

## “LIKE A PUPA STARTING TO HATCH” The Aesthetics of War and Ethics of Peace in Pat Barker’s *Double Vision*

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**Abstract** – Pat Barker’s novel *Double Vision* (2003) addresses the ethics and aesthetics of witnessing and representing suffering in the context of recent hyper-mediated ‘postmodern’ wars (Bosnia, Afghanistan) and a global audience anaesthetized by spectacular excess. Her compelling exploration of the aesthetics of violence against issues of value, morality, shared humanity and truth, and the way she responds to them by weighing the potential of different art forms, provide a forceful poetic statement of the ethical possibilities of peace. As the protagonists confront the moral choices underlying the narrative, visual and ideological challenges of rendering the ‘unsayable’ and the ‘unwatchable’, relationality, partnership, emotional commitment, poetic truth and affect emerge as key steps towards viable responses to the experience of evil informing human life and art alike.

**Keywords:** war photography; literature and war; ethics; aesthetics; responsibility.

### 1. Of visual saturation and emotional loss

Pat Barker’s fame as one of the most nuanced and sophisticated interpreters of the British experience of World War I and its traumatic psycho-social aftermath, is still largely unchallenged. Her *Regeneration Trilogy*, published between 1991 and 1995 – with the last volume, *The Ghost Road*, winning the Booker Prize – insightfully probe the full horror of the Great War by foregrounding the psychological damage and devastating impact which war neuroses have on the very possibility of returning to imaginaries of peace.

At the same time, by thematizing the experiences of canonical British World War I poets, these novels allow for a compelling exploration of the relation between different art forms, the limits and potential of narrative, and the cognitive, moral and formal challenges underlying the task of representing war and violence.

*Double Vision*, published in 2003, interrupts the World War I paradigm, returned to in Barker’s most recent works (*Life Class* 2007, *Toby’s Room* 2012),<sup>1</sup> by addressing the ethical dilemmas posited by recent hyper-mediated ‘postmodern’ wars, such as the first Iraq War (1991), described as “the first to appear on TV screens as a kind of *son et lumière* display” (Barker 2004, p. 241), Rwanda (1994), Bosnia (1992-1996), and, against the backdrop of September 11 which acts as a structuring frame to the recurring eruption of violence in the novel, the early stages of the war in Afghanistan (2001-2002).

These issues are intimately embedded in everyday reality, highlighted by the unconventional setting of the novel, Northumberland’s rural border country. Associations with the myth of ‘rural England’ are undermined immediately, however, as this trope is

<sup>1</sup> Her last novel, *Noonday* (2015), follows the lives of the main characters of the previous two novels into the home front experience of the Blitz.

exploded into a locus of faked authenticity, infiltrated by different strains of evil, regardless of whether originated by human aggression, environmental disaster, or illness. The story unfolds in the aftermath of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001-2002, and is interspersed with depictions of a contaminated landscape. Depleted by the culling of animals, and devastated by pyres, these scenes reproduce mediated images of the epidemics which are clearly suggestive of the visual archives of both September 11 and the war in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

Sharon Monteith and Nahem Yousaf (2005, pp. 283; 297), among others, have argued convincingly that *Double Vision* should be read as an estranging kind of “pastoral”, oscillating between the “regenerative” and “traumatized” modes; whereas Mary Trabucco interprets the novel as a meditation on “vulnerability and trauma in the pastoral mode”, the latter largely being represented “as a mechanism that brings together communities in mourning” (Trabucco 2012, p. 104) through the texturing and connective effects of dialogue (Trabucco 2012, p. 107).

While a variety of minor characters help to flesh out Barker’s perceptive networking of local bonds, her sophisticated dialogism is modulated and sustained, at its best, through the protagonists’ discursive and emotional exchanges, providing “a novelistic meta-commentary on the representation of war” (Kauffmann 2012, p. 83). This entails a painful meditation on seeing and witnessing that includes accepting the shared risks of empathic entanglement, which, in a compelling essay on Judith Butler’s *Frames of War* (2009), Fiona Jenkins has called “a struggle for the common inhabitation of a place of living – a *world* where the vulnerability of witness and witnessed, [...] is mutual and premised on exposure” (Jenkins 2013, p. 120).

