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ARTICLE

21st Century Trauma and the Uncanny: A Gothic Reading of Trauma in Pat Barker's *Double Vision*

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In Pat Barker's 2003 novel *Double Vision*, the intertwining of traumatic and uncanny aesthetics works to affirm the role of the unconscious in traumatic memory, drawing attention to the uneasy connection between trauma, violence, and libidinal fantasy, and offering through this a generic challenge to overly mimetic traumatic representations. The ambivalent significance of traumatic memory as a source both of hermeneutic excess and psychological insight is foremost here, offering brief glimpses into the hidden fantasies of impacted characters. As such, the novel can be read as a semi-Gothic exploration of traumatic pathology, highlighting trauma's experiential 'possession' of an individual or culture in its happening, and questioning along with this the opposing 'traumatological', fantastic, and ideological bases for traumatic suffering. The findings of this examination in turn infer a larger pronouncement on the ambivalent ethics of traumatic representation and on the critical need for narrative and artistic self-examination. In other words, through its concern with various modes of creative representation, the novel comments on the ethical slipperiness of traumatic depictions, though it also explores opportunities for generic innovation in relation to trauma within a contemporary literary-artistic context.

Seventeen years on, the events of 9/11 remain relevant as a symbol of US political and military vulnerability and as a locus for questions regarding the importance of trauma as a Western cultural signifier. Disrupting long-held assumptions about US invincibility and super-power status within the realm of Western popular culture, and ushering in a moment of profound shock and insecurity, the events of that day are now widely recognised as associated with trauma, whether in favour of or against

the use of this designation. Those who frame the trauma of that date call to attention the horror of these events for those who experienced them: the shock, but also a resulting strangely entrancing and disturbing fascination. Judith Greenberg, for example, writes of how, '[n]o matter how many times one repeats the scene of watching, ultimately it confronts us with an absence, an empty skyline, ground zero – the stare of trauma' (30). On a similar note, Jenny Edkins writes of 'the sudden, totally unanticipated and spectacular appearance of a new type of indiscriminate, instrumental violence in the centre of major cities in the United States. […] Something that until that moment had been totally inconceivable happened' (245).

This article explores how one contemporary novel, Pat Barker's *Double Vision* (2003), responds to a post-9/11 trauma-centred perspective, considering both its historical pertinence and its potential psychological and ideological deceptions and limitations. Barker's larger oeuvre is concerned with the meaning of trauma, making her a well-versed commentator on this topic. This is visible in her early novels, *Union Street* (1982), *Blow Your House Down* (1984), and *Liza's England* (1986), all of which explore the traumatic experience of violence and poverty for working-class British women. Likewise, in the *Regeneration Trilogy* (1991, 1993, 1995) Barker considers the traumatic events of World War I, but also how the trauma of this conflict was overlooked, denied, and misinterpreted by the early twentieth century medical establishment. More recently, her novels *Another World* (1998) and *Border Crossing* (2001) have explored traumatic violence enacted against and by children, taking into account the perspective of victims, onlookers, the child perpetrator, and in the latter novel, the psychologist working with the child perpetrator. Her work is thus repeatedly engaged with the occurrence of trauma and its interpretation, often making apparent where popular social or cultural discourses around this topic demand more nuance. As I hope to show, this is also the case for *Double Vision*'s reading of post-9/11 trauma discourses.

The above critical responses to 9/11 marry with an understanding of trauma as defined by trauma theorists such as Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman and Cathy Caruth, in so far as they relate an idea of experiential belatedness.[1] 'It is

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[1] In the subtitle to their 1992 book, *Testimony*, Felman and Laub jointly refer to a 'crisis in witnessing' provoked by the trauma of the Holocaust. In that collection, Laub (84) explains how this is 'an event without witness' in so far as 'it is only now, *belatedly* [in the act of testimony], that the event begins to

not simply the scale of violence that qualifies September 11 as traumatic but the way that the events surprised us,' Michael Rothberg writes. '[They] took us unawares, and broke with our previous horizon of expectations, thus disallowing our defences against anxiety, our *Angstbereitschaft*' (149). In describing trauma in this way, Rothberg negotiates Caruth's interpretation of the concept, which sees this in terms of its 'structure of reception':

> The pathology [of trauma] cannot be defined either by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may or may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a distortion of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. (4)

Caruth conceives of trauma as a structural failure to assimilate certain events, not because of their innate catastrophic nature but rather on account of how they are experienced at the time: belatedly and without full comprehension. The traumatised are, as it were, temporally incapacitated, unable to 'possess' the historical moment they have experienced, even as psychologically this moment appears to possess them (5).

