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## *Analogy in Regeneration*

About a quarter of the way through Pat Barker's *Regeneration*, the psychotherapist William H.R. Rivers has a disturbing dream. When he has awakened from it, Rivers—not surprisingly—analyzes it. In the dream, Rivers saw himself when, as a much younger man, he conducted a series of experiments on nerve regeneration with fellow-neurologist Henry Head. Their work (one of Barker's many borrowings from "real" life) involved the severing of a nerve in Head's forearm and the close observation of the regenerative process. The dream in the novel has been "factual" enough, except for Head's saying to Rivers "Why don't you try it?" and then slicing Rivers' arm. Eventually, Rivers arrives at an interpretation of that part of the dream. He makes a quite decent analogy between the work he had done with Head and the work he does at Craiglockhart military hospital. Central to his analogy is his teaching his Craiglockhart patients to acknowledge fear and repression. That is what he imagines the "Head" of his dream is urging him to "try" (45-8). However, he misses the truly central aspect: *i.e.*, Rivers does not go to war; he does not "try" that portion of his patients' lives that causes the trauma from which they suffer. He is accurate in the dimension of the dream that he has perceived, but he has not seen the whole analogy. This episode reveals much of Barker's theme, but, more than that, it also reveals much of her method, for in this novel analogies are a key method to understanding.

The plot of this novel mainly retains historical reality. The first of a trilogy (of which the last, *The Ghost Road*, would win a Booker Prize), *Regeneration* looks in on Rivers and Craiglockhart just as Siegfried Sassoon has been sent there, in the summer of 1917, following the issuance of his

famous “Declaration,” in which Sassoon, a much-decorated, heroic British officer, in protest against a war he saw as being “deliberately prolonged” by those with the power to end it, declared that he would “no longer be a party” to it. It is Rivers’ job to bring about psychotherapeutic “cures” in his patients; when they are “cured,” they are not generally released to civilian life but returned to battle. Sassoon becomes his patient. The novel focuses primarily upon Rivers and generally follows him throughout his arduous duties. Only occasionally, and briefly, are the thoughts of other characters revealed, while those of Rivers are dwelt upon at some length and in rather considerable detail. The main crisis is his, and it too is borrowed from real life. The historical Dr. Rivers,<sup>1</sup> in *Conflict and Dream*, spoke of a “fear” that bothered him when at Craiglockhart: “the situation that would arise if my task of converting a patient from his ‘pacifist errors’ to the conventional attitude should have as its result my own conversion to his point of view” (168).<sup>2</sup> The novel’s Rivers endures the same trial, more-or-less overcomes it, and at the end, oversees the return of Sassoon to active duty.

Not surprisingly, for this is a novel about persons involved in psychoanalytic processes, *Regeneration* is mostly made up of scenes between two characters. Most of these are “sessions” between Rivers and his various patients, but, session or not, by far the greater part of the novel is composed of these two-party encounters. Always at the center is the Rivers-Sassoon relationship, for it is not only the one that raises the main questions that generate and sustain the plot—Will Rivers succeed in “curing” Sassoon? Will Sassoon be returned to duty? Will he change the views he expressed in the “Declaration”?—but also the relationship that is crucial to theme, for it is the encounter that causes the fictional Rivers to ponder the same question confronted by the real Rivers regarding “conversion” of himself or the patient. While that pairing occupies the narrative and thematic center, practically every other two-party encounter in Barker’s novel relates to it in some crucial way. Constantly, by analogy, the main issues between Rivers and Sassoon are emphasized, and clarified, and amplified by the issues that connect and/or divide the other pairs.

The relationship between Rivers and Sassoon is, naturally, that between therapist and patient, as well as between captain and second lieutenant. Symbolically, it grows into a confrontation, but also a collaboration, between father and son. Not so clearly at first, but more obviously with time, it is a “win-lose” relationship: one must triumph and the other give in. Finally, it becomes a rewarding if somewhat uneasy friendship in

which each becomes, to some extent, the other's conscience. If we look first at the various ways in which this relationship plays out, we can then go on to see how several of the others enrich it by reflecting and amplifying it.

