



# The Ghost Road

*Pat Barker*

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## **The Ghost Road** Pat Barker

The final book in the Regeneration Trilogy, and winner of the 1995 Booker Prize

"The Ghost Road" is the culminating masterpiece of Pat Barker's towering World War I fiction trilogy. The time of the novel is the closing months of the most senselessly savage of modern conflicts. In France, millions of men engaged in brutal trench warfare are all "ghosts in the making." In England, psychologist William Rivers, with severe pangs of conscience, treats the mental casualties of the war to make them whole enough to fight again. One of these, Billy Prior, risen to the officer class from the working class, both courageous and sardonic, decides to return to France with his fellow officer, poet Wilfred Owen, to fight a war he no longer believes in. Meanwhile, Rivers, enfevered by influenza, returns in memory to his experience studying a South Pacific tribe whose ethos amounted to a culture of death. Across the gulf between his society and theirs, Rivers begins to form connections that cast new light on his--and our--understanding of war.

Combining poetic intensity with gritty realism, blending biting humor with tragic drama, moving toward a denouement as inevitable as it is devastating, "The Ghost Road" both encapsulates history and transcends it. It is a modern masterpiece

## **The Ghost Road Details**

Date : Published November 1st 1996 by A William Abrahams Book/Plume (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9780452276727

Author : Pat Barker

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## From Reader Review The Ghost Road for online ebook

### Emily says

This book brings the trilogy - a trio of books highly engaging and deeply important - to a crashing end. Barker returns to her characters Rivers and Prior, now well-loved by her readers, and uses them to explore the messy, stunted end of the war and the human debris it left in its wake as it stumbled to an end.

By splitting the narrative between protagonists, and through time, Barker emphasises the sense of fragmentation that governed the soldiers' war experience. Her individuals are caught between home - the familiar - and the front, a strange place of in-betweenness where normal social codes broke down and new ones sprung up. They negotiate this unstable territory whilst simultaneously coming to terms with experiences of cruelty, violence and needless destruction.

Barker's parallel narrative of River's fieldwork in Melanesia stands beside Prior's stunted diary entries to create a broader picture of how war works within societies; and what purpose, if any, it serves. As Rivers looks back on his time with an unfamiliar society, where he lived as a vulnerable stranger, his patient Prior is thrust back into the line of fire. Their narratives converge, diverge, then finally come back together for Barker's dramatic finish. Gripping.

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### Fabian says

Compared with (previous war novel read) "Empire of the Sun," this WWI novel evades the actual battlefield, to the benefit of everyone, I suppose. No—this one is more "Best Years of Our Lives" with raunchy sex and modern yearnings for release, than, say, other bloody epics like "Gone with the Wind" or "The War at the End of the World" (I just noticed these are not WWII novels. Still). The men in "The Ghost Road" are basically hydra heads—they converge in their collective destroyed psyche—they all survive that same dire illness: the aftereffects of constant murder & despair. I will be frank, war novels are not my cup o tea. Too much description usually gives me a headache, the panorama is so vast and awesome and the characters can often be thought of as pawns. But this account is semitrue, taking exquisite care with the characterizations, which are rich despite the spare prose. Think of this as an emblem of MASCULINITY of war. Even Prior, a gay character (read: breath of fresh air for this genre), can separate sexuality & camaraderie. This truly has something to say. It's a very rich, enlightening, must read.

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### Uncle says

*The Ghost Road*, the final volume in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, won the Booker Prize when it was published in 1995. Set in the last months of the First World War, English society seems haunted by the country's appalling losses. Every character seems to be grieving, or connected in some way to a dead soldier.

But it is not just the spirits of the war dead who haunt *The Ghost Road*. The exhausted Doctor Rivers is so drained by treating traumatized soldiers, that he himself is near a physical and mental breakdown. In this state, some of his own memories resurface, but this time with darker meanings. Charles Dodgson (later known to the world as Lewis Carroll) was a friend of the Rivers family during the doctor's childhood. Dodgson's attentions to Rivers' sister, particularly Katharine Rivers, now have a sinister undertone.