The strength of this argument lies in its appreciation of the temporal elusiveness of 9/11, even as it also conjures the shared experience of those watching.[2] Trauma is understood as communal, 'shared because it is composed of structural features' (Rothberg, 149), which likewise facilitate new avenues for cross-cultural connection. As James Berger argues, trauma constitutes 'a sort of poetics': 'It is about making,

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be historically grasped and seen.' On a similar note, Hartman (1995) writes that '[t]he knowledge of trauma […] is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche' (537).

[2] It is notable, with respect to what follows, that both Hartman and Laub have also written directly on the traumatic character of 9/11's experience, in each case invoking this temporally-centred reading: see Hartman, 2003, and Laub, 2003.

about the creative acts – combining conscious and unconscious motives and pow-ers – that arise out of horror and confusion' (Berger, 52). For some, such as Rothberg and Peter Brooks, this aptly articulates a paradoxical opportunity opened up by 9/11, suggesting a possible forging of new forms of international connection, allowing Americans to understand the trauma experienced regularly in other parts of the world, often as a result of America's own foreign policy. As Brooks puts it, 'It's not that one wants to find anything positive in terrorism and mass destruction but that precisely our new vulnerability to them might alert us to how much they are part of the daily experience of much of the world' (48).[3]

The dominant political and cultural response that the American government and media adopted to 9/11 did not invoke a larger understanding of global trauma, but to the contrary promoted an increasing retribution and dogmatic patriotism, such that, as David Simpson suggests, 'in less than two years we went from the fall of the Twin Towers and the attack on the Pentagon to the invasion of Iraq, a process marked by propagandist compression and manufactured consent so audacious to seem unbelievable' (Simpson, 4). In this sense, we must question how valuable this trauma designation is. The 'inassimilable' quality of trauma may provide a metaphor for emotional horror, but as several critics have noted, such figurative depictions often fail to attend to the discursive and symbolic dimensions of the catastrophe of 9/11, in particular with respect to its pre-imagined and mediated conditions. Žižek famously writes that '[t]he unthinkable which happened was thus the object of fan-tasy [...] America got what it fantasized about, and this was the greatest surprise' (16). Likewise, Claire Kahane comments on the doubleness or 'uncanniness' of 9/11, which was not only 'hyper-real' but also 'surreal' in its occurrence: 'We saw death that day in the only way that we could see it and live, as a dark hole in the side of a superstructure, the site of disappearance of the object, which nevertheless left

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[3] Similarly, Rothberg considers how '[t]he attacks on New York and Washington [...] have awakened some people in the United States – at least momentarily – to a vista of global suffering. They have put Americans in touch with parts of the world, such as Afghanistan, that had previously occupied the most restricted possible zone of public consciousness for the majority of citizens. [...] the recognition that "we" are not alone in the world may be the first step to any productive engagement with histories of political and personal violence' (148).

the trace of its impact in space' (114). In drawing attention to the libidinal allure of 9/11 – its eroticism and postmodern spectacle – in ways that complicate any notion of a straightforward ethical reading, both thinkers offer symbolic readings of 9/11 that challenge prominent trauma theory designations, reaffirming the discursive and imaginary dimensions of catastrophic experience as opposed to emphasising their inassimilable horror.

In offering such readings, these theorists draw on Freud's concept of the uncanny or *unheimlich*, the idea of something strange that is nevertheless familiar in an unnerving way, such that 'everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' (225). For Freud, this classification, explained at least in part in terms of 'repressed infantile complexes' or 'primitive beliefs' (249), helps to account for certain aesthetic experiences not easily made comprehensible: those which cannot be put down simply to rational fears, surprising moments, or gruesome encounters. Instead, these experiences, including, significantly, instances of doubling and repetition – hence the frequency of references to the uncanny in descriptions of 9/11 – are here understood in terms of the psychoanalytic unconscious: an encounter which reveals hidden and perhaps-shameful fantasies and primal fears. As Sarah Eyre and Ra Page reflect, 'being reminded of these old, repressed ideas by an uncanny event or object, sends a shudder of recognition through us which we instantly revolt against' (viii–ix). For Nicholas Royle this relates crucially to 'the ghostly effects of delay and deferral' (60), but also to 'the return of something repressed […] the strange insistence, repression and disavowal of the "death drive"' (84–85). As a result, these belated but also repressed and often self-destructive, fantasies can unexpectedly re-emerge in ways that are deeply discomposing.