Rivers' commitment, in the early stages of the novel, is firm. His responsibility, as he sees it, is to the government and the people of Great Britain, in whose army he serves. As he will say much later in the novel, to Ruth Head, the novel-writing wife of Henry Head with whom Rivers had worked on nerve regeneration: "I wear the uniform, I take the pay, I *do the job*. I'm not going to apologize for that." (164)<sup>3</sup> Consequently, he also feels a commitment to the war effort. That being the case, his responsibility to his patients is to aid them in overcoming whatever particular "war neurosis" has incapacitated each of them, but mainly so that each can be made sufficiently fit to be returned to full duty. This obligation creates a considerably more ambivalent therapist/patient relationship than would be the case under more normal circumstances, and Rivers is far too perceptive (and too much an ironist) not to be aware of this ambivalence, which—up to the arrival of Sassoon, at least—he has mainly succeeded in accepting. However, Sassoon represents, as Rivers, by mid-treatment, will acknowledge, "Not an easy case.... Not in the usual sense a case at all" (118). What makes his not a "case" is that what got him to Craiglockhart is his "Declaration." One may disagree with the principles and/or the facts that he cites in that document, but it hardly seems the work of anyone incapacitated by any kind of neurosis. It is rationally argued, perfectly coherent, and quite cogent. The War Board that sent him to Craiglockhart, partly at the urging of Sassoon's "friend" Robert Graves had perhaps no choices beyond sending him for treatment or recommending a court-martial. In sending him to the hospital, the board left Rivers no good choices either; he must now treat a patient whose "illness" is a rhetorically elegant protest. True, Sassoon had also had episodes of nightmares and apparent hallucinations, but so did thousands of soldiers who had undergone his experience. The real-life Sassoon was well aware of the illogic of his situation. As he recalls in *Seigfried's Journey*:

...the Under-Secretary for War had told the House of Commons that I was suffering from a nervous breakdown, unavoidably ignoring the fact that people in such a condition don't usually do things requiring moral courage. (56-7)

Rivers is cognizant of this anomaly from the start. In his first interview with Sassoon, he makes it clear: "...I don't even think you've got a war neurosis...You seem to have a very powerful *anti-war* neurosis" (15). After they've shared a laugh over this, Rivers makes the rest of his opinion no less clear: "You realize, don't you, that it's my duty to... to try to change that? I can't pretend to be neutral" (15; ellipsis in text).

From the beginning then, this is an unusual therapist/patient relationship. In this instance, Rivers must not so much bring about a recognition by a "patient" of those forces unconsciously restraining his normal capabilities; he must instead talk someone out of a consciously adopted philosophical (and political) position. A third party, Rivers' colleague Brock, raises this oddity in a conference of all Craiglockhart's medical officers. Brock wants to know, regarding Sassoon, whether there is not "a case for leaving him alone." Rivers responds that there is no such case: "He's a mentally and physically healthy man. It's *his* duty to go back, and it's *my* duty to see he does" (73). The position Sassoon has adopted, Rivers contends, is influenced by emotion and is one he holds inconsistently, thus creating "all the more reason to get him to *argue* the position." When Brock wonders aloud how this will be done, Rivers responds, "*Rationally*" (74). Before long, Sassoon has recognized this as well. After a brief while at the hospital, he comes to think that he has "given in, lapsed," that he has "let himself be pacified." He is being won over, he fears, just "[a]s Rivers had meant him to be" (114). It is precisely this wrench in the ordinary therapeutic process that gives Barker's novel much of its drama, as it shifts the dilemma from Sassoon to Rivers. Conscientious and self-aware, Rivers knows that he has had "to express views he was no longer sure he held." Such breakdowns as he treats are not, he knows, the result of any "innate weakness" in the men, but of the war itself (115). He has "survived partly by suppressing" this awareness. But now the presence of Sassoon makes "the justifiability of the war a matter for constant, open debate," and that suppression has become "no longer possible" (116).

While Rivers remains determined to "get Siegfried to give in," (118) he also comes to like him and to respect him "too much to manipulate him" (119). Their interaction leads each to recall his own father. It is not surprising that their relationship, even were there not the difference in their respective ages, would take on aspects of father-and-son; the psychotherapeutic situation is often "parental," both in its demands and in its potential for nurturing. But father-son issues surround these two even

more than might be expected. Sassoon is in several ways fatherless. His father was Jewish, but Siegfried was not brought up as a Jew, and he has had absolutely no encouragement to pursue his father's heritage. The elder Sassoon left the family when Siegfried was five years old, then died three years later. When he arrives at Craiglockhart, Sassoon feels sold out by his fatherland, and he is inclined to see older men as most responsible for that betrayal. Looking at all the elder citizens at Rivers' club, where he is a guest, Sassoon perceives "mingled admiration and apprehension" emanating from them. "Old men were often ambivalent about young men in uniform, and rightly so, when you considered how very ambivalent the young men felt about them" (113).

