

2016

# Equipment for Dying: A Dramatistic Critique of Heroism and the Crises Assaulting Returning Soldiers

Jonathan Mark Broussard

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*, [jbrou68@tigers.lsu.edu](mailto:jbrou68@tigers.lsu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations)



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Broussard, Jonathan Mark, "Equipment for Dying: A Dramatistic Critique of Heroism and the Crises Assaulting Returning Soldiers" (2016). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 103.

[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/103](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/103)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

EQUIPMENT FOR DYING:  
A DRAMATISTIC CRITIQUE OF HEROISM AND  
THE CRISES ASSAULTING RETURNING SOLDIERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by

Jonathan M. Broussard  
B.A., McNeese State University, May 2001  
M.A., McNeese State University, May 2003  
M.A., Louisiana State University, December 2010  
May 2016

This dissertation is dedicated with loving respect to Dr. Elisabeth Oliver: teacher, mentor, and friend. There is no silence in Midgard at your passing, for all who knew you continually and perpetually tell your tales. May the candles you lit here guide your journey now as the All-Father welcomes you to his hall.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people without whom this dissertation would not have been completed. I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Stephanie Grey, for her advice and direction on this project. I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Andrew King and Dr. William Saas for their insights into various aspects of the project. I thank Dr. Kristin Gansle both for serving as my Dean's Representative and for her advice on this and other projects. I would also like to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement throughout my time writing. I would also like to thank my two adopted cats, Legolas Yohji and Lena Belle for providing emotional support through purrs, nuzzles, and snuggles and for reminding me of my place in the pecking order of life. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Leigh Broussard, because without her strength, love, and constant encouragement, I would not have been able to see this through to completion.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER I: SHELL-SHOCKED CINEMA: THE TROPE OF THE MENTALLY-ILL SOLDIER.....	38
CHAPTER II: I, SOLDIER: THE MILITARY MYTHOS OF THE TALOS SUIT .....	70
CHAPTER III: THE ARMY DOESN'T WANT THE D: SYMBOLIC EXPIATION IN THE BATTLE OVER NAMING PTSD .....	114
CHAPTER IV: CLASH OF THE GOD TERMS: CONFLICTING IDEOLOGICAL METAPHORS REGARDING VETERAN HEALTH CARE .....	161
CHAPTER V: THE FINAL MISSION: SUICIDE AS AN ACT OF PIETY .....	208
CONCLUSIONS.....	266
REFERENCES .....	277
VITA.....	293

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Historical Structure of Diagnostic Names .....	145
---	-----

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. The Making of Iron Man .....	79
---------------------------------	----

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a dramatisitic critique of the various crises and challenges assaulting United States soldiers and the current U.S. construction of warrior heroism through the theoretical lens of “Equipment for Dying.” Equipment for Dying theorizes that each specific crisis or challenge faced is a contemporary incarnation of an archetypal challenged faced by all soldiers and the societies that send them to war. Therefore, the dramatic form of the myth of the heroic warrior provides models and guidelines for interpreting and responding to the “deaths” of the soldier: physical, psychological, or economic. As a theoretical frame, Equipment for Dying seeks to answer the question: “How are we to respond when Johnny doesn’t come marching home but is instead carried home on a stretcher, wheeled home while wearing a straightjacket, or borne home in a casket”. To accomplish this ambitious task, this dissertation discusses various discourses that speak about heroism and the crises surrounding U.S. soldiers – the cinematic trope of the shell-shocked soldier, the TALOS suit project, the argument to private veteran health care, the move to rename Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the suicide of Daniel Somers – setting each alongside a particular episode in heroic myth, using the Anglo-Saxon epic of *Beowulf* as a model, to show how the heroic myth both prepares society for the probability of such situations but provides a rhetorical strategy for responding to these situations in keeping with society’s values.



## INTRODUCTION

*History often resembles myth, because they are both ultimately of the same stuff. – J.R.R. Tolkien*

On February 2, 2013, U.S. Marine Corps veteran Eddie Routh shot and killed Chad Littlefield and Navy SEAL veteran Chris Kyle, the highly decorated figure behind the autobiography and successful film *American Sniper*, at a secluded shooting range. Though evidence strongly supported that Routh suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, the Texas jury concluded that Routh knew what he was doing and performed actions demonstrating an awareness of guilt, thus leading to a murder conviction.<sup>1</sup> On Wednesday, April 2, 2014, U.S. Army soldier Ivan Lopez opened fire with a .45 caliber pistol on a crowd at Fort Hood in Texas. Described as a “deranged shooter,” Lopez shot soldiers and passersby from his car, filling the air with over thirty-five bullets in eight minutes.<sup>2</sup> This attack left four dead – including Lopez – and sixteen wounded. Lopez had been treated for numerous mental illnesses, but the U.S. Army remained skeptical that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, for which Lopez was undergoing evaluation, could have been behind this horrific event due to Lopez only serving four months in a combat zone.<sup>3</sup> These events each have (temporarily) reawakened public acknowledgement of the psychological challenges that soldiers face in combat and after returning home. Many call for greater restrictions on gun access to those diagnosed with PTSD; others call for changes in military culture that stigmatize the mentally ill as being morally deficient and weak; still others, including

---

<sup>1</sup> Hal Espen, “The Day Chris Kyle Died: Text Messages and Terror in the ‘American Sniper’s’ Final Hours with Killer Eddie Ray Routh,” *hollywoodreporter.com*, 25 February 2015, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/day-chris-kyle-died-text-777380> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Rich Shapiro and Tim O’Connor, “Fort Hood Shooter’s Spree Lasted 8 Minutes, filled with more than 35 Shots: Army,” *nydailynews.com*, 7 April 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/fort-hood-shooter-spree-8-minutes-35-shots-long-article-1.1748803> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>3</sup> “Fort Hood Shooter Snapped over Denial of Request for Leave, Army Confirms,” *foxnews.com*, 7 April 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/04/07/fort-hood-shooter-snapped-over-denial-request-for-leave-army-confirms/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

some recent veterans, call for a renaming of the condition as Post-Traumatic Stress *Injury*, believing that it is the name that creates the stigma that forms the barricade preventing soldiers from seeking treatment.<sup>4</sup> Such a debate is not new to the Fort Hood incident, because prior to the 2013 publication of the *DSM-V*, the U.S. Armed Forces and the psychiatric community engaged in debate over the naming and classification of post-traumatic stress and its effects on soldiers.

The possible connection to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder locates the Lopez shooting, the second at Fort Hood since 2009, at a nexus of health exigencies whose discourses intersect in the body, mind, and soul of the soldier. For soldiers, a PTSD diagnosis often results in perceptions of weakness by fellow soldiers, denial/revocation of security clearances, early discharge/loss of military career advancement opportunities, difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, interpersonal relationship issues with spouses and family, substance abuse, and suicide.<sup>5</sup> While the general public knows the symptoms and episodes of PTSD, few realize that, for the first time in US history, a significantly larger number of US veterans commit suicide annually than their civilian counterparts.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in 2013 and continuing to this day, an average of twenty-two United States veterans from all wars commit suicide daily.<sup>7</sup> And while PTSD and suicide present dramatic examples of the widening gyre of exigencies swirling around the warrior, they are but two manifestations of the health-related issues soldiers face. Scheduling

---

<sup>4</sup> Goldberg, Eleanor, "Vets Respond to Fort Hood Shooting: Let's End the Stigma Around Mental Health Issues," *huffingtonpost.com*, 3 April 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd\\_n\\_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpimg00000063](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd_n_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpimg00000063) Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hillary S. Burke, Marjorie F. Olney, and Charles E. Degeneffe, "A New Disability for Rehabilitation Counselors: Iraq War Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," *Journal of Rehabilitation* 75 no. 3 (2009): 5-14; Melissa Pearrow and Lisa Cosgrove, "The Aftermath of Combat-Related PTSD: Toward an Understanding of Transgenerational Trauma," *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 30 no. 2 (2009): 77-82.

<sup>6</sup> Mark S. Kaplan, Bentson H. McFarland, Nathalie Huguet, and Marcia Valenstein, "Suicide Risk and Precipitating Circumstances Among Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Male Veterans," *American Journal of Public Health* 102 no. S1 (2012): 131-137, 133.

<sup>7</sup> Jenniver Michael Hecht, "To Live is an Act of Courage: the Crisis of Suicide Among our Soldiers and Veterans Must End. Here's How We can Stop it," *American Scholar* 82 no. 4 (2013): 41-49, 42.

appointments – even for basic medical procedures – averages eight months, and for major, often war-related conditions such as PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury, the wait is often one year or longer.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the physical and psychological wounds that war inflicts upon the minds and bodies of the soldiers who fight, war also inflicts wounds upon the social bodies and minds through violations of economic and social justice. In January of 2014, it was reported that 50,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were homeless, a figure that tripled since 2011.<sup>9</sup> Veteran unemployment continues to rise – even as unemployment overall declines – due to the inability of veterans to translate military skills to a civilian workforce and to the increasingly elevated rates of disability, physical and psychological, that soldiers – especially of the War on Terror – suffer compared to their civilian counterparts.<sup>10</sup> These increasing rates of disability, which contribute to unemployment, homelessness. Prominent Republicans propose that privatizing the VA, with veterans paying an unspecified portion of the cost, will solve this problem, but as this dissertation is written, a bill to increase funding is being considered by Congress. PTSD, suicide, unemployment, homelessness, and the issues surrounding care for soldiers are not new concerns for our military – or for any nation’s military. However, taken together, these physical, psychological, and economic exigencies strike at the warrior from all fronts, individual and collective, and affect all aspect of the warrior’s ethos and relationship to the society the warrior protects.

---

<sup>8</sup> Steve Vogel, “Veterans in Maryland Seeking Disability Benefits can Face a Perilous Wait.”

<sup>9</sup> Gregg Zoroya, “Up to 48,000 Afghan, Iraq Vets at Risk for Homelessness,” *usatoday.com*, 17 January 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/01/16/veterans-homeless-afghanistan-iraq-wars/4526343/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen Jean Hirst “Veterans Struggle with Higher Unemployment Rates,” *chicagotribune.com*, 6 June 2014, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-06-06/business/ct-unemployment-veterans-0606-biz-20140606\\_1\\_young-veterans-u-s-veterans-veterans-struggle](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-06-06/business/ct-unemployment-veterans-0606-biz-20140606_1_young-veterans-u-s-veterans-veterans-struggle) Accessed 29 May 2015.

And it is at the intersection of social reality with the discursive ethos of the heroic warrior that such crises connect to the heroic mythic traditions of any given nation in particular and to those of human civilization as a generalized whole. The knowledge that myths provide “equipment for living” as a member of a particular culture at a particular point in time is unquestioned by scholars across numerous disciplines. Relatively little scholarship exists to connect myths, particularly heroic myths of great warriors, to what this dissertation terms, “equipment for dying” – a culturally-meaningful schema for sizing up recurrent situations in keeping with the pious values of a particular culture group in a particular socio-historical context regarding the warrior’s experiences in combat and providing both the warrior and the society that sends him (and now her) to war with proper methods of evaluation and response to the economic, physical, and psychological distresses that the both face upon the warrior’s return – stresses that cause either the warrior’s literal or metaphorical death. Recognizing the presence of such episodes in heroic myths helps prepare a society for the warrior’s return by invoking a sense of reciprocal obligation between those who wage war and those for whom war is (or is argued to be) waged. This dissertation contends that by devaluing, ignoring, or even removing such episodes from its canon of heroic narratives, a culture ceases to be fully prepared for the impacts that war has on those sent to fight and, consequently, becomes unable to properly respond to the crises that arise when the rifle-smoke and rotting flesh reeking, dismembered, wild-eyed figure of war rides through the home front on his blood-soaked charger demanding his (and now her) due.

While the image of the bloodied and broken veteran returning home could be the coda to the destructive symphony of any war, popular and, in many cases political, discourses in the contemporary United States link the disturbing image of the traumatized and broken warrior with

returning veterans of the Vietnam War.<sup>11</sup> While scholars and critics continue to argue whether or not the Vietnam War was significantly different from its bloody predecessors, U.S. popular understanding is that this war *felt* different. It was the first defeat of the United States military – a military whose technological advantage over its enemy was so great as to threaten, temporarily, the modernist belief that technology was the key to victory – a belief that was restored with the quick, decisive victory that military technology earned the U.S. and her allies in Operation Desert Storm.<sup>12</sup> During Vietnam, news reporting presented actual war footage that aired in people’s living rooms at supper time, providing a sharp contrast to the government produced newsreels that aired in cinemas before movies during World War II. The result of the intrusion of war’s stark, real, and bloody face into the sacred space of the “American family dinner”, the seemingly endless parade of physically and psychologically broken soldiers who, unlike those of previous wars, *seemed* unable to reintegrate successfully into civilian life, and the shock and humiliation of the United States’ first major military defeat combined to alter the nation’s perception of the Vietnam War, of combat trauma, and of war itself.<sup>13</sup> The myth of the United States’ complete dominance in martial arenas shattered during the Vietnam War, and the trauma this caused to U.S. social mind became projected onto those who fought in Vietnam, veterans who had already faced resentment and hostility as embodied synecdochal representations of the politics of the military-industrial complex. The cultural trauma of the United States’ defeat in Vietnam emasculated and demoralized a nation that built its identity on

---

<sup>11</sup> Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 46.

<sup>12</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, “Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers,” *October* 66 (1993): 69-91; Cristina Masters, “Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7 no. 1 (2005): 112-132, 120.

<sup>13</sup> King, *Washed in Blood*, 49; Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 127-128.

the mythic model of the frontier hunter who protects his own Edenic homeland and who exports freedom and democracy to other nations, protecting them from threats they are too weak to conquer alone.<sup>14</sup>

The above crises surrounding our returning soldiers are each individually complex and troubling for all members of the nation. Together, these crises are part of larger assault on the myth and materiality of warrior heroism in the United States, attacking deeply held and long naturalized assumptions about heroism, nationalism, masculinity, mental and physical health, economics, and heroic honor. For a culture whose notions of masculinity, nationalism, and health are intimately linked to its warrior ideal, these crises cannot be ignored.<sup>15</sup> And while positivism's influence leads many to believe in a strict divide between modern materiality and mythic metaphor, the influence of mythic speech, often disguised and undetected in popular and political discourses, continues to influence attitudes and actions in the material world. By reinvigorating contemporary discourses surrounding the multiple crises assaulting United States soldiers and veterans, this dissertation seeks to answer the following question: Do – and, if so, to what extent – U.S. discourses surrounding warrior heroism negatively impact our soldiers and our ability to recognize and to help them when they return home from war in less-than-perfect physical and mental health?

### **Myths and Mythic Heroes**

The current crises assaulting soldiers are problematic, because they represent violations of “what is right” in the drama that is human social interaction. To understand why these problems are

---

<sup>14</sup> Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The American Monomyth* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1977); Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenzt, *Projecting the Shadow: the Cyborg Hero in American Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898-2001* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2-3.

“not right,” one must begin from an understanding of what is right. And for any society, the most powerful and most enduring narration of what is both right and wrong are that society’s cycle of myths. Myths are the great, ancient, overarching metanarratives that equip humans for living within a particular socially-constructed world at a particular moment in history by providing symbolic guides on how one must act to be deemed a worthy member of society, thus providing equipment for pious living. The mythic tale, when told to the proper audience at the proper time, calls to the surface a submerged recognition of an obligation to function in a specific capacity and a specific manner.<sup>16</sup> Such symbolic discourses equip humans for living as members of a particular culture group by guiding their interpretation of their present situation as being a specific iteration of a generic class of situations for which the myth provides an archetypal model. By interpreting their present through the lens of the mythic model, members of a culture group understand how they are to respond to their situation if they seek to be esteemed as good, honorable members of their society.<sup>17</sup> Burke’s notions of symbology, piety, and literature as equipment for living, when taken together, parallel the work of Joseph Campbell, who argues that through inserting oneself into the generalized symbolic form, one becomes consubstantial with the hero who must “battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms”.<sup>18</sup> Such a generalization connects the individual species of *a situation* to the broader genus of *archetypal situations* wherein culturally-defined honorable principles obligate one to act in a certain way. What an individual myth does for a specific genus of situations, a mythology does for the entire suite of experience patterns, fitting “experiences together into a unified whole” and communicating what the culture defines

---

<sup>16</sup> Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 304.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 19-20.

as pious, or appropriate, for a given situation.<sup>19</sup> The mythic narratives, which some would dismiss as primitive etiological metaphors for natural phenomena, what Vico termed “the Jove conceit”,<sup>20</sup> provide symbolic representations of patterns of experience that demonstrate adaptation to the natural and social environment that suggest proper modes of being, methods by which a member of a given culture may interact with the environment so as to be deemed socially “fit”.<sup>21</sup>

Given that this dissertation explores the crises assaulting soldiers in the contemporary United States, the great dramatic form upon which the soldier’s life is built is the heroic myth. The heroic myth, which tells the tale of a culture’s great warrior who ventures forth to fight some monster that threatens the safety of his people, (sometimes) returns with a boon, and is rewarded with gold and glory for his service, functions, as Burke argues, to convince soldiers to “accept the rigors of war” by “advertising courage and individual sacrifice for group advantage” and to enable “the humble man to share the worth of the hero by the process of identification”.<sup>22</sup> The heroic myth provides this symbolic equipment for living within the rigors of war. Such figures and their tales provide, as Mircea Eliade states of soldiers marching to war, models for proper behavior. “Each time the conflict is repeated, there is imitation of an archetypal model.”<sup>23</sup> Myth scholars describes the cyclical pattern of mythic structure wherein, during a time of crisis, the hero, aided by the wisdom of previous generations, ventures into the dark and terrifying wilderness where he (for the hero is almost always biologically male and culturally gendered masculine) undergoes a series of trials that often include slaying some monstrous beast so that he

---

<sup>19</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 73-74.

<sup>20</sup> Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 377-381.

<sup>21</sup> Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 150-152.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 35-36.

<sup>23</sup> Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 29.



may obtain the mystical boon that will revitalize society and is rewarded with economic and cultural capital for his efforts. Calvert Watkins articulates through his study of Indo-European dragon-slayer legends, that such actions earn the hero, undying fame.<sup>24</sup> A picture begins to emerge of a heroic individual who protects his society from a great threat, brings about healing to a wounded society, and earns temporal and eternal reward for those actions.

The above picture is one of archetypal description, neither precluding nor denying cultural variation in the heroic ideal. Just as sustained cultural contact leads to assimilation and acculturation, such intercultural interactions transform the heroic ideal of one or both cultures, as the transformation of the Indo-European dragon-slayer into the American “Hunter” demonstrates. For Janice Rushing and Thomas Frenzt, the “Hunter” blends the northern variants of the Indo-European dragon-slayer with the Native American beast hunter who ventures into the wilderness beyond civilization and slays a beast, which he brings to his people to provide them with sustenance.<sup>25</sup> He is a hero from the outside, riding alone into an Edenic small town in the midst of a crisis, which he solves through extra-legal violence before taking his leave (often at sunset). While this appears to be identical to traditional European heroes such as Beowulf, Siegfried, and Parzival, Robert Jewett and John Lawrence argue that what truly distinguishes the American experience from that of the Old World is Puritanical Christianity. Such influence allows for both the acceptability of a non-violent Christ-like sacrifice and forbidding sexual consummation between the hero and his love interest, fearing that such an event would tame and shackle the hero, sapping his power by keeping him involved in the quotidian world of family

---

<sup>24</sup> Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Rushing and Frenzt, *Projecting the Shadow*, 53.

and business interests.<sup>26</sup> When paired with the discussion of heroic societies, a fuller picture emerges of the hero as a warrior embedded in the hierarchical structure of his society, whose violent actions are ethical and praise-worthy only when directed against the monsters threatening society, who embodies the physical and psychological traits that benefit his station, and is constrained by the cultural values, sexual mores, and gender norms of his society.

While defining “hero” may seem unnecessarily obvious in a dissertation focusing on the connection between heroic discourses and war-induced crises, it proves necessary to present a specific definition for this work’s central object of study, because this honorific has become a charismatic term that has acquired such a wide variety of contextual meanings that it has lost any intrinsic meaning. Overused in the contemporary United States, “hero” signifies any individual who either inspires another to undertake some task or who performs a deed of service for another. The definition used in this dissertation contends that the former class is too broad, including those who not only inspire others to deeds of greatness but also to take up any profession available – from stock broker to artist to athlete to musician. The latter, though seemingly unproblematic, must be refocused so as to exclude those individuals and actions that, while virtuous and honorable, are limited in influential scope to particular localities or regions. This is not to deny the honor, nobility, integrity, and meaning that such “heroic” individuals and their actions have for those they inspire but to delimit the ends of the present study to a particular form of heroic ethos and action that is currently called into crisis by the current exigencies and discourses surrounding it. It bears noting that, as famed mythologist Joseph Campbell articulates, the hero is “the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normal human forms” who have died as modern men

---

<sup>26</sup> Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 186; King, *Washed in Blood*, 2-3.

to be reborn as eternal men – “perfected, unspecific, universal”.<sup>27</sup> To be a hero, one’s actions must benefit an entire culture group - not simply a single individual or a select few.

This dissertation defines the hero as a warrior whose physical form is the idealization of the national, read “male,” body and that embodies the virtues surrounding physical strength, toughness, and masculinity; is either drawn from or connected to the ranks of his society’s aristocracy whose interests he protects and with whom he exists in a reciprocal relationship; demonstrates courage by venturing forth in times of societal crisis to defend society from external threats posed by those deemed to be monsters, the dialectical foil of the hero. As an inventive topic, this definition establishes the essential criteria that mark the boundaries of agents to be classified as a hero. For simplicity, the mythic monster-slayers and their real world counterparts, soldiers, form the various species that populate this genus as well as suggesting the primary venue for heroic action: battle against an external force that threatens his society. Highlighting this scene proves essential, because the underlying contradictions of the heroic narrative can only be smoothed over through directional violence against an external enemy. As this dissertation will demonstrate, when heroic violence is turned inward upon any who are deemed to be “not Other,” then the society must confront what the hero actually *does*: kill people and destroy property for the economic and political benefit of those who, in the modern world, order others to sacrifice but do not sacrifice themselves. Ultimately what society asks of the Hero is to become a monster so that others may continue to call themselves human.

This definition of hero circumscribes the boundaries of heroism to those individuals whose character and ethical actions are meaningful to an entire society. First, it limits the discussion of heroic figures and heroic actions to the macro level of society as performed by

---

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 19-20.

larger-than-life, “heavy” figures whose tales serve as ethical models for behavior.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, this definition excludes the virtuous individuals whose lives and actions model ethical behavior on a small-scale, local level and those larger-than-life individuals who may perform grand actions but whose character fails to demonstrate the required positive ethical valence to be deemed worthy of remembrance for a society. As a final note, this definition alludes to all discourses and aspects whose deconstruction and critique shall be the focus of this dissertation: the body, mind, and spirit of the hero, the economics heroic action, and the political significance and deployment of heroes, narratives of heroic action, and the trappings of heroism for their own purposes that either ennoble the hero or transform the Hero into a monster.

The hero is a social construction whose virtues emerge from a masculine warrior ethos centered upon strength, courage, violence, discipline, and domination. It may seem antiquated to define contemporary heroism through the ancient warrior myths given that, in the contemporary United States, the ethics of the capitalist businessman seem to have replaced those of the warrior as the dominant mode of masculine success, rendering the warrior and his mythic actions as mere metaphors for success in a market capitalist economy,<sup>29</sup> but the warrior holds a special place in the psyche of the United States, affording it a rhetorical power that the capitalist archetype desires to purchase but cannot possess. As Belkin states, “warrior identities can be so closely aligned with ideas about masculinity that some American presidents have been motivated to wage war to demonstrate their masculinity,” because “emulations of masculinity in military contexts convey the message that they are competent and capable leaders”.<sup>30</sup> He further argues

---

<sup>28</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 1982); Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Dierdre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics in an Age of Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 303-313.

<sup>30</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*: 2.

that in the United States, military masculinity constitutes “a set of beliefs, practices and attributes that can enable individuals – men and women – to claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas”.<sup>31</sup> James William Gibson demonstrates that in the post-Vietnam era, Vietnam became a symbol for all societal ills – “from cowardly, corrupt politicians, to unruly women to a deteriorating economy” as warrior myths and ideals continued to animate discourses of heroism, masculinity, and public policy.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, scholars note that war metaphors prove a popular and primary set of symbolic analogies deployed to describe U.S. social interactions from sports to business and beyond.<sup>33</sup>

The ethos of the warrior hero centers upon action in battle against the enemies of society. During heroic action, the Hero suffers pain, hardship, and potential violent death, as a result, the virtues of the hero are those that “integrate pain and organize life in such a way that one is always armed against it”.<sup>34</sup> Such virtues, which locate morality firmly in the sensory world, are those that assist the hero in returning victorious from battle to the praise and reward of the society he risked his life and sanity to protect. As such, the Heroic ethos is one of collectivity, where the individual places the greater good of society above his own, which has the potential – within the combat zone – to dissolve ethnic, racial, and class divisions in society through bonds of brotherhood.<sup>35</sup> From Athens to Iceland, heroic societies place strength, battle prowess, loyalty, honesty, and courage as the central values of heroic masculinity.<sup>36</sup> Aristotle states that all

---

<sup>31</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men* 3.