In relation to post-9/11 literature, this suggests a new way of reading trauma, one which calls attention to both memorial and libidinal concerns. Questioning the temporally-focused reading of trauma pronounced by such prominent trauma theorists as Hartman and Caruth, and asserting instead the continued importance of fantasy and double-meaning in trauma, many post-9/11 novels self-consciously manipulate ironic and fantastic signifiers as a way of recognizing trauma's heterogeneity and possible duplicity as a cultural designator. As Kirby Farrell warns, 'trauma

is both a clinical syndrome and a trope something like the Renaissance figure of the world as a stage: a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control' (2). The susceptibility of trauma to narrative manipulation therefore must be taken into account. As Roger Luckhurst reminds us, 'trauma psychology frequently resorts to the Gothic or super-natural to articulate post-traumatic effects', both in sensational and critical ways (98). Developing these suggestions, I argue that some recent fictional appropria-tions of the Gothic, including Barker's *Double Vision* – which I will focus on here to make space for sustained attention – but also Ali Smith's *The Accidental* (2005), John Burnside's *Glister* (2008), Helen Oyeyemi's *White Is For Witching* (2009), Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009), Nicole Krauss's *Great House* (2010), and Deborah Levy's *Swimming Home* (2011) – explore the layered experience of contemporary trauma and complicate simplistic readings that focus solely on temporally delayed memory effect. The contemporary Gothic, in its engagement with the uncanny, offers access to trauma's hidden psychology in ways which help readers to recognise how pre-existing desires, fears and fantasies play a part in trauma, including fantasies of violence implicit within Western imperialism.

Barker's *Double Vision* – structured around the traumatic experiences of a photojournalist, Stephen Sharkey, and a sculptress, Kate Frobisher, in the context of the wars in Bosnia and Afghanistan – develops these concerns through the criti-cal examination of a trauma that is at once visceral and deeply psychoanalytic. Critics have previously commented on this depiction, especially in relation to the novel's concern with the ethics of representation. John Brannigan writes of how 'the novel engages critically and imaginatively with the politics of post-9/11 vulner-ability. [...T]he imagery of 9/11, and the questions it raises about the ethics of rep-resentation, pervade the novel' (154). Relatedly, Ulrike Tancke also reads the novel as a reflection on post-9/11 traumatic discourse, wherein 'rather than accepting a vague notion of "collective trauma"', the novel instead 'take[s] trauma back to its genuinely debilitating dimensions' (90): in particular in relation to material violence and human contingency. Both readings offer trauma as central to the novel, con-necting it to an artistic ethics (Brannigan) or offering it as a comment on violence

and 'detachment' (Tancke). Yet what is lacking in these readings is a concern for the repressed psychology of trauma and the way in which Gothic signifiers in the text relate unconscious conflict. This novel plays with the Gothic in order to subvert overly redemptive or mimetic trauma narratives, instead recognising trauma's ambivalence and hermeneutic excess. In this way, it infers a statement on the traumatic libido and its connection to Western involvement in recent conflict.

Two aspects of this aesthetic are clear from the opening pages of the text through the novel's concern with uncanny spectrality and its fragmented structure. Both the setting of the novel and the ghostly visions of its traumatised characters foreground a concern with trauma. Opening with a pointedly uncanny and abject imagery, the initial scene of a car accident leaves the reader with a sense of physical and psychic wounding:

> There was no time to think. Trees loomed up, leapt towards her, branches shattered the windscreen, clawed at her eyes and throat. A crash and tearing of metal, then silence, except for the tinny beat of the music that kept on playing. One headlight shown at a strange angle, probing the thick resin-smelling branches that had caught and netted the car. […] Saliva dribbled from the corner of her mouth, blood settled in one eye. (3)

Capturing the immediacy and confusion of the event, as well as its direct bodily pain and mutilation for the protagonist, Kate, this description offers trauma a basis in material suffering, setting the tone for the rest of the novel. Summoning the con-notation of a 'rupture of the skin or protective envelope of the body', resulting in 'a catastrophic global reaction of the entire organism' (Leys, 19), Kate's helplessness as victim evokes her abject condition as the passive subject of trauma. Disabled both physically and emotionally, her condition reaffirms not only the violence of trauma but also an aporia: she appears discomposed by the event, unable to fully describe or place it. Searching her memory, she reflects, 'There was something else, something she needed to get clear, a memory that bulged above the surface, showed its back and then, in a burst or foam, turned and sank again […]. She had a sense of miss-

ing time' (13). This memory raises Caruth's idea of trauma as a sort of 'possession', haunting the victim (4–5), with an event that exists outside of conscience cognitive perception, on the fringes of memory but never wholly captured by it.

