the living...[Any] autonomous order is founded upon what it eliminates; it produces a 'residue' condemned to be forgotten. But what was excluded re-infiltrates the place of its origin - now the present's 'clean' place. It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present's feeling of being 'at home' into an illusion - this 'wild', this 'obscene', this 'filth', this 'resistance' of 'superstition' - within the walls of the residence, and, behind the back of the owner (the ego), or over its objections, it inscribes there the law of the other.26

De Certeau here counters Freud's notion that the modern rational mind can 'rid himself' of primitive beliefs in the ghostly and the uncanny, and argues that the present is perpetually haunted by the dead. In psychoanalytic terms, de Certeau seems to be addressing the return of the repressed, but he is also implicitly critiquing the conceit of psychoanalysis that it can make the ghosts go away. If, as de Certeau argues, haunting is the figurative return of the 'residue' or excluded others of the past to the 'present occupants', then the attempt to exorcize these ghosts is merely an attempt to prolong the repression of voices of protest or difference. Rivers recognizes that this might be the case when he worries about whether he has, in 'curing' his patients, merely silenced their intuitive expressions of protest.

The return of the dead to haunt the living, whether in the form of ghostly apparitions or uncanny experiences, functions to unsettle the conceit of the present. This appears to be an important recognition in Barker's trilogy. 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. The dead lying on the battlefields of France are material testimony to the gaps and contradictions in such narratives, and hence, they are witnessed by Rivers's patients in the trilogy as the spectres haunting Europe. The uncanny experiences represented in the Regeneration trilogy, then, are disturbing not just in their meanings for scientific and psychoanalytic claims to knowledge, but also in their implications for the chrono-and geo-politics of modernity.

Barker represents this crisis in European modernity through tropes of displacement and temporal disjunction. Throughout the trilogy, everywhere - the hospital corridors of Craiglockhart, the landings of a prison, the hollows of an urban waste-land, the labyrinthine streets of a city – comes to resemble the topographical features of the trench or no-man's land. The streets of London and the fields around Craiglockhart seem to resemble the battlefields of France, so that Rivers's patients sometimes behave, mentally and physiologically, as if they are still at the front. They listen for the whine of incoming shells, and see the corpses of their comrades lying all around them. Rivers experiences his own version of this, when his memories of life with a 'primitive' tribe in Melanesia become confused with his waking life in England. Here, the geographical 'otherness' of Melanesia refuses to remain in its place - it continually appears to haunt and disrupt Rivers's sense of 'home'.

Time, too, is continually disrupted in Barker's trilogy. The very notion of anamnesis, as Freud explained it in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', involves a radical disturbance in the patient's sense of time: 'He is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see,