

Artificial Memory in Pat Barker's Double Vision

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Abstract

Questions about artificial memory have become particularly urgent in recent years since memory is so crucial. It must show up in modern art. Artists question its practical role and attempt to unravel the complex web of societal and personal expectations surrounding it. Pat Barker's *Double Vision* (2003) actively explores such concern in which she tries to reflect the effect of the artificial memory throughout her characters in their actions by using their experiences in the war to be beneficial for people who didn't experience war before. Whereas the critical conversation has often boiled the complexity of the relationship between the traumas that the characters had experienced during the war and the artificial memory down to a debate for or against the view of not facing reality and pretending that the world is more secure than it is, that is, when the burden of the memory becomes too much to bear, a person may seek temporary relief by escaping to his mind by creating an imaginary world. Barker's quintessentially narrative and dialogic solution suggests a new and unusual way to come to terms with the problem. Rather than simply rehashing the debate, the novel underlines both the need of putting into words what was formerly unutterable and the immense impact that the system of memory has on one's life and surroundings.

Keyword: memory, artificial memory, trauma, war, Pat Barker, double vision.

Introduction

Pat Barker's Biography

Pat Barker, an English novelist, was born on May 8, 1943 in the town of Thornaby-on-Tees, which is located in the county of Yorkshire. Both Durham University and the Business School, in which she majored in International History, were her educational institutions of choice. Up until 1982, she was a history and politics teacher. She didn't start writing seriously until she was in her mid-twenties, and it was novelist Angela Carter who inspired her to pursue a career as a writer. Her early novels focused on the struggles of working-class women in England's north. Pat Barker's writing is never easy to read because she delves headfirst into taboo topics like psychological problems, pacifism, war, and the murder

of minors. She was selected as one of the 20 "Best Young British Novelists" in a 1983 contest organized by the Book Marketing Council and Granta magazine. Partially based on her grandfather's experiences in the French trenches during World War I, she wrote a trilogy beginning with 1991's *Regeneration*.

The *Regeneration Trilogy*, which Barker wrote between 1991 and 1995 and is her most well-known work, is how many readers are introduced to her work. The third installment of this trilogy was awarded the Booker Prize in 1995. The *Regeneration Trilogy* is unquestionably her finest and most satisfying work due to the author's careful research and seamless integration of historical figures and fictional protagonists. These novels have frequently been criticized for being horrific, brutal, and even brutish; however, the only way we can better understand the First WWI and the mental and also physical distress caused by being in close proximity to threat and death is by getting as close as possible to the fundamental, shocking, and perceptible detail of the conflict (Barker).

One method to analyze Pat Barker's success is to consider how, over the course of ten novels, she rose from the lowest rungs of England's class system, in the slums of the northwest, to the upper echelons of today's educated professional elite in *Cool Britannia*. It may also be said that she has moved away from what her early works hinted at becoming a gothic chronicle of the psychological and physical harm caused by poverty in order to focus on the unique challenges faced by the culturally literate and creatively inclined. A further interpretation of Barker's work is that, despite the shifting identities of her protagonists, she has always depicted a world wherein terrible acts of dehumanization and brutality are part of the fabric of daily existence ("Something Not Quite Right")

Preliminary Notes: *Double Vision*

Captivating fiction about the toll that chronicling violence takes on the reporters and artists who make their living doing so. After September 11th, British journalists Ben Frobisher, a photographer, and Stephen Sharkey, a writer, decide to go their separate ways due to the emotional toll of trying to report from New York City. Reeling from the near-simultaneous revelation that his wife is cheating on him, Stephen returns to England and promptly divorces her and quits his job. Ben eventually went back to his old job. He goes with the anti-terrorist operation to Afghanistan, where he ultimately meets his end.

The new book by Pat Barker is very well written, but it has an odd structure. The title of the book, *Double Vision*, is almost too appropriate. The viewpoints presented in this book cast a shadow on one another, creating an effect more akin to overlap than complementarity. It is not entirely clear what the subject is, what the counter-subject is, who the main character is in the story, and who the supporting cast members are. The sense of dislocation that is induced by reading the book is

almost certainly on purpose and can be interpreted as a form of syncopation; however, this does not account for the entirety of the sensation (Mars-Jones).