Witnessing, in literal or imaginative terms, is what brings together Stephen Sharkey, a psychologically damaged war correspondent who has holed himself up in his brother’s country cottage to write a book about war reportage, and Kate Frobisher, a recently widowed sculptress living in the same area, who is slowly recovering from the injuries sustained in a car crash and is facing the task of creating a colossal sculpture of the risen Christ for Durham Cathedral. Struggling to cope with their own physical and psychological traumas, the protagonists are both mourning the loss of the same man, Kate’s husband, Ben, who used to work with Stephen as a war photographer until he was killed in Afghanistan. Stephen’s deracination is compounded by his impending divorce, following a phone call from New York, on September 11 2001, which had exposed his wife’s affair with another man, literally inscribing the collapse of the Twin Towers, with its dramatic visual saturation, within the scorched landscape of his emotions.

Numbed by such affective disconnections, Stephen is haunted by the traumatic flashback of a murdered rape victim he and Ben had found at the end of a stairwell in Sarajevo:

“Eyes wide open, skirt bunched up around her waist, her splayed thighs enclosing a blackness of blood and pain. Stephen fell on his knees beside her and pulled down her skirt. [...] He wanted to close the terrible eyes, *but couldn’t bring himself to touch her face.* [...] *She had something to say to him, but he’d never managed to listen, not in the right way*” (Barker 2004, pp. 52-53; 55; my italics).

<sup>2</sup> They are also reminiscent of the blazing oil fields in Werner Herzog’s *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), his pseudo-documentary responding to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, or of Tony Harrison’s poem *A Cold Coming*, itself based on a well-known photograph by Kenneth Jarecke.

This horrific “memory fragment” (Banita 2012, p. 57), compounded by a dual sense of guilt – for being at once *too responsive* in the face of professional standards, and *not enough* as a fellow human being – is a major theme in the novel, one that addresses the relation between victim and photographer (but also between writer and reader) as “a meeting of guilt”, as suggested by war photographer Don McCullin (in Edemariam 2005), one of Barker’s acknowledged sources for this work. When Stephen later finds a photograph showing that his friend had gone back overnight as though to reconstruct the “crime scene” (Barker 2004, p. 53)<sup>3</sup> and document its full horror (or its ‘facticity’?), he is profoundly “shocked on her behalf to see her exposed like this, though, ethically Ben had done nothing wrong. [...] And yet it was difficult not to feel that the girl, spread-eagled like that, had been violated twice” (Barker 2004, p. 121). Far from merely thematizing the moral instability of ‘truth’, and the searing debate on the witnessing of atrocities, this scene in my opinion gestures towards a new moral articulation, in which Ben’s choice of objectivity over compassion is qualified by the fact that the picture remains unpublished, a document existing as ‘history’ in Ben’s archive, but never destined to be showcased and consumed as ‘story’.

Peter Wingrave and Justine Brathwaite – the Vicar’s nineteen-year-old daughter helping with Stephen’s nephew, Adam, affected by Asperger’s syndrome – are also essential characters. They act as unsettling and/or enabling ‘doubles’ not only to Kate and Stephen, but to the definition itself, in the novel, of the role of the author/artist and of secular understandings of violence, betrayal, sacrifice and redemption as embodied in the statue of the Christ, the coming through of the main characters and, hopefully, of the village community at large.

The novel is structured along such a proliferation of parallelisms, complicities and mutual entanglements, that the very concept of ‘doubling’ may prove inadequate, so much so one is tempted to agree with Elaine Showalter (2003) that “the experience of reading *Double Vision* is like watching a hologram”, where “a dominant image, intricate and coherent”, is continually destabilized and haunted by other presences surfacing from the text. This does not apply only to characters, but is a structural component of the novel, where each major theme reflects upon the others, allowing for a seamless, multi-perspectival meditation on the role of the artist as “proxy-witness” (Trabucco 2012, p. 109): one who, in Goya’s wake, is able to entangle horror and hope through the combined action of supreme craftsmanship and redemptive compassion.

In *Double Vision*, for the majority of the story different forms of craftsmanship – sculpture, documentary photography, effective reportage, competent storytelling (such as embodied in Peter’s short stories) – are precariously poised between a drive to ‘show’, including by reproducing violent and sadistic imaginaries, and the urge to reach out to almost pre-conscious scenarios of restorative and shared ‘humanity’. By contrast, peace and hope are only allowed to step in when, through a searing and self-searching process, ‘skilful’ practices evolve into fully-fledged ‘Art’. This includes the finished bronze masterpiece as well as Stephen’s hard-gained ‘art’ of entering an empathic relationship, both of which depend for their existence on cognitive and affective partnerships, and responsive regimes of viewing and togetherness.