Other memories concern time Rivers spent in Melanesia. As a youthful ethnologist, his task was to observe and document a South Pacific tribe, one whose ancient culture has been devitalized by its contact with European civilization. In his current depressed state, Rivers can now see unsettling parallels between an ancient, dying culture, and wartime England.

Previous to the *Regeneration* trilogy, Pat Barker was primarily known as a feminist writer, one with working-class, Northern English roots. Yet her feminism is integral to her depiction of the mostly male world of Britain during the First World War.

There is no question that the lives of her female characters have been severely limited by the society's strictures. Billy's working-class girlfriend Sarah works in a munitions factory, in unpleasant, toxic conditions which turn her skin and hair yellow. Yet young working-class women like Sarah leap at the chance to earn what what a man would be paid. The world of middle-class, educated Katharine Rivers, by sad comparison, has shrunk to a fretful sickbed, though though her psychiatrist brother suspects there is nothing physically wrong with her.

The lives of young men, however, are needlessly sacrificed by the thousand by a war-like, patriarchal culture. The male-dominated society of *The Ghost Road* seems to care very little for the lives of individual men. Charles Dodgson, lavishing attentions on the two Rivers sisters, dismisses the male children, remarking that "boys are a mistake". Sarah's mother Ada, a minor but very memorable character, seems to have absolutely no use for the male sex, believing that it is a man's duty to provide for his wife, and then to conveniently die.

*The Ghost Road* is my personal favorite of the three *Regeneration* novels. The series is more than just great historical fiction as Barker poses difficult questions about about how individuals can survive in a society which asks so much of them, even at times their very lives. Even the caustic, "street smart" Billy Prior ultimately seems powerless in the face of such powerful demands. All of Barker's characters are memorable, and all have a meaningful, human part to play in the wider drama of England during "the Great War".

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## **Elizabeth (Alaska) says**

I gobbled this up. It was a fine ending to a marvelous trilogy that brilliantly shows the side effects of the Allied forces having won. These are novels. One of the main characters, Billy Prior, is fictitious. But the doctors and some of the other patients were real people. In this last installment, Billy Prior returns to France and he serves with Wilfred Owen. Dr. Rivers continues to treat the battlefield mentally maimed. Interestingly, Rivers spends a lot of time in his memories of having explored Melanesia. I think this might at first be disconcerting to those who have not read the earlier novels in the series.

Despite all of that and the fact that this won the Booker Prize, I did not feel this was as powerful as either of the earlier books in the series. Perhaps like Prior and Owens became less sensitive to the horrors of the battlefield, I became somewhat less sensitive to those who continued to suffer. The books of the series are all stand alone, but I think I would have appreciated this one even less had I not read the earlier ones. It is important to note also that the action in them takes place chronologically.

I did feel a connection to this one in a way that I did not the others, and in a way which surprised me. Part of the chapters narrated by Billy Prior are in the form of a diary, beginning in August 1918. As the days tumbled on, I looked forward to September 26, to learn whether he was anywhere near where my grandfather's unit fought, and the day my grandfather ceased to be. Prior was nowhere near and the war

continued.

It seems she understood Billy Prior and other working class soldiers, better than Rivers and his class. There is a thread of the discomfort of the the British classes mixing. I looked at Barker's wikipedia entry and it's no wonder this comes through. She was born and raised in a working-class family. *Her first three novels were never published and, she told The Guardian in 2003, "didn't deserve to be: I was being a sensitive lady novelist, which is not what I am. There's an earthiness and bawdiness in my voice."* Indeed there is. Four stars for *The Ghost Road* and I look forward to reading other books by Pat Barker.

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### **Michael says**

Barker's final volume of the "Great War Trilogy" does an admirable job of bringing the series to its expected but none-the-less tragic conclusion. Although The Ghost Road deserves the five stars I awarded it and the Booker prize, it does so in large measure because of what has come before. Barker has created a trilogy in which each volume points the way forward toward the inevitable ending, but in which the final volume suffuses the whole with a new level of meaning as the reader reflects on the first two volumes with a deepened understanding after (even while!) reading the third. It is difficult to comprehend how we continue to send young men (and now young women too) into the meat grinders of war after war from which even those who return alive and physically whole do not do so undamaged by the experience. It is futile to imagine that literature has the power to end war, but this series of fine novels makes a powerful argument that war is itself insanity and that our jingoistic politicians and those who elect them are doing violence to our society that will affect generations to come. Works such as this are necessary to remind us that the essence of war is not in flags, parades, and uniforms but in the cries of hideously wounded men crying out for their mothers as the world explodes in mud and blood around them. It is important that we remember.