The lives of a small group of interconnected characters are chronicled over the course of a single winter in the intricate and compelling ensemble piece "Double Vision." Sculptor Kate Frobisher makes her home in the rural countryside outside of Newcastle, England. The first Christmas has passed since her husband Ben, a photographer, was killed in Afghanistan in the wake of September 11. Like the language that depicts it, Kate's life is calm and reflective, moving with the changing of the seasons:

The weather turned colder, until one day, returning from her walk, she noticed that the big puddle immediately outside her front gate was filmed with ice, like a cataract dulling the pupil of an eye. She heated a bowl of soup, built up the fire and huddled over it, while outside the temperature dropped, steadily, hour by hour, until a solitary brown oak leaf detaching itself from the tree fell onto the frost-hard ground with a crackle that echoed through the whole forest (Barker 64).

In *Double Vision* (2003), she describes the repercussions of modern conflict on war correspondent Stephen Sharkey, who returns to Britain after his comrade is killed in Afghanistan. Although *Double Vision* contains horrifying sections - especially the repeated vision of a young woman raped and died in Sarajevo - it is a more delicate work (if this is possible for such a subject). This may be because, as Barker herself notes, modern warfare is not so much face to face conflict but "a kind of son et lumière show, the first where the shelling of enemy forces acquired the bloodless accuracy of a computer game." It may be perceived as more delicate since, unlike with her other works, the finale of this one offers hope for redemption via love and an appreciation of one's heritage. When reading Barker, you can always count on feeling uneasy. Several writers try to create excuses for terrible moral behavior - youngsters turn violent or killing because they were abused, women turn to prostitution to ease poverty - but he doesn't.

One of Barker's central concerns is depicting the mental states of his characters, which he often does through their actions rather than their words or deeds. She often has her protagonists drink too much so that they can be portrayed in a more natural, unrefined state, and many of her books feature descriptions of dreaming or of people under anesthetic, morphine, or other drugs. It's often just as interesting to hear what other characters notice about a character while they're high or drunk. However, the novels also feature significant material focus. Barker's earlier works feature vivid descriptions of rundown neighborhoods and the viaduct where prostitutes find work.

The Effect of the War

Warfare is "the conduct of war or other armed confrontation" (Dennis Hollingsworth: June 2013 Archives). Conflicts on a global scale are typically settled through military means today. There would be no way to live in a "peaceful" society without it, as nations do not always compromise on their positions. And although fighting does bring apparent effects (as I will describe later on), the fact of the matter is that warfare, sad to say, is an essential aspect of life. A human civilization cannot survive without it. Given its centrality to human existence, it's natural to assume that warfare as we know it now will persist forever. But, warfare have altered greatly throughout time.

Now, wars are more expensive than ever before. Since modern battles include the deployment of expensive new equipment and technology, governments must find a means to cover all their expenditures. Due to the huge cost of a war, countries would need to take extraordinary steps, such as raising taxes, to finance such an event. However, increasing taxes has a negative effect on the economy because it reduces individual wages. People cannot afford to buy goods or feed their family when salaries are low. Increasing taxes increases the cost of goods. With low earnings and rising prices, individuals are forced towards poverty. A high poverty rate is accompanied by a high crime rate, which is a severe negative (since individuals must commit crimes to exist in such an environment). Borrowing funds would be a potential alternative method of financing the conflict. (Strachan 341-50)

The effects of war can alter our values and concepts of good and wrong, particularly in youth. Because of this, groups and regions where conflict has been prominent may be more prone to violence in the future. Families and individuals are displaced as a result of the damage of homes and landscapes, which renders these locations inhabitable, so long as this conduct persists. When individuals are displaced, it's usually because of fighting within their own country, and they're forced to leave their homes in search of safety. This results in a higher incidence of identity crisis among younger refugee populations, as the majority of children are forced to leave their homes at a young age and are unable to experience their family's customs and culture. Citizens may suffer psychiatric disorders such as PTSD, sadness, and anxiety as a result of continuous exposure to combat. These illnesses pose higher dangers, such as high poverty rates and, in the worst situations, homelessness. Wars have far-reaching consequences for society, including psychological damage, social breakdown, population dislocation, and moral upheaval. Be it determined that war has a negative impact on humanity and can lead to long-term issues such like PTSD, depression, cultural shock, and more. ("The Effects of War on Humanity").