<sup>32</sup> Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*, 302-303.

<sup>33</sup> Suzanne McCorkle, “War Metaphors in Popular Magazines,” *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 19 no. 1 (1991): 47-58; Veronika Koller, “Businesswomen and War Metaphors: ‘Possessive, Jealous, and Pugnacious’?”, *Journal of Social Linguistics* 8 no. 1 (2004): 3-22.

<sup>34</sup> Ernst Junger, *On Pain*, trans. By David C. Durst (New York: Telos Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 55-57.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Bauman, “Performance and Honor in 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Iceland,” *Journal of American Folklore* 99 no. 392 (1986): 131-150; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2010): 121-123.

other heroic virtues are derived from courage and end with the production of what society deems to be honor, which is the end of virtue.<sup>37</sup> Heroic societies often instilled courage through discipline and obedience, because “what decided battles most often was fear and panic”.<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche articulates that such virtues situate the warrior’s ethos in dialectical opposition to the priestly ethos, comprised of restraint, restrictions, and chastity.<sup>39</sup>

Overcoming fear, the warrior ventures forth into the wilderness where he undergoes a series of trials, the most dramatically visual of which are the fights against monsters who inhabit dark, desolate wastes external to the ordered, illuminated human civilization of the warrior. As the dialectical antithesis of the warrior, no discussion of Heroism can be complete without a discussion of monstrosity, for it is through overcoming the monstrous that produces the synthetic transcendent construction of hero. Monstrosity and heroism both arise from a belief in the inextricable linkage between physical form and moral condition. Monstrous figures often represent either chaos or traits that have negative cultural valence, such as greed or hubris, that threaten to destroy social bonds and transform humans into beasts.<sup>40</sup> This degradation from human status continues to inform depictions of monstrosity in the modern world through propagandistic representations of enemies in war. While propaganda posters provide the most obvious examples, discourses during wartime link the character of the Other with that which is monstrous, constructing a terrible enemy against whom the warrior must strive. Third Reich propaganda evoked fears of “true German culture” being destroyed by “new-rich Jews in fur

---

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), III.7.

<sup>38</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men: 5*; Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 47.

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingsdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 32-33.

<sup>40</sup> R.W.Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); Alvin A. Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon: Beowulf as Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 95.

coats and shiny new cars, bloated by caviar, cocaine, and lasciviousness”.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the enemies of U.S. war discourses from World War I through Vietnam to the present depict enemies dwelling in dark regions and not in civilized society who are “deeply savage animals and perverts who commit crimes for pleasure” while lusting after women and who “always have harems at their disposal”.<sup>42</sup> Whether they represent primordial chaos, the great sins against kin and creator, or a socially-maligned suite of character traits, the monster, like Vico’s conception of the hero, dances in the margins between human and beast, whose repulsive physical form grants clues to the moral valence society imposes upon the figure and its actions.

As an ideal of the national body, the hero exists in a special reciprocal relationship with the aristocracy of society. The hero is either part of or attached to society’s elite through bonds of kinship or contract.<sup>43</sup> Heroic warriors and modern soldiers receive – or can expect to receive – a suite of economic benefits and cultural capital in exchange for their service.<sup>44</sup> This connection demands that those seeking to understand and deconstruct the Heroic ideal consider that the virtues that make one worthy of remembrance are those valued by the aristocracy.<sup>45</sup> This is not merely a statement of identification, because the actions the Hero performs are those that consolidate and advance the political and economic interests of the aristocracy. Wars have always been fought over money. Heroic military service also offers cultural capital through the prestige afforded those who obtain it. From the champion’s portion to alliances made with families of war-brethren to songs of honor sung before and after their passing to the respect, prestige, admiration, and free pancakes at IHOP on Veterans’ Day, heroes receive cultural capital

---

<sup>41</sup> Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>42</sup> Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*, 66-67.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, 30-31; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 121-130.

that enhances their social standing. As a result, the socially marginalized often volunteer for military service so as to gain an increased opportunity for economic advancement through military service, as the aesthetic of the heroic body (read, “middle class/lower upper class unmarked/white male” body) has the potential to remove the ethnic marks from them that societal prejudice has made a sign of a host of bigoted justifications for denying equal citizenship and the rights and opportunities that accompany citizenship.<sup>46</sup>

This dissertation seeks to apply a Burkean dramatic analysis, informed by the critical sensibilities of deconstructionism, to the culturally bound psychological shema that have been reified through mythic discourses surrounding the heroic warrior. To accomplish this, the various artifacts will be analyzed in their socio-politico-historical contexts, setting the current discourses against episodes from a particular heroic myth, the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, to demonstrate how the heroic myth offers equipment for dying. While most simplistically associated with the Burkean Pentad, the notion of dramatism is a method of understanding motives that extends critiques of stories about human action to the five rhetorical questions that he identified with the terms Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose, or what, where/when, who, how, and why.<sup>47</sup> For Burke, all human social life was symbolic drama. As a result, he critiqued the motives of the social actors through metalinguistic analysis rooted in literary criticism. While Burkean concepts, especially his concepts of piety and literature as equipment for living, would suggest some level of opposition between Burkean analysis and the critical schools of deconstruction and critical semiotics, such a shackling of Burkean thought arises when the scholar circumscribes the boundaries of analysis to a text extracted from the context of its production. As no text arises *ex nihilo*, to provide the most accurate and most robust explication,

---

<sup>46</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 62-75.

<sup>47</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 228.



a proper textual analysis must situate the text within the socio-politico-historical context of its telling. Analysis of the situated text opens Burkean thought to critical inquiry where such motives as piety, guilt-redemption, acceptance, and equipment for living become motives that mythic discourses and mythic elements seek to obscure through invocations of ancient authority with its unassailable gravitas.

### **Critical Dramatism and Equipment for Dying**

This dissertation begins from the assumption that the best way to rhetorically understand the crises surrounding heroism in the United States today rests upon interpreting the issues through critically-informed dramatisitic analysis where the heroic myth offers, in many – but not all – cases, a discursive corrective: equipment for dying. Dramatism, as Kenneth Burke argues, is “a method of analysis” and “a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodological inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions”.<sup>48</sup> In simplest terms, Burke argues that social life *is* a drama, making the primary motive of human social interaction is the expiation of guilt, thus arguing that identification, division and the resulting scapegoat/sacrifice cycles are central dramatisitic structures of social life.<sup>49</sup> If human social life *is* a drama, then, correspondingly, one can critique human social action through the same methods and using the same terms as one would use to critique drama. Dramatisitic analysis can occur, because all human action is based upon symbol systems that are “equally present in systematically elaborated metaphysical structures, in legal judgments, in poetry and fiction, in political and scientific works, in news and in bits of gossip offered at random”.<sup>50</sup> Human action, which Burke differentiates from

---

<sup>48</sup>Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, ed. Joseph R. Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 135.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Overington, “Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatism,” *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 131-156.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, xv.

animalistic motion, begins with a motive that human actors articulate through one or more symbol systems.<sup>51</sup> Though based on symbol systems, Burke cautions that one should not reduce dramatism to a metaphor, arguing that drama is applied “as a fixed form that helps us discover what the implications of the terms ‘act’ and ‘person’ *really are*” (emphasis original).<sup>52</sup>

The mythic cycle, from a Burkean perspective, integrates the collected but seemingly diverse experiences of a culture group into a unified whole – a culturally-meaningful schema of patterns of experience. Mythic speech, which can be defined as a singular utterance that evokes one or more aspects of the mythic cycle, functions as a symbol of submerged experiences that provide equipment for pious living. The mythic tale, when told to the proper audience at the proper time, calls to the surface a latent recognition of an obligation to function in a specific capacity and a specific manner.<sup>53</sup> Here, Burke’s use of symbol as exerciser of submerged experience functions as equipment for living that instructs individuals on how to ‘size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes’ and then formulate a “strategy of strategies” that allow culture members to navigate challenges they face in the world around them.<sup>54</sup> Such symbolic equipment for living parallels the work of Joseph Campbell, who argues that through inserting oneself into the generalized symbolic form, one becomes consubstantial with the hero who must “battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms”.<sup>55</sup> Such a generalization connects the individual species of *a situation* to the broader genus of *archetypal situations* wherein culturally-defined honorable principles obligate one to act in a certain way.<sup>56</sup> What an individual myth

---

<sup>51</sup> Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 55.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 152-155.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 304.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 19-20

<sup>56</sup> Richard Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Press, 1953), 80; Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 29.

does for a specific genus of situations, a mythology does for the entire suite of experience patterns, fitting “experiences together into a unified whole” and communicating what the culture defines as pious, or appropriate, for a given situation.<sup>57</sup>

While the Burkean dramatistic method seeks to illuminate the motive(s) behind human action, it proves tempting and simplistic to limit dramatistic analysis and critique of mythic speech to the text itself, producing an optimistic depiction of mythic discourse as being wholly ennobling, calling out to the unconscious of a culture group, quickening their spirits, and spurring them on to that which is noble, just, and good. Such is often a limitation of the text-centric, psychoanalytic school of mythic scholarship that includes such notable figures as Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Mircea Eliade. However, human motives are not always so selfless and worthy of undying fame. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to apply the critical sensibilities of deconstructionism and critical semiotics to the culturally bound, psychoanalytic schema constructed and reified via mythic discourse by placing the texts to be analyzed in their socio-historical contexts. Heroic mythic speech, like all other forms of cultural discourse, suggests a series of binary oppositions that exist in an intersecting field of discursive tension, for example: hero/monster, honor/dishonor, courageous/cowardice, loyalty/treason, and masculine/feminine. As Derrida states, “in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-a-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand”.<sup>58</sup> Such tensions surrounding the hero and heroic action must be deconstructed, extracted from their hallowed place and examined so that the hierarchy of binaries operating beneath the seemingly benign and noble surface emerge. The discourse must then be reconstituted and returned to its original context so as to

---

<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 74-75.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.

repoliticize the heroic and to expose both the inequalities and power structures naturalized by the deployment of the heroic and the persuasive mechanisms that function to facilitate such naturalizations. Such deconstruction is possible due to the symbolic nature of language and communication, regardless of the medium of transmission.<sup>59</sup>

This repoliticization of mythic discourse, like Burkean dramatic analysis, seeks to uncover the motives – both stated and unstated – for a particular deployment of mythic speech. Deconstruction argues that, because all human communication occurs through symbol systems, True Meaning is impossible to obtain. As a result, any form of communication constitutes all concepts in a tense relationship of reciprocal determination, expressed as binary oppositions struggling for dominance.<sup>60</sup> Deconstruction aims to *repoliticize* myth, because, as Barthes argues, the process of mythologization depoliticizes speech so as to give “an historical intention a natural justification” that makes “the contingency appear eternal”.<sup>61</sup> Such a process relies on the intertwined popular beliefs that myths are (1) timeless in their interpretation, having no connection to societal politics and power structures and (2) naturalization arising from historical precedent carries an innate positive moral valence. By giving mythic speech an aura of timelessness (“Thus spake the Ancient Ones, and thus shall it always be..”), mythic speech ceases to be read as a temporally-dependent and situationally-specific speech act deployed for the benefit of a particular individual or group in a particular socio-historical moment. Instead, mythic speech gains an aura of independent authority, speaking what is believed to be an ancient, eternal, and inarguable Truth. It should be noted that the quality of mythic speech to reflect the contemporary cultural and political realities of its deployment applies equally to the French

---

<sup>59</sup> Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. By Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 38-42.

<sup>60</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 26.

<sup>61</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143.

military propaganda posters that Barthes' critiques and to ancient texts, as Alaric Hall's historiography of the *Heiðdrek's saga* demonstrates.<sup>62</sup> No text arises *ex nihilo*; therefore, to provide the most accurate and most robust explication, a proper textual analysis must situate the text within the socio-politico-historical context of its telling. Carlita Greene promotes a situated analysis of 1970s disaster films, such as *The Poseidon Adventure*, to show how such dysfunctional forms produce propagandistic rhetoric that seeks to equip audiences for living in ways contrary to their best interests, narrowing the field of available choices by silencing discourses promoting alternate viewpoints.<sup>63</sup> Anders argues that literature and art can function to oppose the status quo by suggesting counter-patterns through incongruity that provide a diagnosis of societal ills and suggest a cure through a "rhetorical appeal for a new orientation that carries with it a program of action, a way of being".<sup>64</sup> Analysis of the situated text opens Burkean thought to critical inquiry where such motives as piety, guilt-redemption, acceptance, and equipment for living become motives that mythic discourses and mythic elements seek to obscure through invocations of ancient authority infused with the unassailable gravitas of tradition.

Equipment for dying is a natural, but unstudied, extension of Burke's notion of equipment for living, where culturally-produced texts provide strategies for dealing with recurrent situation types. While equipment for living guides members for how to *live* as an honorable member of a particular culture in a particular historical moment, equipment for dying guides members of a society for how to understand death. Far from being as simplistic as

---

<sup>62</sup> Alaric Hall, "Changing Style and Changing Meaning: Icelandic Historiography and the Medieval Redactions of *Heiðdrek's saga*," *Scandinavian Studies* 77 (2005): 1-30.

<sup>63</sup> Carlita P. Greene, "Early Disaster Cinema as Dysfunctional "Equipment for Living": or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Kenneth Burke," *KB Journal* 5 no. 2 (2009). [http://kbjournal.org/greene\\_greene](http://kbjournal.org/greene_greene) Web.

<sup>64</sup> Abram Anders, "Pragmatism by Incongruity: 'Equipment for Living' from Kenneth Burke to Gilles Deleuze," *KB Journal* 7 no. 2 (2011) <http://kbjournal.org/anders> Web.

providing answers for what happens after death, equipment for dying, as this dissertation defines the concept, offers strategies for responding to crises which both end and threaten life.

Regarding the heroic myth, equipment for dying provides strategies for responding to the recurring situations that threaten the physical, psychological, and economic life of the soldiers who return from war. Simply put, equipment for dying answers the questions of how society is to respond when, instead of marching home, “Johnny” is carried home on a stretcher, wheeled home because he is in a straightjacket, or borne home in a casket. Such responses inform society in general, and its aristocracy in particular, of their obligations to those who have fought the wars that the aristocracy sent them to fight. Returning briefly to Burke’s generalized notion of dramatism, equipment for dying suggests following argument: If a society names soldiers as “heroes,” then (1) soldiers *are* heroes, and (2) society is obligated by that evaluation to respond to them as one should respond all others designated as heroes – not just in times of glorious and invulnerable triumph but also and especially in times of defeat, weakness, illness, suffering, and death.

### **Literature Review**

When connecting heroism and myth to military discourses, the most obvious place to start would be the study of war propaganda, because, as Burke argues the heroic epic exists, at least partially, to make men “at home in” and to accept “the rigors of war”.<sup>65</sup> Calvert Watkins, though not focusing on myth and propaganda, alludes to such a social function of the heroic when he stated that the poet alone could confer on the patron “what he and his culture valued more highly than life itself....expressed by the ‘imperishable fame’ formula”.<sup>66</sup> Watkins’ focus on the renown earned by the mythic dragon slayers finds a parallel in the honor awarded to soldiers in the “city-

---

<sup>65</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 70.

states and at the courts of monarchs” for their noble sacrifices that provide safety (and wealth) for their people through a willingness to “give up hope of safety” and make the ultimate sacrifice if called upon to do so.<sup>67</sup> Moving from general to specific heroic discourses, Alexander Bruce argues that the primary rhetorical purpose of the *Beowulf* poem was to provide young warriors with models for handling the psychologically-damaging situations they would likely face in battle, arguing that the rewards – gold and glory – outweigh the dangers.<sup>68</sup> Though the literatures on other heroic epics are not discussed here, logic suggests that what holds true about *Beowulf*’s rhetorical purpose should hold true for other heroic epics.

It proves easy to link myth to propaganda in pre-modern societies and then dismiss such a connection as the result of “primitive” minds who could not see the “real” world as modern societies do. However, as Jacques Ellul articulates, modern propaganda begins with the creation (or re-creation) of a national myth that “expresses the deep inclinations of a society”.<sup>69</sup> Barthes argues that in modern society, the primary function of mythic speech is propagandistic: to depoliticize the political through a process of naturalization that simplifies the political and social complexities of a current situation by imbuing it with an essence that radiates an aura of timeless truth.<sup>70</sup> Linking heroism to nationalistic and religious impulses, Campbell cautions against modern war propaganda and the “parody-rituals’ that arise from nationalistic zealotry and make saints of “those patriots whose ubiquitous photographs, draped with flags, serve as official icons”.<sup>71</sup> Scholars from Burke to Baird to Bytwerk, among numerous others, have repeatedly discussed the connections between myth, religion, and nationalism in Germany under the Third

---

<sup>67</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), III.6.

<sup>68</sup> Alexander M. Bruce, “An Education in the Mead-Hall: *Beowulf*’s Lessons for Young Warriors, *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001), <http://www.heroicage.org/issues/5/Bruce1.html> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 40.

<sup>70</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 142-143.

<sup>71</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 388-389.

Reich.<sup>72</sup> As Janicke Stramer and Joshua Gunn independently articulate, religious and mythic speech underscore the politics of and provide motivation for recent military engagements.<sup>73</sup> Mirrlees demonstrates how the U.S. military uses the interactive mythic narratives of heroic video games as recruitment propaganda.<sup>74</sup> While this may seem to be a new development, Jewett and Lawrence and Claire Sisco King argue independently that warrior/militaristic heroism in the United States has always been differentiated from its northern European and Native American ancestors by the influence of Puritanical Christian ideology, affording the warrior hero the option of a Christological sacrifice.<sup>75</sup> Though this list of scholarship is far from exhaustive, it demonstrates that mythic, religious, and militaristic discourses are as intimately intertwined in the modern world as they were in ancient societies.

The interconnection between mythic speech and military propaganda is not the focus of this dissertation. Similarly, this dissertation does not focus on the discourses of war but on the discourses surrounding war, specifically those connected to the physical, psychological, and social “death” of the soldier. While it may seem a stretch to argue that heroic myths, especially those of ancient societies, can offer any perspective on the discourses surrounding combat service and the tribulations soldiers face during deployment and after discharge, this dissertation follows the work of psychiatrist Jonathan Shay who contends that pairing the experiences of combat veterans with the experiences of mythic warriors does not “tame, appropriate, or co-opt “

---

<sup>72</sup> Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 191-220; Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon*; Randall L. Bytwerk, *Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004).

<sup>73</sup> Janicke Stramer, “The Language of War: George W. Bush’s Discursive Practices in Securitising the Western Value System in the ‘War on Terror’,” *At the Interface/Probing the Boundaries* 64 (2010): 35-47; Joshua Gunn, “The Rhetoric of Exorcism: George W. Bush and the Return of Political Demonology,” *Western Journal of Communication* 68 no. 1 (2004): 1-23.

<sup>74</sup> Tanner Mirrlees, “Digital Militainment by Design: Producing and Playing *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*,” *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 5 no. 3 (2009): 161-181.

<sup>75</sup> Jewett and Lawrence, *The American Monomyth*, 186; Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2012), 2-3.



either but instead promotes “a deeper understanding of both” in a manner that produces greater sensitivity to the seriousness of the traumas war and military culture inflict upon those who fight, who die, and who return changed from when they entered.<sup>76</sup> Shay, whose work treading veterans afflicted by PTSD has earned him a MacArthur Genius Grant, argues that psychological and social healing can occur only with sufficient communalization of suffering – that those who have suffered feel empowered to tell their stories *and* believe themselves to be part of the larger community. This community is both the community of veterans and the larger culture group for whom the veteran is told he, and now she, waged war(s) to protect.<sup>77</sup> This loss of communalization occurs when the traumatized veteran is deemed untrustworthy, exemplified by demotions and/or loss of security clearances as well as other repercussions, inscribing a negative moral valence onto the psychologically damaged soldier.<sup>78</sup> Burnell, Hunt, and Coleman find that veterans with traumatic war memories often feel a loss of comradeship that results from their inability to produce a coherent narrative regarding their experiences and this loss of comradeship leads to feeling a lack of social support, which, as research has repeatedly demonstrated is an essential motivator for those who need mental health services.<sup>79</sup> Recent findings by Clark-Hitt,

---

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994), xxi.

<sup>77</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 188-189; Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 242-253.

<sup>78</sup> Michael P. Fischer and Terry L. Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” *Rand.org* (2013), [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND\\_OP389.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND_OP389.pdf): 8. Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Karen J. Burnell, Nigel Hunt, and Peter G. Coleman, “Developing a Model of Narrative Analysis to Investigate the Role of Social Support in Coping with Traumatic War Memories,” *Narrative Inquiry* 19 no. 1 (2009): 91-105, 101-102; Al B. Fuertes, “In Their Own Words: Contextualizing the Discourse of (War) Trauma and Healing,” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 21 no. 4 (2004): 491-501.

Smith, and Broderick suggest that the most effective messages persuading soldiers to seek mental health treatment are those who have the credibility established through communalization, most frequently expressed through sympathetic, and similar, combat experiences.<sup>80</sup>

While the focus of this dissertation is on discourses surrounding the experiences of combat veterans, research also demonstrates that the United States, and other Western countries, demonstrate patterns of othering and scapegoating the mentally ill and those whose actions defy cultural norms. Smith and Hollihan argue that similar patterns of locating blame/guilt on the actions of a singular individual who suffers from mental illness, locating the actions of say a “deranged shooter” squarely in the tragic frame, prove insufficient to provide a satisfying conclusion. They suggest a hybrid tragicomic frame that equally recognizes the agency and responsibility of the individual actor and that of the larger social scene, which includes the othering and scapegoating discourses surrounding mental illness in the United States.<sup>81</sup> Other research finds that media discourses have developed a pattern of linking mental illness to danger and violence in reporting – a linkage that negatively impacts perception of the mentally ill and can erect barriers to seeking treatment.<sup>82</sup> Discourses that marginalize and scapegoat those who appear to violate cultural norms are not limited to mental illnesses, because, as Butterworth argues, the post-9/11 political discourses surrounding the steroid abuse scandal in Major League Baseball reveal a desire to purify the national body of all that is deemed “deviant”, whether it be foreign people and ideas or foreign (chemical) substances that are believed to detract from the

---

<sup>80</sup> Rose Clark-Hitt, Sandi W. Smith, and Jordan S. Broderick, “Help a Buddy Take a Knee: Creating Persuasive Messages for Military Service Members to Encourage Others to Seek Mental Health Help,” *Health Communication* 27 no. 5 (2012): 429-438.

<sup>81</sup> Francesca Marie Smith and Thomas A. Hollihan, “Out of Chaos Breathes Creation”: Human Agency, Mental Illness, and Conservative Arguments Locating Responsibility for the Tucson Massacre,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17 no. 4 (2014): 585-618.

<sup>82</sup> Enric Aragonés, Judit Lopez-Muntaner, Santiago Ceruelo, and Josep Basora, “Reinforcing Stigmatization: Coverage of Mental Illness in Spanish Newspapers,” *Journal of Health Communication* 19 no. 11 (2014): 1248-1258.

national body's natural perfection.<sup>83</sup> Flores finds similar discourses surrounding immigration debates in both the 1920s and contemporary political climates where Mexican laborers are essentialized as useful but "un-American", allowed to enter for the cheap labor they provide but excluded from full inclusion in the national body.<sup>84</sup> While these studies focus on a variety of topics, some of which may seem tangential to this dissertation's focus, their inclusion arises from one powerful common thread: social discourses on responsibility have a tendency to focus too narrowly on the actor, ignoring the larger scene that the actor reads (or in the case of those with mental illnesses, potentially mis-reads) when deciding both *to* and *how to* act. The stigmatization that is both created and naturalized by these discourse patterns erect and reinforce attitudinal barriers that prevent those who need treatment for mental health issues to seek treatment, and unless such discourses face the scrutiny of inquiry and critique, those barriers will only grow in strength.

Additionally, these disparate works together illuminate the various discourses that intersect at the body, understood throughout this text as mind-in-body instead of the Cartesian dualistic mind-or-body, of the soldier: discourses of gender, fitness (physical, psychological, or cultural), and nationalism. The soldier's body has long been studied as a marked site of numerous national, scientific, and gendered discourses.<sup>85</sup> As the ideal body of the nation-state, the soldier's body, traditionally male, is expected to be the "pinnacle of masculinity," revered for their "courage, honor, and duty to the country".<sup>86</sup> From pageantry of dress, grooming, insignia,

---

<sup>83</sup> Michael L. Butterworth, "Purifying the Body Politic: Steroids, Rafael Palmeiro, and the Rhetorical Cleansing of Major League Baseball," *Western Journal of Communication* 72 no. 2 (2008): 145-161.