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### **booklady says**

The final novel in a trilogy about the ending of a monstrous war, WWI, supposedly the War to End All Wars. My husband and I listened to it on our recent trip. Given some of the more graphic descriptions of human depravity I don't recommend the audio version. You can more easily skim over sections you don't care to read with a written text v. an audio book. Undoubtedly it would have helped if we'd read the first two books, but it has made me more curious to read *The Guns of August*/*The Proud Tower* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* by way of comparison.

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### **Lisa says**

How do you review a book that you found ... average?

A book that you suspect will disappear from your memory as soon as you pick up something else to read? My personality goes quite well both with rants about horrid books (Thank you, Coelho, writing a review on *The Alchemist* was a blast!) and with gushing about books that made me cry and laugh and shiver (yes, *Of Human Bondage* is still there with me in its entirety, long after closing the book with a sigh of sadness that the 700 page journey is over).

But a historical novel on World War I, with fictional characters I can't really relate to? Well, I have to admit that I made a mistake. I chose it for winning the Booker Prize (and it happened to fall into my hands), and I was not aware it was the third part in a trilogy. It can certainly be read as a standalone, but I might have a different opinion if I had read the other two in the series as well.

My problem with it is on a different level, though. I love history, and I love literary fiction and poetry. I completely understand why a contemporary author would embark on the endeavour to WRITE historical fiction, to lose herself in historical documents, primary sources, objects, witness reports, to reconstruct an era through thorough research. I understand Pat Barker. But this kind of novel always leaves me with the feeling that it must be more rewarding to write it than to read it. For I am not very interested in Pat Barker's reconstructions and relationships with historical characters. I want to go on that journey first hand myself, not explore it in the language of today, through the lense of another history teacher. I want to reread The Poems Of Wilfred Owen, to get to know Sassoon better, or add another Remarque experience to my favourite All Quiet on the Western Front, or even reread sections of the splendid brick of Churchill's The World Crisis, 1911-1918. I want to read all the fiction that was produced back then, adding nuance and understanding through the voices of that time, as I have so often done before, Of Human Bondage and The Voyage Out forever on my best-of-the-best shelf ever since, joining hands with Hemingway's and other brilliant authors' war experiences.

So it is maybe my own fault that I find this rather ... uninspiring. It is a solid novel, for sure. But to paraphrase the most significant quote in the story, it is already a ghost in the making in my literary world.

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### **Erwin says**

An incredible finale to an amazing trilogy. This trilogy about the psychological impacts of the Great War is impressive! The Ghost Road and part one: Regeneration were the best. In 'The Eye in the Door' , the character development of Lt. Prior was somewhat 'off'. It was a bit too much to handle. The final installment made up for a lot. The stories of both Prior and Rivers were fascinating. They came together in the end in a powerful and horrifying understanding of the impact of war, and the futility of (this) war, but also gave a clear understanding of the double standards civilized nations upheld in those days ( and nowadays, no doubt) about what was civilized and what not. This trilogy is highly recommended!

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### **Becky says**

The Ghost Road is the third book in the Regeneration trilogy, and I have to say, I was disappointed. Rivers has moved to war torn London, still dealing with the young fall out from the devastating World War. Prior, a character from the periphery of Regeneration, who moved to the fore in The Eye In The Door, returns to France against Rivers's advice, and the story takes them both to the end of the War. In this respect, the novel was just as captivating and equally sobering as the first. What I couldn't grasp was the need for the bizarre back story of Rivers, his experiences in colonial Africa, and acceptance into a tribe of headhunters. I expected a large denouement, for all of that to fall in with the modern day story, to learn something from his experience there. But it falls flat against the horrifying final moments of the war in France. So mixed feelings about this one, but an excellent trilogy all told.