Artificial Memory

Primarily, memories are the result of information being acquired, sorted, and stored. Recalling facts, figures, and experiences from the past is what memory is all about. What humans know now about the world surrounding comes from what learned and remembered in the past, and the responses to the present are informed by those same memories and lessons. Daily life is unmanageable if we lose the ability to recall past events. Like an Alzheimer's patient, you'd need to constantly think abstractly and repeat the same basic actions. We can't do things like "without thinking about them," like driving a car or brushing our teeth, without our memories. Human capacity for conceptual memory of past experiences underpins our ability to think abstractly, draw conclusions, and even share information with others ("Artificial Memory Systems"). So, "artificial memory" is a historical overview of the works written in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries that focus on memory training as well as the technology of memory that were in use at the time and are represented in the literary of the period. It's the first piece of literary research to seriously consider the renaissance of mnemonics during the Romantic era. The attention that is paid to all these memory practices may assist grasp a secret language of memory, which may, in turn, modify our understanding of how literary history has developed. In turn, artificial memory may offer a new method to interpret the "story" that comprise nineteenth-century literature.

Humans rely on their memories as a foundational resource, as it is via recalling the past that are able to shape our present and anticipate our future by identifying commonalities and trends. When see destructive patterns of behavior in themselves or others sometimes, painful recollections might serve as warnings to prevent us from repeating those actions. However, this oversimplifies the process, leaves with more questions than answers, and fails to explain why humans tend to repeat the same errors over and over again. On the other hand, remembering pleasant experiences from the past can make individuals fixate on the past rather than living in the present, especially in light of the growing cultural and social significance of technology. These seemingly opposing memory processes appear to be a fascinating component of the phenomenon, one that has sparked academic inquiry and creative expression (gradesfixer).

Since memory is so vital, it must show up in contemporary art. Artists not only question its practical use but also attempt to untangle the complex web of societal and personal expectations surrounding it. According to author Olivier Dyens, art is a universal movement since it is rooted in the experiences of all people. Melancholy, grief, joy, fright, fury, and the like are a shared esperanto. Emotion and art are memories. Beings with consciousness can move through time and space because they have memories to draw upon. Memory underlies both order and

complexity. A being can't learn and adapt without memories. It is impossible to become a conscious being without the ability to recall past experiences and apply them to the present. All humans share something in common: the capacity to form and recollect emotional memories of happiness, sadness, anger, and other strong emotions. Art replicates our memories (Boorstin 115-120).

Memory-related issues go far deeper than only questions of personal and collective identity; it is an impossible endeavor to locate the 'truth' behind sources that repeatedly prove to be untrustworthy due to the characteristics of human mind. Like a work of art, memory may be viewed multiple times with each viewing yielding a unique experience. George Orwell's "1984" paints a chilling vision of a society in which recollections are being shaped forcibly to be whatever "the Party" wishes them to be, and the method of getting back and changing the history in the present is examined at length inside the novel. Personal recollection weakens in the face of the political picture of the past. ("The Value of Memory in Human Life).

While in literature the concept of memory is different. To remember something in literature is to capture it on paper as a record of what has come before. Historical events shape memories, but so do the societal, political, and religious experiences of fictional characters. Memory is used in three distinct ways that often coexist in such a text: then, to establish the credibility and significance of a text based on the experience and reputation of previous authors; second, to infuse a feeling of reminiscence in a text; and third, and most globally, to construct an individual's or a group's sense of who they are ("Literary Memory").