As we shall see shortly, this is a perception that will—more fully and deeply—occur later to Rivers. Meanwhile, Sassoon moves toward an awareness of the role that Rivers is occupying in his life. The night before Rivers is due to depart on a three-week leave, Sassoon has an hallucination (or a nightmare; it is not perfectly clear that he is awake) in which he is visited by a deceased comrade. Upon rising in the morning, he seeks Rivers, finds that he has already left, and feels a "sense of loss" (144). Looking into a mirror while he washes up, he recalls looking into a similar mirror when he was a five-year-old child, probably on the very day when "his father left home." Sassoon smiles, "amused at the link" he has made, then more soberly realizes "only now, faced with this second abandonment... how completely Rivers ha[s] come to take his father's place" (145).

Immediately following this scene, we see Rivers, now on leave from the hospital, pondering his own thoughts during a church service. Two icons arrest his wandering gaze: the crucifixion and a picture of Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac. These represent, for Rivers, "the two bloody bargains on which a civilization claims to be based." Yet it is Abraham's readiness to do in his son that represents, in Rivers' mind, *the* bargain:

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.

At this historical moment, however, Rivers feels that the bargain is being broken, since "old men, and women of all ages" are gathering to

sing hymns, while “[a]ll over northern France,” the would-be “inheritors” are dying (149). Rivers goes from the church to his brother’s home, where he recognizes some of the furniture as being from their childhood home, including a picture that hung “in his father’s study” (153). This item, remindful to the reader of Sassoon’s mirror, leads him to remember his father’s doing speech therapy with stammerers, including Charles Dodgson and the young Rivers himself, and to remember also various ways in which he had rebelled against his father’s authority (154-5). He realizes how complex and unending is the relationship of father and son, and that recently he has “thought more about his father than he’d done since he was a child.” The parallel does not escape him between his father’s working with stuttering patients and his doing the same at Craiglockhart.<sup>4</sup> But the parallel breaks down, Rivers also realizes, in his not having a son. Immediately that reminds him that an “unfinished letter to Siegfried” is on his desk, and he at once sits down to resume that letter (156).

The parental-filial nature of their relationship does not just occur to Rivers and Sassoon in private thoughts when they are apart; in the late stages of the novel, it is observable—not always positively—to both of them. The scene that sets the novel in the direction of resolution comes at the end of Part 3 (of four), in which Sassoon confides to Rivers—he has told no one else—that he intends to return to combat. He almost desperately seeks to know that Rivers is pleased at his decision, and as he asks him directly, he is “looking at Rivers with an extraordinary mixture of love and hostility” the way in which many a son in any culture or era has looked at his father, the way Sassoon earlier looked at old men in general, and the way, no doubt, in which Isaac looked at Abraham. Sassoon gets his wish: Rivers is pleased (190). Still later, however, they come to a sharp disagreement over whether a young homosexual friend of Graves’ ought to be treated for homosexuality, whether he is in need of being “cured” (204). As that chapter ends, Sassoon demands to know if he must be expected to “conform” in all areas of his life, even those in which conforming goes against his conscience. He insists that he cannot live like that, then adds: “*Nobody* should live like that.” He gets from Rivers a reply of the type that, at one time or another, perhaps every young man has heard—and resented hearing—from his father:

‘You spend far too much time tilting at windmills, Siegfried. In ways which do *you* a great deal of damage—which I happen to care about—and don’t do anybody else any good at all.’ He

hesitated, then said it anyway. 'It's time you grew up. Started living in the real world.' (205)

