

UNRAVELLING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SCARS OF WAR: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF TRAUMA IN PAT BARKER'S NOVEL *THE LIFE CLASS*

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Abstract:

Psychiatric scars from stressful events can last a lifetime and affect people who were directly or indirectly affected. Pat Barker's book *The Life Class* looks at how tragedy can have a deep effect on its characters, especially on Paul, an ambulance driver who is dealing with traumatic neurosis. This paper looks at how repressed pain shows up as emotional outbursts and mental blocks, which eventually cause repressed feelings to come out and PTSD symptoms to appear. Paul's problems show how complicated stress is and how it can have long-lasting effects on mental health. In addition, the story shows how outside triggers can bring up buried trauma, showing how damaging it is to keep feelings inside. The novel underscores the enduring scars left by tragedy, challenging conventional social norms and reshaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world

KEYWORDS: Trauma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Psychological Scars, War, Repressed Memories, War Trauma

Psychological scars can last a lifetime after a traumatic event, whether it happened directly or indirectly. In the book *The Life Class*, the main character is an ambulance driver who struggles with the psychological effects of their experiences, which eventually cause them to show feelings they had been holding back. On the journey of self-reflection, we examine the details of buried pain and how it manifests as emotional outbursts. He has PTSD. Paul experiences a huge sensory overload as the ambulance fills with the piercing cries of hurt individuals. During his trips, he frequently witnesses and hears the cries of injured individuals. In the book, it says, "The stretchers are level with the back of the driver's seat, so the groans and cries go right into your ears. Sometimes they seem to be inside your own head" (LC 217); this shows how he is affected by the trauma. Even though there is no one in the ambulance, he feels an illusion. In his illusion, patients scream inside of his head. This keeps on echoing; his normal life is affected by this sound. This sound is the repressed traumatic thoughts of Paul. It comes to surface when memories of the past are triggered by the circumstances.

This type of incident allows previously suppressed feelings to surface. To make a dramatic point about how hiding sad memories can have unexpected effects, Paul admits to crying too much on a normal trip back to base. The narrator says he can't stop crying because of this. Even though there were no obvious traumatic events, a flood of repressed feelings came out, making it hard to rationalise and keep your mind in check. When the human mind is weak, repressed thoughts and pain come to the surface. "The dissolution of repression leads to the emergence of repressed thoughts and emotions into conscious awareness," (Freud, 100).

The narrator's statement that the outburst of tears seemed to happen without his conscious permission shows how complicated the relationship is between conscious and unconscious processes when trauma shows up. People's unconscious minds keep holding on to blocked memories and feelings, even if they try to explain or hide how they feel. Triggers can bring these feelings and memories to the surface. Something inside or outside the person triggers repressed trauma, which remains dormant. It's important to stress that the outburst came as a surprise, which shows how harmful suppressed trauma can be.

She thought, How strange it was to lie on the cold ground looking up at the sky with rain falling into your eyes and not blink or turn your head away. Paul's voice was in her ear. 'Come on, now. Come away.' She hadn't known she was shaking until he touched her. Now she looked up into his face. His eyelids were crusted with white dust. In the middle of it all, a red, wet mouth makes sounds. 'We've got to get you to the station before it starts again.' (Life 190)

People often have scary experiences that stay with them during times of chaos and war. Elinor and Paul as they try to stay alive in the dangerous world of war. This incident delves deeply into the connections between trauma, repression, and survival traits. It's like the walls and floors are shaking, showing how uncomfortable the room is overall and how people are always afraid of danger. Elinor and Paul's rushed search for safety shows how important it is to stay alive during a war. Elinor's natural action of keeping it steady shows how desperately she is trying to find stability in a world full of constant disaster. It's easy to see how badly the bombing has hurt people, as well as how desperate and broken they are. Seeing buildings on fire and pieces of once-private areas broken off is a sad reminder of how war changes lives and affects everyone.

When Eleanor went to see the damage after the bombing, she saw destroyed homes and plastic bags that she didn't know what to do with. She is experiencing traumatic shock; "the traumatic spontaneous paralysis is completely explained and brought into line with the paralysis produced by suggestion; and the genesis of the symptom is unambiguously determined by the circumstances of the trauma" (292) in his work *On The Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena*, which is impairing her ability to think clearly. She initially believed that the plastic bags were carrying people, but they were the body parts of people who had been hit by a bomber plane. Her whole body shakes with fear. The overloaded monitor doesn't show how her body is doing; it just stuns her. She got back to normal after a while, but then she realised she was in psychological shock. The horrific image of bodies buried beneath the debris serves as a stark reminder of the harm that war inflicts on people. Elinor got sick to her stomach watching people die. This showed her how much loss hurts and how fragile life is when there is conflict.

The terrible things that happen to Elinor and Paul when they leave the war-torn city hurt them traumatically. Their story shows how strong the human spirit can be; they wither when trauma affects them. They also learn a powerful lesson about the long-lasting effects of trauma.