The Artificial Memory in Double Vision

Pat Barker tries in her novel to reflect the effect of the artificial memory through her characters not only their action by using their experiences in the war to be beneficial for people who do not experience war before. The vivid example is losing her father and how she was imagine that she lost him in the war despite the fact that she spend her youth listening to her grandfather telling her about the war. So, she is the actual example of the artificial memory. Barker feels like she was experiences the war before in her own memory.

In Double Vision, Barker uses the crime as a metaphor for the memory of war as She depicts a single winter from the perspective of several interconnected people. Sculptor Kate Frobisher makes her home in the rural countryside outside of Newcastle, England. The first Christmas has passed since her photographer husband Ben was slain in post-9/11 Afghanistan. The pace of Kate's life, as depicted in her writing, is slow and contemplative, moving in harmony with the changing of the seasons:

The weather turned colder, until one day, returning from her walk, she noticed that the big puddle immediately outside her front gate was filmed with ice, like a cataract dulling the pupil of an eye. She heated a bowl of soup, built up the fire and huddled over it, while outside the temperature dropped, steadily, hour by hour, until a solitary brown oak leaf detaching itself from the tree fell onto the frost-hard ground with a crackle that echoed through the whole forest (Barker 3).

Barker also concentrates on academics and artists from the middle class, as opposed to the disadvantaged working class of her earlier works. This book focuses heavily on the horrors of war, including the Gulf War of 1991, the Yugoslav Wars of 1991–1995, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as well as the war in Afghanistan. After resignation from his position as a war photojournalist and moving to the country, Stephen Sharkey, one of the novel's main protagonists, is inspired to write a book on how war is portrayed in popular culture. By depicting a world that is filled with violence throughout *Double Vision*, the author comes perilously close to invalidating the effects of trauma and endorsing a victim-centered perspective.

The author makes no effort to convey a dialogue with the reader, make them a participant or a witness, or replicate the time-displaced sensations brought on by the fake memory. A few additional painful situations are described in reasonably simple prose, thus the ending pages left blank can hardly be labeled as a failure to depict trauma. If the blank pages are meant to be a graphic example of an irrepresentability of memory, therefore the tactic fails to shock and even move the reader. Even though the author narrates Stephen's nightmare in which he is in Sarajevo and Justine's dissociation after she is attacked, there is no structural experimentation at the level of speech, no substantial gaps in the story, no fragmentation, and no time distortions to suggest the characters' traumatic experiences. Memory arts took numerous forms in the 19th century, from print memories castles to huge engravings depicting decades of history via memorable pictures, inspiring many creative responses. Each system serves as a discursive location that exposes the evolution of memory and reading arguments, in addition to how these discussions became classified and gendered and that what each character tries to reveal in the novel (Abrams)

Barker avoids structural innovations in favor of a focus on grief for her protagonists,¹⁸ as Stephen is shaken by the atrocities of war, Kate grieves for her spouse, and Justine is victimized. Even though Ben died in Afghanistan a year earlier and only appears in flashbacks and memories, his important role in the plot effectively conveys the profound sense of loss. Through the system of the memory every character creates an artificial memory as if they have their own life to reflect to the others through these memories

Victims' worldviews are broken after the trauma, and they are powerless in the face of the overpowering force of their recollections (cf. Herman 33). The individuals around them may notice a dramatic change in the way they interact because of their memory problems. The survivor's fundamental safety assumptions are shattered, and he or she has a profound sense of insecurity as a result (51). A sensation of isolation and abandonment sets in. Victims not only lose contact with the world, but also experience a violation of their own physical safety. When the body is attacked, damaged, or defiled, the individual frequently loses command of their own bodily processes (53). A reestablished feeling of powerlessness must be earned by victims. The victim's support system plays a significant role in determining the result of the memory. Lessening the severity of symptoms and promoting rapid recovery, social support from loved ones plays a crucial role (63). The victim may feel safe and protected in their company.