Reading this scene from the novel in light of J. G. Ballard's idea of trauma as a form technological pornography (49), wherein high-tech atrocity (in the precise event of the car accident) becomes a type of trauma spectacle, narrative references to the 'tearing of metal' and 'shifting parallelograms of light and shade' (3) introduce a new public forum of traumatic witnessing. As Mark Seltzer explains, '[t]his coalescence, or collapse, of private and public registers […] makes possible the emergence of something like a pathological public space' (4). In this case, Kate's abject body – with 'dribbling saliva' and 'clotting blood', on exhibit for the reader as well as passing drivers – speaks to this new spatiality, where the exhibit of pain reinforces trauma's alluring potential. The unnamed presence standing by her car, 'breathing, watching, not calling for help' (14), resonates this notably voyeuristic quality.

Stephen Sharkey, a former colleague of Kate's husband Ben, offers yet another instance of trauma in the novel, wherein he is also disturbed by recent public disasters. Having worked with Ben in Afghanistan, where he was employed as foreign correspondent, Stephen feels the tragedy of Ben's loss, if also the foolishness of its occurrence. 'Your life – *for that*?' (305), he remarks on seeing the photograph that led to Ben's death. As Brannigan comments, he seems unable in this passage to understand or credit Ben's photographic commitment, outraged by the suggestion of a trade of art for life (155). Nevertheless, what traumatises Stephen is not only Ben's death but also his own ambivalent position towards his demise and also towards the numerous atrocities he has witnessed on assignment, including the falling bodies during 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, and the violated corpse of a young woman in Bosnia. Connecting individual personal experiences to prominent global political events, these memories, unbidden, return to Stephen and haunt him in the form of nightmares. Lying in bed at night, he imagines '[the girl's] head 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' (55). Reoccurring without apparent impulse or meaning, these experiences echo

Caruth's idea of trauma as 'the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits' (4–5). The memory 'possesses' Stephen despite himself, haunting him in a way that he cannot fully comprehend.

Indeed, it is not only the memory of the girl which haunts Stephen but also Ben's photograph of her, which leaves Stephen unsettled in an unexpected way: 'shocked on her behalf to see her exposed like this, though, ethically, Ben had done nothing wrong' (121). In this scene, Ulrich Baer's description of the photograph as capable of 'captur[ing] the shrapnel of traumatic time' (7) – 'confront[ing] the viewer with a moment that had the potential to be experienced but perhaps was not' (8) – seems fitting, offering an apparently apt account of Ben's photograph's likeness to, and therefore participation within, Stephen's traumatic encounter. As Baer explains, 'Because trauma blocks routine mental processes from converting an experience into memory or forgetting, it parallels the defining structure of photography, which also traps an event during its occurrence while blocking its transformation into memory' (9). Stephen's inability to process the photo's affective impact – which, 'simply restored the corpse to its original state' (121) – underpins this reading, authorising a trauma-centred approach to photographic temporality.

This scene complicates Caruth and Baer's readings in important ways, adding to an interest in the libidinal dimensions of trauma. While Stephen has no trouble confronting and integrating the impact of his experiences either in Bosnia or with respect to 9/11, the struggle and shock he experiences connects not only to a particular 'structure of experience', a belatedness in trauma's occurrence, but also to his own erotic and violent impulses, which encompass a more visceral horror. Indeed, what overwhelms Stephen in this scene, as revealed by his vision of the girl 'underneath him […] dry and insatiable' (55), is his own sexualised attitude towards her violation and murder, which makes him complicit in her atrocity. Stephen is stunned by how he remembers this raped and murdered woman in the context of libidinal arousal: seeing the photograph, he expresses shock 'on her behalf to see her exposed like this'; it is as if, in the process of being photographed, '[she] had been violated twice' (121).