They brought a child in last week, a little boy, perhaps ten years old. It's not supposed to happen, but the ambulance driver who'd been flagged down at the side of the road by the parents just dumped him here and drove off before anybody could argue. He'd lost both arms. The stumps were curiously like wings. When he tried to move them, he looked like a fledgling trying to fly. Even with the morphine, he was in terrible pain. (Life 193)

Paul, a half-doctor working in a war zone, must deal with a lot of moral problems. The story of the hurt child illustrates these issues. The ambulance driver's cruel abandonment of the child shows how conflict can make people less human, while Paul's strong reaction to the child's pain shows how hard it is to find a balance between professional distance and empathy. The child's limbs without arms that look like wings are a sad reminder of how violence kills innocence. Observing the child's defects and witnessing his struggle to move, akin to a baby bird attempting to fly, reveals the profound loss of control and hope that follows a fight.

Paul's contact with the child's upset mother shows how people who have been hurt by war feel pain that is hard to hear. People who have lost a loved one often feel useless and hopeless. This is evidenced by the mother's absence during her son's last moments. When it turns out that the child's mother killed him, she says, "She had a pillow in her hands. I didn't realize. What would I have done if I had? If I don't get a transfer to ambulance work soon, I think I may have to take some leave." (Life 194) It illustrates how morally ambiguous acts of kindness can become when there is conflict. Paul's experience with real-life violence against people makes him question his past ideas about what is right and wrong. He starts to think about what it means to be human. while he is in terrible pain. Paul's in-depth thoughts on what happened before and after the child died show how worry can change a person's mind over time.

Paul can't get rid of the horrible memory of the boy and his mother, which makes it hard for him to stay mentally strong as fear and hopelessness keep hitting him. Paul's thought of taking some time off shows how badly he needs to get away from the stress in his life. Paul is so mentally worn out from seeing other people suffer all the time. This is why he wants to find comfort in a short break from the terrible things going on in the war. This shows in a moving way how trauma during a war can have a huge effect on people's minds. We see the unpleasant truth of human pain, moral uncertainty, and existential problems that people in conflict face every day through Paul's introspective account.

The road was clogged with limbers, motor vehicles, and men marching towards the front. They look like a machine: all the boots moving as one, shoulders bristling with rifles, arms swinging, everything pointing forward. And on the other side of the road, men were stumbling back, trying to keep time, half-dead from exhaustion, and with this incredible stench hanging over them. (197 LC)

When the narrator talks about the soldiers' physical and mental states, it makes the reader feel deeply detached from the horrible things that happen in battle. The depiction of soldiers marching in unison, resembling machines, illustrates the dehumanising effects of war. The coordinated movement of boots, spiked weapons, and swinging arms severely limits the troops' individuality and freedom, making them like simple parts in a vast military complex. Putting together pictures of troops moving forward and falling backwards shows how war hurts soldiers' bodies and minds. People think that the soldiers who came back from the front lines are half-dead because “sensory overload and sensory deprivation for a systematic attack on all human stimuli”. (McCoy)

This illustrates the gradual loss of energy and spirit. The strong smell that hangs over the troops as they come home is a powerful reminder of how terrible war is. Because of trauma, people lost the overwhelming presence of death and decay on the battlefield, numbing their senses and minds. The comparison of soldiers to irrigation buckets carrying an ethereal load shows how battle makes people less sensitive to other people's pain. Because of the never-ending loop of death and violence, extreme trauma changes, and the troops can't feel what other people are feeling. As a result, they don't care about the crimes they see or commit. The images of soldiers moving to the front lines and coming home from service might show how people caught up in the machinery of war feel alienated from their own lives. Despite being the same individuals, their distinct journeys demonstrate the irreversible transformations caused by war trauma. They become lost in a sea of moral confusion and deep-seated pain as a result.

“Happy are men who, yet before they are killed, can let their veins run cold. / Whom no compassion fleers.” (Owen, 137) The poem does a great job of showing how the harsh realities of battle can make soldiers lose their minds. It shows the terrible mental damage that comes from becoming less sensitive, less human, and losing touch with one's own existence. This is not the soldier's fault; they have to be insensible. Extreme trauma and pain give a soldier mental death. They simply become walking death machines who complete the mission that is ordered.

Identity is one of the most important criteria for normal people. But this war shattered everyone. One can see many characters in this novel, but they undergo traumatic events that lead to modifications in their behavior. They lost their identity because of the war trauma. War trauma is the worst thing. Throughout the book, Paul Tarrant has a big identity problem. He starts out as a bright art student at London's Slade School of Art, but when World War I breaks out, everything changes. Paul joins the army and works as a medical orderly on the front lines in Belgium. It is there that he sees the horrible truths of war. This event has completely changed who he is as an artist and as a person. In the war, he became handicapped. The trauma he sees and goes through makes him question his views and goals, which makes him wonder what his purpose and place in the world are. He keeps on switching jobs from one to another. He never finds peace as well as his identity. He started as an art student and worked as an ambulance driver, medical orderly, and war artist. He quit every job because he felt traumatic pain in his jobs. He witnesses lots of incidents that repress his unconscious.