It's the same for soldiers who have a tight-knit combat group behind them in battle: "Clinging together under protracted situations of risk, the fighting group develops a shared belief that its mutual loyalty and dedication may protect them from harm. They develop an irrational dread of being separated from one another that rivals their terror of physical death. People with memory problems require support from those around them as they work to restore a healthy sense of identity and cope with the deaths of loved ones (cf. Herman 63). They won't be able to start getting back to normal until then. Stephen was trying to deny the effect of the memory. He's running away from his tragic past to a quiet town in the Northeastern countryside. Stephen experiences a sense of helplessness and abandonment upon his arrival in the country. He feels worthless and 'invalid' in every sense of the word:

At the station he lugged his cases on to the platform and stood with them, one on either side, like inverted commas, he thought, drawing attention to the possible invalidity of the statement they enclosed. Invalid, or invalid, whichever way you cared to pronounce it, that was how he felt. (DV 35)

A first indication that an artificial memory lies beneath the surface is a portent of disturbing nightmares. The story's first signs of acting out occur after the protagonist reaches the cottage. Stephen is constantly vigilant and uneasy, awakening at every sound. He continually assured himself, "...nobody had died here... no violent deaths... no skulls in the grass..." (DV 49). Even as the novel opens and Stephen is still being introduced, we learn that he has a sleep problem: "... he'd found it impossible to sleep. He downplayed his PTSD symptoms at the time by saying, "At the time, I just thought it was a quirk of mine." (DV 48) This snippet demonstrates that at that point in the story, Stephen would rather live in denial. He avoids thinking about his past because he is not

ready to deal with it. Stephen drinks in order to avoid having to face his past:

He needed a drink, and that was a problem because he had the car with him. And yet he didn't want to go tamely back home with a bottle as he had on previous nights. Not bloody likely. He looked around for a wine bar – he could have one drink, for God's sake, there was no harm in that, and even one at the moment felt like a life-saver, softening his mood, dissolving the hard edged of memory so that he could flow into the lives around him. (DV 142)

Also Besides Stephen, Kate is one of the central figures in *Double Vision*, and she turns to alcohol to help her cope with her painful history. Barker doesn't make as much of a deal out of her problem with alcohol as she does with Stephen, but she does hint at it. Barker emphasizes Kate's sense of isolation and loneliness throughout the novel:

Once there, she enjoyed the evening, in spite of having restricted herself to just two glasses of wine... (DV 2) The nurses would be stuffing flowers into vases, drawing the blinds, settling people down for the night – and her solitary, shuffling progress suddenly seemed lonely and pathetic. Sometimes the only cure for feeling sorry for yourself is a good long sleep. She would make herself stay up till ten o'clock, make a few calls, watch television, have a couple of stiff whiskies and go to bed. (DV 18)

The reader is left with the heavy impression that Kate is completely on her own to deal with the situation. This sentiment is expressed early in the book, with the opening line: "Christmas was over" (DV 1). Kate is initially solely grieving the death of her husband Ben in the beginning chapters. It's apparent that her loss has a profound impact on her life, but she is making adjustments and persevering; "... and it was working, she was getting through, she was surviving" (DV 2). Kate faces a new test and painful experience with the automobile accident. She suffers from significant memory loss, which can be partially attributed to the accident, but Barker indicates that there is more at play:

There is something else, something she needed to get clear, a memory that bulged above the surface, showed its back and then, in a burst of foam, turned and sank again. It was the sound of her breathing that had summoned it. She groped after memories that dissolved even as she tried to grasp them. She had a sense of missing time. The minutes – how many minutes? – she'd drifted in and out of consciousness, while somebody had stood by the car, breathing, watching, not calling for help. (DV 13-14).

The accident has left her with few recollections, and the ones she does have are being actively suppressed by her own mind. She tries to calm down by doubting her own thoughts: "But all her memories were muddled, and for huge periods of time she had no recall at all..." Therefore, it's likely that her recollection of the man who'd stood and

observed her was skewed. Evidence of a head injury." (DV 14) Kate argues with herself that her memories are untrustworthy because she gave inconsistent answers to the physicians two days after the collision when they asked her questions about her condition. That she is so eager to lay this phase of her life to rest demonstrates how important it is to her.

