

With close analysis of pages 37-39 of 'Regeneration' discuss the presentation of war as a theme, in comparison with poetry of Wilfred Owen.

The theme of war is represented in a number of ways by both Pat Barker and Wilfred Owen, however it is interesting to analyse these different ways and assess what both the gender of the authors and the dates in which they were written effect the accounts of the events. To understand the presentation of the theme of war it is vital we look at the language and structure of both pieces of work.

By looking at page 37 of ~~Regeneration~~ we immediately see from Pat Barker that for the soldiers of the trenches there is no escape even if they are physically away from them, the use of language draws together senses of everyday home life and the horrific life in the trenches, 'For the first few stops the bus was crowded' this highlights how returning soldiers find it impossible to return and re-integrate back into society, they were cast away to the nightmare of trench life, crowded with thousands of young men like himself, yet life back home continues, now he is back amongst civilians, the mental effects of war do not end now he has returned, the post-traumatic stress continues and can be stimulated by the most trivial of experiences, 'smelling of wet wool' is an example of this, obviously the connection has been made with the smell of the khaki in the trenches, this has a chain reaction and also subconsciously Burns finds himself 'tensing' with fear at the contact with others. Pat Barker has represented the theme of war here as a life changing experience, the nightmare for the surviving soldiers is inescapable. We can directly link this to the work of Wilfred Owen, more specifically 'Mental Cases' Wilfred Owen also represents how the lives of men have been hugely changed by the experience of war, 'who are these?' the opening question is an indication of the

change of the men, making them unrecognisable, strangers, outsiders.

With the use of language we also see the presentation of the theme of war coming through from Pat Barker, she describes a branch to have 'rattled along the windows with a sound like machine-gun fire' the use of the word rattled is a harsh sounding word and is obviously used to over emphasize the noise the branch made however the use of the branch also ties in with the link between nature and war, the effects of this man made evil has blurred the boundaries of the soldiers mind between nature which is a beautiful thing to this monstrosity. Language is also key as Barker describes Burns to go on to 'bite his lips to stop himself crying out' this could be interpreted in a number of ways, there was a huge amount of pressure placed on the soldiers to prevent civilians from knowing the horrifying truth of the trench life, dramatic measures were even taken to censor letters back home. However also a degree of responsibility it put onto the civilians by Barker, here there is an attack on the effect the civilians had on war heroes, there was no acceptance for trauma caused by the war, 'shell-shock' was seen as a sign of cowardice, because of this, in this example Burns feels the need to prevent this understandable outburst for fear of being cast as an outsider. It could also be said that Barker touches upon the theme of masculinity, it is a stereotype of a male to be expected not to cry or show too much emotion to a horrific experience, it is in the nature of man to be able to protect. This once more ties in nicely with the work of Owen in 'Mental Cases' as a similar theme is touched upon. The very title is a direct representation of the attitude towards post-traumatic stress, the returning soldiers who showed any signs of it were simply 'mental' and could not be helped so they were once more cast out of the society they fought to protect. Another example of this comes with the use of the word 'hilarious' completely inappropriate to the theme of the poem it represents the mockery

any soldier received who returned with obvious mental effects of war and how they were perceived as they did everyday things yet with the added difficulties. This shows the naivety and ignorance of those at home during the war.

Language also is used to present the theme of war by drawing similarities between the barb-wire in the trenches and when on his walk a 'tuft of grey wool had caught on one of the barbs' again he is immediately back to experiencing the fear of the trenches as we see the 'sweat as he struggled to free it' even though this act seems reasonably trivial to the civilian, for Burns there would have been no distinction between that and the matter of life and death that came with being trapped. With Barker's choice of language we also see the complete transformation in Burns, from the hints that he is drawing connections to the trenches, but then his imagination grips him as we see the 'stiff khaki' this shows Burns mindset now as he is in his mind once again at the front.

Barker also creates a very interesting image as she describes Burns' coat to have been a 'mess of mud and dead leaves' this is very clever as we can easily relate this to Burns running through no-man's land, with all things trying to prevent him from reaching his destination in this instance the use of nature for example 'twigs tore at him' however this can easily be replaced with bullets, then as he falls the mess on his coat in his eyes could easily be the blood of the carcasses laid around him. The imagery then continues as he sees the tree, it was 'laden with dead animals' this image is very important as it represents the random acts of violence of placing the animals on the tree but also the carelessness of the war its self, the violence is completely random, those who kill each other knew nothing of the individual they shot, they had been labelled the enemy and Barker attacks this concept. Burns mental state again represents the struggle the soldiers had as he is described to 'look around at the

circle of his companions' the fact in reality the companions are animals has again a few possible interpretations, the use of animal imagery shows how merciless the killings are, they are practically slaughtered like animals, sent slowly walking to inevitable death. There also is a sense of loneliness coming through as a result of survivor guilt, Burns recognises his men to be dead however he is the only one alive, sat on his own, the final line is firm evidence of this 'this was where he had wanted to be' with these men he was accepted, he was one of them and with acceptance comes comfort. This togetherness can also be seen in my opinion in 'Mental Cases' throughout we see the use of the collective term 'these' this shows they are seen as a group, yet with the deaths they become alone.