‘We live on the coast. Right on the front, in fact—the sea’s about two hundred yards away—and people think we’re signalling to German ships. It’s ridiculous, but that’s what they think.’ She tried to smile, but it wouldn’t stay in her mouth. ‘If we close the living room curtains, that’s a signal. Open them; that’s a signal.’

Flowers in the window: signal. And as for switching on a lamp, well!’ ‘But that’s insane.’ (Life 120)

Trauma comes from the widespread fear and suspicion of foreigners during the war. Catherine talks about how everyone in her community is paranoid and thinks that everything her family does could be a signal to the enemy. Surveillance and misunderstandings happen all the time, making it hard to do normal things like close the curtains or put flowers in the window without being seen as suspicious. The psychological toll of living under such scrutiny is clear. People who are seen as others are targeted by the traumatic xenophobic reaction, which shows how broad it is. These kinds of violent acts make people feel scared and unsafe.

Personal attacks like the time her thirty-year-plus resident father was spat on in the street make the pain even worse. This public shame and disrespect make the family feel even more betrayed and cut off from their community. The fact that Catherine had to fight tears as she talked about what happened shows how emotionally hurt and useless they feel. At the end of the day, these events make the problem of not being able to rent a house seem small in comparison.

Catherine goes through a lot of traumas because of prejudice, which makes her change her name from Stein to Ashby. At first, she can't rent a house because her last name sounds German, which shows the racism she faces. The fact that people treat her badly just because of her name shows how deeply mistrust and hatred run in her society, which makes her feel very bad. This kind of bias not only keeps her from getting what she needs, like a place to live, but it also makes her feel like she doesn't fit in with or identify with anyone. She gave in to social pressure so much that she changed her name to Ashby, which was a huge psychological trauma and mental step.

Catherine's name change to Ashby represents how she was forced to cut ties with her family and her own past. She changed who she is to fit in with social norms, which shows how far she has to go to avoid discrimination and be accepted. It also shows how deeply traumatising it is to live in a place that rejects and ignores her true identity. This case shows how mistrust and hostility in society can have a big effect on people, causing psychological trauma like fear, loneliness, and emotional exhaustion. Even though she lost her house and family, she became an alien in her country, which traumatised and discriminated against her. she believes England that country is her home. She feels so sad about leaving for another country.

though it was depressing, to say the least. You go into a trance; it’s the only way. Then suddenly I looked down and realised that one of the men at the bottom of the heap was wearing a British army uniform. The others were all French. He must have been separated from his unit, or perhaps this ground was fought over by the British in the first few weeks of the war. He’d been there a long time. In fact, he was so badly decomposed that when we tried to lift him, he came apart in our hands. Somebody loved him once. And still does; that’s the devil of it. (Life 227)

The finding of body parts under a tarp in a yard was a very traumatic event. The narrator and others have to deal with these grim remains, which include the body of a British soldier buried with French troops. As they try to avoid feeling the emotional weight of the situation,

they wear masks and gloves, giving the scene a strange, detached feel. In the early stages of the war, the British soldier probably got split or lost, showing how long and destructive war can be. The narrator thinks about how sad the situation is and realises that someone loved and still loves this fallen hero, even though time has passed and he or she is breaking down. The letter shows a heavy load and a need to share these painful truths, recognising that these things are part of their story even though they are very hard on them emotionally.

Through the characters in Pat Barker's *Life Class*, especially Paul Tarrant, an ambulance driver during World War I, this paper looks at how tragedy can leave lasting psychological scars. The story goes into detail about how stressful events, whether they are experienced directly or indirectly, have a big effect on people long after the events themselves. This is shown by Paul's journey, in which he struggles with repressed feelings that finally show up in sudden outbursts, which are a sign of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The cries of the hurt put him through constant sensory overload, making it hard to tell the difference between what's real and what's going on inside him.

Paul's emotional breakdown while doing everyday things shows how buried trauma can come back suddenly and make it hard to control oneself. This shows how complicated the relationship is between conscious and unconscious processes when upsetting memories come back and get in the way of normal functioning. The story says that these kinds of emotional outbursts are caused by subconscious cues, showing how deeply ingrained trauma affects people even in everyday scenarios.

Catherine's trauma shows up in different ways because her last name sounds German, and she faces prejudice and discrimination during the war. The fact that she changed her name to Ashby shows how deeply social rejection affects people's minds and how far people will go to avoid being hurt. It shows how societal biases can have a lasting effect on a person's identity through this change, which is a loss of identity and cultural history. Overall, *Life Class* shows how tragedy, like being in a war or being treated unfairly by society, can leave long-lasting scars that change how a person sees themselves and the world. Through Paul and Catherine's stories, it is shown how trauma changes people's lives in deep and lasting ways, seriously challenging social rules and personal identities.

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