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## **Megan Baxter says**

What becomes of us when all we know is death and killing, and that is taken away?

If that is the question being asked, the answer is not forthcoming. The book ends just before the war does, so we never get to see how any surviving characters would reintegrate into civilian life. From their worries, their neuroses, and what the experiences of warfare have done to them, the answer appears to be "not well." If the experiences of Rivers among the headhunters are instructive, particularly not well.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

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## **Marina says**

This novel is the third in a trilogy, and I have to admit that my reading probably suffered from not having read the first two volumes that form the story.

The novel opens in the final months before the end of World War I. The Narrator alternates points of view between Dr Rivers (a real historical figure) who treats shell-shocked and damaged men at a War Hospital and one of his former patients at the hospital, a young and not very likeable lieutenant.

From the beginning my interest was held by the war hospital setting, the broken men and Dr Rivers's rather unorthodox methods of treatment. I also found the fever-induced memories of his time with a head hunting tribe on a Melanesian island to make fascinating reading. Inevitably the reader's mind is led to draw parallels between the attitudes of the Melanesian tribesmen, those of their new rulers and those prevalent in war torn Europe some twenty years later. For all the inevitability and truth in those conclusions I felt like a child held by the hand and led to them and this I resented. I wish there could have been more subtlety.

I was distinctly less interested when the narrative switched to the young lieutenant. Looking back I can see that he was a very well drawn character, shown to us with warts and all. The thousands that marched to their death during that period of unnecessary bloodshed were not beautiful saints, they were men with faults, and not always likeable. And they didn't deserve the suffering and fate that was meted out to them. Still, I found my interest ebbing away when the author focused on the more earthy needs and pursuits of this man. Billy Prior, who returns to the trenches, in spite of medical advice, not only doesn't break down, but performs one final act of heroism before the guns cease. Even so he can take no pride in an act that he recognises as futile, and one that ultimately causes more suffering.

I thought the descriptions of the realities of the war zone and the trenches to be quite persuasive if a little forced in comparison to other books with the same subject matter. (*All Quiet on the Western Front* comes to mind).

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## **Giedre says**

I have just finished the book today and I have to say that it totally blew me away.

The third book of the trilogy centers mostly on two of all the characters who were present in the previous books, Rivers and Prior. Throughout the books the characters are developed into vivid, compelling, independent personalities. You can almost feel you knew them in real life after you finish the trilogy, they

are so real, so well-developed.

Prior, as a character, shows all of his sides. He's witty, intelligent, brave, and at the same time neurotic, sadistic, unscrupulous, and you still can't avoid finding him really likable, probably because he's so close to what we all are, he's so humane. No perfect hero, but most of the times even painfully familiar, reminding us about our own flaws.

I could definitely continue, but I will round up just by saying that "The Ghost Road" accompanied by the previous two books in the trilogy has definitely won a place in the very top list of my favourite books.

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## Laura says

The final installment of Pat Barker's trilogy regains some of the cohesion lost in the second one, partly because it focuses more on Dr. Rivers' past, and partly because Billy Prior — as repugnant as ever — finally returns to battle. What does it say when the horrors of trench warfare perk up a story?

A chunk of the narration takes place as Dr. Rivers battles influenza and his mind wanders back to the time he spent in Melanesia researching a tribe of head-hunters. Their barbaric thirst for heads yet their willingness to curtail the practice, the white man's abhorrence of head-hunting yet their willingness to send millions of young men to their deaths, a people destroyed by their refusal to fight wars and a nation destroyed by fighting a war...these contradictions all give a not-too-subtle commentary on the moral ambiguity of 20th century British culture. Frankly, I'd sort of checked out. A little social criticism goes a long way if you're not distracted by engaging characters. Plus I'd endured too many tasteless sexual encounters between Billy and whoever was handy to really care much about the book. (What on earth would make an author think that coarseness is going to be anything other than repellent? Are there readers so depraved that they don't mind?? I shudder to think.)

