

Uniforms, Technologies of the Closeted Self, and Pat Barker's *Regeneration* Trilogy

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Abstract

While the British Army was still stuck in trenches on the Western Front, the British society saw the rise of patriotism, which called for the country's ideological uniformity, therefore giving rise to the persecution of homosexuals. It is the country shrouded in wartime horrors and political intrigues that Pat Barker's WWI novels, the *Regeneration* trilogy—*Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), and *The Ghost Road* (1995)—deliberately represent; and it is these hideous years that the homosexual officers of Barker's trilogy are thrown into, the most prominent examples being Siegfried Sassoon, the poet turned anti-WWI officer, and Billy Prior, the working-class fictional character. In Barker's trilogy, this collective anxiety for losing national solidarity finds the officer's uniform a convenient symbol of patriotism to admire, and hence, uniformed officers and their images are to be worshiped by the public. However, Barker's trilogy does not celebrate the officer's uniform as an everlasting symbol of patriotism; rather, Barker's novels show how wearing the officer's uniforms can be secretly turned into what Michel Foucault calls the technology of the self, used strategically by the homosexual officers to conceal their identities in order to escape persecution and to survive the disciplinary mechanisms in Britain's wartime society. This article consists of three parts. The first part of the article will focus on the relationship between the history of the officer's uniform and the making of patriotism as a prevalent ideology. The second part of the article will situate the WWI discourses on uniforms in the framework of Foucault's theory of the technology of the self. The third part of the article will analyze how Barker's trilogy represents and appropriates the historical discourses on the officer's uniform to generate possible technologies for homosexuals serving in the Great War to deal with the homophobic social contexts.

Keywords: Pat Barker, *Regeneration* trilogy, Michel Foucault, technology of the self, queer studies