Throughout much of the foregoing, one must bear in mind that, while the Rivers-Sassoon pairing may have a powerful father-son component, it also has a strong dimension of "win-lose." Theirs is a zero-sum game. Given their initial goals (Rivers' to return this soldier to duty, Sassoon's to "no longer be a party" to an "evil and unjust" war), one of them can triumph only at the other's expense. Indeed, one might see theirs as a double win-lose match, since there is the danger for Sassoon that he will not only return to the front but will be dissuaded from his opposition to the war and for Rivers that he will fail at restoring Sassoon to duty and in the process be converted to Sassoon's anti-war view. That they are to some degree in competition is more-or-less acknowledged between them early on. When Rivers expresses the opinion that there is "nothing more despicable than using a man's private life to discredit his views," Sassoon's only partly joking rejoinder is "I thought discrediting my views was what you were about?" (55). Again, the psychoanalytic process is, by its nature, partly competitive. One recalls Freud's rationale for not undergoing analysis himself: he would be constantly "ahead" of any analyst. At times we see Rivers staying similarly "one up" on Sassoon, as when the latter attempts to guess what Graves has told Rivers about him: "What a fine upstanding man I was until I fell among pacifists. Isn't that right? [Bertrand] Russell used me. Russell wrote the Declaration." Rivers replies, "No, he didn't say that" (53). The one truly honest part of Rivers' reply is "that," if "that" be taken to mean Sassoon's final sentence. Graves did not accuse Russell of writing Sassoon's "Declaration," but as the reader has already seen, he did (21-23, especially 23) say to Rivers the rest of what Sassoon has guessed. Ruth Head later detects accurately how this aspect of the process is going when she insists to Rivers that Sassoon's return to combat ought to be by his own choice. Rivers insists "It *is* his choice," but Ruth merely smiles and shakes her head. (164). Shortly, we will look again at this win-lose motif in another context.

The most remarkable thing about Rivers and Sassoon in *Regeneration* is the manner in which each influences the other so much that each virtually becomes the other's conscience. This is first seen when Sassoon begins addressing remarks to Rivers when they are not together. After Sassoon has completed a round of golf with another patient, he contem-

plates a moment that took place on the course, when his opponent threatened him with a golf club:

He conjured Rivers up in his mind and asked, *What was that you were saying about 'safety'? Nothing more dangerous than playing golf with lunatics.* 'Lunatics' was a word Sassoon would never have dared use to Rivers' face, so it gave him an additional pleasure to yell it at his image. (85)

Rivers is similarly affected by his discussions with Sassoon, and eventually they have almost exchanged places, in regard to one's being searching and inquisitive and the other's being defensively reticent. In a later deliberate "provocation" of Rivers, Sassoon speaks of himself as being in a "loony-bin." When that gets no response, he observes that "things like this... happening to people" he knows makes it "quite difficult to go on... with the protest." When even this gets no comeback, he leans forward and prods, "*Wake up*, Rivers. I thought you'd pounce on that," to which Rivers can only reply wearily "I don't feel much like pouncing" (118).

In the novel's last ten pages, Rivers becomes convinced that his Craiglockhart experience has changed him. Actually, some change in him is first perceived by Ruth and Henry Head. When Henry points this out to him, Rivers recalls an analogous time in his life. On his way back from the Solomon Islands, he had engaged in a sort of values-clarification exercise with some islanders and come to the realization that he and they could hardly speak with any understanding about some cultural differences, as those differences are just too profound and too pervasive. The realization, he now tells Head, gave him a sense of "the most *amazing* freedom" (242). Once back in England, though, he found nothing had changed: "*You* know you're walking around with a mask on, and you desperately want to take it off and you can't because everybody else thinks it's your face" (242). Head, seeking to perceive the analogy, asks "And now?" And Rivers responds: " 'I think perhaps the patients've... have done for me what I couldn't do for myself.' He smiled. 'You see healing *does* go on, even if not in the expected direction' " (242; ellipsis in text). In the novel's last scene, Rivers is amused by the irony that he, in the "business of changing people, should himself have been changed and by somebody who was clearly unaware of having done it" (249).

Win-lose has been greatly complicated: Rivers wins and Sassoon loses, in that Sassoon does go back to war, thereby rendering the Declaration temporarily ineffective; but Sassoon is still opposed to the mindless continuation of the war, and so apparently is Rivers. Or at the very least great inroad has been made upon his conscience.

To this point, we have looked at how Barker manages the characters who are central to her plot and theme, and they constitute a clever piece of business by an inventive novelist. She pulls the reader into the story as an ally of Sassoon, who faces an obvious dilemma at the outset. Then, over the course of the following chapters, she eases us into the perspective of Rivers, and we become aware that his is a no less dramatic dilemma. Finally, the two principals complicate and complement each other's dilemmas, and all comes to a sad but inevitable conclusion. All this, however, is but the basis for Barker's inventiveness.