This emphasis on the libidinal aspects of trauma, and the ability of trauma to inculpate the sufferer despite his or her victimhood, echoes the perspective of Susannah Radstone, who emphasises the psychic participation of the victim within the traumatic act. Trauma may, according to Radstone, entail not only a 'anomalous' or unnameable event, but also a crucial 'puncturing' or achieving of libidinal fantasy, which returns unbidden:

> An event may prove traumatic, indeed, not because of its inherently shocking nature but due to the unbearable or forbidden fantasies it prompts. Or, conversely, an event's traumatic impact may be linked to its puncturing of a fantasy that has previously sustained a sense of identity – national as well as individual. (2003, 120)

In this way, Radstone, drawing explicitly on Freud, signals a wider understanding of traumatic paralysis, which recognises the 'ungovernability of the unconscious'. She continues, 'what is lost [with trauma theory] is that fundamental psychoanalytic assumption concerning the challenge to the subject's sovereignty posed by the unconscious and its wayward processes – processes which might include, but should not be limited to, an identification with the aggressor' (2007, 16). Reinforcing trauma's potential to encompass not only victimhood but also libidinal investment, this reading complicates further the ethical position of the character of Stephen in the novel, inferring at once guilt and unacknowledged attraction to the violated girl.

Horrified, or indeed traumatised, by how he feels, Stephen's internalisation keeps him entrenched in melancholia, even as he develops strategies to repress and evade this. For example, responding to the falling and 'thudding' bodies on 9/11, he recalls fantasising sexually as a means of forgetting these occurrences: 'To shut the sound out, he focused on [his wife's] breasts and was rewarded by a stir of lust. Sometimes when you're so saturated in death that you can't soak up any more, only sex helps' (97). Responding to this scene, Ulrike Tancke notes how it 'play[s] on the link of sexuality and death, Stephen acknowledges the destructive implications of traumatic events – yet in a different and more disturbing way than we would probably expect' (87). What allures Stephen in this moment is precisely 9/11's violence,

which allows him to translate or sublimate trauma into fantasy in order to exploits its pleasure. Here, trauma mediates 'in the formation of neuroses, even where what appears to be at stake is the relation between a neurosis and memory of the past' (16). Stephen, entranced by his own ungovernable conscious, is affected not only by memory, but also by libido.

Two other narratives in the novel develop this reading: Kate's relationship with Peter and Stephen's with Justine. The first of these, which begins with an assistant-ship when Kate takes on Peter following her crash, quickly transforms into something more disturbing. Kate's discovery of Peter dressed in her clothes and pretending to sculpt the Christ figure (though without actually touching it) disarms her, as Kate expresses terror at seeing Peter so transformed:

> [S]he felt a spasm of revulsion, not from him, but from herself, as if he had indeed succeeded in stealing her identity. It was easy to believe that what she'd seen in the studio, through the crack in the door, was a deranged double, a creature that in its insanity and incompetence revealed the truth about her. (179)

The scene, ending with Kate backing slowly away from the studio and running to the house, 'where she locked and bolted the door behind her' (178), conforms neatly to a common Gothic tropology. As Catherine Spooner explains, often in Gothic texts 'one character "steals" the identity of another or, alternatively, becomes trapped in an alien identity by wearing (or recreating) their clothes' (130). In this novel, the distressing effect of the experience suggests an act of violation in relation to Kate's imitated personhood, and the loss of an associated claim to a unique and coher-ent individuality. As Paul Coates explains, '[p]aradoxically, the Double enhances the ideology of individualism: it puts the self in the place of the other' (2, also qtd. in Spooner). Interestingly however, in the novel, it is Kate's own unconscious para-noia rather than Peter's that disturbs her. In fact, 'the truth about her' is what fright-ens Kate. Locating trauma in her own repressed insecurity, Kate agonises that her own weakness and vulnerability will be revealed following Ben's death.

Stephen's relationship with Justine also draws on the trope of unconscious involvement in trauma and again makes evident an internal, libidinal dimension to trauma. Stephen recognises how he is drawn to Justine despite his own reservations, and sees himself as something of a father figure to her. Reflecting on how his feelings for her are 'paternal' rather than 'patronising' (139), he later reconsiders this verdict, as he 'grind[s] her pelvis into his, throwing his head back and baring his teeth as he came': 'Nope, paternal wasn't the right word either' (139). The sexual aggressiveness of this passage underlines his libidinal involvement with Justine, which plays a part in deciding his unsettling behaviour. As he reflects, he has become sexually alive again following sex with Justine: 'he noticed every woman he passed. The sensation was almost painful, like blood flowing back into a numbed limb' (141). His new eroticism distracts him from his new relationship and from the challenge of coping with trauma through interpersonal and emotional investment.