<sup>84</sup> Lisa A. Flores, "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 no. 4 (2003): 362-387, 381.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Nourry, "Body-Politic (National Imaginary): 'Lest We Forget...Mateship (Empire) Right or Wrong,'" *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 19 no. 3 (2005): 365-379.

<sup>86</sup> Beth Linker, *War's Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 20.

parade marching, and sleep and dining schedules, every aspect of a soldier's regimented life codifies the bodies of soldier males so that they become "formally constructed social backgrounds encumbered with sedimented semantic weight" that forms the "moral order" of the community, embodying physical strength and psychological stoicism.<sup>87</sup> Connected to the mythic and historic pasts of his country, this idealized soldier male exudes an ethos of heroic sacrifice, reflects the glory of the national past, and stands ready to face the physical and political threats of the present.<sup>88</sup> The soldier body is, therefore, a site of convergence wherein discourses of nationalism, militarism, and gender converge into a physical being where the physical body, trained intensely during boot camp, disciplines the mind so that the mind can better control the physical body during the stresses of combat. The soldier, as the ideal of the nation-state, is conditioned, trained, and indoctrinated so that he, and now she, embodies all that is deemed "fit": physically, psychologically, and culturally.

This dissertation differs from previous research in that it connects the discourses surrounding war and the soldier's return to the heroic myth. As a result of this linkage, this text argues that heroic myths both prepare soldiers for the very real probability that they will return either physically and/or psychologically wounded or dead and inform society – especially the aristocracy – as to how it should respond to the returning wounded and dead and what it owes the soldiers who fight its wars – regardless of whether or not a citizen agrees with the politics that launch any particular military action. The statement that society owes the warriors/soldiers sent

---

<sup>87</sup> Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 59.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), 5; Michael Williams, "The Idol Body: Stars, Statuary and the Classical Epic," *Film & History* 39 no. 2 (2009): 39-48, 48.

to fight its wars is not a statement of naïve, blind, overzealous patriotism but, as David Graeber argues, the very foundation upon which economic markets, money, and taxation are based.

Because this is the simplest and most efficient way to bring markets into being. Let us take a hypothetical example. Say a king wishes to support a standing army of fifty thousand men. Under ancient or medieval conditions, feeding such a force was an enormous problem – unless they were on the march, one would need to employ almost as many men and animals just to locate, acquire, and transport the necessary provisions. On the other hand, if one simply hands out coins to the soldiers and then demands that every family in the kingdom was obliged to pay one of those coins back to you, one would, in one blow, turn one’s entire national economy into a vast machine for the provisioning of soldiers, since now every family, in order to get their hands on the coins, must find some way to contribute to the general effort to provide soldiers with things they want. Markets are brought into existence as a side effect.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the practical, tangible reality that such provisions provide, the exchange of coinage/provisions, Oboth martial and civilian, for military service functions as part of the symbolic, social reality to create, maintain, and transform relationship based upon honoring the known reciprocal obligations each party has toward the other.<sup>90</sup> The observance, or lack thereof, of the reciprocal obligations between aristocracy and warriors is expressed countless times in myth – from Hroðgar’s generosity to his sermon warning Beowulf about unkingly greed to Achilles’ rage that erupts when Agamemnon publicly retracts an accepted gift of a slave girl – because the military, as Shay argues, “is a social construction defined by shared expectations and values”. When those expectations are violated, the offender “inflicts manifold injuries” on the one(s) offended.<sup>91</sup> This dissertation both follows this line of thought and extends Shay’s noted parallels between the heroic myth and the military experience both the broad suite of crises

---

<sup>89</sup> David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville Books, 2012), 49-50.

<sup>90</sup> Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, 40-42.

<sup>91</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 6.

assaulting contemporary United States veterans and speculating about how U.S. discourses surrounding warrior heroism may need to change in light of new developments in military technology.

### **Dissertation Structure**

What follows is a brief summary of the dissertation's structure. Each of the five chapters will include with a discussion of myth, and when an artifact is necessary for comparison, this dissertation chooses to use the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* as its artifact. This is not an arbitrary decision but is instead the product of much thought and deliberation. From a theoretical standpoint, *Beowulf*, like its other counterparts in the broader canon of Germanic heroic narratives, concludes with the death of the hero. For a dissertation arguing that heroic myths provide equipment for dying, it proves essential that the text present the hero's death. That said, the Germanic tradition (Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, continental German, and Gothic) features the death of its heroes as a distinguishing characteristic. While other traditions, such as the Greek tradition, feature heroes who die, Achilles, other heroes in that tradition, Odysseus, are allowed to return home and reunite with loved ones. The Germanic tradition does not allow a "happily ever after" where "Johnny" marches home. All Germanic heroes die, and the sense of fatalism that praises courage demonstrated in the face of certain death.<sup>92</sup> As *Beowulf* himself says, "Wyrð oft nered / unfaerne eorl, þonne his ellen deah!" ["Fate often protects an unfated nobleman when his courage is strong!"]<sup>93</sup> This certainty of death provides an illumination of how heroic myth provides equipment for dying: If a warrior goes into battle knowing that his death is likely, then the myth should prepare both the warrior and his society for that eventuality

---

<sup>92</sup> Scott Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 28-29.

<sup>93</sup> *Klaeber's Beowulf, Fourth Edition*, edited by R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008): 572b-573. All quotes from *Beowulf* come from this edition, and all translations are my own.

and for their respective obligations. For the warrior, that obligation is to demonstrate courage in the face of certain death. For the society, the specifics of that obligation depend on whether or not the warrior returns home physically whole, physically wounded, psychologically wounded, or dead. The obligations of society in general and its aristocracy in particular to returning warriors who are wounded or to warrior death will be the focus of the chapters of this dissertation, and the mythic model that informs a societal response shall be discussed near the beginning of each chapter.

Two works that particularly informed this study are psychiatrist Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*, both of which masterfully and eloquently connect the experience of United States soldiers to ancient Greek heroic myth. Shay argues for the parallels solely on the basis of the "similarity of their [Vietnam veterans whom he treated for PTSD] war experiences to Homer's account of Achilles in the *Iliad*".<sup>94</sup> This dissertation does not doubt that such similarities exist; in fact, it would be shocking were there not similarities of experiences between a mythic tale of an ancient war and the tales of soldiers who fought more contemporary wars. Following that logic, *any* heroic narrative could be substituted for the Greek texts in theory and uncover similar truths. This dissertation chooses *Beowulf* not only for the centrality of heroic death as a theme of the Anglo-Saxon epic, and that of the larger Germanic family, but also due to the historical connection of the United States to the Anglo-Saxon past. From a literary standpoint, Calvert Watkins noted that of all the Indo-European dragon slayer legends, those of the Germanic family "have continued to seize popular imagination from the Dark Ages right down to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries".<sup>95</sup> From a political, historical, and legal standpoint, Thomas Jefferson inaugurated the study of Anglo-Saxon language and literature at the University

---

<sup>94</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, xiii.

<sup>95</sup> Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 414.

of Virginia for the express purpose of connecting the newly-formed nation to its ancestral legal past – the Germanic common law. As he stated, “and Fortesuce Aland has well explained the great instruction which may be derived from it to a full understanding of our ancient common law, on which, as a stock, our whole system of law is engrafted.”<sup>96</sup> While his purpose was for law students to understand the history of then contemporary law as descended from Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, the study of Anglo-Saxon literature would have likely led the students to the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (likely due to Thorkelin’s 1786 transcriptions) which recounts the heroic exploits of a dragon slayer. Thus, while this dissertation does not discount the similarity of soldier experiences to those of the Greek mythic heroes, the choice of *Beowulf* as an artifact arose from the significance of death to the Germanic heroic tradition and from the historical, legal, and imaginative influence of the Anglo-Saxon and, by extension, the rest of the Germanic tradition on the United States, a nation whose early leaders were primarily English in ancestry.

The final reason for choosing *Beowulf* is personal, and for this reason, I shall beg one indulgence wherein I break from the more impersonal third person tense. I chose *Beowulf* as an artifact in an attempt to honor a professor, a mentor, and a friend who passed during the writing of this dissertation: Elisabeth, “Lisi,” Oliver. Lisi was one of the foremost scholars of Anglo-Saxon law. She taught me Old English, and she encouraged me to use that knowledge to teach myself Old Norse, which I needed to write my M.A. thesis on boasting in the Icelandic sagas. A Harvard graduate who studied under famed linguist Calvert Watkins, Lisi was the type of person who was difficult to impress, but once you impressed her, you never found a more vocal and forceful supporter and proponent of your work. And your work constantly improved, because Lisi knew how to draw better things out of you than you thought you could possibly produce.

---

<sup>96</sup> Herbert Baxter Adams, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1888), qtd. on 93.



While being a great scholar and teacher are laudable, she was also a true, loyal, and honest friend. I choose *Beowulf* to honor one who taught me so much about being a scholar, a teacher, and a human being. The hall will not be silent, because I will tell your tales, Lisi, so that those who come after you may know of your greatness. You have earned undying fame. May you rest in peace.

The first chapter begins with a discussion of the ever-changing nature of myth as a living metaphor for the experiences of society through an exploration of one of the most significant recent transformations in the United States' heroic myth: the fragmentation of the trope of the shell-shocked soldier as depicted in post-Vietnam War U.S. cinema. Originally a unified trope, the shell shocked soldier provided a metonymous condensation of the multiplicity of issues and experiences surrounding combat-induced psychological disturbances into a single narrative that presented shell shock and its effective treatment as analogous to hysteria: by slapping the soldier, he can return to normal functionality. This trope in U.S. cinema aligned with its mythic ancestor and argued for a unified narrative of response: a soldier suffering from psychological distress is weak, cowardly, and unmanly. Post-Vietnam, the trope splits into two primary strains – the vengeance-taking sufferer and the suicidal outcast. Through an analysis of famous examples of each of these variants, (John Rambo of the *First Blood* trilogy and Nick from *The Deer Hunter*, respectively, this chapter contends that these two variants both reflect the conflicted national response to the Vietnam War and the veterans who fought it and, though offering a more robust depiction of combat-induced psychological trauma than their predecessors, continue to hinder national action regarding veterans' mental health issues by arguing that social action is unnecessary – either the wounded warrior can still perform when needed or he, and now she, was “different” and “broken” from the beginning, thus making the

suicide tragically inevitable. This chapter then concludes with depictions of combat-induced stress and psychological trauma to demonstrate how the trope could be further refocused in order to evoke a desire for positive social action in the audience.

Chapter Two explores the intersection of the ethos of the mythic warrior hero and modern military technology through a critique of the discourses surrounding USSOCOM's TALOS project. The TALOS (Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit) provides powered body armor to increase strength, agility, and protection, first aid capabilities, and a host of satellite and drone linked communication, sensory, and targeting enhancements, creating a soldier who is fully integrated into the technology – a military cyborg. Through a reformulation of cyborg theory that seeks to reanimate the monstrous, terrifying nature of the cyborg as a site of capitulation to the forces of capitalism and the military-industrial complex, this chapter demonstrates how the TALOS project reveals and seeks to reduce the military's anxieties about the suitability of the human body to perform and to survive in combat. Furthermore, this chapter speculates on three areas of the heroic ethos that the TALOS suited soldier challenges: (1) can heroism flourish when the fear of death is removed, (2) how does one gain honor through struggle when one has complete tactical advantage, and (3) from where does heroic character arise (within the soldier or from the technology of war). Given that the suit is not set to be deployed until 2018, this chapter simply speculates, arguing that the implementation of this suit, though well-intentioned to protect soldiers, may necessitate changes to the United States' understanding of heroism in war.

The third chapter explores an argument written by leading PTSD psychologists Frank Ochberg and Jonathan Shay to Dr. John Oldham, President of the American Psychiatric Association, in 2012 arguing in favor a military-proposed renaming of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury in the, then, upcoming *Diagnostic and Statistical*

*Manual of Mental Illness, Fifth Edition*. The letter argues that the incorrect classification of Post-Traumatic Stress as a “disorder” – a heavily stigmatized word in both U.S. military and civilian cultures – has made soldiers averse to seeking treatment. Through a lengthy analogy to a series of physical injuries that move from most invisible (epilepsy) to the most visible (landmine-induced amputation), Ochberg and Shay demonstrate how the diagnostic criteria will remain unchanged, thus suggesting that changing the name of the condition will change the perception of the condition. This chapter then explores the letter’s argument through the dramatic lens of the scapegoat, arguing that the letter, though well-intentioned, both reaffirms the military’s traditional dismissal of the import of mental illness and offers the military a symbolic expiation of any guilt it may feel for its own stigmatization of soldiers with mental illness as weak, cowardly, and unheroic. The proposed name change would, therefore, offer the military a scapegoat. By removing the “disorder” from the name of the condition and assuming that a name change will effect an immediate change in orientation toward the condition, the U.S. military can claim “victory” in the war over combat-induced post-traumatic stress without having to address the greater underlying issues that stigmatize those who are psychologically wounded by war – wars the military sent them to fight.

Chapter Four explores the intersection of the heroic tradition and economic policy through a critique of the argument to privatize the VA health care system made by CATO Institute analyst Michael Tanner. While the mistreatment, undertreatment, and non-treatment of veterans by the VA health care system deserves its own critique, the argument to privatize the system offers a point of entry where the ancient tradition of the mythic warrior hero clashes with the more modern mythic tradition of heroic capitalism, placing the obligations a society’s aristocracy owes to those who fight its wars at the forefront. Through an analysis of the

metaphors arising from the first principles, the God Terms, of both sides, this chapter contends that the move to privative VA health care restructures the heroic myth in a manner that transforms the warrior from a hero into a captive of the monstrous, decadent, irresponsible Big Government. Thus, the captive-warrior needs rescue from a great hero: The Invisible Hand of the Free Market. This appropriation of the heroic cycle that allows the Invisible Hand to rescue the captive warriors allows its proponents to continue to claim that they “support our troops” while simultaneously denying any obligation to provide care for those wounded in fighting their wars.

The final chapter explores the physical end of the heroic narrative through an analysis of the suicide note left behind by Sergeant Daniel Somers, a U.S. Army veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom who ended his own life on 10 June 2013. Suffering from a host of war-induced conditions, including PTSD, TBI, fibromyalgia, and Gulf War Syndrome, Somers’ described his suicide as a “final mission” to free a prisoner of war. Reading Somers’ suicide note through a frame that blends Emile Durkheim’s concept of altruistic suicide with Burke’s notions of piety and the epic frame, suggests that to understand a soldier’s death, one should read his or her motivation through the lens of the values by which the soldier lived and fought – the values instilled in the soldier through military training that then become hardened and crystallized during the stresses of combat. This complicates the popular notion of suicide as cowardly and selfish, arguing that the suicidal soldier may interpret his or her physical and psychological situation in a manner similar to a combat situation where a hostile force tortures and oppresses innocent people in a manner so terrible that decisive, violent action is the only way to bring about freedom. Rereading suicide as heroic illuminates the polysemous and polyvalent nature of self-inflicted death, and this struggle over how to properly interpret suicide as either honorable or

cowardly suggests a rhetorical exigence that has motivated Somers' family to lobby for changes in the VA health care system that could, hopefully, prevent other soldiers from believing that suicide is the only pat to freedom from combat-induced suffering.

CHAPTER I:  
SHELL-SHOCKED CINEMA:  
THE TROPE OF THE MENTALLY-ILL SOLDIER

“*Twenty-two years of mental tears, / Cries a suicidal Vietnam Vet. / He fought a losing war on a foreign shore / to find his country didn't want him back.*” - Poison, “*Something to Believe in*”

Poison's famous power ballad references an all-too-common image in both the real world and popular media in the late 1970s and early 1980s: a suicidal Vietnam veteran. The individual is likely to be homeless, disheveled in appearance, addicted to alcohol or some illicit drug such as heroin, and possibly physically wounded though likely suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The image of the homeless, mentally-ill Vietnam veteran has taken hold across numerous genres of popular media that it becomes easy, and common, to associate PTSD with soldiers and veterans of the Vietnam War. However, as the histories of both PTSD and war narratives demonstrate, mental illness and psychological collapse have always been close companions of soldiers. From Achilles' grief at Patroclus' death or the flight of the twelve veterans in *Beowulf* onward, heroic myths from antiquity to modern movies like the *First Blood* trilogy to the recent *American Sniper*, storytellers have demonstrated a fascination with the compelling narrative created by combat-induced psychological distress.

To some, beginning a dissertation focused on the crises surrounding United States soldiers and veterans with a discussion of cinema may seem odd; however, to see the importance of mythic discourse and mythic tradition on the contemporary conception of heroism, one must look to the contemporary myth-tellers: the movie makers. And while technological innovations allow people to watch movies anywhere, in the original incarnation, the cinematic experience followed the form of a myth-telling ritual. While this chapter shall not provide a full comparison of the cinematic experience to Van Gennep's work on rites of passage, it bears noting that going

to see a movie traditionally follows the same structure: separation (leaving the day-to-day to enter into the sacred space of the cinema), liminality (one is neither part of the “uninitiated” who have not seen or heard nor the “initiated” who have seen/heard and who understand), and incorporation (the movie becomes part of one’s life and thought processes). While the incorporation stage finds its most obvious form in the practices of fan culture,<sup>97</sup> Campbell argues that the larger-than-life figures in cinema become models for other people’s lives.

There is something magical about films. The person you are looking at is also somewhere else at the same time. That is a condition of the god. If a movie actor comes into the theater, everybody turns and looks at the movie actor. He is the real hero of the occasion. He is on another plane. He is a multiple presence. What you are seeing on the screen really isn’t he, and yet the “he” comes. Through the multiple forms, the form of forms out of which all this comes is right there.<sup>98</sup>

The archetypal “form of forms” presents a culturally-meaningful model for responding to a pattern of experience, the “‘type’ situations” that underscore all social structures, as Burke states, when he presents literature of all types as equipment for living.<sup>99</sup> As Mackey-Kellis argues, this direction in “how to live” is one of the most important cultural functions of myth and mythic speech – both in the ancient, oral narratives and in the modern, cinematic tales.<sup>100</sup>

Generally speaking, films, as cultural productions, provide guidance for interpreting and responding to recurrent situations that members of a society typically face. As equipment for dying, the films discussed here provide – and have provided – culturally meaningful narratives for interpreting and responding to combat-induced mental illnesses, particularly Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through the trope of the shell-shocked soldier. A powerful and common

---

<sup>97</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Jonathan Broussard, “(Ad)Dressing Masculinity: Male Cosplay Performance at Fan Cons,” *Southern Anthropologist* 34 no. ½ (2009): 19-31.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 20-21.

<sup>99</sup> Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 293-294.

<sup>100</sup> Susan Mackey-Kallis, *The Hero and the Perennial Journey Home in American Film* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 17-18.

trope in war films, the image of the shell-shocked soldier condenses a wide suite of experiences into a single, seemingly-unified narrative that provides an audience with a perspective on how to interpret and respond quickly to a complex and commonly encountered situation. In the case of the shell-shocked soldier, the trope conditions an appropriate response to encountering a mentally-ill veteran whose lived reality proves incongruous to the mythic reality created, naturalized, and maintained through dominant discourses of masculinity, mental illness, and military service. This trope articulates a linkage between moral violation and psychological collapse, often depicted as cowardice. While it proves easy to argue that tellers of heroic tales connect cowardice to psychological collapse due to the propagandistic nature of heroic narrative, official psychiatric discourses during the World Wars offered such interpretations of shell shock.

That said, the trope's narrative fragmented after the Vietnam War into two varieties: the vengeance-taking sufferer and the suicidal outcast. Through a discussion of the shell-shocked soldiers presented in the films *First Blood* and *The Deer Hunter*, this chapter will explore and critique the narratives created by these two tropic variants, illuminating the response that each suggests toward the shell-shocked soldier. The vengeance-taking hunter presents the suffering soldier in a more sympathetic light, suggesting that his suffering arose from his combat experience; however, this narrative then depicts him functioning heroically when called upon to do so, suggesting that PTSD may not be as debilitating as many believe if the soldier can function when needed. The suicidal outcast presents the tale of a young man who was marked as "different from the other boys" before he entered the military, and, that social deviance affixes a tragic fatalism to his narrative. His death was the result of a moral (social) failing; even without "The War," this end was inevitable. In some ways, both of these discourses constrain social



action to help alleviate the suffering of soldiers and veterans. From there, this chapter will then discuss a possible transformation of the trope that could provoke discourses leading to social change.

### **Tropes and Culture**

Following the first and sixth definitions listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one would assume that a trope is merely an ornamental use of language: a figurative or non-literal use of a word or phrase repeatedly used by a particular culture in a particular historical moment. The OED's initial definition supports a reading of a trope as mere ornament – a manner of communication where poetic decoration is chosen over plainspoken description. While the ornamental and poetic nature of a trope suggests a literary usage, a more meaningful avenue for rhetorical analysis begins from a recognition that tropes are repeated figurative devices that can be localized to a particular socio-historical moment.<sup>101</sup> Following Burke, this chapter focuses on a trope's role in the “discovery and description of ‘the truth’”, arguing that tropes are not mere linguistic ornaments designed to demonstrate artistic virtuosity but are instead epistemological categories that reflect patterns of experience and, consequently, become both shorthand representations signifying those patterns and reductions that direct and constrain cultural imaginings and discourses that converge on the people, places, and situations signified by the tropes.<sup>102</sup>

While an analysis may discuss tropes as belonging to a particular meta-class of rhetorical and literary devices, one of the so-called “Master Tropes,” it bears reminding that the boundaries that delineate these four tropes are fluid and permeable. Burke himself noted that the tropes

---

<sup>101</sup> Christian Lundberg, “Enjoying God’s Death: *The Passion of the Christ* and the Practices of an Evangelical Public,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 no. 4 (2009): 387-411, 389.

<sup>102</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 503; Christopher J. Gilbert and Jonathan P. Rossing, “Trumping Tropes with Joke(r)s: *The Daily Show* “Plays the Race Card,” *Western Journal of Communication* 77 no. 1 (2013): 92-111, 95.

overlap considerably. “Thus as reduction (metonymy) overlaps upon metaphor (perspective) so likewise it overlaps upon synecdoche (representation).”<sup>103</sup> As metonymy, the trope reduces a complex suite of discourses and experiences, what Burke described as an “incorporeal or intangible state”, to a single, concrete image – a *thing* to be grasped. Through this reduction of the complexities of experience into a single image that creates the illusion of a unified pattern, the deployed trope then represents a complex situation in a manner that suggests idealistic simplicity – a single, archetypal pattern of experience as opposed to a complex range of similar patterns of experience(s). As a metaphoric representation of a pattern of experience, the trope then provides a perspective that directs audiences to interpret each specific instance of the trope in a manner identical to how they interpret the archetype.<sup>104</sup>

In simplest terms, tropes are topics of invention and, therefore, function to translate the unknown into the known. While Hartnett and Larson propose that the master tropes animating death penalty argumentation might spur creative discussions regarding the causes of crime and violence and goad citizens to “re-evaluate our nation’s long dependence on state-sanctioned violence” and thus “re-imagine the possible meanings of terms like justice, reconciliation, equality, community, and even democracy itself,” the deployment of tropes often demonstrates one or more stereotypical views that the dominant culture group holds toward a marginalized group.<sup>105</sup> In his analysis of Steele’s “The Age of White Guilt,” Weiss demonstrates how “the most evocative and frequently occurring of the tropes share a salient characteristic: They are

---

<sup>103</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 507.

<sup>104</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 503-511.

<sup>105</sup> Stephen John Hartnett and Daniel Mark Larson, “Tonight Another Man Will Die: Crime, Violence, and the Master Tropes of Contemporary Arguments about the Death Penalty,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 no. 4 (2006): 263-287, 283; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

inescapably *binary* and, moreover, *oppositional*".<sup>106</sup> Lacroix discusses how the stereotype of the "Ignoble Savage" has evolved from colonial discourses to the "Hollywood Indian" to the "Casino Indian" that constructs a reductionist representation of all First Nations peoples so as to signal "both the changed economic, political, and social circumstances of some tribes and the concomitant fear and anger this new power seems to have elicited in the cultural discourse about Native Americans" that results in "a new and more virulent form of racism".<sup>107</sup> Tropes also provide avenues through which a culture can banish the fear caused by the "Other": dismissal. As Gilbert and Rossing note, the trope of the "race card" in U.S. discourses allows those who would rather not "see" race to devalue the "social significance of race" and to treat "any mention of it as trivial and antithetical to a postracial society".<sup>108</sup> As temporally and culturally-bound topics of invention, tropes have the power and the potential to both constrain and transform societal attitudes, emotions, and actions in ways that either reinforce or challenge the power structures of society.

