

IMPLEMENTATION OF FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYTIC METHOD THROUGH W. H. RIVERS IN PAT BARKER'S *REGENERATION TRILOGY*

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Abstract

Psychoanalysis is one of the major parts of psychology that deals with the human psyche. There are various methods in psychoanalysis. One of the famous methods is derived by Sigmund Freud. This research article focuses on Freud's psychoanalytic method and it also explores how the method is used cleverly by Pat Barker in her novels *Regeneration* and *The Ghost Road*. Barker implements the method with the help of the fictional W. H. Rivers, a psychiatrist, who treats the traumatized soldiers of World War I. Rivers uses a specific method of Freud to analyze his patients Siegfried Sassoon, Anderson, William Burns, and Billy Prior get them back to their normal life. This research will discuss a detailed account of the specific method of Freud and also discusses how Pat Barker uses this method of psychoanalysis through fictional W.H. Rivers. It also finds whether the specific method of psychoanalysis used by the fictional Rivers regenerates the wounded traumatized soldiers of WWI in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*.

Keywords: Anderson, Billy Prior, Burns, Pat Barker, Psychoanalysis, Regeneration, Siegfried Sassoon, Sigmund Freud, Trauma, World War I.

Psychoanalysis plays a vital role in analyzing the human mind. It focuses on the unconscious mental process of the human psyche. Oxford English Dictionary defines psychoanalysis as "a method of treating mental disorders by investigating the conscious and the unconscious elements in the mind." Thus psychoanalysis can be understood as a group of theories and therapeutic methods that deals with the unconscious mind to treat mental disorders. Sigmund Freud, an Australian psychiatrist is the one who coined the word psychoanalysis during the origin of the psychoanalytic movement. "The psychoanalytic movement originated in the clinical observations and formulation of Australian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, who coined the term psychoanalysis."(Britannica)

Freud found and developed many methods in psychoanalysis, this research article will particularly discuss only the Talking Cure method of Freud.

Freud tried the talking cure in his private practice but found patients would talk pretty freely to him without hypnosis, provided they were in a relaxed position specifically, lying down on a couch, and if they were encouraged to say whatever came into their heads, a process known as free association. Once a patient talked at length, Freud could analyze what the person said to figure out what past traumas were likely causing the patient's current distress.(Radzicki)

The Talking Cure method in psychoanalysis means the verbal conversation between a patient and a psychiatrist. It takes off the blockage of the traumatic effect and helps in transferring the emotions and memories from inside to outside and cures the traumatized patients. In the late twentieth century, this talking cure psychoanalytic method became more popular among writers. Pat Barker belongs to one such

writer. She uses the talking cure method in her novels *Regeneration Trilogy* through the fictional W. H. Rivers.

Pat Barker, is one of the most prominent writers in British Literature. Her works *Regeneration Trilogy* mainly focus on trauma, post-traumatic stress and disorders, homosexuality, war, and psychoanalysis. Barker uses both historical characters as well as fictional characters in this trilogy to maintain the historicity. W. H. Rivers is a historical figure, he was a psychiatrist during World War I. He treated many traumatized soldiers. Barker uses this character with slight modification in her *Regeneration Trilogy*. Fictional Rivers is a war doctor at Craiglockhart hospital. He treated traumatized soldiers like Siegfried Sassoon, Anderson, Billy Prior, and Burns.

Regeneration is the first novel in *Regeneration Trilogy*, Barker shows Rivers as the one who uses talking cure psychoanalytic method for analyzing the mind of his patients. Rivers' conversation with patients starts with Siegfried Sassoon. Rivers' initial step is to find the problems hidden inside the mind of his patients. "One of the nice things about serving afternoon tea to newly arrived patients was that it made so many neurological tests redundant" (*Regeneration* 14)

Rivers made a lengthy conversation with Sassoon. Rivers had already read the report of Sassoon from the medical board, but he wanted Sassoon to speak with him. Rivers uses this conversation to find the memory which affects the mind of Sassoon. The first thing Rivers finds in Sassoon is war neurosis and the second one is nightmares and hallucinations. "Taking unnecessary risks is one of the first signs of a war neurosis.....Nightmares and hallucination come later" (16-17).