The need for empathic connection is nowhere more explicit than in Peter, an “odd-job man” in his late twenties with an MA in Creative Writing, who assists Kate in preparing the scaffold and the cast of the Christ during her disability. His presence looms

<sup>3</sup> See, also, Rawlinson 2009, p. 129.

over the lives of the other characters as a sinister signifier of the missing link which prevents a narcissistic, though powerfully mimetic artwork from becoming ‘the real thing’. A re-embodiment of Danny Miller, the child killer grown to be a stalker who is the protagonist of Barker’s previous novel *Border Crossing* (2001), Peter – “the Biblically named betrayer”, as Andrew Tate (2008, p. 38) has perceptively noted – soon develops into an uncanny figure, menacing and yet strangely seductive, whose role is nonetheless paramount in enabling Kate to translate her artistic vision into form. From the beginning, he seems to be endowed with a mysterious ability to cross boundaries: he is always ‘already there’, with Kate “never hear[ing] him come in” (Barker 2004, p. 65). Despite her impairment, “He didn’t help her to her feet [...]. He never touched her [...], his fingertips never brushed hers” (Barker 2004, p. 69). This description highlights Peter’s role as an emblem “of a failure of empathic seeing in the novel” (Kaufmann 2008, p. 94), someone who, in Justine’s description, merely “dump[s] his own emotions on to the other person and then empathizes with himself” (Barker 2004, p. 191).

This uncanny disposition to feed parasitically off other people’s visions and emotions is further highlighted by his wearing glasses without corrective lenses. Though an obvious reference to unresponsive or predatory uses of photography, and/or passive and sadistic viewing, this hints primarily at a narcissistic bent that is disquietingly exposed in a chilling scene where Kate discovers Peter alone at night in her studio, wearing her working clothes, and miming her chiselling of the Christ, “stealing her power in an almost ritualistic way” (Barker 2004, p. 178).

She cannot avoid seeing him as “a deranged double”, a “creature” endowed with the uncanny faculty to “reveal[ed] the truth about her” (Barker 2004, p. 179). While he is most often evoked as an obvious double to the artist – “his thoughts pushing against her mind” (Barker 2004, p. 107) – Peter is suspected also of being the “headless figure”, and sadistic, impassive “spectator” who had visually preyed on Kate, “breathing, watching, not calling for help” (Barker 2004, p. 14), as she lay half-unconscious in her car after the crash.<sup>4</sup> In this perspective, his figure would also act as an incisive critique of un-empathetic constructions of war correspondents and photographers as detached observers and ‘neutral’ reporters of atrocities.

The same predatory attitude informs Peter’s published short stories, that Stephen seems unable to “stop reading”, gripped by their “detailed observation, that always implied empathy, and yet, somehow, mysteriously failed to deliver”, “slipping into sympathy” (Barker 2004, p. 164), instead, with their inbuilt destructive drive. In the novel, the term ‘predatory’ recurs almost exclusively in relation to Peter, with the sole exception of a group of seven plaster casts meant to represent the terrorists of September 11, “lean, predatory, equally ready to kill or die” (Barker 2004, p. 66), embodying a disturbing intensity of feeling, whose ambivalence Kate wanted to render and explore. Relevant to Barker’s co-terminous meditations on visual representation and photography on the one hand, and the nature of the literary imagination on the other, Peter’s “lack of moral centre” becomes a powerful image, as Maya Jaggi (2003) notes, not only of Kate’s, but also of Barker’s questioning, as a novelist, of her own “fascination” and struggle with the “dark imaginings” (McEwan 2005, p. 39), challenging all creative attempts to confront violence, pain and evil.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For a convincing comparison between this scene and the beginning of Cronenberg’s *Crash*, see Rawlinson 2009, pp. 130-131.

<sup>5</sup> Peter explicitly acknowledges the influence of the early McEwan on his own short stories.