The second accident scene, as Stephen drives Justine home, builds on this concern, making evident the thin line between violence, sex, and trauma. Repeating the brutality of Kate's accident scene, and in doing so reiterating the text's doubling aesthetic, this instance connects Stephen's earlier trauma centred on 'thudding' bodies, building on an implicit connection between 9/11 and lust, trauma and libido. As Justine snags her neck on a barbed-wire, Stephen responds with an allured fascination:

> He was hardly aware of the words. He could only stare and stare at the red tear in the white skin. He wanted to put his hand over it. He wanted to touch it with his fingertips. It was as if his mind had been torn, a rent made in the fabric of his daily self and through this rent, slowly, all previous inhibitions and restraint dissolved into the night air. (90–91)

The layered textuality of this scene, and its emphasis on shock and visual absorption, develops the novel's Gothic aesthetic and inflects this through the operation of doubling, iteration, and uncanny horror. Stephen is enthralled by the lure of the deathly as a continuation of trauma, introducing the Bosnian girl in yet another form, as Stephen 'smelled the stairwell in Sarajevo, and dragged cold air into his lungs' (94).

In doing so, he imagines Justine as a double of the girl, with her mouth 'slightly open', also waiting (94). The disturbance elicited by this connection reaffirms the violence of trauma: it is Stephen's cravings themselves which unsettle him, in Freud's words, 'unbinding' his ego's 'protective shield' (qtd in Leys, 29); it is this, rather than the memory of the girl per se, which keeps him entranced.

Indeed, Stephen's search for post-traumatic recovery enforces this message, recognising the importance of fantasy in negotiating and understanding psychological trauma. Stephen responds to his condition by refusing to embed himself in personal and romantic relationships, reasoning that it is easier for him to repress and transfer his trauma libidinally than to manage it through emotional commitments. As a result, he detaches himself from other people in order to protect himself emotionally, thereby reinforcing his trauma as a result of this psychic estrangement. He becomes isolated, enclosed in his own interiorised condition and unable to recognise where meaningful relationships might help him to recover. Significantly, the narrative suggests that the cure for this condition emerges not from therapeutic insight – in popular jargon, the 'talking cure' – but rather from the unexpected shock that Stephen experiences in response to an assault on Justine. Despite his own hesitations in committing himself to Justine, her attack awakens his sense of responsibility for her, demanding a renewed awareness of personal connection. This becomes clear where, following the assault, Stephen declares his love for Justine and experiences his trauma regarding the girl in Bosnia dissipate. He reflects, 'For a moment he saw the girl in the stairwell in Sarajevo, but she'd lost her power. This moment in this bed banished her, not forever, perhaps, but long enough' (302). The significance of trauma here relates directly to the capacity of the psyche to regulate its occurrence, stepping in (through the shock provoked by the abject body) where willpower cannot.

The ethical implications of this representation reaffirm Terry Eagleton's writings on trauma and the body, which he uses to explore 'a materialist morality' (181) founded in the shared capacity for suffering. Eagleton argues that:

> It is because of the body [...] that we can speak of morality as universal. The material body is what we share most significantly with the whole of the rest of our species, extended both in time and space. Of course it is true

that our needs, desires, and sufferings are always culturally specific. But our material bodies are such that they are, indeed must be, in principle capable of feeling compassion for any others of their kind. It is on this capacity for fellow-feeling that moral values are founded; and this is based in turn on our material dependency on each other. Angels, if they existed, would not be moral beings in anything like our sense. (155–156)

Eagleton proposes trauma and the abject body as a fundamental framework for moral understanding within the modern world, in so far as this relationship underwrites a capacity for empathy with the suffering other. We owe morality to each other, he suggests, precisely because we all feel pain and know what this means. Similarly, Hal Foster writes that 'for many in contemporary culture truth resides in the traumatic or abject subject, in the diseased or damaged body. This body is the evidentiary basis of important witnessings of truth, of necessary witnessings against power' (166). Judith Butler also reflects on how the traumatised body has the power to paradoxically awaken us to the mutual dependency of separate lives, reinforcing 'the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own' (28). Offering trauma as a basis for a renewed moral understanding, these critics propose a new awareness of interpersonal and cross-cultural connectedness made possible through shared suffering in relation to the characters in this novel.