One of the big disappointments with the trilogy is that the characters who were so fascinating in *Regeneration*, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, are absent from the second book and make only cameo appearances in the last. Much of the charm (which isn't really the right word) of *Regeneration*'s premise is the fleshing out of historical people and encounters. Instead, Barker took the least appealing character from the first book and focused the rest of the series on him.

The ending, at least, packs a punch. And as a bonus, Wilfred Owen returns for a brief appearance, even if it is only in time to get killed at the Sambre-Oise Canal (he died on November 4, exactly one week before Armistice; his mother received word of his death as church bells rang out victory — that part's not in the novel). I would definitely read *Regeneration* and definitely skip the next two. Bizarrely, *The Ghost Road* is the one that actually won the Booker Award.

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## Aubrey says

*I honestly think if the war went on for a hundred years another language would evolve, one that was capable of describing the sound of a bombardment or the buzzing of flies on a hot August day on the Somme. There are no words. There are no words for what I felt when I saw the setting sun rise.*

I have a hypothesis that the muddled history I've internalized of whether *The Lord of the Rings* is a single work or a trilogy has something to do with the fact that reading *Regeneration* the way I did meant that its sequels were destined for five stars regardless of intervening time or space or change of tune. Of course, the sequels could have *really* fucked up to the point that this fate was broken and denied, but in this case, Barker kept up her streak of leaving the reader broken in her wake. A warning, perhaps, but with the subject at hand, to be denied would be the more dangerous route, as that would involve withholding some amount of the truth, a mechanism which must occur if ever one is to convince others to go to war. Not revolution, mind you. Not rebellion, nor mutiny, not even resistance. War.

*By any proper civilized standard (but what does **that** mean **now**?) we are objects of horror. But our nerves are completely steady. And we are still alive.*

I have my doubts about the reception of Barker's other works, especially the ones that also take place in merry old WWI-era England. On the one hand, the writer in the *Regeneration* trilogy has her finger on its pressure point in the ways that forgo all talk of being 'of the times' that it's nearly impossible for that to have all evaporated by the time the first words began forming for another project. On the other, it'd be a downright shame, as while I've already committed to finding a nice three-in-one edition to reread every ten years or so, I've grown tired of going over the same old territory in various media. Sticking to the same author is hardly adventurous, and I don't think I'll be dislodging R.L. Stein off my most read authors list anytime soon, but many-tomed classes in the vein of Austen and Shakespeare have given me an appreciation for bibliographical evaluations. If Barker isn't worth this endeavor, I don't know who is.

*I suppose what one **should** be asking is whether an ideal becomes invalid because the people who hold it are betrayed.*

The strange part is that this trilogy doesn't treat with war at its most creative. This isn't Haiti in 1812, or South Sudan in 2011, or anything lending to postcolonial or anti-settler state. You can't even make an argument for genocide, or at least not on any level other than the peripheral. The statement made by one of the characters that poison gas and trenchfare was the worst the twentieth century had to offer was made by a brain firmly in its present, the skill of an author rather than an imagination and thus the sort of hubristic perfection no one alive would ever want to be able to afford. Some things, however, never go out of style: post-traumatic stress disorder, homophobia, biphobia, toxic masculinity. One could make an argument for racism, but as far as fictional ethnography written by a white author goes, Barker was more than willing to hand off the baton to someone who has the right to talk about such things.

*We have to die, we don't have to worship it.*

At the end, I have to say, I regret the ending. It wasn't a horrible ending, practically the best one, but a better one than that would have been to never end, which is so overwhelmingly selfish a statement that I can only make it after having gone through each of the three books in the order intended. Due to the matter of various prizes and places on esteemed lists, as well as the way in which the writing is constructed, this is one of the more pulled apart series, some reading the first and no other, some heading straight to the third, the oft-neglected second suffering from both middle sibling syndrome and the mystique of the loner piece of literature, without sequel and thus without close compare. Even I wasn't the most orthodox about my road to completion. After leaving the first in the series to itself for three years and rushing through the following two in the last month, I'm nearly drunk with the bone-raking pathos of what I remembered and what I've just experienced. One way of reasoning it out is that the books were there when I needed them. The power of them, though, suggests that I was there when they needed me.