After recognizing the problems of Sassoon, Rivers tries to rectify the problems. By using the talking cure method Rivers tries to stop his nightmares and hallucination of Sassoon. Whenever Sassoon portrays himself as weak, Rivers motivates him by ensuring he is a normal human being. "Do you think I'm mad?, No, of course you're not mad.....Hallucination in the half-walking state are surprisingly common, you know" (21). At the end of the conversation with Sassoon, Rivers followed the same strategy. When Sassoon asked whether he was mad, Rivers replied not. He explained what Sassoon was suffering from and he mentioned that he has to change Sassoon's ill mind. "Sassoon stood up, 'You said a bit back you didn't think I was mad'. I'm quite sure you're not. As a matter of fact I don't even think you've got a war neurosis. Sassoon digested this." (22)

The second patient with whom Rivers conversed is Burns. Burns is one of the patients of Rivers in Craiglockhart hospital. Burns suffered from both mental and physical trauma. He had met a severe bomb attack during World War I. "He'd been thrown into the air by the explosion of a shell and had landed, head-first, on a German corpse, whose gas filled belly had ruptured on impact. Before Burns lost consciousness, he'd had time to realize that what filled his nose and mouth was decomposing human flesh" (26-27). Due to this traumatic experience, he was not able to have his food. Whenever he starts to eat the unpleasant incident during the war comes into his mind and this makes him vomit. "Now, whenever he tries to eat, that taste and smell recurred. Nightly, he relived the experience, from every nightmare he awoke vomiting" (27). While starting the conversation with Burns, Rivers couldn't get any verbal reply from Burns, he replied only through gestures "It doesn't get any better, does it? He said. Burns shook his head" (25).

Later Burns begins to speak with Rivers. The conversation between them was not as long as Sassoon's. Rivers cleverly starts the conversation by creating an image of helping Burns out of his physical trauma. Rivers extends his conversation to study more about his patient Burns, so he enquires about Burns's sleep at night. Rivers in the case of Burns sees no progress and doubted the improvement because of the severity of his trauma. Rivers haven't ignored Burns, he hopefully continues his treatment to get Burns out of trauma, but all his effort has failed in Burns's case. Burns himself refused to overcome the trauma. He hesitates to speak about the traumatic incidents to Rivers whenever Rivers tries to speak with him.

What kind of night do you have?

Not too good

Have you made any progress with what we talked about?

Not really.....

You know the worst thing is . . . Burns scanning Rivers face – that it is a . . . a joke” (26)
What had happened to him was so vile, so disgusting, that Rivers could find no redeeming feature. (26)

The third character whom Rivers come across with his psychoanalytic method is Anderson. Anderson is traumatized by his haunting dreams. His dream is completely different from others. Anderson recollects and shares his dream with Rivers. Both had a good conversation and this helped Rivers to study the situation of Anderson. Rivers finds Anderson’s issue as a mild problem and he continuously converses with Anderson. This conversation made progress in the problem of Anderson.

”What was the most frightening thing about the dream?

The snake

A long silence

Do you often dream about snakes?

Yes” (39-40)

“Yes I’ll be alright once I’ve had a rest” (41).

In the research article *Communicating Trauma: Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy and W H R Rivers’ psychoanalytic method*, the author Karolyn Steffens mentioned that Barker has used the talking cure method in *Regeneration Trilogy* through her characters Rivers and Anderson. Steffens has also said the importance and the success of the talking cure method and face-to-face dialogue.

Barkers’ novel dramatizes the talking cure by posing Rivers and Anderson conversing with one another. Although Anderson is not fully cured and remains skeptical of Rivers’ methods, the conversation between Rivers and Anderson crucially displays Barker’s insistence on the success of the talking cure and the importance of face-to-face dialogue.

(Steffens 13).

The fourth and final character Rivers examined is Billy Prior. The conversation between them had brought out two traumatic memories from the latest battle in which Billy fought. The first incident Billy reveals is watching his comrade who slides inside the trench after a gunshot "with a red hole in his forehead and an expression of mild surprise on his face” (The Ghost Road 193). The second incident is the bayonet incident. Billy refuses consciously to reveal the incident. “The bayonet work. Which I will not remember not remember” (193). When Rivers tried to get the forgotten memory from Billy, he couldn’t get it from him. “Rivers would say, remember now any suppressed memory stores up trouble for the future, well too bad. Refusing to think the only way I can survive and anyway what future?” (193). Billy made himself silent during the bayonet incident, this silence can be considered as the fear of the past traumatic experience which he couldn't describe any more.

However, Rivers and Barker have conflicting views on the efficacy of his talking cure method. While Rivers maintains that it is necessary to treat shell shock, he also challenges the purposes for why it is utilized. He also believed that the treatment may send soldiers back to the Front. He makes the soldiers talk, cry, and grieve, but he silences them, especially their protest.

At a time in British history when first-hand witnesses were vanishing, Barker's trilogy revives Rivers' distinctive psychoanalytic method and emphasizes World War I. At the same time, she respects these silences, acknowledging the need to recollect but also the inability of voicing for veterans.

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