The parallels that Barker draws in the text between Justine's attacked body and that of the Bosnian girl, who likewise 'had something to say to him' though 'he'd never managed to listen' (55), reinforce a larger moral picture, in which, crucially, abject corporeality and trauma make possible a paradigmatic awareness of human dependency. As Eagleton notes, 'If our sympathy for others were not so sensuously depleted, we would be moved by their deprivation to share with them the very goods which prevent us from feeling their wretchedness' (184). In other words, empathy (made possible through shared suffering) becomes a crucial precondition for morality and political engagement in the novel, as in the modern world. In humanity's common capacity for pain, political responsibility finds its basis.

In a novel about trauma, underpinned by a wider concern with representational ethics, Gothic components complicate this vision significantly, making apparent not only the necessity but also the difficulty of achieving an altruistic morality and politics. Through a negotiation of excess and the uncanny, Barker discloses Stephen and Kate's uneasy relationship with their own desires and fears, not only libidinally – in relation to private manifestations of desire, as explored above – but also politically – with respect to trauma's contemporary media importance. Implicit in the novel's attention to the media spectacle following 9/11, Bosnia, and Afghanistan as sites of global disaster is an awareness that trauma might be (and has been) manipulated and distorted within that media to promote authoritarian and paternalist power.

Stephen's trip to the Hague to witness the Milošević war trial buttresses this understanding, where images that the prosecutors use to convict Milošević for war crimes just as easily pass as evidence convicting his enemies: 'It wouldn't be the first time the dead had been made to work overtime, appearing as victims in the propaganda of both sides' (130). Likewise, Stephen is readily conscious throughout the novel of the way in which the media has functioned to mask violence and suffering in the Gulf War and Afghanistan as a response to Western political imperatives: 'War had gone back to being sepia tinted. Sanitized. Nothing as vulgar as blood was ever allowed to appear' (131). In these passages, Jean Baudrillard's argument that war has become 'hyperreal' in the contemporary age, and Caroline Brothers' that 'the twentieth century has seen […] a dramatic narrowing in the sphere in which photography can operate as a kind of witness' (202) are implicit, undermining any notion of objective photographic record. In this way, the novel critically exposes photography's vulnerability to manipulation – its capacity, 'even unintentionally', to 'mislead' (135) – and highlights the need for scepticism in response to this.

In the context of the novel's larger post-9/11 reflection, these deliberations invoke a new idea of photojournalism in the contemporary age: one in which self-consciousness and critical thinking play an integral part. On the one hand, as Roger Luckhurst remarks, photojournalism has indeed boomed in the era following Yugoslavia, wherein 'the figure of the war correspondent or photographer came to feature as a kind of moral limit, the exemplar of a Western society finally traumatized enough to be prompted to confused action' (169). Ben and Stephen clearly fall into

this category, such that the novel grants them a good deal of professional integrity. As Stephen remarks, 'you can't have democracy if people don't know what's going on' (141) – he and Ben offer their art as a way to contradict wars 'designed to ensure that fear and pain never came home' (242).

In the novel, the success of this project is notably limited, and spectacle remains the dominant mode of representation, undermining any concept of effective news-broadcasting. As Mark Rawlinson remarks, '[p]hotography becomes a weapon governments can use against their own, even better educated populace […] "embedding" of photo-journalists in military units functions as a mode of censorship' (137). The only means by which Ben's photography gets around this overwhelming impasse is by subverting the very documentary conventions upon which his art relies. By including his own shadow within his photographs, and thus exposing his complicity in taking the photo and casting the event in a particular light, Ben's pictures critique their own 'objectivising' intentions, making evident the reality of artifice and journalistic involvement. As Stephen remarks, 'The shadow says I'm here. I'm holding the camera and that fact will determine what happens next' (123). This self-consciousness becomes a strategy available to the photographer for demythologising the photo's associations of 'documentation': the photograph's 'truth' is exposed as critically, ethically ambivalent.