Against this morally and emotionally unanchored world, Justine, who has herself experienced abandonment and betrayal, appears as an emblem of vulnerable and yet pristine and resilient femininity, which at once embodies the ability to empathetically connect with, and ‘touch’, the minds and bodies of unresponsive, resistant or sadistic others. Her role is central in connecting Stephen back to the everyday claims of peace and hope. She almost immediately starts a liaison with him, materializing, even on their first encounter, as a kind of healing goddess, a reverse projection of the raped girl in Sarajevo. (This connection continues to resurface, as though to highlight human precariousness and vulnerability, and announce the violent attack by burglars Justine herself is to suffer at the end of the novel). An image of spontaneity and untainted vision – even ‘revolutionary’ in her refusal to watch the news – she indicts television’s pandering to the relentless demand for hyped visual terror and violence as “all pumped up emotion” and downright “wanking”, objecting in particular to “the voyeurism of *looking* at it” (Barker 2004, p. 118; my italics).

## 2. Exploring the aesthetics of violence and hope

Against a framework evoking Adriana Cavarero’s paradigm of “horrorism” (2008), the ‘voyeurism/knowledge’ dichotomy that informs Justine’s and Stephen’s contrasting positions about current televised reportage provides a useful entry point to the huge body of criticism addressing the ways in which *Double Vision* thematizes and explores the ethics and aesthetics of representing contemporary war. The novel’s probing of well-known philosophical, political and artistic responses to this issue includes an explicit acknowledgement of Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (also published in 2003), which casts its shadow over Kate’s and Stephen’s metafictional reflections on visual representation. Even more pervasive is Goya’s influence. Not only do the main protagonists contemplate and discuss Goya’s *Interior of a Prison* in the nearby Bowes Museum, but also three famous captions from Goya’s etchings *Disasters of War*<sup>6</sup> are conflated into a single epigraph, so as to effectively short-circuit issues of “atrocities, spectacle and witness” (Rawlinson, 2009, p. 126) into a pervasive and disturbing frame: “*No se puede mirar. One cannot look at this. Yo lo vi. I saw it. Esto es lo verdadero. This is the truth*”.<sup>7</sup>

References to Goya and Sontag have commanded huge critical attention in scholarly approaches to this novel, and will not be discussed in this essay, the main focus of which is the inextricable nexus between violence and morality that Barker posits as a major challenge for the creative imagination and the very processes of representation. From this standpoint, to find a response through which novelists and artists, but also readers and viewers, can bear testimony to the “obscenity” of suffering while at the same time resisting its perverse scopic appeal, becomes a mark of accomplished artistry and human commonality, both of which entail a commitment to keeping hope alive. In this perspective, the colossal statue of the Christ looms large over the story, and even though it is never rendered ekphrastically, but takes shape “like a pupa starting to hatch” (Barker

<sup>6</sup> 83 etchings made between 1810 and 1820, but made public only in 1863, long after the artist’s death. Here we might perhaps find a parallel with Ben’s unpublished photograph of the girl in Sarajevo, whose value resides in the witnessing.

<sup>7</sup> Georgiana Banita (2010, p. 60) notes that by instituting a distinction between looking and seeing, this epigraph conveys “the paradox of a double vision mobilizing both obligation and guilt”.

2004, p. 289), it invests the richly-textured journalistic canvas of *Double Vision* with broader, universal meanings. As Monteith and Yousaf have noted, the work “demands attention [...] even in a culture of spectacle because it disturbs and fascinates” (2005, p. 290).

Pitching sculpture against film and photography is in itself significant, as the tangible engagement with matter of this art form stands in sharp contrast to the destructiveness and lack of compassion<sup>8</sup> of Peter’s stories. Compared to his voracious and almost radiographic penetration of characters whose lives are predetermined and doomed by the original sin of authorial narcissism and betrayal, the carving of the Christ builds on excavation and subtraction, and entails essential notions of liberation from imprisonment, bringing to light, revelation, and the hard corporeal and emotional work, for the artist as well as the spectator, of wrestling both with an idea and the resistant matter that surrounds it. The emphasis on shedding, peeling off, hatching, along with Kate’s sense of loss and impairment – of waste – are conspicuous from the inception, with Kate “*stripping* the [Christmas] tree of lights and decoration”, “*cutting off* the main branches”, and “*dragging* the trunk down *to the compost heap*” (Barker 2004, p. 1; my italics). The scene takes place against the backdrop of a haunting Gothic replica of Birnam Wood in *Macbeth*, where “ranks upon ranks” of trees, “a green army marching down the hill”, materialize to wage war on the protagonist in the scene of her car crash, with their “branches claw[ing] at her eyes and throat” (Barker 2004, p. 3).