Barker has been quite faithful to historical fact. She has tinkered with minor details, particularly those that affect characterization. One small example: Sassoon informs us that when Wilfred Owen sought him out for the first time, he (Sassoon) was somewhat preoccupied, having just played thirty-six holes of golf (Sassoon, 58-9). In Barker's novel, Sassoon is a reluctant golfer; he has to be talked into playing by Anderson, a fellow-patient. In a relatively short novel, little details can make a great difference. Barker knows that too avid an interest in golf might make *her* Sassoon look more frivolous than the perfectly earnest character she wants. On the other hand, she just as often sticks to fact and makes it develop character for her. Frederic Bartlett, the real-life Rivers' student, friend, and colleague, recalls a mannerism of the good doctor's: "He would take off his steel rimmed spectacles and pass his hand over his eyes" (Slobodin, 73). No fewer than a half-dozen times, Barker uses this mannerism for her Rivers, and it is remarkable how well it works symbolically—the nearly exhausted Rivers is half-aware that his "vision" of the world is no longer as clear as it once was, and so forth. It is the kind of detail that Jonathan Pryce finds very useful in portraying Rivers in the Gillies MacKinnon film based on this novel. Pryce does not wear glasses in the film, but he frequently puts his hand to eyebrow or mouth, giving Rivers a symbolic "see-no-evil-speak-no-evil" demeanor, as well as bespeaking his vulnerability.

Barker is not writing history or biography, and the real test of her talent is how invention will supplement fact. She has to invent conversations, she must wholly invent characters' thoughts, and she creates much

of this novel's success by inventing supporting characters. The best of these is Billy Prior, another young officer suffering from war neurosis, particularly, when we first meet him, from mutism. He is a very different fellow from Sassoon, and his relationship with Rivers makes, accordingly, a contrastive analog to the other. Most visibly, Prior differs from Sassoon in class and education; he does not have the elegance, the delicacy, the careful manners of the polished and poetic (and older, more sophisticated) Sassoon. As we get to know him better, we find he differs as much in inherent temperament. Prior is "a little, spitting, sharp-boned alley cat," (49) who is "cuckoo-backed to the point where normal conversation [becomes] almost impossible," (65) and who has the "air of knowing the price of everything" (77)—recalling Oscar Wilde's definition of a "cynic." To be sure, these are all Rivers' perceptions of him. But at other times, he is revealed to us independent of Rivers. From his own thoughts, we learn that he makes a point of lying to Rivers at least once every session (87). When Rivers, in an exasperated moment, says to Prior concerning his earlier retreat into mutism, that it would be "nice" to take refuge now and then in silence, Prior hurls back a question: "What do you mean *would be*? You do it all the time" (133).

The waspishness of Prior makes a useful contrast to Sassoon. More than that, though, his interactions with Rivers make a productive analogy to those between Rivers and Sassoon. That psychotherapy is always somewhat adversarial—if not downright antagonistic—is underscored for us by the constant tensions between Prior and Rivers. Whereas Sassoon politely lets Rivers get away with any number of assertions that might have provoked a sharp response from one not so courteous, Prior is not nearly so gracious. Rivers does not hesitate from working on Sassoon's emotions, when he points out how "safe" he is at Craiglockhart. He goads Sassoon on that point: "You don't think you might find being safe while other people *die* rather difficult?" (36). Sassoon, although the question angers him, and although he has considerable hostility toward the war views of older men, does not flash back with such an observation as "It doesn't bother *you*." Again, when Rivers, in the same vein, contends that getting tearful over casualty lists is not the best way to show sensitivity to the situation in France (69-70), Sassoon does not demand to know what would be the best way. In either of these cases, it seems unlikely that Rivers would have escaped Prior's wrath as easily.

Most of the time, Prior is not quite rude to Rivers, but his candor threatens the boundary. After one of their early exchanges, Rivers ob-

serves, a bit impatiently, “You have to *win*, don’t you?” Undaunted, even though he is proving the case against himself, Prior issues his own observation-in-the-form-of-a-question: “You know, you do a wonderful imitation of a stuffed shirt. And you’re not like that at all, really, are you?” (66). At another point, he calls attention to Rivers’ stammer. He insists that he is “not being awkward,” but “genuinely interested” (97), and he is almost certainly truthful about this; Prior is not the type to disclaim “being awkward” when he is. But one cannot imagine Sassoon’s doing anything similar.

