

Character of burns in "regeneration" by pat barker



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In *Regeneration* Pat Barker utilises the character of Burns as a way of presenting the extent to which the society have managed to damage the young soldiers. Burns is a fictional character used as an extreme case in Craiglockhart Hospital that presents the emotional destruction that all soldiers feel and further enhances the strain from society on Burns individually shown in the actions he uses to demonstrate a severe deterioration.

It is clear that the war is continuously playing on the mind of Burns in this extract by the militaristic imagery he uses when describing, what to other members of society, would be simply a normal walk around. On the bus journey first of all he describes the rattle of branches on the bus windows as sounding like ' machine-gun fire', which depicts the constant reminder he faces of the front line. The reaction of Burns trying not to be caught ' crying out' having heard these sounds suggests just how stressful being reminded of war in any way can be.

Throughout this extract Burns also shows the discontent he feels and the struggle he faces to do the simplest of tasks such as walking up a hill. Barker refers to Burns' struggle as ' climbing the hill between trees'. The clever use of ' climbing' suggests the physical struggle he faces but also draws parallel with the feeling of climbing in and out of trenches on the western front that he formally faced, therefore hints at the idea that being reintegrated into British society was as much a " war" as it was when fighting on the western front.

Again Pat Barker manages to show Burns facing the mirrored difficulties of war when he is ' slipping and stumbling' in ' his mud-encumbered boots' just

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like if he was in the harsh conditions of war. However we know that actually the 'ploughed field' he was walking through was nowhere near as difficult to travel through as in the western front which highlights how he has got far worse since returning which could possibly be due to the added pressure of society that he has been unable to adapt to life back home.

Another key indicator that displays the pressure that has affected the character of Burns is the physical strains he faces. He depicts the discomfort with human contact so he 'tensed, not liking the contact' which indicates the disconnection he feels from society. Barker also further illustrates the dissatisfaction with life in general with his very pessimistic reflection on the day at the beginning. Looking at his room window he envisaged a 'blurred landscape' and the 'sky and hills' dissolved 'together in a wash of grey'.

The 'grey' and 'blurred' landscape that would have realistically have held much greater detail in rural Scotland- where Craiglockhart was located- shows the insignificance of the surrounding world for these struggling soldiers. These dull adjectives simply underline the feeling of being fed up that Burns would have felt having being withdrawn from war and now has understood that he no longer has much meaning in life due to the societal pressure forced upon him.

The feeling of being fed up that Burns portrays is seen through his dislike for spending time with others in the 'common room'. He describes the talk as 'facetious tones' describing how he does not care what people have to say as it does not wish to spend time socialising with others due to the domino effect that he feels alienated from society. The men appear to sit around the

' common room' and talk about ' the war, the war, the war' showing how annoyed he is that this is all people talk about.

The repetition of ' the' shows that this was the single most important thing of the time and this has left Burns feeling annoyed that he would rather just disconnect himself from everyone instead of feel pigeonholed to only talk about such a distressful topic. As Billy Prior mentions later on in the novel this club ' will be the club to end all clubs' whereas Burns clearly does not comply with this. Physical strain on him. Paranoid- everything is against him. Possibly signs of disconnection from society leaving him emotionless. Conclusion. Print bibliography and photocopy extract.