The central trope of this analysis is that of the "shell-shocked soldier." The shell-shocked soldier, often but not always a veteran, has never left the war behind. He, always a male veteran, has "seen things" and "done things" that he cannot unsee and that he cannot undo. The classic narrative this trope presents is a soldier who is forced/obligated to kill another human being for a logical, noble reason such as self-defense, war, protection of loved ones, and/or to shorten/end a great war. As a result, he either loathes all killing or is horrified to discover that he enjoys killing, causing the veteran to be wracked with survivor guilt. He is psychologically wounded by

---

<sup>106</sup> David Weiss, "Metonymy in Black and White: Shelby Steele's Revelatory Racial Tropes," *The Howard Journal of Communication* 16 no. 1 (2005): 1-19, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Celeste C. Lacroix, "High Stakes Stereotypes: The Emergence of the 'Casino Indian' Trope in Television Depictions of Contemporary Native Americans," *The Howard Journal of Communication* 22 no. 1 (2011): 1-23, 2-3.

<sup>108</sup> Gilbert and Rossing, "Trumping Tropes with Joke(r)s," 93.

his experiences in war, and, consequently, the trope takes its name from “shell shock,” a World War I military designation for the condition that would, post-Vietnam, be renamed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This narrative usually results in a veteran who has great difficulty feeling, emoting, and caring for others and themselves in normal ways.<sup>109</sup> While the most common depictions of this trope present a shell-shocked veteran, it proves important to note that the mediated depiction of those psychologically wounded by war is not limited to those who have been discharged from active duty. Such depictions occur in films such as *Patton*, *Captain America: the First Avenger*, in the video game series *Metal Gear Solid*, and in both actual and parodic form in the television series *M\*A\*S\*H*. Thus, while one may find it tempting to focus on veterans alone, it proves imperative to recognize that popular media has not avoided demonstrating that psychological trauma can afflict and complicate the lives of active duty soldiers. At this point, it should be noted that this chapter chooses to replace the more common name of “Shell-Shocked *Veteran*” with the name “Shell-Shocked *Soldier*” so as to include depictions of combat-induced stress that affect soldiers in basic training such as Private Pyle in *Full Metal Jacket*, soldiers suffering stress during combat such as Captain America, and those suffering from PTSD after discharge.

The trope of the shell-shocked soldier is pervasive across numerous genres of popular culture from songs such as Blue Oyster Cult’s “Veteran of the Psychic Wars,” Poison’s “Something to Believe in,” Charlie Daniels’ “Still in Saigon,” and Billy Joel’s “Goodnight Saigon” to films from *Saving Private Ryan* to *The Deer Hunter* to the famous and popular *Rambo* trilogy to television series as diverse as *Doctor Who* and *Homeland* to video games such as *Metal Gear Solid* and *Mass Effect*. His presence in cinema finds the most academic

---

<sup>109</sup> “Shell-Shocked Veteran,” *tvtropes.com*, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ShellShockedVeteran> Accessed 29 May 2015.

scholarship. In their work on masculinity in war films, Donald and MacDonald mention shell-shocked soldiers only briefly – and only in the context that command, and many soldiers, believe shell shock to signify cowardice. They give no mention to the repeated appearance of the shell-shocked soldier as a trope of war film masculinity.<sup>110</sup> As Grajeda notes, since 1946, Hollywood has regularly filled post-war period cinema with narratives of veterans returning home in “a less than celebratory way” where the “emotional wreckage of war at a personal level nearly always trumps political and historical understanding”.<sup>111</sup> While the overtly political understanding may be of less importance than the personal effects of war, numerous other scholars note that Vietnam films depicting a shell-shocked soldier often function to either allow for the reclamation of masculinity lost through shocking military defeat, a legitimization of Reagan-era policy, or as a symbolic method of regaining national pride after the embarrassment of the nation’s defeat in Vietnam, aligning such suffering heroes to function in a Christological fashion as a synecdoche for the imagined national suffering brought about by the defeat in Vietnam while offering the possibility for redemption.<sup>112</sup>

That Vietnam-era films depicting veterans traumatized by war do not offer the “apolitical” and “ahistorical” timbre that other post-war depictions of the traumatized veteran returning home offer suggest that the U.S. experience with the Vietnam War is read as being different than with other wars – wars in which the United States emerged as a clear victor. As a

---

<sup>110</sup> Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald, *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 162-164.

<sup>111</sup> Tony Grajeda, “Post-War Postponed: War without End, the Returning Soldier in American Cinema, and the Gendered Representation of Trauma,” *Democratic Communique* 26 no. 2 (2014): 55-71, 58

<sup>112</sup> Susan Jeffords, “The New Vietnam Films: Is the Movie Over?” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 13 no. 4 (1986): 186-194; Carol Fry and Christopher Kemp, “*Rambo* Agonistes” *Literature Film Quarterly* 24 no. 4 (1996): 367-375; James William Gibson and Dennis K. Davis, “Paramilitary Culture,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 no. 1 (1989): 90-94; Philippa Gates, “Fighting the Good Fight: The Real and the Moral in the Contemporary Hollywood Combat Film,” *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 22 no. 4 (2005): 297-310; Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 14.

result, one may logically connect the psychological trauma of the Vietnam veteran who returns home to find an unfriendly nation with the psychological trauma of the United States who returned from Vietnam to find the world changed after its first defeat. Morag asserts that cinematic depictions of the Vietnam War and Vietnam veterans allow the national psyche to process the trauma of defeat through depictions of soldiers/veterans suffering a profound loss of their sense of self, and through an incoherent depiction of the masculinity including the failure to conform to heteronormative models of behavior and interpersonal relations, a tortured body, psychological collapse, and shattered sexuality, these films subvert the intimate connections between masculinity, patriarchy, and nationalism.<sup>113</sup> Thus, while PTSD has long been a lingering psychological effect of combat service, the Vietnam War has had a powerful impact on shaping “popular ideas about war and psychological trauma”.<sup>114</sup> This chapter contends that popular Vietnam-era films offer two variants of the trope of the shell-shocked soldier: the vengeance-taking sufferer and the suicidal outcast. These two sub-tropes present the image of the traumatized veteran as a focal nexus wherein discourses surrounding war, masculinity, modernity, and mental health converge. Their deployment in film both reflects historically-situated cultural attitudes toward mental illness and constrains discourses surrounding combat-induced PTSD. Together, the effects of these sub-tropes direct the popular understanding of combat-induced mental illness in a manner that minimizes its significance so as to slow, if not fully prevent, societal pushes for more research, more effective and available treatment options, and more recognition that the greatest factor contributing to the mental health of the shell-shocked soldier is war itself.

---

<sup>113</sup> Raya Morag, “Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of the Vietnam War,” *Communication Review* 9 no. 3 (2006): 189-219.

<sup>114</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 128.

## Shell-Shock in Pre-Vietnam Cinema

Before discussing the variants of the trope that emerge as a result of Vietnam and of their significance to contemporary discourses surrounding combat-induced trauma, it proves meaningful to provide a brief discussion of how earlier films – and films set in earlier wars – present shell shock. This early iteration of the trope, the Unmanly Hysteric, whose response to violated traditional discourses of masculine and heroic stoicism that produced what were read as cowardly and unmanly actions. As a result, such popular discourses located blame on the soldier instead of on the war. While a brief discussion of this older iteration of the trope seem to be a simple historical detail, the depiction and treatment of shell shock in films set in pre-Vietnam wars illuminates the war-time discourses that intersect at the body of the shell-shocked soldier and would have gone largely ignored in popular representations of the condition had something not changed as a result of U.S. forces being defeated in Vietnam. And while the emerging sense that the Vietnam War was “different” or “unique” may partially account for the trope’s transformation and fragmentation, as shall be demonstrated, each of the new varieties draws upon, and thus continues, one of the two primary evaluative characteristics of the original parent trope: the suffering soldier is unmanly/unheroic or the fault for the soldier’s suffering is his own.

The classic cinematic example of this iteration of the trope occurs in *Patton*, where General Patton slaps a young soldier, Pvt. Bennet, who is hospitalized for shell shock.

Patton: What's the matter with you?

Pvt. Bennet: I.. I guess I.. I can't take it sir.

Patton: What did you say?

Pvt. Bennet: It's my nerves, sir. I.. I.. I just can't stand the shelling anymore.

Patton: Your \*nerves\*? Well, hell, you're just a God-damned coward.

[Soldier starts sniveling]

Patton: [Slaps him, once forehanded, then backhanded on the rebound]

Patton: Shut up! I won't have a yellow bastard sitting here \*crying\* in front of these brave men who have been wounded in battle!

[Soldier snivels some more, and Patton swings a vicious forehand slap, knocking his helmet away]

Patton: \*Shut up!\*

[to the doctors]

Patton: Don't admit this yellow bastard. There's nothing wrong with him. I won't have sons-of-bitches who are afraid to fight \*stinking up this place of honor!\*

[to soldier]

Patton: You're going back to the front, my friend. You may get shot, and you may get killed, but you're going up to the fighting. Either that, or I'm going to stand you up in front of a firing squad. I ought to shoot you myself, you god-damned... bastard! Get him out of here!

[pulls his service automatic. At that, the doctors leap forward and hustle the soldier out of the tent. Patton keeps shouting at the soldier's back]

Patton: Take him up to the front! You hear me? You God-damned coward!

[Takes deep breath]

Patton: I won't have cowards in my army.<sup>115</sup>

Based upon a historical incident, this scene depicts both a suffering soldier who breaks down into hysterical crying fits *and* the response of the military leadership to soldiers' suffering. While the depiction of shell shock is indicative of both recorded observation and cultural perception of mental illness, Patton's response, as a depiction of military perception of psychological trauma, proves the most significant and telling. Patton begins by offering cowardice as an alternate diagnosis to shell shock when he says, "Well hell, you're just a God-damned coward," a sentiment he repeats three more times during the scene, concluding with "I won't have cowards in my army." He then dismissively devalues the psychological suffering that war can bring by contrasting Bennet's nervous condition to those "brave men who have been wounded in battle" and by stating that by treating Bennet in the same hospital as those brave men, Bennet is "stinking up this place of honor".

Patton's comments prove indicative of the military response of his day – and of many ranking officials in today's military as well, and, as such, they reveal the traditional military interpretation of heroic decorum that PTSD "violates." The suffering soldier, the shell-shocked

---

<sup>115</sup> *Patton*, dir. Franklin J. Schaffner (1970; Burbank, CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2006), DVD.



soldier, is hysterical, emotional, fearful, cowardly, dishonorable, and, ultimately, unmanly. Since its first modern diagnosis by military psychiatry during the First World War, soldiers suffering from shell shock have been noted to exhibit a wide array of symptoms, including “fatigue, poor sleep, nightmares, jumpiness...[heart] palpitations, chest pain, tremor, joint and muscle pains, loss of voice and hearing, and functional paralysis.” Psychiatrists also noted that sufferers may break down and cry if asked to describe their condition.<sup>116</sup> The physical and emotional symptoms, according to psychiatrists, resembled hysteria, and, as a result, shell shock earned an initial classification as a variant of hysteria.<sup>117</sup> As an artistic trope, the analogy that psychiatrists draw between the two conditions suggests the depiction of the “cure” for shell shock: a slap to the face often accompanied by a lecture on heroic honor or duty.<sup>118</sup> *Patton* clearly depicts this pattern of response to observed symptoms as General Patton slaps Pvt. Bennet twice before ordering him back to the front where the young private returns to military service.

That military psychiatry initially interpreted shell shock as analogous to hysteria and then proceeded to treat shell shock in a similar fashion – through some form of physical shock such as the depicted slap to the face – is interesting; however, what proves meaningful for this discussion is what such an analogy says about the soldier who suffers from shell shock. Given that hysteria has long been considered a “woman’s disease” in that it “attacks women more than men,” a soldier afflicted with shell shock became seen as unmanly.<sup>119</sup> Manliness, from the viewpoint of the U.S. military and U.S. culture in general, demands that a man be strong, dominant, and

---

<sup>116</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 23.

<sup>117</sup> Dora Apel, “‘Heroes’ and ‘Whores’: The Politics of Gender in Weimar Antiwar Imagery,” *The Art Bulletin* 79 no. 3 (1997): 366-384, 371; Elizabeth Nelson, “Victims of War: The First World War, Returned Soldiers, and Understandings of Domestic Violence in Australia,” *Journal of Women’s History* 19 no. 4 (2007): 83-106, 88.

<sup>118</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 71.

<sup>119</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness & Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 149.

stoic.<sup>120</sup> The observed symptoms of shell shock, which include crying fits and an unwillingness/inability to fight, violate the gendered norms that United States culture demands of men in general and of soldiers in particular. The soldier suffering from shell shock has his condition dismissed as not a “real” war wound, is treated as a coward who is acting like a hysterical woman, and is, consequently, “cured” the way one “cures” a hysterical woman.<sup>121</sup> Even though combat-induced, shell shock, like other mental illnesses, is stigmatized as something from which “real men” do not suffer but through which they press on stoically.<sup>122</sup>

That the stigmatization of mental illness as unmanly persists to this day and creates a substantial barrier to soldiers seeking treatment for PTSD (shell shock) is problematic enough, but the cultural implications of the analogical linkage between shell shock and hysteria do not end there.<sup>123</sup> In addition to being “unmanly,” the shell-shocked soldier must face further stigmatization in the form of blame for his own suffering. As *Patton* articulates, Pvt. Bennet has not been wounded like the “brave men” with physical injuries; he is simply a “God-damned coward.” While Shephard begins his analysis of combat stress diagnoses with the First World War, numerous other studies have demonstrated that the attribution of shell shock/war neurosis/PTSD to a poor moral character has a history that stretches from antiquity to the contemporary military climate in the United States, where Department of Defense funded research articulates that either undiagnosed, pre-enlistment mental illness or a drug addiction –

---

<sup>120</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 4.

<sup>121</sup> Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>122</sup> Mark Nichols, “Male Melancholia and Martin Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence*,” *Film Quarterly* 58 no. 1 (2004): 25-35; James H. Wirth and Galen V. Bodenhausen, “The Role of Gender in Mental-Illness Stigma: A National Experiment,” *Psychological Science* 20 no. 2 (2009): 169-173; Mark Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914-1939,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 91 no. 3 (2010): 503-531.

<sup>123</sup> Goldberg, Eleanor, “Vets Respond to Fort Hood Shooting: Let’s End the Stigma Around Mental Health Issues,” *huffingtonpost.com*, 3 April 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd\\_n\\_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpmg00000063](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd_n_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpmg00000063). Accessed 29 May 2015.

and not combat trauma – are the primary causes for the current high rate of veteran suicides.<sup>124</sup> And while many find an undiagnosed, pre-enlistment mental illness – or the predisposition to mental illness – to be a more palatable etiology for shell shock than a moral failing such as cowardice, the implications that the ultimate cause of the suffering arises from some socially-constructed “deviance” within the soldier prove problematic, because this etiology ignores environmental factors. In the case of combat-induced post-traumatic stress, the narrative that the trope of the shell-shocked soldier tells articulates that war is not the cause of the suffering – even though the name of the trope and of the condition are derived from the lived experience in combat zones.

The argument that the original iteration of the shell-shocked soldier trope puts forward is that moral deviance, which from the Enlightenment forward has included mental illness, leads to psychological collapse in humans; therefore, those humans who collapse must be morally deviant.<sup>125</sup> Shell shock is a form of psychological collapse that happens to human soldiers; therefore, soldiers who collapse must be morally deviant. Depending on the time and the situation, this deviance may be seen as cowardice, unmanliness, drug addiction, or mental illness. By implying that the soldier – and not the war environment – is the primary cause of the suffering has dangerous implications that arise from soldiers who avoid both diagnosis of and treatment for combat-induced psychological trauma. Such implications include drug addiction, which adds legitimacy to the trope’s narrative, domestic violence, unemployment, and suicide.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, 25; Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 71; P.S. Ellis, “The Origins of the War Neuroses, Part I” *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* 70 no. 3 (1984): 168-177; Cynthia A. LeardMann, Teresa M. Bowell, Tyler C. Smith, Michael R. Bell, Besa Smith, Edward J. Boyko, Tomoko I. Hooper, Gary D. Gackstetter, Mark Ghamsary, and Charles W. Hoge, “Risk Factors Associated With Suicide in Current and Former US Military Personnel,” *JAMA* 310 no. 5 (2013): 496-506, 502.

<sup>125</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 67-72.

<sup>126</sup> Melissa Pearrow and Lisa Cosgrove, “The Aftermath of Combat-Related PTSD: Toward an Understanding of Transgenerational Trauma,” *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 30 no. 2 (2009): 77-82; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 169.

While psychological trauma often has numerous contributing factors, the cinematic depiction of the trope suggests that the primary fault lies with the soldier. *He* caused his own suffering. And by placing the blame and burden of suffering on the victim, the inherently traumatic nature of war becomes obscured, and the narrative that war is glorious, just, and noble is allowed to continue with minimal, if any, challenge from the citizenry. This allows the heroic narrative to function not only as a manner through which those who make great sacrifices for the common good can be praised but also in a manner through which those who seek to capitalize on the martial glories of others can continue to profit.

### **John Rambo: The Vengeance-Taking Sufferer**

Things changed during the Vietnam War that interrupted “the nation’s ability to narrativize itself”.<sup>127</sup> Guerilla warfare replaced pitched battles. The civilian population saw actual footage of the war on their televisions during the evening meal. The brutal reality of what war actually was proved incongruous with the idealized, and carefully controlled, depictions of military heroism from the Second World War. These and other social and political factors led to a series of protests, many of which depicted anti-war protesters projecting their anger at the political institutions onto the drafted soldiers, whom they often termed “baby killers”. It was after Vietnam that the condition once known as shell shock became known officially as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>128</sup> While researchers debate whether the Vietnam War was different than the wars that preceded it, it felt different to many in the United States. The United States had lost its first war, and the soldiers, many of whom had become drifters, addicts, or suicidal (or worse) due to poor employment opportunities and numerous physical and psychological illnesses bore the blame for that defeat in the popular mind. After all, these “baby

---

<sup>127</sup> King, *Washed in Blood*, 44.

<sup>128</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 131.

killers,” were morally deviant and threats to civilian society, and moral deviance is unheroic. And heroes win the wars they fight.

However, a *New York Times* piece written by Jon Nordheimer in 1971 suggested an alternative that would slowly take hold: perhaps the Vietnam veteran was not a monster but a victim of the war and of the political establishment that sent him to fight it.<sup>129</sup> However, as McClancy contends, the victimization of Vietnam veterans removed any possible critique of their actions and any positive social action to improve their situations in civilian society.<sup>130</sup> As this reinterpretation of the Vietnam veteran gained traction, it paved the way for the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Memorial was completed in 1982, the same year that the most famous popular culture depiction of a shell shocked Vietnam veteran, John Rambo, appeared in cinema in the movie *First Blood*.<sup>131</sup> Based upon the novel of the same name by David Morrell, *First Blood* tells the story of an unemployed Special Forces agent, John Rambo, who, while hitchhiking through a small town, is picked up by Police Chief Teasle and dropped off at the edge of town. Rambo returns, is booked for vagrancy and resisting arrest, is brutalized by corrupt deputies, assaults the officers, and flees into the mountains where his violent outburst cause his former commander Col. Trautman to fly in from D.C. in order to bring an end to the violence. The film ends with Rambo surrendering to Trautman and being arrested. The film’s conclusion differs markedly from the book’s, where Trautman kills Rambo at the main character’s request. That said, the film’s sympathetic portrayal of the shell-shocked soldier could have marked a turning point in public discourses surrounding combat-induced

---

<sup>129</sup> Jon Nordheimer, “From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero,” *New York Times* 26 May 1971, sec A:1, 16.

<sup>130</sup> Kathleen McClancy, “The Rehabilitation of Rambo: Trauma, Victimization, and the Vietnam Veteran,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47 no. 3 (2014): 503-517, 504.

<sup>131</sup> *First Blood*, dir. Ted Kotcheff (1982: Lion’s Gate; 2004).

psychological trauma; however, the change to the conclusion and the resulting sequels work to transform John Rambo into the archetypal vengeance-taking sufferer, a troubled figure who, though he suffers from a serious psychological condition, can still function heroically if called upon in the right situation. As such, this transformation of the trope of the shell-shocked soldier allows for a symbolic reclamation of heroic masculinity that was stripped from the U.S. psyche following the defeat in the Vietnam War and a dissemination of the idea that such masculinity was the ideal for all American males.<sup>132</sup>

Scholars who have discussed Rambo as a glamorization of Vietnam veterans, a propaganda tool for Reagan and Bush Era military policy, and a symbol for the quest to reclaim U.S. heroic masculinity have noted that Rambo suffers from PTSD.<sup>133</sup> McClancy notes that prior to *First Blood*, numerous films “such as *Chrome and Hot Leather* (1971), *The Born Losers* (1967), and *Satan’s Sadists* (1969)” featured “violent Vietnam veterans bringing the savagery of foreign war home to the United States;” however, she focuses her attention on the shift in cultural perception of Vietnam veterans as a whole (an important transformation of public opinion, to be certain) but fails to note how the film *First Blood* and its sequels depict a transformation of the narrative constructed through the trope of the shell-shocked soldier.<sup>134</sup> In short, while the individual and collective narratives of the *Rambo* franchise have been praised as a cinematic representation of a shift in public opinion regarding Vietnam veterans, the criticisms

---

<sup>132</sup> Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*, 9.

<sup>133</sup> Fry and Kemp, *Rambo Agonistes*, 370; Amy Salyzyn, “John Rambo v Atticus Finch: Gender, Diversity and the Civility Movement,” *Legal Ethics* 16 no. 1 (2013), 97-118; McClancy, “The Rehabilitation of Rambo,” 518; Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, “The Imperial Warrior in Hollywood: Rambo and Beyond,” *New Political Science* 30 no. 4 (2008), 565-578; Harold Schechter and Jonna Semeiks, “Leatherstocking in ‘Nam: Rambo, Platoon, and the American Frontier Myth,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 24 no. 4 (1991): 17-25; Paul Budra, “Rambo in the Garden: The POW Film as Pastoral,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 18 no. 3 (1990): 188-192.

<sup>134</sup> McClancy, “The Rehabilitation of Rambo,” 505.

launched against them have ignored the role that the film's transformation of the shell-shocked soldier trope has paralleled the aforementioned transformation of public surrounding Vietnam veterans.

The trope of the shell-shocked soldier, one must recall, portrays the veteran as being at fault for his own suffering. His psychological collapse is the result of some moral failing, and thus, he deserves what happens to him. *First Blood*, however, depicts the veteran in a more sympathetic light. Rambo is just passing through the small town on his way to find a friend of his from the war, but the local police chief, Teasle, hassles him about the length of his hair and refuses to allow him to eat in town, stating that he does not like drifters. Rambo, feeling unjustly insulted, returns to the town and is arrested on charges of vagrancy. After being arrested, Deputy Galt, a sadistic deputy with a Southern drawl who symbolically represents "fascist oppression" joyfully beats Rambo with a police baton and then douses him with a high pressure fire hose to "bathe" him, triggering a flashback to a POW camp where he responds in a manner appropriate to that situation – with violence.<sup>135</sup> Rambo's PTSD emerges only during the flashback, which occurs during what the audience recognizes to be unjust and brutal treatment by overbearing police who misread his character based upon his appearance. By allowing one of the major diagnostic features of PTSD, the flashback, to emerge naturally as a result of the hostile and unfair environment in which Rambo finds himself, this iteration of the trope suggests a different narrative: one where environmental factors supplant moral deviance as the primary cause of the veteran's suffering.

Though Rambo uses the skills that made him a "baby killer" in Vietnam, the fact that he displays those skills only after he suffers numerous episodes of unjust treatment by the local

---

<sup>135</sup> Fry and Kemp, "Rambo *Agonistes*," 370.

authorities marks him as a sympathetic figure responding to a terrifying and unfair environment – even as his demonstration of his lethal skills continues to escalate.<sup>136</sup> That his suffering has an etiology that is at least partially environmental gains even greater traction when, during a massive standoff with local and state police, Chief Teasle asks, “Whatever possessed God in heaven to make a man like Rambo?” and Col. Trautman responds, “God didn’t make Rambo. I made him!” This simple, quickly delivered line suggests, on the surface, the obvious fact that the Army trained Rambo in the deadly skills he has been demonstrating. However, given that Rambo’s commanding officer claims responsibility for Rambo’s actions suggests that the military and the war they sent Rambo to fight share some of the responsibility for his actions – that his suffering and the suffering that he visits upon others might not have transpired had he not endured what he had during his service in the Vietnam War. The film ends with Rambo being surrounded by police and National Guard forces. Trautman tries to talk him into surrendering peacefully, and they have a frank conversation about how the war has left Rambo feeling obsolete – feelings crystalized when he states, “Back there, I could fly a gunship. I could drive a tank. I was in charge of million dollar equipment. Back here, I can’t even hold a job *parking cars!*” The film then ends with Rambo surrendering to Trautman who escorts him into police custody.