Before they have been dealing with each other for long, Rivers and Prior have both recognized the air of competitiveness enveloping their exchanges. Some time after Rivers’ accusation about Prior’s need to win, Prior insists that it is Rivers who has that compulsion. Rivers tries to be cooperative:

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

Prior smiled. ‘This may come as a shock, Dr. Rivers, but I had been *rather assuming* that we were not.’ (80)

The uncertainty concerning “sides” is only a little bit more prominent in their dealings than it is in those of Rivers and Sassoon, but the reader is made aware of this mainly through the blatancy of Prior.

Similarly, the parental relationship of Rivers to Sassoon (and others, as we shall see) is limned for us by an almost-but-not-quite identical link between Rivers and Prior. Billy is not without parents, literally at least, for we see them in the novel when each seeks out, separately, a meeting with Rivers. We quickly learn that Mr. Prior is as unsatisfactory a father to Billy as he is dissatisfied with Billy as a son. The elder Prior seems to resent his son’s being “ambitious” as much as he resents his not yet having achieved his ambitions. He sees Mrs. Prior as having “drilled” ambitions into her son (56), although young Prior himself will insist that his mother was over-sheltering because of his asthma. To each of them Rivers says “You must be... proud” of their son. Mrs. Prior answers instantly, “I am” (58). But Mr. Prior questions, “Must I? *I’m* not proud. He should’ve stuck with his own.” Bill would have, Mr. Prior asserts, “a damn sight more sympathy from me if he had a bullet up his arse” (57). Probably Mrs. Prior has the definitive word on “the trouble” between young Prior and his father: “...the block had to chip. He’s never been

able to accept that Billy was different" (58). It is clear, however, that he cannot accept similarities either.

Rivers' parental role, one of the novel's main motifs, is most dramatically demonstrated through Prior. Under hypnosis, Prior is led by Rivers to recall the incident that seems to have triggered his "breakdown" and his episode of mutism. While gathering the remains of comrades killed by a heavy-artillery shell, Prior finds himself holding in his hand an eyeball of one of them.<sup>5</sup> Upon awaking, Prior is convulsed by tears, and when Rivers comes near him, he grabs Rivers by the arms and commences "butting him in the chest, hard enough to hurt." Rivers is aware that this is not an attack but a plea for physical contact, and he is "reminded of a nanny goat on his brother's farm, being lifted almost off her feet by the suckling kid" (104). While preparing for bed that evening, Rivers muses over some of the keenest insights in the novel. "Fathers [he thinks] remain opaque to their sons... Mercifully, doctors are also opaque to their patients. Unless the patient happens to be Prior" (106). He goes on to recall John Lanyard, his patient at St. John's, who once called Rivers a "*male mother*" (106-7).

Prior thus becomes something of a breakthrough experience for Rivers, another good reason for Barker's having invented him. In this same bedtime scene that follows Prior's hypnotic recollection, Rivers recalls "a look" that he has seen on the faces of soldiers and in only one other place—on women in public wards of hospitals, "the look of people who are totally responsible for lives they have no power to save" (107). It is in this segment of the novel that Rivers forms a new theory: the "manly" activity of war has brought about in young men a "feminine" passivity (108). Late in the novel, Prior becomes aware that what he has made out of Rivers is not a replacement of his father. It was always his mother, Prior notes, who tried to hold him back from activities that she thought his asthma would not let him perform. Now Rivers wants Prior returned to active duty, but in a non-combative status, because of the asthma. He is doing "exactly the same thing" as Mrs. Prior. "Probably [Prior observes] why I never wanted you to be *Daddy*. I'd got you lined up for a worse fate." Rivers instantly smiles, "remembering the nanny goat" (210).

Rivers/Prior is a relationship that is interesting in its own right; but it is even more interesting for what it reflects of Rivers/Sassoon. The father-son connections, the distinct aspects of mentoring and nurturing, the competitiveness—all of these are the same only more so, with the result

that we see them more pronouncedly in the main relationship for their analogous presence in the supporting one.