*A curious, old-fashioned romantic poet, though I don't know why I say that, there's plenty of them about...But then they don't all quote, 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers,' as he did, quite without embarrassment, the other night while I was getting ready for bed. I said very*

*sourly indeed that a more appropriate quotation for this stage of the war might be: 'I am in blood stepped in so far that should I wade no more...' His leap across the room was rather remarkable. He'd slapped a hand across my mouth, and we were staring at each other, dumbstruck, before either of us had time to think, his face chalk-white and I suspect mine as well, each trying to remember what the penalty is for smacking an officer in the gob. Quite possibly death.*

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## **Karen says**

I can't say enough good about this trilogy. In an interview with Pat Barker, she described growing up in a home where she saw the lifetime of effects of WWI. Struggling with the effects of a war she didn't live through, her obsession led to a brilliantly re-imagined world, much of it based on historical records.

She addresses the war from several angles: a brilliant psychologist, women who are freed to work in munitions factories, soldiers faced with moral and class conflicts.

The first book is set in an institution where soldiers are sent for shell-shock. A pacifist is sent there too, to prevent him from speaking out about the war.

The second book addresses the government's fear of traitors in war time: gays and socialists are targeted.

The third continues the story of a few of the characters, who are now returning to the front.

The writing is remarkable, flipping from harsh memories, to forgotten childhood incidents, to the psychologist's anthropology studies in Africa. The therapy sessions were the most engrossing--almost voyeuristic--but they did so much to develop all the characters.

All three books are engaging--interesting plots and characters-- but work on a deeper level too, questioning why nations go to war and how individuals survive it.

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## **Cathy (cathepsut) says**

The Regeneration Trilogy: I read these books in the late '90s, after Ghost Road was first published. I was in love with the British war poets of WWI at the time and this fit right in. I don't remember many details, but these books were great reads. Very atmospheric, accessible and captivating main characters, I suffered with them every step of the way.

P.S.: The movie is also very good.

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## **Ted says**

'Shotfarfet.'

So mutters a horribly wounded Craiglockhart patient to his family and fiancée, as Rivers stands helplessly in attendance. ... *his speech was incomprehensible. The wound to his lower jaw made it difficult to determine whether this represented a deficit in the power of using language, or whether the failure to communicate was entirely or primarily mechanical. He showed some understanding of speech, however ...*

He suddenly realizes what the man is saying through his mangled face. (view spoiler)

Barker has used the following epigraph.

Now all roads lead to France  
And heavy is the tread  
Of the living; but the dead  
Returning lightly dance.

'Roads', Edward Thomas

At some sort of recent moment I developed an urge to rewrite and complete my reviews of Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy; and a few days ago, having reached the point where a review of the hauntingly-named finale, *The Ghost Road*, had become the final step, it occurred to me that this book probably deserved something better than what I'd done for its predecessors – which was to make up reviews consisting of vague memories, a quote or two, and extracts from Wiki articles about the books. (I think the "deserved something better" probably connected to the fact that *Ghost Road* was the one book of the three that won the Booker when it was published.)

So, I read it again. Got through in two or three evenings. When I finished, wiped the tears out of my eyes and patted myself on the back, murmuring "well that was a good plan."