While this scene ends *First Blood*, John Rambo’s story continues in two more films to create an epic narrative that completes this iteration of the trope, cementing the figure of John Rambo as the archetypal suffering hero. In *Rambo: First Blood, Part II*, Rambo returns to Vietnam to free POWs and take violent vengeance upon the remnants of the Viet Cong. In *First Blood, Part III*, Rambo undertakes a covert mission into Soviet Russia to rescue Trautman,

---

<sup>136</sup> McClancy, “The Rehabilitation of Rambo,” 511-512.



assaulting and taking symbolic vengeance upon the great enemies of the United States at that time – the Soviets (as Stallone did in another of his late Cold War-era films, *Rocky IV*, where he became the U.S. dragon-slayer by defeating the aptly named Russian boxer Ivan Drago). In *First Blood, Part II* and *First Blood, Part III*, Rambo fulfils the narrative of the heroic quest in his efforts to rescue POWs and Trautman, respectively, that adapts the captivity narrative in a manner that allows the heroic warrior male to regain the masculinity taken from him by avenging his defeat (against the Viet Cong) and then by defeating the great enemy (the USSR).<sup>137</sup> And, as Boggs and Pollard argue, the *Rambo* trilogy provided inspiration for President Reagan who presided “over a series of proxy wars in Central America”. They further argue that the *Rambo* trilogy created “the formulaic motif of rescuing POWs from evil Vietnamese Communists” that “became almost standard Hollywood fare.”<sup>138</sup> And for the nation as a whole, the motif of a singular heroic individual rescuing POWs symbolized the rescuing of the “true” American narrative of heroic frontier individualism and martial glory.

Taken as a trilogy, the *Rambo* films present a narrative wherein the shell-shocked soldier can still function – when he is truly needed. If the trope prevents positive social action, it is not because this iteration redraws the soldiers, and by extension the United States, “as victims rather than perpetrators [in Vietnam]” and shows “that we suffered just as much, if not more than, the Vietnamese,” as McClancy concludes.<sup>139</sup> Instead, this iteration prevents social action through the complete articulation of the heroic myth. John Rambo is a shell-shocked soldier, but he is one who can still function heroically when his country calls upon him to do so. He may be mentally ill, but he is not, as Patton stated of Pvt. Bennet, “a God-damned coward.” His

---

<sup>137</sup> Schechter and Semeiks, “Leatherstocking in ‘Nam,” 23-24; Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 128-130.

<sup>138</sup> Boggs and Pollard, “The Imperial Warrior,” 574-575.

<sup>139</sup> McClancy, “The Rehabilitation of Rambo,” 518.

suffering is not caused by moral deviance but by environmental factors that molded him into a killing machine and reconditioned his way of seeing the world. And although he appeared to be a long-haired drifter, he did not react in a situationally inappropriate manner until he was unjustly placed in a situation that evoked a flashback. It bears mentioning that no senior officer slaps Rambo out of a hysterical fit during the trilogy. Rambo is the shell-shocked soldier who reclaims the soldier's masculine ethos and ultimately reclaims the heroic nature of the warrior male through vengeance on the Viet Cong and a successful mission against the Russians. This iteration of the trope, therefore, suggests the following argument: If psychological collapse is the result of moral deviance that prevents the soldier from being able to function in situations demanding heroic morality, then how devastating a condition can combat-induced PTSD be if the soldier suffering from it can still function heroically when such actions are demanded of him?

**Nick: The Suicidal Outcast**

The previous question may seem unsupportable, but when one considers that in both the original draft of the film and in the novel, *First Blood*, John Rambo commits a form of assisted suicide when Col. Trautman kills Rambo at Rambo's request. Thus, the heroic reclamation of masculinity performed by the *Rambo* trilogy must be juxtaposed against the narrative that it almost performed: that of the suicidal outcast. The suicidal outcast is the loner who, even before he entered the military, was different from the other men in some way, and he is, therefore, marked as being "not quite right." He then goes to war, either has an experience or a series of experiences that traumatizes him, and then returns home. However, instead of being able to "soldier on" and function heroically, this figure takes his own life. This iteration of the trope of the shell-shocked soldier also emerged out of the Vietnam War, but instead of providing a

vehicle for the reclamation of heroic masculinity, the suicidal outcast highlights the internal etiology of the sufferer, suggesting a tragic inevitability. As shall be demonstrated through the example of Nick, the suicidal figure in the 1978 film *The Deer Hunter*, this iteration of the trope emphasizes the suffering veteran's "deviance" from normal society in a way that suggests a tragic inevitability that limits social action by suggesting that nothing could have been done to help this individual.

*The Deer Hunter* chronicles the story of three friends from a small working-class town in Pennsylvania: Mike, Steven, and Nick. As the film starts, the three young men prepare for two upcoming rituals: marriage (Steven) and military service (all three). Before they ship out for training, the three go on one last deer hunt, an activity that all enjoy, but Nick, the only quiet and introspective one of the group, enjoys it not for the violence and thrill but, as he says, "For the trees." Mike kills a deer with "one shot" – a repeated theme throughout their combat service. During their tour of duty, the three are captured by the Viet Cong and, while imprisoned, forced to challenge each other to a series of games of Russian roulette upon which the guards make wagers. The three escape, but eventually become separated from each other. After a series of adventures, Mike finds Nick in an underground Russian roulette gambling den. He enters the competition in the hopes of bringing Nick home alive, but when they face off, Nick, his arms covered in scars from heroin used to self-medicate, raises the gun to his own temple, smiles, says "one shot", and ends his own life.<sup>140</sup>

That Nick is traumatized by war is unanimously recognized by scholars.<sup>141</sup> And while most scholarship focuses on the rhetoric of war and masculinity or on the film as exemplar of a

---

<sup>140</sup> *The Deer Hunter*, dir. Michael Cimino (1978; Universal Studios, 2012). DVD.

<sup>141</sup> Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas S. Frenzt, "The Deer Hunter: Rhetoric of the Warrior," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 no. 4 (1980), 392-406; Frank Burke, "In Defense of *The Deer Hunter*, or: The Knee Jerk is Quicker than the Eye," *Literature Film Quarterly* 11 no. 1 (1983): 22-27; Frank Burke, "Reading Michael Cimino's *The Deer*

line of “realistic” Vietnam films that, through a presentation of the war from the soldier’s experience, depict the war as futile and chaotic, the eye of scholarship rarely turns its gaze toward the narrative that this film’s iteration of the trope of the shell-shocked soldier tells. And while *The Deer Hunter* does not focus its lens on Nick’s story alone, his suicide is the film’s climax. Therefore, in a film that, as Rasmussen and Downey argue, “emphasizes the arbitrary nature of war by focusing on human suffering,” it proves both meaningful and imperative that the depiction of the sufferer, the shell-shocked soldier, become the focal point of analysis.<sup>142</sup> It is the film’s depiction of war that imparts the tragic inevitability to Nick’s suicide, and by pairing the highly-stigmatized act of suicide with a tragic form in a futile war, this iteration of the trope constrains discourses about combat-induced PTSD that could potentially stifle positive action in the real world.

Nick, as suicidal outcast, is presented as being different from his two friends. Michael and Steven are both loud and boastful; Nick is silent and introspective. Michael and Steve go hunting for the thrill and the kill; Nick goes to enjoy the trees. Rushing and Frenz argue that, “No one questions Nick’s masculinity... Nonetheless, he also displays several qualities normally considered feminine because they are opposites of the heroic persona”.<sup>143</sup> Scholars have described Nick as quiet, introspective, sensitive, compassionate, and empathetic. In terms of a familial unit, Nick is the feminine mother-figure of the friend group.<sup>144</sup> While not an “outcast” in the traditional and easily recognizable sense, Nick’s character traits mark him as different. He is not like the others who glorify in the heroic bravado of violence and war – having never

---

*Hunter*: Interpretation as Melting Pot,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 20.3 (1992): 249-257; Karen Rasmussen and Sharon D. Downey, “Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War Films: Subversion of the Mythology of War,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 no. 2 (1991), 176-195.

<sup>142</sup> Rasmussen and Downey, “Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War Films,” 178.

<sup>143</sup> Rushing and Frenz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 104.

<sup>144</sup> Rushing and Frenz, “*The Deer Hunter*,” 397; Burke, “Reading Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter*,” 253.

experienced it themselves. Drawing from the pre-Vietnam iteration, this variant of the trope suggests that the suffering figure has a flaw, a violation of some social norm of proper heroic conduct, and that this violation is responsible for his suffering. This social violation is one of gender norms. Nick's character is dominated by qualities traditionally aligned with the feminine, and, consequently, he is marked as one who violates traditional masculine behaviors, which become crystalized and idealized in the mythic figure of the warrior.<sup>145</sup> That Michael and Steven, whose characters are dominated by traditionally masculine traits, survive the war (and the film) and are able to successfully reintegrate to one degree or another while Nick, the feminine one of the three, cannot survive, suggests that this violation of masculinity is, at least partially, to blame for his suffering. His suffering occurred *because* he was not like the others; those who were "masculine" before the war were able to survive while the one who was not, fights, "a losing battle against his shadow".<sup>146</sup>

Nick's feminine characterization mark him as different, and as his tropic narrative moves toward its conclusion, this difference, a violation of society's behavioral and heroic norms, engraves a sense of tragic inevitability onto his death. Tragedy, as Kenneth Burke argues, draws upon similar materials as the epic, but focuses on one great sin of the protagonist – one violation of a societal norm that then surrounds his actions with "the connotations of crime" so that the "magic fatality" is blended with "forensic materials".<sup>147</sup> Thus, while *The Deer Hunter* may depict war as arbitrary and may subvert the values of the heroic myth upon which the ethical justification of war is based,<sup>148</sup> the film's iteration of the trope of the shell-shocked soldier as a

---

<sup>145</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 4-5; Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, xii-xiii; Rasmussen and Downey, "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War Films," 180.

<sup>146</sup> Rushing and Frenz, "The Deer Hunter," 401-402.

<sup>147</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 38-39.

<sup>148</sup> Rasmussen and Downey, "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War Films," 190.

suicidal outcast reaffirms traditional military and societal discourses that articulate that psychological collapse, especially during and after combat, results from deviance and unheroic (read as unmanly) character. This reading becomes deepened during Nick's suicide scene where, in a gambling club, his arms are revealed to be covered in scars from heroin injections – a traditional method of self-medication for Vietnam veterans suffering untreated or undiagnosed PTSD. The belief that the primary factor that leads to suicide resulting from a combat-induced psychological collapse is an internal flaw continues in official discourses to the present day. Military discourses still treat soldiers who suffer as being weak, and psychologists employed by the DOD find that the increased rate of suicide is not directly impacted by combat experience but by “an increased prevalence of mental disorders in this population”.<sup>149</sup> Thus, while *The Deer Hunter* depicts war as arbitrary, chaotic, and unheroic, its depiction of the shell-shocked soldier as one who is marked from the onset as a violator against masculine/heroic behavioral norms suggests a tragic narrative that argues that his death was inevitable. The war may have hastened his descent into drugs and suicide, but had he been like his friends, had he followed “the rules” of manly behavior, he would have likely survived. And while the John Rambo model suggests that PTSD may not be that terrible if the suffering hero can still function, the Nick model suggests that positive social action is not possible, because those who can reintegrate and function will do so while those who cannot were destined to meet their tragic end.

### **Considerations on Social Action**

The trope of the shell-shocked soldier changed its form in movies depicting the Vietnam War, splitting into two variants: the vengeance-taking sufferer and the suicidal outcast. While each of these variants concedes an environmental factor as a cause of the veteran's suffering, the

---

<sup>149</sup> LeardMann, et al., “Risk Factors Associated With Suicide in Current and Former US Military Personnel,” 502.

narrative represented by these iterations of the trope works to constrain discourses that could produce positive social action working to alter the perception of combat-induced psychological trauma. The vengeance-taking sufferer, the Rambo archetype, responds violently to unjust situations – his environment causes his suffering. However, when called upon to be heroic, he performs as a masculine warrior hero should perform. The suicidal outcast, the Nick archetype, violates the heroic code of masculine behavior that Rambo epitomizes, and, as a result, he cannot function normally after experiencing combat-induced psychological trauma. Taken together, these two iterations suggest a line of opposition to social action that argues that changes to the social reading of combat-induced PTSD and the policies connected to that reading are unnecessary, because those who are worthy of the title of warrior hero will still be able to function when called upon. Those who cannot function – even after experiencing combat-induced trauma – are unworthy; their fall, while tragic, is inevitable and unstoppable. This is not to suggest that transformation of a trope cannot spur social change. This chapter will now briefly discuss two examples that have the potential to open the discourses surrounding combat-induced psychological trauma: the original ending for the film *First Blood* and *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

The original ending for the film *First Blood* was identical to that of the novel: Col. Trautman kills John Rambo at the soldier's request. As a potential variant, had the film ended as the novel, the narrative told by this iteration of the trope would have depicted a sympathetic figure whose suffering is caused by his environment and whose end is brought about by that environment. Additionally, given that Trautman, as a representation of the U.S. Army, declares, "I made him," this ending would have provided a strong suggestion that the suffering of the shell-shocked soldier is the product of the war. This ending would have been a reverse-

*Frankenstein* ending where the Doctor, after recognizing that this creation is monstrous, kills his Creature. Such an ending would have clearly articulated that the military, which becomes a synecdochal reduction and metonymous representation of the United States government, is responsible for the suffering of the shell-shocked soldier. While this transformation of the trope would not have magically erased prior discourses and completely altered public perceptions of mental illness, the immense success and popularity of *First Blood* could have transformed the trope of the shell-shocked soldier into an image that the public held up as an argument for greater funding, more research, and easier access to psychiatric treatment for combat veterans. Instead, as Jeffords, Gibson, and Boggs and Pollard have all discussed, the film and its sequels drift into “jingoistic narcissism” and function as an embodiment of the virtues of traditional American military heroism and champion U.S. imperial power.<sup>150</sup>

The Frankenstein’s monster motif appears in a more recent iteration of a soldier who suffers from combat-induced psychological trauma: Captain America. Whether or not Captain America can be clinically diagnosed with PTSD is immaterial, but to say that he has been traumatized by war is undeniable. This brief discussion focuses on a specific event when he ventures behind enemy lines to rescue Allied soldiers from Hydra. Among the soldiers captured is Cap’s childhood friend Bucky Barnes. As they make their escape, Cap fails to save Bucky who falls to his death in the Alps. While Captain America is heralded as a hero upon his return, sadness darkens his face. The next scene shows Agent Peggy Carter walking up to him as he sits alone in a bar, drinking hard liquor as if it were water. Cap then states, “Dr. Erskine said that the serum wouldn't just affect my muscles, it would affect my cells. Create a protective system of

---

<sup>150</sup> Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 2-3, 12; Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*, 9; Boggs and Pollard, “The Imperial Warrior.”



regeneration and healing. Which means, um, I can't get drunk. Did you know that?"<sup>151</sup> The serum that turned scrawny Steve Rogers, the archetypal ninety-eight pound weakling, into Captain America, the Charles Atlas-bodied super soldier, increased his metabolism to the point that he processes alcohol as if it were water. Like many veterans, real and fictional, Cap turns to self-medication to ease his suffering, and like veterans soon learn, self-medication does not help. This scene, like the original ending of *First Blood*, presents a soldier trying to cope as soldiers often do – alone and through drugs. However, by referencing Erskine's serum as the cause of his inability to find even temporary solace in alcohol, Captain America's moment of trauma provides a clear connection between the war and trauma in the life of a soldier. That which transformed Steve Rogers into Captain America prevented him from being able to unsee what he saw, unable to forget what had happened, and unable not to suffer. That which made him threatens to destroy him.

Captain America, like John Rambo, is able to “soldier on” and be the hero that the world needs him to be. This fact may make a discussion of a film based upon a comic book character irrelevant in a discussion on the depiction of shell-shocked soldiers; however, what *Captain America* does is depict in clear, direct language the linkage between the full suite of military experience and psychological trauma. *First Blood* alluded to that link when Trautman declared, “I made him”, but *Captain America* directly links the “making” of the soldier to that which prevents his healthy (and unhealthy) processing of trauma. John Rambo turned violent as a result of unfair treatment by corrupt police officers. Steve Rogers was a good man – a man chosen specifically for his moral qualities – who suffered as a result of a harsh and unfair environment. For the trope of the shell-shocked soldier to open discourses about war and mental illness in

---

<sup>151</sup> *Captain America: The First Avenger*, dir. Joe Johnston (2011; Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2013). DVD.

ways that suggest both the possibility and the plausibility of positive social action, highlighting the positive correlation between the war environment and the psychological trauma must become the *sine qua non* of the trope.

Although the character of Captain America predates that of John Rambo, the film *Captain America: The First Avenger* can be read as a cinematic descendent of *First Blood* in that it depicts a psychologically wounded soldier who continues to fight on and become heroic. *Captain America*, like *First Blood*, has its own countrapuntal depiction of the shell-shocked soldier in the Showtime series *Homeland*. This political thriller series, which is currently ongoing, depicts the post-discharge career of Nicholas Brody, a USMC sniper whose actions present an ambiguity: either he suffers from PTSD resulting from his service in Iraq or he has been turned by Al Qaeda. The series is ongoing, and so the conclusion of the narrative cannot be discussed at this time; however, what proves significant is that, like *The Deer Hunter*, *Patton*, and countless other films, *Homeland* raises the question of the veteran's moral character. Either he is a good man who was wounded by war, or he is a liar faking symptoms to cover treason. The presentation of a potential linkage between PTSD symptoms and treason appears on the surface to be a novel development of the trope; however, treason simply becomes the morally deviant behavior that replaces cowardice as an expression of unheroic and unmanly behavior.

### **Conclusions**

As long as wars continue to be waged, those who fight them will suffer psychological trauma. As long as stories are told of wars and warriors, those stories will feature episodes of psychological breakdown and collapse. The trope of the shell-shocked soldier will endure and will transform. The transformations must occur in order for the trope to continue to be meaningful as a discursive unit, a figurative representation of countless lived experiences that

functions to grant perspective on a complex suite of discourses focused on the single nexus point of the suffering soldier/veteran. As a historical artifact, the trope of the shell-shocked soldier was unified in its narrative until films featuring Vietnam veterans began to emerge. Then, like public opinion on the Vietnam war and on those who fought it, the trope fragmented along two primary lines: one sympathetic (the vengeance-taking sufferer) and one unsympathetic (the suicidal outcast). The former presents the veteran's suffering as a result of injustice in the environment around him. The latter argues that, while environmental forces are at play, the ultimate cause rests in some aspect of moral/cultural deviance.

The purpose of this chapter is not to present a mere historiography of this trope in order to demonstrate its continued longevity; that needed no analysis. However, in analyzing transformations of the trope over time, what emerges are the questions the tropes raise about the nature and severity of combat-induced PTSD that constrain social action. The vengeance-taking sufferer, the Rambo figure, suggests that social action may not be necessary, because those who are truly heroic of character can still function as heroes when called upon to do so. The suicidal outcast, the Nick figure, suggests that social action is likely to be futile, because the suffering and death of such individuals is marked by the tragic inevitability born of a moral failing, a violation of some social or cultural norm, possessed by the individual *before* he entered the war. By referencing contemporary film, television, and military-funded scientific findings, this chapter demonstrates that these two archetypes have remained powerful and meaningful as interpretative frames of how to understand the effects and importance of combat-induced psychological trauma.

While much of this chapter has focused on critiquing the cinematic trope as a constraint barring positive social action to provide better aid for soldiers suffering from PTSD, this chapter

did note that the transformation of the trope as a result of the Vietnam War did afford a small glimmer of hope through a direct but subtle linkage of the veteran's suffering to the war environment. What proved surprising is that this linkage occurred in a film that has been dismissed by critics and scholars as pandering to militaristic and nationalistic impulses through a glamorization of violence as heroic – *First Blood*. The same can be said of its sequels and of its descendants like *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Equally surprising is that a film that earns critical acclaim and scholastic praise for being critical of the war continues to link psychological trauma to a moral failing on the part of the soldier – *The Deer Hunter*. Again, the same can be said for its descendants such as *Homeland*. While the academic responses and interpretations of the films and television programs is not in dispute, these surprising findings prove to be interesting correlations that have gone unnoticed in the academic literature. This chapter's hope is that in illuminating the questions that emerge as the trope of the shell-shocked soldier transforms into the iterations familiar to contemporary audiences, a recognition that how a culture talks about a topic as serious as combat-induced PTSD can either constrain or suggest social action designed to produce positive changes, serving as a prelude to the chapters that follow where the current issues surrounding heroism, masculinity, physical and mental fitness, morality, and death will be explored through various artifacts and bodies of discourse that all share a common nexus: the body of the soldier. Tropic discourses, like mythic speech, must continue to evolve to reflect or comment upon the attitudes and beliefs of the society that tells them; should either a trope or a myth cease to evolve alongside society, it becomes a static remnant of the past and ceases to function in any meaningful way as equipment for living and for dying.

Popular discourses surrounding the psychological trauma of veterans suggest the public's understanding of such issues, but as a trope, the shell-shocked soldier often oversimplifies the problem into a single, unified narrative. And while that narrative appears to have split into two variants following the Vietnam War, the general public still regards psychologically wounded veterans with fear and apprehension, afraid of triggering a worst-case scenario episode. The military is well aware of the complex suite of issues that soldiers and veterans face both during combat and after discharge that can impact their physical, psychological, and social lives. The next chapter discusses one proposed remedy: the TALOS armored suit. Dubbed the "Iron Man" suit, this project draws inspiration from fictional heroes such as Iron Man, the titular character in a series of comic books and movies by Marvel, and Master Chief, the heavily armed and armored super soldier of the *Halo* video game franchise. Human life is fragile, and although the great warrior heroes of myth rarely suffer physical and psychological wounds in battle, their human counterparts often do suffer greatly. Thus, the United States Special Operations Command has commissioned the building of the TALOS suit, because, if the soldier's mind and body cannot be trained to be invulnerable to the dangers of battle, then the soldier's mind and body must be built to be invulnerable to the dangers of battle. The unstated goal of the TALOS project is for myth to meet materiality in a cyborg super soldier.

## CHAPTER II: I, SOLDIER: THE MILITARY MYTHOS OF THE TALOS SUIT

*“A hero? Like you? You’re a lab experiment, Rogers. Everything special about you came out of a bottle!” – Tony Stark, The Avengers*

A young Special Forces operator is killed during a tactical engagement in Afghanistan while maneuvering through a door. At the post-mission debriefing, a young officer asked the senior commander, Admiral William H. McRaven of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), “After all these years in combat, why don’t we have a better way for the tactical operators to go through a door?”<sup>152</sup> Admiral McRaven, who organized and executed Operation Neptune Spear (which led to the death of Osama Bin Laden), began recruiting military, scientific, and industrial minds for a project designed to ensure the safety of combat Special Forces troops. As he articulated, “I am very committed to it because I'd like that last operator we lost to be the last one we ever lose in this fight or the fight of the future, and I think we can get there.”<sup>153</sup> The resulting project is the Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit, or the TALOS armor.

The TALOS armor is designed to be a revolution, not an evolution, in military technology through a “comprehensive family of systems” including a powered exoskeleton for increased strength and agility, magnetorheological armor, an oxygen system, body temperature regulation systems, health monitoring and first aid systems, Google Glass-style combat information visual displays, communication and information processing systems, and integrated weapons.<sup>154</sup> While the prototype is currently in testing, the following examples will suffice to

---

<sup>152</sup> Steven Hoarn, “Adm. William H. McRaven Updates TALOS Progress,” *defensemedianetwork.com*, 13 February 2014, <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/adm-william-h-mcraven-updates-talos/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Noelle Swan, “Iron Man: Super Suit Trying to Jump from the Movie Screen to the Battlefield,” *csmonitor.com*, 21 May 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/USA-Update/2014/0521/Iron-Man-Super-suit-trying-to-jump-from-the-movie-screen-to-the-battlefield> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>154</sup> Steven Hoarn, “Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS) Request Elicits Response from RDECOM, Others,” *defensemedianetwork.com*, 15 June 2013, <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/tactical-assault-light-operator-suit-talos-request-elicits-rdecom-response/> Accessed 29 May 2015; Cheryl Pellerin, “McRaven:

describe the scope of the technology in the suit. The exoskeleton, designed by Ekso Bionics, a company known for developing exoskeletons that allow paraplegics to walk, will provide the strength and agility to perform missions while carrying “hundreds of pounds of load”.<sup>155</sup> This system, powered by hydraulics, proves essential, as the current military estimate for the suit’s weight is “upwards of 400 pounds, with 365 of that being made up by the batteries alone”.<sup>156</sup> The magnetorheological armor, developed by MIT, has the ability to transform from a liquid to a solid in milliseconds when either a magnetic field or an electrical current is applied, providing advanced ballistics protection with less bulk than traditional ballistics armor.<sup>157</sup> The result is a mechanized, life-sustaining, performance enhancing, powered suit that has drawn comparisons to that worn by Marvel Comics superhero, and fictional MIT graduate, Tony Stark: the Iron Man.