Very different from Rivers' association with Prior is that with David Burns, whom we also meet early (Chapter Two) in the novel, when "a commotion" is created in the dinner hall by Burns's "choking and gagging" on his meal (17). After he is taken to his room, Rivers joins him at once, and we learn the cause of the choking: Burns has been victim of an experience "vile" and "disgusting" even by the standards of Craiglockhart. When "thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell," Burns "landed, head-first on a German corpse, whose gas-filled belly had ruptured on impact," filling Burns's nose and mouth with "decomposing human flesh" (19). Probably the saddest case Rivers deals with, Burns refers to his experience as "a joke" (18), and Rivers understands just what he means: that his "suffering was without purpose or dignity" (19). Spending time with Burns causes Rivers to be "plagued by questions that in Cambridge, in peacetime, he might have wanted to pursue, but which in wartime, in an overcrowded hospital," are worse than useless to him (19). Consequently, it is with Burns that Rivers alters his usual methods. His "nerve ha[s] failed him" each time he has tried to "cure" Burns by the usual psychoanalytic method of making him face the reality and recollection of his experience. However, this prompts Rivers to ask himself a pertinent question: "...was Burns's experience really worse than that of the others?" (173). Burns's family experience also sounds familiar. He is not able, at this stage of his traumatic young life, to be near his parents, especially his father: "He's a great believer in the war, my father [he explains to Rivers].... It's best we don't see too much of each other at the moment" (171).

It is with Burns, too, that Rivers shares something like a battlefield experience. On his three-week leave, Rivers visits Burns, now discharged from Craiglockhart, at a small summer home in Suffolk owned by Burns's family. A severe storm blows in from the sea, and the two of them must pile up sandbags in order to protect the house. Trying to sleep that night, Rivers mulls over how potentially bad all this is for Burns: "Piling up sandbags, followed by the nearest thing to a bombardment nature could contrive..." (177). The "sound of a maroon" wakes Rivers and his having just spent a week in London during air-raids makes him "identify the sound... positively as a bomb" (178). Getting out of bed, he finds that Burns has left the house. While searching the shore for him, Rivers comes to a "resemblance" that had crossed his mind previously: "This waste of

mud, these sump holes reflecting a dim light at the sky, even that tower... like France. Like the battlefields” (179). It is in the cellar of the Martello tower that Rivers finds Burns, cringing and staring upward unseeingly. Whether he has gone there in a desperate effort to escape the “battlefields” or to commit suicide<sup>6</sup> is not clear. As Rivers half pushes and half leads him out of the tower and to safety, Burns’s “body [has] the rag-doll floppiness of the newborn” (180). In this grotesque parody of a birth, Rivers is again a “male mother.”

Later, Rivers recalls his reaction upon finding Burns in the Martello tower: “*Nothing justifies this. Nothing nothing nothing*” (180). And as he does so, he is “rather glad not to be faced with the task of explaining that statement to Siegfried” (181). Although Rivers may have long known this, it is the first time that he has overtly acknowledged it. Once more we see the novel’s main pairing, and its main theme, replicated and reinforced by the analogy of another pairing. Rivers’ “male motherhood” is more blatantly prominent in the scene with Burns at Suffolk, but it is no less relevant in his scenes with Sassoon. The latter is older than Burns, and far more sophisticated than Burns or Prior, yet his dependence upon Rivers is as complete as theirs. So too, Rivers’ turnabout in his war views is dependent upon his relationship with Sassoon, but it is affected in precisely the same ways by his dealings with Burns and Prior.

One does not see Barker’s use of analogies, of parallels, only in the interactions between Rivers and his patients. In fact, perhaps the best example of her ingenious creation of narrative and thematic structure, and of her ability to expand theme into ever more broad concentric circles, comes in her providing a girlfriend for Prior—Sarah Lumb, a munitions worker—and then introducing to us her mother, Ada. Sarah and Billy are a mirror of the novel’s other pairings in the way that they need each other, nurture each other, love each other, all the while that they fear and—consequently?—resent each other. Quite possibly, they also mirror the human dilemma. However, it is Ada and Sarah who make a pair yet more useful to Barker. When her mother wants information from Sarah (in this case, about Billy Prior), she gets it “by a mixture of bullying, wheedling, cajoling, questions, speculations, wild surmises and sudden bitter silences” (193). With, once again, only a slight amount of exaggeration, this can serve as a description of Rivers’ getting recollections from his patients. To her friends, following the visit with Ada, Sarah admits, lapsing into her mother’s dialect, “I swore I wasn’t gunna tell her about Billy, but she winked it all out of me” (200). Very shortly after that,

Rivers reminds himself that getting “a few simple facts out of [Prior] was like extracting wisdom teeth” (206). In the previous chapter, Mrs. Lumb had “extracted the whole story of Sarah’s relationship with Billy Prior” (193). Clearly, she uses Rivers’ methods, as he uses hers.