This position brings to mind Judith Butler's writing on photography, in particular her defence of the photograph as capable, when imbued with sufficient self-consciousness, of providing an informative critical lens. While Susan Sontag argues that photography is unable to provide the 'narrative coherence' necessary to produce political interpretation (823), Butler instead proposes that photography can lay claim to an interpretive logic, precisely in the sense that it frames its subject:

> We can even say that the political consciousness that moves the photographer to accept those restrictions and yield the compliant photograph is embedded in the frame itself. We do not have to have a caption or a narrative at work to understand that a political background is being explicitly formulated and renewed through the frame. In this sense, the frame takes

part in the interpretation of the war compelled by the state; it is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly. (823)

In the context of 9/11 and the 'war on terror', Butler remarks that photography enjoys an especially important role in challenging the widely-established outlook of the state, including that endorsed in the photos from Abu Ghraib: 'we must also read the interpretation compelled and enacted by the visual frame, coercive and consensually established […] Grief, rage, and outrage may be born precisely of what we see, since what we come to see is a frame, an interpretation of reality, that, with [Sontag], we refuse' (827). In other words, in recognising the Abu Ghraib photos' reactionary framing methodology, the viewer, along with photographer, gains a keen political insight: grasping how much, or how little, the respective images challenge the received state prejudice.

J.M. Coetzee went on to develop this thinking into a comment on literary framing, explaining how the reality of suffering and torture within modern authoritarian regimes places the writer in a position of dilemma, one in which the imperative of documentation is pitted against the anxiety of sensationalism. 'In creating an obscenity, in enveloping it in mystery,' Coetzee remarks, 'the state unwittingly creates the preconditions for the novel to set about its work of representation' (363). 'Yet,' he continues, 'there is something tawdry about following the state in this way, making its vile mysteries the occasion of fantasy' (363). In this sense, 'the true challenge', Coetzee argues, is 'how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms' (363). As such, Coetzee encourages the contemporary writer to reclaim the terms or frame in which suffering and torture is represented, to invest not in the project of realism so much as critical awareness: a deep-set alertness to how even the most 'objective' records may offer state apparatuses.

In Barker's novel, and in Ben's photographs, this concern is underpinned by the use of Gothic and self-conscious structures as critical, demythologizing devices. While making clear the profound difficulty of representing suffering in the post-9/11

era, reinforcing, in Ben's words, our modern incapacity to 'escape from the need for visual record' – our 'appetite for spectacle' (101) –the novel also manipulates self-consciously Gothic generic devices associated with the uncanny, making evident the ethical ambivalence of images of atrocity and the need for resultant scepticism. In this way, almost despite itself, the novel offers a critical challenge to views of Gothic texts as necessarily complicit with sensationalising discourses, at the same time as it challenges views of photography as inherently apolitical. In both cases, the novel suggests that genre can be used to understand the psychology of trauma and to alert the reader to the danger inherent in 'embedded' representation. Rather than merely 'complicating or abandoning' Gothic narratives 'in order to refocus the reader's attention on social or historical themes' (Brannigan, 3), Barker instead appropriates these narratives in her own terms in order to make visible a new opportunity for self-conscious, critical thinking about trauma. In this way, in accordance with Luckhurst's claim that 'the Gothic might prove appropriate to provide scripts for trauma' because 'from its foundation the genre has been "embroiled within the history of 'subject'"' (98), *Double Vision* gestures towards the continued relevance of genre writing in a post-9/11 context and is suggestive of its function not only in representing trauma, but also in deconstructing it.

This position is echoed by the works of authors listed earlier in this article (Smith, Burnside, Oyeyemi, Chikwava, Krauss and Levy) as contemporaries of Barker who support her uses of Gothic tropes and devices and foreground their relevance in a post-millennial world. While these writers, on the whole, do not tend to engage directly with the events of 9/11, instead exploring a wide range of personal and communal traumatic encounters, their writings, like Barker's, nevertheless unite to offer a contemporary examination of the psychologically and hermeneutically complex nature of trauma, and to challenge established readings of trauma. Set against a context of on-going post-9/11 politics, typified by the 'us v. them' rhetoric of the Bush administration,[4] but also, more recently, the flagrant anti-immigrant discourse

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[4] In his much-cited response to the events of 9/11 on 20 September 2001, President George W. Bush stated that '[e]very nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.'

and policy of Trump's White House,[5] Barker's novel is offered by this article as an important literary response to twenty-first century US and Western governmental appropriations of trauma discourse in the name of self-defence and security.

Competing Interests

The author declare that they have no competing interests.

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[5] For recent commentary on this, see Gessen, Phillips, and Pilkington.

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