While the functionality of the suit and the appearance of the released concept sketches resemble that of science fiction super soldiers, the armor’s acronym, TALOS, evokes both ancient myth and contemporary metaphor: the machine. MIT professor Gareth McKinley states that “The acronym TALOS was chosen deliberately. It’s the name of the bronze armored giant from *Jason and the Argonauts*.”<sup>158</sup> Talos, in Greek mythology, was a giant human-shaped automaton made of bronze that protected Europa on Crete. The mechanical mythic figure of Talos connects the TALOS armor to the dominant metaphor of modern military discourse: the

---

People, Technology, Partners are SOCOM Priorities,” *defense.gov*, 12 Feb. 2014, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121652> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>155</sup> Globe Newswire, “Ekso Bionics™ Announces Launch of Ekso™ Labs,” *virtual-strategy.com*, 28 March 2014, <http://www.virtual-strategy.com/2014/03/28/ekso-bionicstm-announces-launch-eksotm-labs?page=0.0#axzz3FwaT3LYA> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>156</sup> Sebastian Rueda, “US Military Turns to Hollywood’s Legacy Effects to 3D Print Iron-Man Suit,” *threediz.com*, 10 July 2014, <http://www.threediz.com/uncategorized/us-military-turns-to-hollywoods-legacy-effects-to-3d-print-iron-man-suit/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>157</sup> Hoarn, “Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS) Request Elicits Response from RDECOM, Others.”

<sup>158</sup> Mike Wheatley, “US Army Building TALOS: Real-Life Ironman Armor to Give Troops ‘Superhuman Strength,’” *siliconangle.com*, 14 October 2013, <http://siliconangle.com/blog/2013/10/14/us-army-building-talos-real-life-ironman-armor-to-give-troops-superhuman-strength/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

soldier/army as machine-man, a cyborg.<sup>159</sup> As a politically-constructed hybrid technological-biological being, the cyborg becomes a productive metaphor that illuminates the degree to which ancient military anxieties surrounding the ability of the biological body to function optimally in combat drive the fetishistic desire for military technological advancement to construct through technology what cannot be created through training: the perfect and immortal soldier. The TALOS' promised revolution in warfare becomes more of an evolution both technologically and rhetorically, because the continued advancement of military technology that now penetrates the biological body of the soldier extends the modernist metaphor of the soldier as a machine downward. As the metaphor marches closer to literal reality, the project's discourses find themselves in conflict with the traditional heroic ideal along three lines: the ability of courage to shine without the threat of death, the potential for gaining honor when one has a huge technological advantage over the enemy, and the effect that displacing the heroic ethos onto the weapon has on the treatment of the soldier by the military and society.

### **Ethos by Body: Heroism as the Born Identity**

Although the military admits that it chose the acronym TALOS to resonate with the mythic image of a great mechanical protector, the significant issue for rhetorical consideration is what effect this mechanical powered suit will have on the current conception of warrior heroism, specifically the warrior ethos, as it is deployed in the contemporary United States. Heroes have always had magical talismans to assist them. Arthur had Excalibur. Siegfried had Gram. Beowulf had chain armor forged by Weiland, the king of the Elves and the smith of the gods. Such equipment, bestowed by a representative of the "benign, protecting power of destiny," is a

---

<sup>159</sup> Eyal Ben-Ari, *Mastering Soldiers: Conflict, Emotions, and the Enemy in an Israeli Military Unit* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 34.



symbol of divine blessing, protection, and authority.<sup>160</sup> The mythic warrior hero is one who must demonstrate the physical and psychological excellencies that will all him both to function and to survive combat situations: physical strength, martial skill, courage, honor, loyalty, endurance, and stoicism in the face of hardship and death – the same traits expected of the ideal U.S. soldier.<sup>161</sup> While weapons and armor have a practical function in combat, illuminating their symbolic function in mythic and heroic discourse suggests that the hero could still function heroically *without* that specific piece of equipment. As a brief example, when Beowulf confronts Grendel’s mother, his mortal sword broke against her skin, and she pierced his magical armor with her seax (an Anglo-Saxon short sword), endangering his life.<sup>162</sup> However, the poet declares, “*ond hālig God / Ġewēold wigsigor*” [“and Holy God / Controlled the battle-victory”].<sup>163</sup> Beowulf then stood up, and God revealed the one weapon that can defeat Grendel’s mother: a giant-forged sword, which becomes a symbol of divine favor.<sup>164</sup> This weapon allows him to accomplish his mission, but it is only granted to him after God deems him worthy, or, as the poet declares, “*rodera rædend; hit on ryht ġescēd*” [“the ruler of heaven; he decided it rightly”].<sup>165</sup>

The traits and abilities that make one heroic, the warrior ethos, do not arise from the weapon but from within the warrior and are first symbolized by the warrior’s body. The body and physical appearance of the mythic warrior suggest a heroic character, because, ancient societies believed beauty to be reflective of virtue and deformity to be reflective of vice.<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>160</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with 1000 Faces*, 71.

<sup>161</sup> Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 22; Jennifer Barker, “‘A Hero will Rise’: The Myth of the Fascist Man in *Fight Club* and *Gladiator*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36 no. 3 (2008): 171-187.

<sup>162</sup> *Beowulf*, 1523-1550.

<sup>163</sup> *Beowulf*, 1554b-1555a.

<sup>164</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 47.

<sup>165</sup> *Beowulf*, 1555.

<sup>166</sup> Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 12.

Consider in *Captain America* how Steve Rogers is chosen not for his physical strength but for his moral strength, and after he undergoes the experiment that transforms him into Captain America, his physical form is as beautiful and perfect as his moral form is purported to be. Ancient myths, such as *Beowulf*, offer similar linkages between physical and moral form. As Peggy Knapp states, “Beauty mediates between idea and appearance.”<sup>167</sup> When he steps on the shores of Denmark, the coast guardian links his physical form to his worthiness by first declaring, “*Nāefre ic māran ġeseah / eorla ofer eorþam*” [“never have I seen a greater noble on the earth.”] and then “*nis þæt seldguma, / wāpnūm ġeweorðad, næfne him his wlite lēoge*” [“this is no mere hall-man (retainer), made worthy by weapons, unless his countenance belies him”].<sup>168</sup> As Lee notes, the coast-guardian’s words strengthen “moral and physical resonances” that demonstrate that Beowulf is heroic, wherein “the hero’s physical powers of action and his moral fibre are closely identified”.<sup>169</sup> Of Beowulf’s might, the poet declares “*þæt hē þīrtiges / manna mæġencræft on his mundgripe*” [“that he thirty men’s strength in the grip of his hand”].<sup>170</sup> The coast-guardian’s mention that Beowulf’s looks might belie what appears to be a noble and heroic ethos arises from the context wherein a stranger, accompanied by a band of armed warriors, steps foot on the shore, but in the end, he pronounces their intentions honorable, meaning that they have no intention of raiding Denmark.<sup>171</sup>

Compare Beowulf’s appearance to that of his famous opponent, Grendel. Little is said of Grendel’s appearance, but the poet does state that “*him of ēagum stōd / liġġe ġeliīcost lēoht unfæġer*” [“from his eyes emanated / most like a flame, a distorted light”].<sup>172</sup> Little more is said

---

<sup>167</sup> Peggy A. Knapp, “*Beowulf* and the Strange Necessity of Beauty,” in *On the Aesthetics of Beowulf and other Old English Poems*, ed. By John M. Hill (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010): 81-100, 83.

<sup>168</sup> *Beowulf*, 247b-248a; 249b-250.

<sup>169</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 10.

<sup>170</sup> *Beowulf*, 379b-380.

<sup>171</sup> Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 100-101.

<sup>172</sup> *Beowulf*, 726b-727.

of his appearance, but the poet does describe how this strong fiend bursts through the doors of Heorot and devours upwards of thirty men each night. The poet also tells of his lineage as descended from social violation; Grendel is of the kin of Cain along with “*eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas, / swylce gigantas*” [ettins and elves and demons / and also giants”].<sup>173</sup> The inclusion of *eotenas* and *gigantes*, both of which reference “giants”, proves interesting, because *Eotenas* [“ettins”], is cognate with the Old Norse *Jotunn*, the frost giants who opposed the *æsir* (the gods). *Gigantes* derives its etymology Greek tales of a race of giants incited to rise against the Olympians. Taken together in proximity, we find that the *Beowulf* poet presented a totality of worldly monstrosity as arising out of Cain’s act of fratricide; thus, the poet declares that all monsters, both foreign and domestic, are the progeny of Cain. Consider also one of the most famous Germanic monsters, the dragon Fafnir. Once a prince of the Dwarves, his greed for a magic ring led him to murder his father, and as he fled into a cave, his twisted moral nature became reflected in his physical form as he transformed from Dwarf to dragon. While the coast-guardian’s words indicate a knowledge that the relationship between physical appearance and spiritual morality is not fully identical, the physical form becomes a shorthand, signifying what *should* be identical. Ultimately, however, monstrosity, like heroism, is revealed through action but manifests itself in the physical appearance.

While the beautiful, idealized body of the warrior suggests an honorable, noble character, it is the actions that one with such prodigious strength and appearance that determine whether or not one is worthy of the honorific “hero”. Such actions often require the hero to venture out into hostile territory and confront one or more monsters wherein the hero faces “threat to life and property” in fighting “the ravager of man and beast” in order to return, hopefully, to society with

---

<sup>173</sup> *Beowulf*, 112-113a.

a life-affirming boon.<sup>174</sup> The fight with Grendel should be simple, because Beowulf has a distinct technological advantage through his sword and magical armor. However, before the Scyldings retire for the night of his fight against Grendel, Beowulf utters the following promise:

<p><i>Nō ic mē an herewæsmun gūþgeweorca, forþan ic hine sweorde aldre benēotan, nāt hē þāra gōda, rand gehēawe, nīþgeweorca; secge ofersittan, wiġ ofer wæpen, on swā hwære hond mærdō dēme,</i></p>	<p><i>hnāgran taliġe þonne Grendel hine; swebban nelle, þēah ic eal mæġe; þæt hē mē onġēan slea, þēah ðe hē rōf sie ac wit on niht sculon ġif hē ġeseċēan dear ond siþðan wītiġ God hāliġ Dryhten swa him ġemet þinċe.</i></p>
---	--

<p>I myself in war-stature do not In the works of war Therefore, I with my sword Deprive of life, He knows not the finer skills Hew my shield, For wicked works Relinquish sword War without weapons, On whichever hand, Will a lot glory,</p>	<p>tally poorer than Grendel himself; will not slay him, though I am fully able; that he may strike me back, although he is renowned but we must at night if he dares to seek and then wise God, the holy Lord as seems fitting to Him.<sup>175</sup></p>
--	---

The language of this section is that of a legal oath to “enact in battle the strength and courage being claimed”.<sup>176</sup> That said, it proves important to note that Beowulf does not promise victory, but, in stripping himself of sword and armor, he sets himself on equal technological footing, claiming no unfair advantage, so that victory is awarded to the one deemed worthy. Beowulf has the strength of thirty men; Grendel devours thirty men each night. Both are equal in physical strength. Both solve problems through violent means. Beowulf is not a hero, *because* of his

<sup>174</sup> Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 300.

<sup>175</sup> *Beowulf*, 677-687.

<sup>176</sup> Knapp, “*Beowulf* and the Strange Necessity of Beauty,” 92.

physical excellence. Beowulf is a hero, *because* he deploys that physical excellence in life-threatening situations in order to perform a dangerous action that benefits the larger community. As shall be demonstrated, the TALOS project both reveals military anxiety about the ability of the human body to become the heroic warrior ideal and suggests areas of the heroic ethos directly connected to the dangers that battle places on the heroic body that may need revision.

### **Building the Soldier**

While SOCOM bills the TALOS project as a revolution in military technology, the power armor is revolutionary only to the degree with which it makes corporeal the military-industrial complex through the construction of the liquid steel armored body of the cyborg soldier. Otherwise, the TALOS project appears to be born of the “technoeuphoria of the Gulf War,” wherein official and popular discourses converged to articulate that high tech weaponry won the war.<sup>177</sup> It is this belief, which began with the wars and conflicts of the 1990s, that technology can minimize – or even prevent – soldier death that animates the TALOS project and marks the power armor as a site of the military’s embodied fear that the human body is too fragile for the needs of contemporary war. The United States Armed Forces, like other Western nations, faces the added challenge of transforming civilians into soldiers, and, it accomplishes this task through an intense physical and psychological conditioning that occurs in basic training, operating under the assumption that if the perfect soldier cannot be birthed, then the perfect soldier must be constructed.

This intense physical training and psychological discipline born of this philosophy gave rise to the great metaphor for the modern soldier: the body of the male soldier *is* a machine. Metaphor, as Burke articulates, provides a perspective on one thing by seeing that thing “*in*

---

<sup>177</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 45.

terms of something else” through either similar physical appearance (*A looks like B*) or through similar response (our response to *A should be like* our response to *B*).<sup>178</sup> While the use of mechanistic metaphors for the human body extend back to the scientific revolution, the metaphor of the soldier’s body being machinelike began with the First World War, establishing the hierarchical dominance of the technological/masculine over the natural/feminine to guard against the threat that the natural, fleshy, feeble, and irrational female body will “turn the male body into a mush of flesh, blood, and bones”.<sup>179</sup> As the dominant metaphor of all modern armies, Ben-Ari argues that, soldiers are “thought to operate and have the qualities of machines” in terms of efficiency, reliability, and interchangeability of identically functioning parts.<sup>180</sup> The metaphor of the soldier as a machine, therefore presents the military body as a strong, masculine, theoretically-impenetrable whole that functions efficiently according to established rules of engagement and that embodies the past glories and professed ideals of the nation-state.

The TALOS project presents a downward movement that literalizes the machine metaphor by integrating the soldier into the weapon system. Concept art for the TALOS suit depicts faceless armor with exposed hydraulic joints that provide the soldier with the ability to function in the nearly 400 pound armored suit, the integrated and self-powered communication technology, sensory interface to provide monitoring ability and enhanced tactical awareness, powered field medic and life support functions are all enhancements to the soldier’s basic biological abilities that, should the suit either malfunction or cease to function, the soldier will no

---

<sup>178</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 503; I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 100-118.

<sup>179</sup> Vladimir Glebkin, “A Socio-Cultural History of the Machine Metaphor,” *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 11 no. 1 (2013): 145-162, 156; Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine*, 133; Cornelius Bork, “Communicating the Modern Body: Fritz Kahn’s Popular Images of Human Physiology as an Industrialized World,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 32 (2007): 495-520, 507; Raz Yosef, “Spectacles of Pain: War, Masculinity and the Masochistic Fantasy in Amos Gitai’s *Kippur*,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24 no. 1 (2005): 49-66, 56.

<sup>180</sup> Ben-Ari, *Mastering Soldiers*, 34.

longer be able to access.<sup>181</sup> Juxtaposed against the current model of armored soldier in Figure 1, the TALOS suit evokes images of a faceless, super soldier made popular in science fiction from Heinlein to *Halo*.<sup>182</sup> The image conjured is not a postmodern *homo sapiens habilis* using (but being visually distinct from) his mechanized tools of war but of a hybrid who may be more machine than man – a cyborg.



Figure 1: The Making of Iron Man

Scholarship on the cyborg begins from a definition of the cyborg as a hybrid of the biological and technological that “deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments”.<sup>183</sup> Conceived in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, the cyborg was a way to allow astronauts to adapt to life in space through technological and pharmacological enhancement.

<sup>181</sup> United States Special Operations Command, “Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS), *fedbizopps.gov*, 15 May 2013,

<https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=82f14d2b5ccb4b508211f074d4bf51c3&tab=core&tabmode=list> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>182</sup> Dion Nissenbaum, “U.S. Military Turns to Hollywood to Outfit the Soldier of the Future,” *wsj.com*, 4 July 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/u-s-military-turns-to-hollywood-to-outfit-the-soldier-of-the-future-1404527893> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>183</sup> Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, “Cyborgs and Space,” *Astronautica* (Sept. 1960): 26-27, 74-76, 27.

Posthumanist scholars have, however, expanded the scope of the technological enhancements in an unproductive manner that circumscribes all human experience. Borst states that to qualify as a cyborg requires that technology be “intimately interfaced with the human body, no longer existing as an attachment or tool, but incorporated within or altering the body’s inherent structures”.<sup>184</sup> The cyborg’s essence is that of a broadly defined natural-cultural hybrid entity, that includes every tool use from pencils to pacemakers to astronauts that become tools but extensions of human intelligence.<sup>185</sup> Clark concludes that human-technology hybridization, the cyborg-ing of humanity, is “an aspect of our humanity,” and is “as basic and ancient as the use of speech”.<sup>186</sup> Shah, argues that the hybrid nature of the cyborg improves its functionality by allowing it to translate “abilities and the capabilities learnt in one system [of experience] in an efficient and effective” manner for the other.<sup>187</sup> The presented image argues that the cyborg is a natural extension of *homo habilis*, a commonplace experience where humans use technology to adapt to the world around them.

In a seemingly contradictory movement, posthuman scholars impart to the commonplace cyborg a boundary-transgressing potential similar to that of monsters – the ability to “call attention to ways in which science, technology, and medicine routinely contribute to the fashioning of selves”.<sup>188</sup> Gray argues that the cyborg metaphor “makes the political centrality of technology undeniable”.<sup>189</sup> Murphy argues that cyborg art, which often creates organs out of

---

<sup>184</sup> Elizabeth Borst, “‘Cyborg Art’ as a Critical Sphere of Inquiry into Increasing Corporeal Human-Technology Merger,” *At the Interface: Probing the Boundaries* 85 (2012): 283-307, 283.

<sup>185</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 72-74; Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13; Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>186</sup> Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4-6.

<sup>187</sup> Nishant Shah, “Material Cyborgs; Asserted Boundaries: Formulating the Cyborg as a Translator,” *European Journal of English Studies* 12 no 2 (2008): 211-225, 212.

<sup>188</sup> Gary Lee Downey and Joseph Dumit, “Locating and Intervening” in *Cyborgs and Citadels*, eds. Gary Lee Downey and Joseph Dumit (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1997): 5-30, 7.

<sup>189</sup> Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 20.



machines, uses a reversal that forces the audience to examine the ethical implications of biomechanical metaphors in structuring reality.<sup>190</sup> Haraway unabashedly declares that cyborgs offer possibilities for feminist interpretation, critique, and activism, because these “illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism” are sites of resistance and opposition to the parents who created them.<sup>191</sup> Borst argues that cyborg art serves as both a celebration and a warning of the deep intimacy that humans share with their technology.<sup>192</sup> As he concludes *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, Clark breaks from his largely optimistic tone to confront the “specters that haunt these hybrid dreams,” such as inequality, alienation, intrusion, and uncontrollability, reminding readers that for all the promise of human-technology hybridization, the systems of domination that haunt contemporary hierarchies remain to be confronted.<sup>193</sup> If the cyborg is as commonplace as writing with a pen, then the cyborgization of humanity is likely to go unnoticed. Such a broad definition diminishes, and potentially negates, the cyborg’s power to function as a site of opposition and render it meaningless and unusable for scholarly inquiry into the problematic relationships existing among humans, their technologies, and the power structures of society.

This chapter seeks to reanimate the cyborg’s utility as a politically-situated metaphor and a concept for meaningful critical scholarship by arguing that the cyborg exhibits technological-biological integration to such an unusual degree so as to illuminate a boundary transgression that, through a capitulation to the patriarchal military-industrial complex, exposes one or more of the military-industrial complex’s anxieties about the human body through a techno-fetishistic re-

---

<sup>190</sup> Timothy F. Murphy, “Artistic Simulacra in the Age of Recombinant Bodies,” *Literature and Medicine* 26 no. 1 (2007): 159-179, 176.

<sup>191</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), Kindle edition, location 3096.

<sup>192</sup> Borst, “Cyborg Art,” 284.

<sup>193</sup> Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 167-195.

construction of the ideal “human.” Qualifying as a cyborg first requires an integration between organism and machine, specifically that technological machines must be attached to – and possibly penetrate – the organic body. More meaningful than the commonly cited example of the use of a pen to solve mathematics problems, this intimate level of integration between the biological and the technological produces a “*fluidity* of the human-machine integration” that results in a “*transformation* of our capacities, projects, and lifestyles”.<sup>194</sup> Clynnes and Kline describe the cyborg as being fitted with life supporting technologies that penetrate the body to provide “continuous slow injections of biochemically active substances at a biological rate” to allow for the function of “desired performance characteristics under various environmental conditions” through the “selection of appropriate drugs”.<sup>195</sup> The physical construction of a cyborg, therefore, requires that technology be grafted onto, and possibly, penetrate a base organism for the purpose of adaptation to a new environment.

The second criterion demands that the degree of intimate integration between biological and technological be different enough from the quotidian to produce a sensory-arresting response in the audience, who then contemplate the meaning(s) of this hybrid figure. As numerous scholars from Burke to Haraway argue, boundary-transgressing genres and creatures, have the potential to be subversive and oppositional, calling for, as Burke states, “a revolutionary shift in our attitude toward the symbols of authority”.<sup>196</sup> Through the penetration of sensitive points on the body such as the skin, the eyes, and the orifices, the cyborg should evoke reactions of disgust and fear that suggest biological and social pollution through such penetration of the foreign into the interior of the biological/social body – often in the pursuit of physical, intellectual, or

---

<sup>194</sup> Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 24.

<sup>195</sup> Clynnes and Kline, “Cyborgs in Space,” 74.

<sup>196</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 61.

political perfection.<sup>197</sup> Haraway states that cyborgs “are, literally, *monsters*, a word that shares more than its root with the word, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify.”<sup>198</sup> Monsters, grotesques, and cyborgs are hybrid beings in which “opposing processes and assumptions coexist in a single representation,” and whose existence threatens to oppose the “corporeal limit to human definition,” to erode “the strong conceptual differentiation between man and beast, man and demon, or man and god,” to illuminate “pollution, transgression, [or] a breakdown in social order,” to bear “a sign of warning from the forces of the sacred,” or to evoke fear that technology has outpaced humanity as the “hunter’s weapon evolves into a cyborg which then hunts the hunter”.<sup>199</sup> As with monsters and grotesques, the cyborg elicits a confusion that arises when “the forensic pattern gives more prominence to the subjective elements of imagery than to the objective, or public, elements.”<sup>200</sup> The cyborg’s incongruous and transgressive physiology, existing somewhere between human and machine, arrests the senses and should demand a meditation to produce an interpretation on the penetrations of the political, through the guise of objective technology, into our biological and social bodies and should be a site that, at the very least, suggests opposition to militarism and patriarchal capitalism. The cyborg should function as a psychopomp, guiding society toward a posthuman utopia. While it possesses the potential for this radical opposition to the processes of domination in Western society, there exists at least one type of cyborg that instead offers a capitulation to those same processes: the cyborg soldier.

The term “cyborg soldier” conjures images ranging from Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* to *Halo*’s Master Chief to Darth Vader as a politically-constructed being that arises at the

---

<sup>197</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 149-150; Diane Marie Keeling, “History of (Future) Progress: Hyper-Masculine Transhumanist Virtuality,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 29 no. 2 (2012): 132-148, 144.

<sup>198</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, location 129.

<sup>199</sup> Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque* (Aurora: The Davies Group Publishers, 2006), 17; Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine*, 3; Rushing and Frenztz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 5.

<sup>200</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 59-60.

intersection of techno-scientific, militaristic, and masculinist discourses and literalizes the metaphor of the soldier as a machine. This cyborg capitulates to – but does not oppose – the power structures of militarism and patriarchal capitalism.<sup>201</sup> Since the eighteenth century, the theory behind military training has been that the soldier can be constructed. As Foucault argued, the human body entered “a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it.”<sup>202</sup> Gray argues that the “basic currency of war, the human body,” is a key site of “technological grafting” in the United States military.<sup>203</sup> This is not solely a problem of the United States Armed Forces, for as Theweleit describes the German military academy during and after World War I as a machine that must reproduce identical mechanisms, soldiers, who continually produce “a power machine in which the component does not invest in his own pleasure, but produces that of the powerful. The man pleurably invests his self only as a thoroughly reliable part of the machine.”<sup>204</sup> Mythologist Joseph Campbell said of the most famous cyborg soldier, Darth Vader, “He’s a robot. He’s a bureaucrat, living not in terms of himself but in terms of an imposed system.”<sup>205</sup> The cyborg soldier, therefore, willingly submits to the power structures of militarism and patriarchal capitalism and becomes dismantled and refashioned into a machine-man that willingly sacrifices individuality, humanity, and autonomy for the desires of those in power.