More is reciprocally reflected in these two relationships than the elder members’ methods of drawing out the younger ones. In significant ways, Ada Lumb’s two girls have been manipulated by her much as Rivers’ “boys” are conditioned by him. In a reflection of Sarah’s, we learn that Ada has “struggled to bring up her two girls alone, and yet, when it came to *teaching* the girls, ...tried to encourage all the opposite qualities. Prettiness, pliability—at least the appearance of it—all the arts of pleasing.” This manipulation has been a source of some frustration to Sarah, who seems not to have taken to this “teaching” of enforced passivity as readily as her sister. Sarah has found it “dispiriting.” To Ada, however, it is clear that this is “how women [get] on in the world” (195). Meanwhile, we have watched Rivers attempt to convince young men—and in particular to convince Sassoon—that it is necessary to participate in “the Great Adventure” of this war, though that participation will likely consist “of crowding in a dugout, waiting to be killed” (107). After we have read Sarah’s reflections on what her mother trained her to be, we watch Rivers refine his earlier view of war neurosis as a feminizing phenomenon. In the refinement, he theorizes that it is not so much the “sudden shocks or bizarre horrors” of the war that cause breakdown, as it is “prolonged strain, immobility and helplessness.” The war neuroses this causes in men are, he concludes, “the same disorders” that beset women in times of peace (222).

Barker provides us with a wry reinforcement of these Lumb/Prior/Rivers parallels when, late in the novel, Prior visits Sarah in her apartment, sees a picture of Ada, and says, “Your mother looks like my doctor” (216).

Numerous other interactions of pairs could be examined in much this same manner, as *Regeneration* is largely composed of scenes involving two and only two characters; Barker’s works invite transformation into stage and film productions. (An earlier novel, *Union Street* has been adapted as a stage-play.) Rivers’ sessions with Willard, for example, provide an overt contrast between the phenomenon of “breakdown” and that of “cowardice.” When Rivers meets with Anderson—the only patient we see at Craiglockhart who was in the Medical Corps—the good question arises of “What do you do when the doctor breaks down?” (31). To the reader,

of course, the question applies to Rivers more pertinently than to Anderson. The final major pairing in the novel is that of Rivers and Lewis Yealland, another historical figure, who “treats” soldiers in ways vastly different from Rivers’. The scene between them at National Hospital contrasts their methods: Rivers is humane, Yealland is cruel. Yet it implicitly emphasizes the similarity of their intentions and even, to some extent, their methods. Both are determined to remobilize these presently incapacitated soldiers whether or not that is what the soldiers “want.” The “confrontation” (234) leads Rivers into another dream in which one of Yealland’s severely deformed patients recites Sassoon’s “Declaration” (235).

In all these analogies is the essence of Barker’s method. Virtually every interaction of two characters contains and reflects every other; they qualify, intensify, and—ultimately—clarify one another. In every match-up we have looked at here, there is simultaneous conflict and connection. At least one member of every pair is a threat to the other in some way; however, they are also friends (or better) in each case, and each has much benefit to derive from the other. There is *simpatico* and there is antagonism, and in practically every instance we see both pretty clearly. Sometimes the participants do too—one or both. Mainly, whatever all else they do, all of these pairings amplify the themes raised in the central relationship, that between Rivers and Sassoon. To an engaging story and some perfectly realized characters, Barker thus adds a structural pattern that is as intricate as it is dramatically and thematically functional.

### Notes

1. Following this paragraph, the “historical” or “real” Rivers shall be so designated; otherwise, it is the novel’s Rivers who is meant.

2. Rivers’ placing those quotation marks about “pacifist errors” is worth noting. At this point in *Conflict and Dream*, he is discussing “patient B,” who is clearly identifiable as Sassoon, a patient who “was not suffering from any form of psycho-neurosis, but was in the hospital on account of his adoption of a pacifist attitude while on leave from active service.” (167)

3. Since Barker makes frequent use of italics, this essay will not identify them as hers. In quotations here, all italics are the novel’s.

4. Stammering and mutism were two of the most common symptoms of “war neurosis” seen at Craiglockhart, in reality as well as in this novel. Both are much discussed in *Conflict and Dream* and in Slobodin.

5. This incident creates the central motif for the next novel in the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door*.

6. The novel has already made clear that Burns knows that the cellars flood at high tide.

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