With a kind of demonic inversion, the very first sentence of the novel, “Christmas was over” (Barker 2004, p. 1), seems to deny the miracle of incarnation inherent in the festivity, giving way to a process of humiliation, loss, betrayal, imprisonment, torture, sadistic voyeurism: emphatically not, as required by Kate’s commission, to the holiness and wholeness of Resurrection. Numbed by trauma, soon to be immobilized by plaster and braces, Kate is a living double of the ‘figure’ imprisoned in her mind which is waiting to be rescued from its inchoateness.

She sees this figure as “the Jesus of history, whose scarred body attests to the continuing exchange of suffering between the strong and the weak”, as suggested by Mary Trabucco (2012, p. 111) who indexes it also to “Albert Camus’s atheological version of Christ, as Shoshana Felman describes it: ‘not a man-God but an archetypal human witness’” (in Trabucco 2012, p. 111); a figure that, towards the end of the novel, the artist acknowledges as resembling at last “a man” (Barker 2004, p. 300). It is up to Peter, however, the all-but-innocent spectator, to attest to the completion of the statue by exclaiming, on looking at the finished work, “My God!” (Barker 2004, p. 291). As wonder and recognition coalesce into a single moment of dense irony and perceptive reception criticism, Peter’s conclusive remark, “He hasn’t forgotten anything, has he? Betrayal, torture, murder, and nothing of it matter” (Barker 2004, p. 292), pays homage to both Kate’s artistic achievement and the notion that ‘Art’ and ethical representation cannot subsist outside relationality.

The critical struggle between corporeality and divinity (or the ideational, as Kate is not a believer), between memory and forgetting, resentment and forgiveness, and, ultimately, the representational power of mimesis and that ethical ‘spark’ which allows an artwork to transform horror into hope, in *Double Vision* is largely fought over the bodily shape and materiality of the statue of the Christ. Interestingly, Kate is presented from the

<sup>8</sup> See Rawlinson 2009, p. 132.

outset as someone approaching her task from the somewhat ‘scandalous’ and sensuous perspective of making a male nude embodied in violent ‘history’.

The physicality of her Christ, and the marks of the violence inflicted on its body, never seem to be an issue: “The belly was scored in three, no, four different places. She put her hands into the cracks. [...] Cheekbones like cliffs, a thin, dour mouth, lines graven deep on either side, bruised, cut, swollen. Beaten up” (Barker 2004, p. 180). The focal point of her artistic (and personal) challenge seems to reside instead in the eyes, which she realizes will “have to be enormous” (Barker 2004, p. 69), in order to be visible and elicit an affective response from an observer. And she recalls how the “the decisive moment” in Peter’s emotional involvement in the project came “when it – he – acquired a face” (Barker 2004, p. 106). Eyes are also paramount in Stephen’s traumatic memories of the girl in Sarajevo, “boring into the back of his neck” (Barker 2004, p. 54), as though the girl “had something to say to him, but he’d never managed to listen, not in the right way” (Barker 2004, p. 55).

These and similar recurring references point to the relevance of the Levinasian notion of “the face” and its discussion in Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life*, in analysing both the novel’s narrative approach to representing suffering and violence and Barker’s thematization of war photography. These analytical perspectives have been rewardingly adopted by Mary Trabucco (2012) and John Brannigan (2005, 2011), among others, and may be usefully cross-fertilized by studies on war photography such as Fiona Jenkins’s (2013), and Alex Dancev’s (2009), which remind us of the way ethical photography responds to Levinas’ description of “the face” as “a fundamental event”, requiring an ethical response that is “[n]ot just a response, but a responsibility” (in Dancev 2009, p. 39).

Both Butler and Dancev have drawn attention to the philosopher’s understanding of “[t]he face as the extreme precariousness of the other. *Peace* as awakens to the precariousness of the other” (Levinas 1996, p. 167; my italics). This last sentence also provides a valuable entry point into the last section of the novel, featuring Justine’s attack by burglars and Stephen’s transition from passive, professional witnessing to responsive ethical action. Detecting the impending evil from his isolated, bird’s-eye perspective at the top of a hill, Stephen rushes down the slope in a desperate attempt to rescue the girl, “knowing all the time that, even if he ran till his heart and lungs burst, he still wouldn’t get there in time” (Barker 2004, p. 243). This act – that, after Dancev, we might define of “senseless kindness” – is at the same time a sign of Stephen’s progressive reawakening to the values of peace through the restorative influence of Justine and a much needed confirmation of the priceless dignity of human beings. While he finds Justine horribly battered and bruised, his arrival, which causes the attacker to escape, may have been useful in preventing sexual assault. In this way, Stephen’s responsive, uncalculated action (along with the girl’s agency and resilience) is fundamental in undoing the web of references that, in his ‘dark-adapted’ mind (Barker 2004, p. 226), connect the haunting image of the girl in Sarajevo with Justine.