This machine-man who submits his will to the will of the power structures that the cyborg, according to Haraway, exists to oppose, does not evoke the proper response that a boundary-transgressing being should evoke in the audience. In fact, the opposite occurs, and this

---

<sup>201</sup> Cristina Masters, “Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7 no. 1 (2005): 112-132, 114-116.

<sup>202</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 135.

<sup>203</sup> Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War*, 196-196.

<sup>204</sup> Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Vol. 2 Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 153.

<sup>205</sup> Campbell with Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 178.

is due to the mythologization of the cyborg soldier by USSOCOM and popular culture. Post-9/11 the military doctrine of Network Centric Warfare began to weapons, soldiers, and popular media flows into a flexible fighting network that both enshrined the cyborg soldier as an awe-inspiring hero and who functions to recruit potential soldiers.<sup>206</sup> Through the video game *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*, “the US military acquired a powerful visual medium to recruit real soldiers” through playing as Spectre, a hypermasculine cyborg soldier who is “idealized and biased to the elite geopolitics of the US national security state.” The game directs players to see the cyborg soldier as something desirable to become and not as a monstrous grotesque whose hybrid form should provoke reflection on the political penetration of technology into human life.<sup>207</sup> This appropriation of science fiction imagery in video games designed for recruitment exemplifies Barthes’ critique of myth as depoliticized speech that “once made use of, it becomes artificial”.<sup>208</sup> Thus, through the military’s appropriation of such popular discourses as science fiction novels, movies, video games, and comic books, the cyborg soldier becomes a passive servant to the military-industrial complex instead of the ultimate warning about the political intrusion of technology on human life. Instead of reading such “real world Darth Vaders, RoboCos, or Daleks” as terrifying due to their nature as potentially more machine than men, such figures become images of heroic masculine idealization that can be used to naturalize the

---

<sup>206</sup> Clay Wilson, “Network Centric Warfare: Background and Oversight Issues for Congress,” (Congressional Research Service, 2007), <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32411.pdf>. Accessed 29 May 2015; Tanner Mirrlees, “Digital Militainment by Design: Producing and Playing *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*,” *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 5 no. 3 (2009): 161-181.

<sup>207</sup> Mirrlees, “Digital Militainment by Design,” 168-170.

<sup>208</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 118.

militaristic, patriarchal capitalist systems of domination and to recruit others to capitulate and extend the reach of their power.

The capitulation of the individual that precedes assimilation into the cyborg soldier does not occur through nefarious coercion and cult-like brainwashing but through the largely unconscious forces of technophilia and techno-fetishism. Technophilia, a love of technology that emphasizes the positive impacts of technology on human social life, became a hallmark of art, criticism, and both political and popular discourses during the Cold War.<sup>209</sup> While the intimate connection between industrially-driven technology and the military campaign in Vietnam may have cooled the unbounded enthusiasm regarding technology's positive transformative power, as Hayles notes, the "flickering signifiers" of technology continue to tug at our hearts and minds in a digital-technological transformation of Freud's industrial-mechanical libidinal economy.<sup>210</sup> From products such as the iPod to Tamagotchi and even dating simulation video games, the intersection of the flows of desire with technology are alive and generative of meaningful experiences.<sup>211</sup> For the military, technophilia is the insistence on providing the best and most advanced technology for soldiers in the belief that the tactical advantage technology offers will guarantee victory.<sup>212</sup>

The United States' military's degree of technophilia intersects with the concept of techno-fetishism in that the love of technology becomes a replacement for something that is lacking in the soldier. Drawing on Freud's concept of castration anxiety, Fernbach describes the

---

<sup>209</sup> Yvonne Lam, "Technophilia vs. Technophobia: A Preliminary Look at Why Second-Language Teachers Do or Do not Use Technology in the Classroom," *Canadian Modern Language Review* 56 no. 3 (2000), 389-420, 390-391; Anne Collins Goodyear, "From Technophilia to Technophobia: The Impact of the Vietnam War on the Reception of 'Art and Technology,'" *Leonardo* 41 no. 2 (2008): 169-173, 169.

<sup>210</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," *October* 66 (1993): 69-91.

<sup>211</sup> Dominic Pettman, "Love in the Time of Tamagotchi," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 no. 2/3 (2009): 189-208; Joshua Gunn and Mirko M. Hall, "Stick it in Your Ear: The Psychodynamics of iPod Enjoyment," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5 no. 2 (2008): 135-157.

<sup>212</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 25-29.

hypermasculine cyborg in science fiction pieces such as *Terminator* or *RoboCop* as sites where phallic power becomes constituted in “technological metaphors rather than anatomical signifiers” in a manner that argues that “technoprops seem necessary for the performance of a phallic masculinity”.<sup>213</sup> For the military, the cyborgization of soldiers compensates for the “developmental wall” of the limitations of the human body.<sup>214</sup> To compensate, the soldier is encased and penetrated, metaphorically and/or literally, by technological enhancements that combine “machine-like endurance with a redefined human intellect subordinated to the overall weapon system”.<sup>215</sup> By moving toward a Cartesian teleological separation of intellect/mind from emotion/body, this reformulation of the cyborg soldier builds upon Masters’ critique that military techno-scientific discourses inscribe a masculine subjectivity onto technology in order to emasculate the enemy who is “impregnate[ed] with death and destruction rather than life” and argues that the masculinization of technology in military techno-scientific discourses also emasculates the U.S. soldier by marking the soldier’s body as weak and penetrable by foreign militaristic phalluses such as bullets, missiles, and shrapnel.<sup>216</sup> As such, the emasculated and, consequently, feminine body of the soldier must be protected by the strong, impenetrable, masculine steel-flesh of military technology. The cyborg supersoldier is no longer a man who is trained and disciplined to “Be all that he can be,” but instead, he is “Built into what he must be” in order to survive. Reading the military cyborg through the concepts of the grotesque, technophilia, and techno-fetishism reinvigorates the cyborg’s utility for critical scholarship by highlighting how the construction of the cyborg soldier marks the biological body of the soldier.

---

<sup>213</sup> Amanda Fernbach, “The Fetishization of Masculinity in Science Fiction: The Cyborg and the Console Cowboy,” *Science Fiction Studies* 77 no. 2 (2000): 234-255, 236.

<sup>214</sup> Masters, “Bodies of Technology,” 114.

<sup>215</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 196.

<sup>216</sup> Masters, “Bodies of Technology,” 121.

## TALOS: Reducing Body Anxiety through Engineering

The soldier's body has long been studied as a marked site of numerous national, scientific, and gendered discourses.<sup>217</sup> As the ideal body of the nation-state, the masculine soldier body "relegates the feminine symbolically, and in practice, to a supporting position" in the national hierarchy.<sup>218</sup> The soldier male is expected to be the "pinnacle of masculinity," revered for their "courage, honor, and duty to the country".<sup>219</sup> The pageantry of insignia and parade marching as well as the uniformity of dress, response, and grooming codify soldier males so that the physical bodies cease to be "biological monads," but become "formally constructed social backgrounds encumbered with sedimented semantic weight" that forms the "moral order" of the community.<sup>220</sup> The idealized soldier male embodies physical strength and psychological stoicism: hard, strong, enduring, loyal, unwaveringly obedient, and unemotional.<sup>221</sup> Connected to the mythic and historic pasts of his country, this idealized soldier male exudes an ethos of heroic sacrifice, reflects the glory of the national past, and stands ready to face the physical and political threats of the present.<sup>222</sup> The soldier body is, therefore, a site of convergence wherein discourses of nationalism, militarism, and gender become intertwined within a physical being and where the physical body, trained intensely during boot camp, disciplines the mind so that the mind can better control the physical body during the stresses of combat.

---

<sup>217</sup> Daniel Nourry, "Body-Politic (National Imaginary): 'Lest We Forget...Mateship (Empire) Right or Wrong,'" *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 19 no. 3 (2005): 365-379.

<sup>218</sup> John W. Howard, III and Laura C. Privera, "Gendered Nationalism: A Critical Analysis of Militarism, Patriarchy, and the Ideal Soldier," *Texas Communication Journal* 30 no. 2 (2006): 134-145, 135.

<sup>219</sup> Linker, *War's Waste*, 20.

<sup>220</sup> Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 59.

<sup>221</sup> Barker, "A Hero will Rise"; Jeff Knight Parker, "Literature as Equipment for Killing: Performance as Rhetoric in Military Training Camps," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 10 no. 2 (1990): 157-168.

<sup>222</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), 5; Michael Williams, "The Idol Body: Stars, Statuary and the Classical Epic," *Film & History* 39 no. 2 (2009): 39-48, 48.



The goal of such training is resilience, which the U.S. Army defines as “the maintenance of normal functioning despite negative events or circumstances, disruptions, or changes in demands” and “refers to overall physical and psychological health” that enables one to “bounce back from adversity”.<sup>223</sup> Born from anxieties concerning the ability of young civilian men, and now women, to adapt to and to survive in the stressful, difficult, and dangerous types of contemporary tactical combat engagements, the United States Armed Forces developed a philosophy of training dubbed “Physical Readiness Training” that articulates its philosophy of “train as you will fight”.<sup>224</sup> The current model focuses on strength and agility, favors burst speed and sprinting over prolonged distance running, and incorporates obstacles and challenges soldiers are likely to encounter during contemporary tactical engagements in the Middle East.<sup>225</sup> As Whitfield East concludes, “As the Army moves to a smaller, lighter, more mobile force in the fight against the global war on terrorism, a long-term, comprehensive commitment to the highest quality physical readiness training is mandatory to ensure our future success.”<sup>226</sup> Given that physical readiness training exists to mold both the body and the mind, military discipline and boot camp suggest that contemporary military philosophy, though born of a modernist dualism that separates body from mind, recognize a connection between the body and the mind; therefore, this chapter’s discussion of the soldier’s body should be understood as referring to the interconnected mind/body system.

---

<sup>223</sup> Paul B. Lester, P.D. Harms, Mitchel N. Herian, Dina V. Krasikova, and Sarah J. Beal, “The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program Evaluation, Report #3: Longitudinal Analysis of the Impact of Master Resilience Training on Self-Reported Resilience and Psychological Health Data,” (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Army, 2011), 5.

<sup>224</sup> United States Department of the Army, “FM 7-22 Army Physical Readiness Training,” (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Army, 2012), 27.

<sup>225</sup> Stew Smith, “New Army PRT and CRT,” *military.com*, <http://www.military.com/military-fitness/army-fitness-requirements/new-army-prt-and-crt> Accessed 2 November 2014.

<sup>226</sup> Whitfield B. East, *A Historical Review and Analysis of Army Physical Readiness Training and Assessment* (Fort Leavenworth, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 220.

This physical readiness extends beyond simply training and disciplining the soldier's biological body to the point of constructing the perfect soldier through an integration of the human body into a complete, technological weapon system.<sup>227</sup> The TALOS project is the next stage of that construction of the perfect cyborg soldier. In 1985, DARPA unveiled the Pilot's Associate for fighter pilots, which was designed to "relieve the pilot of numerous lower-level functions and present to him, for ultimate decision, the best courses of action" through the integration of "four expert systems dealing with system status, mission planning, situation assessment, and tactics planning through an expert pilot-vehicle interface".<sup>228</sup> The Pilot's Associate was part of a Strategic Defense Initiative program for developing artificial intelligence that would mechanize war by developing computing technology that would select and attack targets that the computers chose, self-directed obstacle-breaching machines and constructing tanks, and "a wide range of robotic research" programs.<sup>229</sup> Such programs resulted in warfare (Operation Desert Shield/Storm) that is increasingly mediated by smart bombs and by computers that sanitized war's "bloody reality" through allowing long-distance killing viewed over computer screens with video-game style interfaces.<sup>230</sup> Drone combat continues this sanitization by removing more of the "embodied risk" of traditional combat morality.<sup>231</sup>

Reading Admiral McRaven's articulated desire for "that last operator we lost to be the last one we ever lose in this fight or the fight of the future," thus becomes a continuation of military anxieties about soldiers' physical and mental performance during war.<sup>232</sup> As TALOS

---

<sup>227</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 195-196.

<sup>228</sup> DARPA, "Pilot's Associate," in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995): 101-103, 101.

<sup>229</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 51-69.

<sup>230</sup> Kevin Robins and Les Levidow, "Socializing the Cyborg Self: the Gulf War and Beyond," in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995): 119-125, 120.

<sup>231</sup> William O. Saas, "After Honor: On Drones and the Distinguished Warfare Medal Controversy," in *Disturbing Argument*, ed. Catherine Palczewski (New York: Routledge, 2014): 342-348, 347.

<sup>232</sup> Swan, "Iron Man: Super Suit Trying to Jump from the Movie Screen to the Battlefield."

Project Manager Michael Fieldson stated in a Federal Drive radio interview, the three main goals for the suit are “to enhance our survivability of our operators. At the same time we’re trying to increase our cognitive awareness, and if possible, we’re trying to augment that human performance. And the reason why, we’re trying to make our systems so that the soldier is more survivable in certain high threat missions.”<sup>233</sup> During the eleven minute interview on the program *Federal Drive*, Fieldson stresses the importance of increasing operator survivability six times and of providing improved ballistics protection four times. The nine categories of technologies that SOCOM described in the official white paper advertisement for the project reflect military anxiety over the insufficiency of the natural, though highly-trained, soldier’s body to survive and adapt to the dangers and stresses of combat along three lines: physiological performance, survivability, and psychological fortitude.

In an effort to augment physiological performance, the TALOS suit will incorporate a hydraulic exoskeleton to increase both strength and agility as well as technologies to improve situational awareness.<sup>234</sup> The suit uses these capabilities to assist the operator in “lifting heavy loads” and to “provide the wearer [with] information about their environment using cameras, sensors and advanced displays”.<sup>235</sup> The exoskeleton would provide the strength to lift both the nearly 400 pound suit as well as the 60-100 pounds of field gear that soldiers currently carry as well as increase their ability to “evade and chase enemies”.<sup>236</sup> The situational awareness provided by the cameras, sensors, and displays will provide, according to TALOS Team

---

<sup>233</sup> Michael Fieldson, Interview by Tom Temin and Emily Kopp, *Federal Drive*, 1500 AM Federal News Radio, 9 January 2014, <http://www.federalnewsradio.com/1166/3538722/Federal-Drive-Show-Blog---January-9-2014> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>234</sup> United States Special Operations Command, “Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS).”

<sup>235</sup> Tanya Lewis, “U.S. Military’s ‘Iron Man’ Suit Prototype Debuts This Month,” *livescience.com*, 23 May 2014, <http://www.livescience.com/45860-ironman-suit-military-tech.html> Accessed 2 November 2014.

<sup>236</sup> Daniel Nadler, “Welcome to TALOS, where Tony Stark Meets G.I. Joe,” *institutionalinvestor.com*, 2 August 2014, <http://www.institutionalinvestor.com/blogarticle/3367649/welcome-to-talos-where-tony-stark-meets-gi-joe/banking-and-capital-markets-trading-and-technology.html#.VFbPKvnF98E> Accessed 2 November 2014.

officials, “user-friendly and real-time battlefield information” that will produce “beyond-optimal human performance”.<sup>237</sup> The sensory interface will be a “Google Glass-esque HUD, which will feed its wearer live battleground information,” will include night vision, and will be supported by reconnaissance drones and military satellites.<sup>238</sup> The ideal of such a multi-sensory interface, as McRaven articulates, is to fully integrate the operator’s “cognitive thoughts and the surrounding environment” so as to display and synthesize “personalized information” about the current tactical situation.<sup>239</sup> Though not stated as a goal of the TALOS’ HUD, it is not difficult to image it functioning similar to DARPA’s Pilot’s Associate that both gathers and synthesizes information with the purpose of relieving the pilot of “lower-level functions” and presenting him with “the best courses of action”.<sup>240</sup> Whereas the strength to carry a warrior’s equipment during combat, the agility and mobility to successfully engage the enemies and the battlefield terrain, and the situational awareness of battlefield conditions has traditionally arisen from the physiology of a soldier that may have been enhanced by an external tool, the TALOS, and similar military technologies reconstruct the soldier so that his “hardware,” his physical body, integrate smoothly into a holistic system that subordinates the human to the overall cybernetic system.<sup>241</sup> The famous Army slogan, “Be all that you can be,” is no longer enough, because the cyborg soldier must transcend all that a man can be in order to become that which he *must be* to both survive and succeed in combat.<sup>242</sup> Such machine-human integration will provide a

---

<sup>237</sup> Matthew Cox, “Experts are very Skeptical about the Pentagon’s Plan for Iron Man Suits,” *businessinsider.com*, 22 April 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/experts-skeptical-about-pentagons-iron-man-suits-2014-4> Accessed 2 November 2014.

<sup>238</sup> Colin Druce-McFadden, “U.S. Army will have its Iron Man Suits in Four Years,” *dvice.com*, 19 November 2013, <http://www.dvice.com/2013-11-19/us-army-will-have-its-iron-man-suits-four-years>, Accessed 2 November 2014; Nadler, “Welcome to TALOS.”

<sup>239</sup> Horan, “SOCOM Seeks TALOS.”

<sup>240</sup> DARPA, “Pilot’s Associate,” 101.

<sup>241</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 195-196.

<sup>242</sup> Masters, “Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities,” 114.

comparable combat advantage for TALOS-equipped soldiers over enemies whose physiological performance is bound by the limitations of even a well-trained human body.

Once the TALOS-soldier has escaped the limitations of human physical performance to become all that he must become, he acquires a greater chance of surviving combat. As McRaven and Fieldson have both repeatedly stated, the overarching goal for the TALOS project is to increase survivability – ultimately to the point of zero casualties. To accomplish this, the TALOS will have advanced liquid ballistics armor, sensors to monitor core body temperature, heart rate, and hydration levels, and first aid capabilities to administer oxygen and hemorrhage controls as needed.<sup>243</sup> The TALOS suit will also include relay sensors for “remote monitoring,” allowing medical operators to transmit “real-time casualty reports and videos to trauma teams” in order to “improve chances of survival for those wounded by guns, explosions, or crashes.” Additionally, such systems would allow battlefield medics to access patient vital signs and receive advice on the most efficient and effective means of treatment in real time.<sup>244</sup> The first line of defense will be MIT’s magnetorheological liquid armor that hardens in milliseconds. Should an enemy weapon penetrate the armor, the “TALOS would monitor [the operator’s] health and even stop bleeding using a ‘wound stasis’ program such as the one being developed by DARPA that sprays foam on open injuries,” according to military expert John Reed.<sup>245</sup> As Harraway argued, such fantasies about invulnerability arise from a “nuclear culture unable to accommodate the experience of death and finitude within available liberal discourse on the collective and personal individual.”<sup>246</sup> While not denying the nobility in the desire to prevent any U.S. soldier from

---

<sup>243</sup> Cox, “Experts are Very Skeptical about the Pentagon’s Plan for Iron Man Suits.”

<sup>244</sup> OAF Nation, “The Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit (TALOS),” *oafnation.com*, 22 March 2014, <http://www.oafnation.com/dod/2014/3/22/tough-path-to-tough-suits> Accessed 2 November 2014.

<sup>245</sup> “The Iron Man Cometh: U.S. Army Commissions ‘TALOS’ Suit with Liquid Armor,” *rt.com*, 11 October 2013, <http://rt.com/usa/talos-socom-army-us-986/> Accessed 2 November 2014.

<sup>246</sup> Harraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, loc. 4581-4582.

dying during combat, the zero-casualty ideal of the TALOS project exposes the “desperate, anxious, fearful and violent attempt to make possible what can never be – the mastery of the American self” through the construction of a mobile fortress/armored suit designed to render the soldier’s body impenetrable and inviolate to the pollution of combat that weakens, feminizes, and destroys the strong, hard, and inviolate idealization of the soldier male and the national body.<sup>247</sup>

If military training and research cannot provide enough skill and equipment for the soldier to both perform optimally and to physically survive combat, then it should prove unsurprising that the final site of body anxiety the TALOS project seeks to overcome is the ability of the soldier to withstand the fear, terror, and psychological trauma of war. The stated purpose of military physical training is one of physical performance. As U.S. Army publication FM 7-22, *Physical Readiness Training*, articulates, “Training must be both realistic and performance-oriented to ensure physical readiness to meet mission/METL requirements.”<sup>248</sup> While the physical ability to perform in combat is a necessary outcome of training, gaining psychological discipline, which enables to remain in combat and perform the assigned duties under the threat of bodily injury and death, is another central goal of physical training. FM 7-22 later states that physical training “gives personnel the confidence that all Soldiers in the unit have similar physical capabilities and the mental and physical discipline needed to adapt to changing situations and physical conditions.”<sup>249</sup> Physical conditioning during training is nearly always accompanied by the singing of Jody Calls, which further the psychological conditioning that must accompany the physical conditioning if the recruit is to become a soldier by instilling a

---

<sup>247</sup> Masters, “Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities,” 121-130.

<sup>248</sup> United States Department of the Army, FM 7-22, 1-3.

<sup>249</sup> United States Department of the Army, FM 7-22, 1-7.

collective sense of loyalty, justice, unwavering obedience, and invincibility.<sup>250</sup> Employing systems theory, military training seeks to imbed each soldier in a totalizing system so that “the individual soldier has less of a chance to deviate from expected behavior”.<sup>251</sup> Marching, drilling, and physical conditioning inform both the body and the character of the soldier, becoming, as Foucault stated, part of a “bodily rhetoric of honour”.<sup>252</sup> The psychological purpose of discipline is to combat the greatest enemy of any commander: fear. From antiquity to the present, fear of death has elicited the same suite of responses from soldiers: madness, desertion, or debilitation “to the point where they could no longer go on”.<sup>253</sup>

While this, at present, is only speculation, should the TALOS’ HUD be similar to that of the Pilot’s Associate, the synthesized “personalized information” about the current tactical situation could easily prove to be safeguard against the failure to perform one’s duties should fear overtake a soldier in combat. Should the TALOS’ HUD have such capabilities, the situational awareness that gathers and synthesizes information pertaining to the current battlefield environmental conditions could suggest a proper course of action, thus functioning as a redundancy system that would initiate a course of action should the fear either paralyze the operator or cause the operator to forget procedure during a tactical engagement. Additionally, the vital sign monitoring system could, though unstated at present, be adapted to monitor physiological signs associated with mental illness.<sup>254</sup> Again, this is not a stated objective of the TALOS project, but given the recent proliferation of news reports and commentary surrounding the mental health challenges facing soldiers and veterans, the suggestion that monitoring an

---

<sup>250</sup> Parker, “Literature as Equipment for Killing,” 158-159.

<sup>251</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 199-200.

<sup>252</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135.

<sup>253</sup> Gabriel, *Heroes No More*, 45-67.

<sup>254</sup> Horan, “SOCOM Seeks TALOS.”

operator's psychological health and increasing their mental resilience to the stresses of combat underlie the TALOS project proves a logical connection to make. Therefore, the TALOS project reveals the full suite of military anxieties surrounding the holistic mind/body of the soldiers relating to their performance and survivability in combat situations.

The strength-enhancing and life support abilities and the potential for the TALOS HUD to both interpret the scene and suggest a proper response to the environmental – both physical and social – conditions faced by the soldier serve as the primary differences between TALOS and the original iron man suit: the plate armor of medieval knights. Both armors function to protect the soldier, but the technologies incorporated in the TALOS seek to remove some of the limitations placed on the elite soldier, both ancient and contemporary. No knightly armor had the ability to dramatically increase physical strength and agility, but the TALOS' powered exoskeleton does that. No knightly armor offered damage stabilization, even then battlefield surgery existed to patch up knights so they continue to fight, but the TALOS suit will possess both first aid/damage stabilization technology and sensors to remotely monitor soldier vital signs. During the First Crusade, heat exhaustion proved a greater danger and source of casualty than combat itself, but, as discussed earlier, the TALOS suit will provide thermal regulation to prevent heat exhaustion and frostbite.<sup>255</sup> The HUD technology that the Pilot's Associate uses and that the TALOS might use did not exist during the Middle Ages; knights were expected to be able to interpret the scene and decide on the best course of action. If, as Admiral McRaven believes, there is anything revolutionary about the TALOS, then it is the number of basic functions from movement to basic healing to scene interpretation to decision suggesting/making that are displaced from the body of the soldier into the TALOS armor. By displacing so many

---

<sup>255</sup> J. F. Verbuggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, From the Eighth Century to 1340*, trans. Sumner Willard and S. C. M. Southern (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), 232-234.



essential aspects of how soldiers are constructed through myth, training, and political discourse (strong, agile, the pinnacle of human performance, able to make quick decisions to strike effectively, etc.) from the body and into the armor, the anxieties about the performance of the soldier's body during combat that the TALOS project seeks to address suggest challenges to the traditional construction of the heroic ethos of the warrior.

