

# **Introduction**

### **i) Pat Barker: An Introduction**

Pat Barker, one of the significant modern British novelists, was born in Northeast in Thornaby-on-Tees in 1943 and lives now in nearby Durham with her husband. She was educated at local grammar school and at the London School of Economics, where she studied economics, politics, and history. She taught history at a college of further education in the North-east, but left in 1970.

### **ii) Her Works and Achievements :**

Pat Barker is basically a realist writer. She has written much about the lives of working-class women in the north-east of England, where she herself grew-up. She modifies her realism by concentrating on working-class women's poverty, degradation and humiliation.

Union Street, her first novel was published by Virago in 1982 to huge critical acclaim and was made into a film, Stanley and Iris. The following year Pat Barker was chosen as one of the twenty 'Best of Young British Novelists', was joint winner of the Fawcett Prize for fiction and runner up for the Guardian Fiction Prize. Virago published her second novel Blow Your House Down in 1984 and her third The Century's Daughter in 1986. Her other novels include The Man Who Wasn't There (1989) and the highly acclaimed trilogy: Regeneration (1991), The Eye in the Door, winner of the 1993 Guardian Fiction Prize and The Ghost Road (1995) which won Pat Barker the Booker Prize in 1995. Her next novel is Another World (1999). Her recently published

novel is Border Crossing. The first two books deal with the lives of working-class women and remaining are war-novels.

### iii) A Brief Account of the Novels:

Pat Barker's extraordinary first novel Union Street deserved every bit of high praise heaped on it by reviewers in Great Britain where she was named to the Book Marketing Council's much-publicized list of the Best Young British Novelists- and the United States. Set in England's grim and grimy Northeast, its seven loosely linked chapter offer a vision of working-class women's lives that is very biting, sarcastic, heartbreaking and unique.

Blow your House Down is set in the same part of England as Union Street perhaps even the same neighbourhood with its boarded up streets slated for demolition, its factories, small working-class houses. Blow Your House Down is swift, spare and utterly absorbing. It is also a bit puzzling. If the plot of Blow Your House Down could have used some rethinking, the novel nonetheless presents a remarkable portrait of the women themselves.

In Britain, Pat Barker is regarded as a regional writer, but this is surely a trivializing misnomer. What distinguishes her novels is not their regional qualities- an unusual setting, salty dialect, ways of life unfamiliar to the middleclass reader.

Barker is not a provincial writer working in a narrow or marginal genre. Her vision is wordly and in the grand tradition of the political

fiction that she has entered so ambitiously. Her most obvious models are from the 19th century. The Century's Daughter is a detailed account on the policies of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In this era infatuated with glamour and personality the absence of adventure and adultery in The Century's Daughter should not disguise the fact that it deals with that commercial fiction used to be about real lives.

The Man Who Wasn't There is a curiously appealing novel, which sound like an appropriate title for a thriller or mystery. But Pat Barker has actually written a story that for the most part resides in the vivid imagination of a 12-year-old boy named Colin. The boy is searching for the father he never knew. But it is not satisfying one because the author expects the reader to fill in too many blanks.

Regeneration is different from her other books in many ways. Its time is World War I, location is Scotland, its characters are nearly all men – British army officers. Its central subject is the classic male theme of war and manhood.

The Eye in the Door is Pat Barter's sequel to Regeneration. It is about the young British soldiers traumatized by their experiences in World War I and particularly with the poet Siegfried Sassoon. It is an impressive work, illuminating with compassion.

In Pat Barker's novel The Ghost Road the final volume in a trilogy that makes this war close and pressing history of our present moment. The Ghost Road won Pat Barker the Booker Prize in 1995.

In Another World Pat Barker follows a principle more often favoured by playwrights than novelists. There is a good deal of compassion in Pat Barker's book, but not a lot of hope. It is a powerful, moving and deeply humane study of the tyranny of the past and the quandaries of the present.

Border crossing is her recently published novel. Her war trilogy is a feminist and as class embattled a work as Pat Barker has ever written.

Pat Barker has been a classic example of a working-class realistic novelist. Her territory has been the bleak industrial towns of the Yorkshire coast where she grew up, her characters the depressed poor of those towns, particularly the women. She has written about these people with a harsh sympathy that is troubling and compelling: the life of the poor house wife there or a prostitute or a women, the world of shabby pubs, boarded up terrace houses and urban waste lands where such women exist must be as she describes it.

Union Street and Blow Your House Down – these are the books that first brought Pat Barker to notice, which might also have been characterized as masculine if not for the fact that they were about the lives of poor and desperate women.

Pat Barker grew up poor in the Industrial North and her work has always stood out for what might be called its anti-Merchant – Ivory view of English civilization. Her arduous, unsentimental care for those at the

bottom – and the fact that in her world women have always been ground into the layer farthest down – ghettoized her early books twice over.

Pat Barker herself has said that the decision to write about the war was a deliberate response to patronizing reviews of her working-class settings, and to the inevitable critical words “But uh, can she do men?” .....as though that were some kind of Everest. The author has certainly proved that she can “do men”

Pat Barker is able to make us see her characters from within, as they see themselves, and reveals the full individuality and humanity of women who have got short shrift both in literature and in life. That makes her a feminist, a realist and a wonderful writer.