A “diamond-hard point of determination to live” (Barker 2004, p. 244), Justine resists the burglar’s attempt to objectify her into a broken thing, required not to look, move, or speak. In the same way, she deconstructs and subverts discursive attempts by the police to categorize her as someone defined by ‘her’ attacker, fiercely aware that “[t]here was quite a bit more to her than that” (Barker 2004, p. 267): the outraged young woman who refuses to watch the news, resists as well the linguistic passivization implicit in the process of ‘becoming’ news herself.

And, while Justine's brief stay in hospital, marked by estrangement, immobilization and trauma, is clearly evocative of Kate's experience at the beginning of the novel, it is worth noting how pervasively these final episodes focus on images of 'the face'. "Her face a mask of blood" (Barker 2004, p. 246), Justine appears to Stephen with her "[f]orehead cut and bruised, nose swollen, [...] and cuts to her head" (Barker 2004, p. 247), vulnerable and yet resilient in her determination to come to terms with the "meaningless, brutal, random eruption of violence" (Barker 2004, p. 254) that has intersected her life as senselessly and abruptly as wars often do. It seems as though, by foregrounding Justine's face and body in pain along with the girl's ability to accept, look forward and come through, Barker is addressing in terms of narrative Kate's dilemma about representing torture and martyrdom visually through the female body (a spectacle that Peter describes as "a wet sadist's dream" [Barker 2004, p. 149]).

Justine's resistance to being objectified as 'mere' body and consumed like pornography (it is not a coincidence that the burglar calls her "cunt") comes out beautifully through her faith in the restorative and affirmative power of the word, as is apparent in her attempt to recover individuation, self-consciousness and agency, immediately after the attack, by "shutting her eyes and saying I, I, I [...] over and over again" (Barker 2004, p. 253). This, and the determination to inhabit the world in a way that is dialogic and relational, being aware of one's own vulnerability and yet not afraid of exposing it to the encounter with the other (regardless of whether it is responsible, like Stephen, or irresponsible, as in the case of Peter watching the statue of the Christ), point to a poetic resolution that coincides with the avocation of ethical modes of viewing and storytelling.

In line with Jessica Gildersleeve's comments on *The Disasters of War*, *Double Vision* seems to be pointing, ultimately, to the artist's ethical commitment "to an individual act of seeing by the 'I', and by the eye" (Gildersleeve 2009, p. 32), a view which is supported and beautifully brought out by the rich intertextuality of its conclusion. Several critics have noted how Kate's acknowledgment of finishing her Christ, and Peter's almost contemporary invitation to Justine "You see?" (Barker 2004, p. 307) purposefully echo Lily Briscoe's "I've had my vision" in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Not to mention, of course, Conrad's ever resonating "before all, to make you see" in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.<sup>9</sup>

Exploring the aesthetics of violence unflinchingly against issues of value, morality, shared humanity, and truth, and attempting to respond to them in terms of narrative, matter and form, appears ultimately to be on a continuum with, and a forceful poetic statement of, the ethical possibilities of peace. As the protagonists address the moral choices underlying the narrative, visual and ideological challenges of rendering the 'unsayable' and the 'unwatchable' (the full shocking, 'pornographic' import of representing the tortured and annihilated body against the violent imaginaries of war and martyrdom and a global audience anaesthetized by spectacular excess), they come to acknowledge relationality, partnership, emotional commitment, poetic truth and affect as key steps towards viable responses to the experience of evil informing – without voiding them of agency and meaning – human life and art alike.

<sup>9</sup> See, among others, Gildersleeve (2009), and Mary Trabucco (2011, 2012). Conrad's statement, moreover, features as an epigraph to Don McCullin's *Unreasonable Behaviour: An Autobiography* (2010), and chimes with Barker's description of her craftsmanship as a tool to "enable people to think clearly and feel deeply simultaneously" (in Showalter 2003).



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