*The Ghost Road* is definitely about ghosts. (view spoiler) And there are other sorts or spirits which join that dance down the road: the ghosts of the living, the younger selves of characters which only exist in the memory, before those selves were altered inexorably by the horrors of that War which, failing to "end all wars", instead succeeded monstrously in ending so many selves, millions physically, more millions spiritually, ghosts of both these millions, dancing and marching. They are joined by spirits which inhabit the myths and minds of Melanesian natives, natives which Dr. Rivers had studied years prior with Arthur Maurice Hocart, and which in this novel keep coming back to him, weaving in and out of the narrative. (view spoiler) On Eddystone Island, Rivers and Hocart struggle to communicate with these natives, one of them, Njiru, becoming Rivers' ultimate source to his people's myths and legends. His people, by the way, a culture defined by head hunting. Banned now with extreme penalties from taking heads by the colonial British, and astoundingly, as Rivers realizes, decreasing in population, dying out as a culture, marrying less, because all their spiritual traditions connected with this head hunting, and intermeshed with every other aspect of their daily lives. So the ghosts of this culture, the ghosts of the spirits which ruled it, joining the march. One of these spirits is that of *Ave*, whom Njiru consents to explain to Rivers shortly before he, Rivers, is to depart from the village. (view spoiler) And we realize that *Ave* has ruled the world, metaphorically, at this dreadful time in Rivers' life, producing the broken patients he's been treating, destroying peoples en masse, and now, at the end of the story, conjuring up the destruction of the next apocalypse, the Spanish influenza, Pestilence taking over from War, bringing new recruits to the Danse Macabre. Even the ghosts of the future, futures which will never be for those killed and shattered in the war, are summoned to the road, as are the literary

ghosts of Barker's trilogy: Sassoon, Billy Prior, Wilfred Owen, Rivers.

This book is a most deserving winner of the Booker. As one review said, it is "deeply eloquent".

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**Previous review:** Regeneration

**Next review:** Memory of Fire I: Genesis

**Older review:** Invisible Man

**Previous library review:** The Eye in the Door

**Next library review:** Another World

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## **Martine says**

The final instalment in the Regeneration Trilogy struck me as a bit unfocused and heavy-handed in its use of symbolism and parallel storylines. However, certain scenes were very powerful, and the ending packed a punch.

I'm not sure why *The Ghost Road* rather than *Regeneration* or *The Eye in the Door* won the Booker Prize. I can only assume the Booker judges wanted to honour the trilogy somehow and so picked the last book to show their appreciation, much like the Academy showered *The Return of the King* with Oscars even though *The Fellowship of the Ring* was a vastly superior film. Personally, I thought *The Ghost Road* was the weakest of the three books (rated a mere 3.5 stars, as opposed to the 4 and 4.5 stars I gave the other two books), but it didn't mar my overall impression of the trilogy, which is good.

A review of the entire trilogy is forthcoming.

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## **Michael Robotham says**

I've enjoyed this trilogy and THE GHOST ROAD - a former Book Prize winner is perhaps my favourite of the three books.

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## **Paul says**

Last of an excellent trilogy and it does help to have read the previous two books as many of the characters run through them all and there are references back. You could read it as a standalone, but a good deal would be lost, especially the nuance.

We reconnect with characters from the previous books. There is very little of Sassoon and Owen is present in a small way; Prior and Rivers take centre stage. The narrative alternates between the two as they experience the last days of the war. We also go in flashback to the time Rivers spent in Melanesia with a tribe of head-

hunters.

Prior is recovering and makes a deliberate decision to return to France, reflecting the same decisions made by Owen and Sassoon. The sex/death circle works its way through in Prior's liaisons before and after he returns to France. Rivers describes observing a tribe in Melanesia who had been banned from headhunting and other warlike activities. Their whole reason for existence had disappeared and as their culture was based on the rituals related to the gaining of heads the tribe was in decline and lethargy had set in. The contrasts with war in the west are neatly and obviously drawn.

We see Prior, despite his deprived working class childhood, developing his own voice and starting a diary. We also see over the trilogy what the war did for women, allowing them independence previously not possible and the chance of earning a wage. One character even says that August 4th 1914, when the war started was for her the day Peace broke out "the only little bit of peace I've ever had".

I remember when this book came out one reviewer's idea of praise was to say that it could have been written by a man (!!!). Barker had previously written about strong working class women; here she focuses on men, but also on the effects of war for women and the adjustments society had to make as it coped with "shellshock" and the thousands of men it affected. She is reflecting some of her own working class northern background and she has said herself that she decided to write about the war following some patronising reviews of her early novels about women. What a response! And, of course these novels are just as feminist and class centred as her earlier ones; just reframed.

The last chapter of the novel again emphasises the sheer futility of it all focussing on some of the last actions of the war, when everyone knew it was over and peace was days away. The troops, including Prior and Owen are sent over the top for the last time.

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