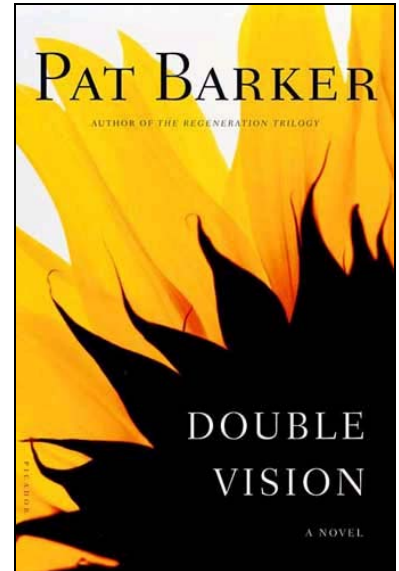


READING GROUP GUIDE

Double Vision

by Pat Barker

ISBN: 0-312-42410-8



About the Book

Gripping and provocative, Pat Barker's tenth novel *Double Vision* explores the degrees of complicity in human violence. Steven Sharkey, a British journalist, has covered atrocities in Bosnia and the World Trade Center terrorist attack of September 11. But when his friend and professional partner Ben Frobisher is killed by a sniper in Afghanistan, he returns to his brother's home in England to write a book on journalism and violence. There, he visits Ben's widow Kate, a sculptor mourning her husband's death, and begins an affair with Justine, a sexually adventurous woman twenty years his junior, who forces him to reevaluate everything he once believed. *Double Vision* once again exemplifies how, as *The Miami Herald* states, "Barker creates a room of endless mirrors where nothing can be trusted, tucking in images that resonate in strange, unexpected places."

About the Author

PAT BARKER is the author of nine novels, most recently *Border Crossing*. For her highly acclaimed *Regeneration Trilogy*, she was awarded the Guardian fiction prize and the Booker Prize. She lives in England.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think is the significance of the book's title *Double Vision*? How do the dual narratives of Kate and Stephen establish a theme of doubleness? In what other ways does doubleness function throughout the story?

2. Consider the various depictions of violence within the novel. What does Barker seem to be saying about mankind and violence? Which incidents of violence in the book most disturbed you? Why? Do her descriptions of violence contribute to story's suspense? How?
3. After meeting Justine, Stephen realizes that there is "nothing like lust to make you feel life's worth living" (p 53). How is sex a revitalizing force in the book? How is it a destructive one? Were there any ways in which the characters' sexuality was represented that surprised or disturbed you? Explain.
4. On page 64, Stephen listens to Justine's desire to begin a new life in London, and he reflects that "he was the wrong one to criticize anyone for thinking real life was somewhere else – he'd devoted his whole working life to that delusion." What does Stephen mean by that? How was his working life "devoted to a delusion"? From your own experience, have you ever thought that real life would begin somewhere else? Explain.
5. On page 72, in response to Stephen's resistance to therapy and his perception of it as an exercise in self pity, Justine says, "I don't think it's about feeling sorry for yourself or even a therapist feeling sorry for you. It's supposed to be a lot tougher than that." What do you think Justine means? Do you agree with her? Have you or anyone you know had an experience with therapy that supports either Stephen or Justine's point of view?
6. On page 85, Stephen is surprised that he misses his friend Ben more than his ex-wife ("Now that was a shock, though perhaps it shouldn't have been. He'd shared more with Ben"). How was his relationship with his wife different from Ben's relationship with Kate? What do you think defines a successful marriage? Can a friendship be as strong, or stronger, than a marriage? Explain. Do you think Stephen's relationship with Justine ultimately will be better than the one he had with his ex wife Nerys? Why?
7. The novel's epigraph by Goya is: "One cannot look at this/I saw it. This is the truth." On page 100, Stephen cites this quote, then thinks, "There's always going to be this tension between wanting to show the truth, and yet being sceptical of what the effects of showing it are going to be." Why do you think Barker chooses this epigraph? How is the quote and Stephen's thoughts regarding it, significant to the story? How might it be significant to current world events?
8. Discuss the moral implications of Ben's photograph of the raped and murdered girl in Bosnia. Do you agree with Stephen that he did nothing wrong in restoring the corpse to its "original state" (p 102) before photographing it? What are the moral responsibilities of art and journalism concerning human atrocity? In the author's note, Barker acknowledges Susan Sontag's book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* as "thought-provoking and useful in writing this novel" (p 259). If you are familiar with Sontag's book or reviews of it, how has Barker dramatized the ethical issues raised by Sontag?
9. On page 238, Kate reflects that Alec "did tend to assume that in the great war on good and evil he'd always be on the right side, whereas Kate couldn't help thinking real adult life starts when you admit the other possibility." What do you think she means by this? Do you agree? Does Stephen fail or succeed to "admit the other possibility" by the novel's end? Explain.
10. "We live our whole lives one step away from clarity," Stephen ultimately realizes (p 222). What is clarified for Stephen by the end of the story? What is unresolved? Consider the same question concerning Kate, Justine, Peter, and Alec.

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