After a time of denial, signs of misbehavior eventually manifest themselves, typically as flashbacks and nightmares. Stephen has trouble sleeping due to his recurring dreams and flashbacks. He is tormented by the recollection of the night he and Ben discovered a dead, raped girl in Sarajevo with her "eyes wide open, skirt bunched about her waist, her splayed thighs enclosing a blackness of blood and agony" (DV 52). After Stephen has an anxiety attack, he tells himself, "No skulls in the grass, no females with splayed thighs and skirts around their waist displaying, even in the early stages of decomposition, what had been done to them before they died." The girl reappears, and the story continues. (DV 49) Just before he drifts off to sleep, he can't stop thinking about her:

... Stephen lay cramped and wakeful inside his sleeping bag, thinking about the girl, and the way her eyes had looked up at him, seeing nothing. Her head was beside his on the pillow, and when he rolled over on to his stomach, trying to get away from her, he found her body underneath him, as dry and insatiable as sand. (DV 55)

After a time of absence, the raped girl reappears in Stephen's recollections there at the end of the story, when his lover Justine is brutally attacked by thieves:

So many raped and tortured girls – he needed no imagination to picture what might be happening to Justine. It would not have surprised him to find her lying like a broken doll at the foot of the stairs, her skirt bunched up around her waist, her eyes staring. (DV 250).

To forget, individuals must "return to the moments of psychic brokenness that have rendered them incapacitated" (Lea 103). That's why their recollections aren't only symptoms of the acting-out phase; they're also early, promising indicators of a functioning memory system. By the book's conclusion, we see each of the four major characters making strides toward healing from their traumatic experiences. Stephen was less likely to contract now. In spite of the fact that "the whisky flashed and glinted in his glass, and the heat from the flames made his lips feel huge and bloated, fish lips," he makes a conscious effort to limit his alcohol intake. He told himself, "Stop drinking." (DV 298). He is preoccupied with his relationship with Justine, the details of which we shall get to in a while.

In the book's final section, titled "Double Vision," Stephen recalls in excruciating detail the moment he discovered Ben's lifeless body in Afghanistan. This event is foreshadowed early on in the text but is never

explicitly addressed. In addition to this, the raped girl in Sarajevo no longer has any control over Stephen's life: "For a second he saw the girl in the stairwell in Sarajevo, but she'd lost her authority. For the time being at least, this intimate moment in bed had cast her away". (DV 203) The trauma is now a part of his history, and as a result, the girl has lost her influence over him. There is no longer any barrier between Stephen and the traumatic experience, and he is able to talk about it freely. He is confident in his ability to overcome the trauma, but he is also aware that it will always be a part of who he is.

The majority of people would rather not face reality and pretend that perhaps the world is more secure than it actually is. They want to believe they are invulnerable and unaware of the regular violence that surrounds them. The image of safety dissipates when a traumatic event occurs that affects the person directly, affects those they care about, or happens in their presence. After what happened, they decided they could no longer put their trust in God and would instead have to take matters into their own hands by fleeing the world they knew. When the burden of the memory becomes too much to bear, a person may seek temporary relief by escaping to his mind, much like they may physically retreat to the countryside. The creation of an imaginary world is a popular escape from the truth. According to Stephen, his brother Robert's success and contentment just pour out of every pore (DV 38), but beneath the flawless facade is a shattered family. Kate, too, frequently opts for the fictitious over the real. When thinking back on the accident, she would rather deny the presence of the person breath next to her and maintain the lie that no one called the police since no one was present. As a means of evading the realities of life, they devise their own memory system.

Ultimately, the novel emphasizes, on the one hand, the overwhelming effect that the system of memory has on one's life and surroundings, and, on the other, the necessity of putting into words what was once unutterable. Healing is a lengthy and arduous process, but the author gives it a multifaceted appearance that helps the reader overcome the various challenges they'll encounter along the way. The ability to communicate with and defeat the evasive character through the power of memory is crucial to the process of moving through.

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