### **It's Alive! But is the TALOS Soldier Heroically Ethical?**

Since antiquity, the body has been a site of political marking by society, as cultural discourses inscribe numerous statuses regarding group identity, gender, sexuality, and morality on the biological form of human beings.<sup>256</sup> The warrior male has long been noted to be the idealized depiction of masculinity in many societies, the United States included.<sup>257</sup> The primary traits of this heteronormative masculine ideal are physical strength, power, fitness, control, dominance, stoicism, and heteronormative sexuality.<sup>258</sup> As previously discussed, the process of modernity added, or perhaps highlighted to a more noticeable degree, the connection between the technological and the masculine, especially in the construction of the soldier. The ideal of military, warrior masculinity arises from training the body and the mind to respond in particular ways, through which, "movements like marching" and "attitudes like the bearing of the head belonged to a bodily rhetoric of honour".<sup>259</sup> The perceived positive correlation between the physical discipline and moral rectitude afforded by military training has such a positive valence in United States popular thought that it enables individuals – even those who have never served –

---

<sup>256</sup> Jennifer Wingard, *Branded Bodies, Rhetoric, and the Neoliberal Nation-State*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 9-10; Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 59;

<sup>257</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 1-7.

<sup>258</sup> Valerie Palmer-Mehta, "The Wisdom of Folly: Disrupting Masculinity in *King of the Hill*," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 26 no. 2 (2006), 181-198, 188; Shawn Parry-Giles, "Gendered Politics and Presidential Image Construction: A Reassessment of the 'Feminine Style,'" *Communication Monographs* 63 (1996), 337-353, 344; Tony E. Adams and Keith Berry, "Size Matters: Performing (Il)logical Male Bodies on *FatClub.com*," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 33 no. 4 (2013), 308-325, 311; Knight, "Literature as Equipment for Killing," 160.

<sup>259</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 135.

to “claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas”.<sup>260</sup> Military training inscribes the stated ideals of the United States on the soldier’s body through the “stress of the environment” that pushes them beyond their limits in order to break down their civilian mentality and remake them as soldiers who, to borrow the tag line from the U.S. Army’s long-running and successful campaign, “Be all that they can be.” Broken down, degraded, pushed to their breaking points and beyond, soldiers have been constructed for centuries; however, the strength, agility, constitution, and courage that enabled them to function in the stress of combat has always been within the bounds of that which is human.<sup>261</sup>

Because of the high risk of physical and psychological suffering brought on by combat situations, military training seeks to mitigate the anxieties about the physiological and psychological preparedness for survival combat by functioning as equipment for living, for killing, and for dying honorably within the extraordinary life-world of the warrior in combat.<sup>262</sup> As Marine sergeant Jon Davis articulates, is to prepare recruits to perform acts that defy “all logic,” go “against all human instinct,” and “take one of the most intensive acts of psychological programming to overcome,” specifically, “to train 18-year-olds to run to the sound of gunfire and perform under fire and the threat of death.”<sup>263</sup> By training them to act appropriately in specific types of situations, military training instills a sense of warrior piety in them that makes certain types of actions ethical when performed within the scope of their duties during wartime.<sup>264</sup> Though military training is not depicted in many heroic myths (exceptions include Wolfram’s *Parzival*), heroic myth and military training intertwine in the values they seek to instill in their

---

<sup>260</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 3.

<sup>261</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 13.

<sup>262</sup> Burke, *Philosophy of the Literary Form*, 253-262.

<sup>263</sup> Jon Davis, “Why are Military Boot Camps so Intense?” *slate.com*, 5 March, 2013

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/quora/2013/03/05/why\\_is\\_boot\\_camp\\_so\\_intense.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/quora/2013/03/05/why_is_boot_camp_so_intense.html) Accessed 2 November 2014.

<sup>264</sup> Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 150-152.

intended audiences, making them into the celebrated ideal of the great warrior or the warrior god through a recognition of the metaphoric, ritualistic connection between the ideal combat (mythic hero v. mythic monster) and the actual combat (human soldiers v. human enemies).<sup>265</sup> What the heroic myths celebrate as ideal traits become qualities to which soldiers are trained and disciplined to aspire: physical perfection and strength, courage, integrity, obedience, stoicism in the face of death, and a willingness to sacrifice one's life for the good of the people.<sup>266</sup> Thus, the heroic ethos is an ethos born of hardening the body against pain for the express purpose of being able to make difficult choices and to perform dangerous actions for the benefit of his, and now her, society – even if the choice is to offer one's life to defend and protect society. While the tactics and the technologies of war have changed dramatically over the millennia, the ideal of the warrior has remained relatively unchanged. The TALOS project, however, could become a site of the ideal's transformation.

The TALOS project exemplifies Gray's contention that in postmodern war, "it is the weapons themselves that are constructing the U.S. soldier of today and tomorrow."<sup>267</sup> Klaus Theweleit argues that when the male soldier is perfectly mechanized, "his psyche [is] eliminated – or in part displaced into his body armor, his 'predatory' suppleness".<sup>268</sup> Therefore, the construction of a technological exoskeleton that will enhance many of the physical and, potentially, some of the mental attitudes beyond that which is humanly possible, suggests an inquiry into what such suits imply for the future of the heroic ideal. While reading the TALOS suit as a site of military anxiety about the potential for the soldiers' bodies and minds to function

---

<sup>265</sup> Vico, *New Science*, 92; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 29.

<sup>266</sup> Rushing & Frentz, *Projecting the Shadow*, 61-63; Richard Bauman, "Performance and Honor in 13<sup>th</sup> Century Iceland," *Journal of American Folklore* 9 no. 392 (1986), 131-150, 140; Parker, "Literature as Equipment for Killing," 159-160; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.7

<sup>267</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 195.

<sup>268</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 2*, 162.

effectively in combat requires only a small logical leap, inquiring what such a transformation in embodied military technology implies for the future of the heroic ideal is fraught with the difficulties brought about by speculation. What may be argued as logical based upon theory may not come to pass after the suit is deployed for tactical engagement. Therefore, this critique will refrain from pronouncing certainties about what will happen to the nature of the heroic ethos after the deployment of the TALOS soldiers but will instead present three aspects of the heroic ethos that the TALOS project challenges: the ability of courage to shine without the threat of death, the potential for gaining honor when one has a huge technological advantage over the enemy, and the effect that displacing the heroic ethos onto the weapon has on the treatment of the soldier by the military and society.

The first challenge that TALOS presents to the traditional conception of the heroic ethos demands a consideration of the potential for courage to shine when the soldier is encased in a mobile fortress and thus fights without the fear of death. While one of the underlying goals of military training is to make a soldier *feel* invincible, recall Admiral McRaven's statement of belief that the TALOS project can achieve the goal of a zero-casualty combat engagement: "I'd like that last operator we lost to be the last one we ever lose in this fight or the fight of the future, and I think we can get there."<sup>269</sup> There is a qualitative difference between feeling invincible but knowing that death is a probable result of entering combat and in knowing that one is encased in a suit that will theoretically make one fully invincible. Soldiers must believe they can survive, or they would not charge into combat. The recognition of the danger combat poses, and of soldiers'

---

<sup>269</sup> Parker, "Literature as Equipment for Killing," 159-160; Swan, "Iron Man: Super Suit Trying to Jump from the Movie Screen to the Battlefield."

choice to act in the face of such danger, prompt the soldiers' actions to be read as heroic. As Aristotle articulated, dying in battle is the noblest death, because the soldier dies for a purpose greater than himself.

Now such deaths are those in battle; for these take place in the greatest and noblest danger. And these are correspondingly honoured in city-states and at the courts of monarchs. Properly, then, he will be called brave who is fearless in face of a noble death, and of all emergencies that involve death; and the emergencies of war are in the highest degree of this kind....for he has given up hope of safety, and is disliking the thought of death in this shape, while they are hopeful because of their experience. At the same time, we show courage in situations where there is the opportunity of showing prowess or where death is noble; but in these forms of death neither of these conditions is fulfilled.<sup>270</sup>

According to Aristotle, honor comes from performing an action that one finds distasteful in a dangerous situation for the greater good. Similarly, Ernst Junger argues that the purpose of training and discipline are not purely physical but psychological as well, as these embodied practices that “encourage hardening oneself like steel” function for the maintenance “of complete control over life, so that at any hour of the day it can serve a higher calling”.<sup>271</sup> And as Masters articulates, a prime political objective that has resulted in the explosive growth of military technology from the Gulf War to the present is a desire to keep soldiers completely safe.

The contemporary ‘technophilia’ manifest in American military technoscientific discourses represents not only the desire to win wars, but more importantly represents the desire for absolute hegemony and dominance – a hegemonic subject-self. Integral to this is keeping soldiers ‘safe’ because ‘dead’ soldiers represent failure in the eyes of the American body politic, and dead soldiers represent vulnerability to the other.<sup>272</sup>

While the traditional understanding of heroism interprets potentially distasteful actions performed for some higher purpose as courageous, such actions must be performed while the potential hero literally risks his or her life in the performance of those actions. Victory and a

---

<sup>270</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.6.

<sup>271</sup> Junger, *On Pain*, 16-17.

<sup>272</sup> Masters, “Bodies of Technology,” 121.

safe return home, however, are not guaranteed. Contemporary United States popular understanding of the heroic narrative, however, links victory to heroism in a manner that also demands the “happy ending” of the soldier returning home alive to a ticker tape parade of admiring citizens. If the TALOS project achieves its zero casualty goal, then United States discourses of heroism will need to either remove or reevaluate how they define battlefield courage, because the once real threat of death will no longer be a concern.

Intertwined with the risk of death is the importance of the tactical advantage that the TALOS suit would offer the soldier wearing it over his or her enemy. As McRaven emphasized, “If we do TALOS right, it will be a huge competitive advantage over our enemies.”<sup>273</sup> Traditional combat morality is “premised on immediate and embodied risk” to the soldier, which technological innovations, like combat drones, remove or, potentially, minimize.<sup>274</sup> The honor gained from victory arises from overcoming an enemy who is either your equal or your superior in strength and ability. To briefly exemplify from myth, consider Beowulf’s speech before his fight with Grendel where he states that his adversary “*for his wonhydum wæpna ne recceð*” [“in his recklessness heeds not weapons”], and, as result, Beowulf declares, “*ac ic mid grāpe scea / fōn wið fēonde ond ymb feorh sacan, / lāð wið lāpum-ðaēr gelyfan scea / dryhtnes dōme sē þe hine dēað nimeð*” [“but I with my grip shall fight with this fiend and over life strive, enemy against enemy; there must trust in the judgment of the Lord, whichever one that death takes”]<sup>275</sup> As the poet describes the opponents as physically equal, Beowulf relinquishes his technological advantage so that none may say it was not his heroic nature that earned him victory. War, as Eliade declares, is the “imitation of an archetypal model” depicted in myth as the slaying of a

---

<sup>273</sup> Horan, “Adm. William H. McRaven Updates TALOS Progress.”

<sup>274</sup> Saas, “After Honor,” 347.

<sup>275</sup> *Beowulf*, 432-441, quoted passages: 433a; 438b-441.

monster.<sup>276</sup> The TALOS establishes a battlefield struggle where one side (the U.S.) enters the field wielding the most advanced weapons and communications technology available to any soldier but the other side (Taliban, Al Qaeda, or ISIS combatants, for example) enters the field using military and communication technology that was considered advanced two wars prior to the engagement. Therefore, it would seem that the United States places such a high premium on victory alone as proof of heroism that it regards any means of securing victory to be ethical, which entails that should the TALOS suits fail, the soldiers wearing them would bear greater shame than any other soldier defeated in battle.

With the minimization – or removal – of both the threat of death and the challenge of an equal enemy, the next challenge the TALOS poses to the heroic ethos is one of location. Traditionally, heroic character is thought to emanate from within and be reflected by the warrior’s appearance. The heroic warrior is as beautiful as the villain is monstrous.<sup>277</sup> While the linking of a moral valence to physical form appears antiquated to contemporary eyes, current discourses on numerous body-related issues suggest that the United States still functions as if this linkage is true.<sup>278</sup> Hence, the purpose of boot camp has always been to train and discipline the body so that the soldier could “be all he could be” and thus guarantee victory in a roughly even contest against the nation’s enemies. Since the dropping of the atomic bombs, however, the origin of victory has been increasingly relocated in the technology with which soldiers wage war.<sup>279</sup> As an example, victory in the Gulf War was not only attributed to the smart bombs and

---

<sup>276</sup> Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 29.

<sup>277</sup> Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine*, 12.

<sup>278</sup> Shiela Reaves, Rethinking Visual Ethics: Evolution, Social Comparison and the Media’s Mono-Body in the Global Rise of Eating Disorders,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 26 no. 2 (2011), 114-134; Stephanie Houston Grey, “*Ally McBeal* as Allegory: Setting the Eating-Disordered Subject in Opposition to Feminism,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 no. 4 (2006), 288-306, 291; Deborah Morrison Thomson, “Big Food and the Body Politics of Personal Responsibility,” *Southern Communication Journal* 74 no. 1 (2009): 2-17.

<sup>279</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 173.

the Patriot missiles, but depicting the war itself became “the ultimate voyeurism” as operators (and audiences) saw “the target hit from the vantage point of the weapon”.<sup>280</sup> The intertwined technophilia and technofetishism that glorify and locate the potential for victory in the weapons of war instead of in the bodies of soldiers suggest a challenge to the belief that the heroic character, and thus the potential for victory, reside in the body of the soldier.

The TALOS suit furthers this relocation of heroic character by displacing his psyche into his body armor so that “in the moment of action, he is as devoid of fear as of any other emotion,” possessing a “machinelike periphery, whose interior has lost its meaning”.<sup>281</sup> The warrior’s body, trained and disciplined, experiences combat phenomenologically. Physical sensory input is processed by the brain, which recalls the tenets of being a good soldier instilled in it through training, so that the soldier reads the scene and acts appropriately according to military culture.<sup>282</sup> By reading and responding properly to specific examples of the recurrent types of combat situations, the soldier demonstrates piety, marking his actions as ethical within the frame of combat.<sup>283</sup> Sensory data will be obtained through drones and satellites, and, should the TALOS suit’s HUD follow that of the Pilot’s Associate, reading the scene and determining the proper action will be “suggested” by a computer and not by the soldier.<sup>284</sup> Additionally, as previously stated, the suit will handle movement and weapon targeting functions, thus relocating most of the activity into the suit itself, suggesting that TALOS will be the primary actor within the limits of the tactical engagement. While, as in the case of the Pilot’s Associate, the final authorization to act may rest with the soldier, it is not unthinkable to assume that command, which will be able to

---

<sup>280</sup> Masters, “Bodies of Technology,” 123-124; Ken Robins and Les Levidow, “Socializing the Cyborg Self: The Gulf War and Beyond,” in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Grey (New York: Routledge, 1995): 119-125, 121.

<sup>281</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 2*, 162.

<sup>282</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 135; Parker, “Literature as Equipment for Killing.”

<sup>283</sup> Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 150-152.

<sup>284</sup> Druce-McFadden, “U.S. Army will have its Iron Man Suits in Four Years;” DARPA, “Pilot’s Associate.”



monitor the soldier's actions from a distance, would have some manner of failsafe to disable the suit should an enemy steal the suit, a soldier go AWOL, a soldier snap due to combat stress while wearing the suit, or a soldier turn rogue.

Therefore, with many of the sensory and perceptive functions that enable a soldier to respond to the scene ethically relocated to the TALOS suit itself, the necessity of the soldier's body – in the sense of an integrated whole of mind and body – for heroic action. Retired Special Forces master sergeant and Silver Star recipient Scott Neil stated that the TALOS soldier will be “an up-armored Pinocchio” and that “Now the commander can shove a monkey in a suit and ask us to survive a machine gun, IED, and poor intelligence all on the same objective.”<sup>285</sup> As someone who earned a citation for valor earned through “gallantry” of action “against an enemy of the United States”, Neil embodies the accepted military definition of gallantry, which is “nobility of behavior or spirit. Heroic courage.”<sup>286</sup> By referring to the TALOS armored soldier as both a puppet and a monkey in a suit, Neil suggests that the soldier will no longer be in control of his or her actions in combat. Thus, the TALOS suggests an objectification of the soldier in a manner that dehumanizes the soldier in a more complete manner than does contemporary war: the TALOS could potentially transform the soldier from heroic being at the zenith of human potentiality into an automaton, a puppet constructed and controlled by the patriarchal military-industrial complex. The soldier's body, then, becomes no different than a laboratory monkey, but the hero – the being within whom the nobility of spirit truly resides – would become the TALOS suit itself. Any level of heroism afforded the armored soldier would

---

<sup>285</sup> Howard Altman, “Altman: SOCOM Assault Suit Conjures Images of Trek Planet,” *tbo.com* 23 September 2013, <http://tbo.com/list/military-news/altman-socom-assault-suit-references-trek-planet-20130923/> Accessed 9 November 2014.

<sup>286</sup> United States Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Manual 1348.33 Volume 3,” (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense Technical Information Center, 2012), 13, 52.

be granted only so long as the soldier proves to be an integral and integrated aspect of the cyborg weapon system.<sup>287</sup> While this is speculative, the intimate and nearly complete integration of the biological into the technological weapons-logistics-communication system that is the TALOS suggests that politicians and military elites could forget that the idea of the soldier/army as a machine is *metaphorically* true and not *literally* true. Reading the soldier body as a literal machine, a piece of military technology, could lead to problems arising from the doctrine of planned obsolescence: the belief that technology has a finite span of utility and after that it is discarded and replaced by a newer model. Such wastefulness is problematic when applied to inanimate technology, but should soldiers be treated as technology, discarding them becomes truly horrific and immoral.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The TALOS project ultimately represents an effort to create the perfect soldier: an unflinching, unstoppable, and undying killing machine. While this has been the goal of all militaries in general and special forces in particular from the Persian Immortals to the Jomsviking berserks to the Knights Templar to the Waffen-SS to the Green Berets, the TALOS project represents more than a postmodern, technologically-constructed extension of the desire to realize this desire. Admiral McRaven's declaration that the TALOS project can produce a zero-casualty war where the comparative advantage of the elite U.S. Special Forces operator is unmatched (and likely unmatchable) by any of the U.S.' enemies suggests that the TALOS is to be the teleological resolution of the warrior dream: the perfected soldier – the obedient and unstoppable killing machine-man, who like his mythic namesake will guard and protect the chosen Europa (the U.S.) from all who threaten to plunder and destroy her. While McRaven claims that the TALOS

---

<sup>287</sup> Gray, *Postmodern War*, 195.

project is a revolution and not an evolution, it is clear that the machine-human hybrid, the military cyborg, created by the TALOS operator represents the logical conclusion, or as Burke termed it an “ultimate reduction”, of the discourse that began with the metaphoric linkage between the soldier and the machine.<sup>288</sup> The TALOS operator should be the most perfect soldier. That which could not be obtained from training – drive to fulfilment spurred on by the symbolic resources of metaphor and myth – is claimed to be within man’s reach through technological construction.

As this chapter has demonstrated, this teleological drive to create the perfect machine-soldier that is capable of winning a zero-casualty war reveals anxieties about the ability of the human body to function and survive the dangers of combat, demonstrating Burke’s concept of man as being “rotten with perfection” that draws upon Freud’s understanding of a repressive drive that continuously strives for its complete satisfaction.<sup>289</sup> That which this drive to perfection represses are the twin anxieties of the imperfection and imperfectability of the human body as a primary means of military victory. The body breaks. The mind shatters. The spirit fails. Life ends. The ancient and modern military philosophers, theorists, and commanders recognized this. The traditional solution has always been more rigorous training and more intense discipline that would harden the body and fortify the mind and spirit against the terrors and dangers of war.<sup>290</sup> This training, as equipment for killing, draws upon the heroic myth of the monster-slayer, and heroic tales and martial training have traditionally been paired so as to keep the soldier in the mythic mind – as one whose actions on the battle reflect the symbolic actions of the great warrior/warrior-god who slays the monsters.<sup>291</sup> Postmodern war’s technophilia and

---

<sup>288</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 292.

<sup>289</sup> Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 70-71.

<sup>290</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 66-67.

<sup>291</sup> Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 29.

technofetishism arise from this teleological movement by presenting technology – specifically long-range artillery as the U.S. successfully demonstrated during Operation Desert Storm – as solutions; however, the elevated rates of serious injury and casualty brought about by Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the domestic crises arising from veteran suicide and the failures of the VA health care system, suggest that such technologies – even when allied with rigorous training and intense discipline – prove insufficient to achieve the perfection of the warrior ideal: the unflinching immortal killing machine.

While the desire to protect soldiers from the physical, mental, and emotional traumas of war is laudable, if not naïve and impossible, the danger that arises from this technophilic and technofetishistic drive to perfection is a substitution of the soldier’s body for the cause of his, or her, trauma and suffering instead of locating the cause of such suffering as being war itself. This substitution, which as Burke says of the scapegoat, projects upon the body of the soldier the “troublesome traits” of war that those who argue for and profit from it would like to forget, specifically that the cost of war cannot be measured without reckoning the broken bodies and shattered lives of those they send to fight for their own profit.<sup>292</sup> As a result of this scapegoating of the body, the “human” aspect of the soldier body is to be exiled to a liquid steel prison: the TALOS armor. As this chapter has discussed, numerous physical, cognitive, and technical aspects of the performance of war that military training has sought to instill in the soldiers are being displaced into the TALOS suit. Should the TALOS suit see combat, the *suit* would perform as the warrior more than the *soldier* inside the suit. Safe inside this liquid steel prison, the human body would be “present” but, theoretically safe from the chaos and horror of war. The soldier is necessary to operate the suit. The human takes a supporting role to the

---

<sup>292</sup> Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 73.

technologically-constructed star of the combat theatre: the TALOS suit. Although how the suit will be deployed in combat situations has yet to be divulged, such combat agents or units will be more machine than man, and it is through making those in combat more technological product and less biological person that the military hopes to reduce its anxiety over threats that war poses to the physical, mental, emotional, and economic health of those sent to fight war, to their families, and to nation while avoiding the obligation to place blame for combat-induced suffering where it belongs: on war itself.

In the language of the symbolic drama that is war, the soldier's body is a complex sign. Sculpted to be the pinnacle of physical conditioning, decorated with a tailored uniform emblazoned with insignia of rank and reward, and equipped with the most advanced weapons and communication systems modern technology can manufacture, the United States soldier signifies hegemonic masculinity, discipline, obedience, violence, and domination – the virtues of the military-industrial complex and of patriarchal capitalism. The soldier's body also signifies strength, courage, nobility of spirit, a willingness to risk death and to sacrifice life for a purpose greater than oneself, and honor – the virtues of the hero. As modernity rose, the emerging scientific and medical discourses began to apply the metaphor of the machine to their discussions of the human body, suggesting that a healthy body functions efficiently like a machine. The soldier's body, trained and disciplined, becomes exalted as the ideal masculine body and, consequently, becomes the sign of the ideal body of the nation – a model of the form and function of the ideal (and obedient) citizen. Dressed in uniform and properly armed, the soldier's body signifies the past, the present, and the future of the nation in all its glory and shame.

As the twenty-first century neared and dawned, the image of the cyborg replaced that of the machine as the metaphoric representation of the soldier's body in popular and some official

discourses to suggest the ideal body is a hybrid organism where the technological at least partially encases and penetrates the biological. The soldier no longer uses technology, but he, or she, is integrated into a complex web of technological weapons, logistics, and communication systems. Contrary to the official public relations statements of USSOCOM, the TALOS project is an evolution in the cyborgization of the soldier. As a technological-biological hybrid, the metaphor of the cyborg has the potential to call attention to the ways political and cultural forces penetrate the biological and social body with technology. Such penetrations often go unnoticed due to cultural beliefs in the objectivity of science and the benevolent nature of scientific invention and progress.

Because military cyborgs, of which the TALOS is the most contemporary example, stand at a point of intersection between numerous popular science fiction and official discourses wherein cyborg warriors are regarded as either fully heroic or worthy of awe and admiration, these cyborgs become sites of capitulation to the very forces they should call those sighting them to resist. Through a reworking of cyborg theory that illuminates the degree to which the technological penetrates the biological, this chapter reanimate the cyborg to function as a meaningful metaphor for cultural criticism. Illuminating the degree of technological penetration into the biological and social bodies brought out how discourses of technophilia, particularly a militaristic brand of technophilia that demonstrates both a love of gadgets and a belief that superior technology can guarantee victory, overshadows a techno-fetishism that seeks to use technology to compensate for the inadequacy of the biological body to function optimally in combat.

However, the military anxieties over the ability of the biological body to survive and succeed in combat are as old as war itself, but they do suggest a more meaningful line of inquiry

that the cyborg concept can illuminate: given the body of the soldier as the residence from which heroic ethos and nobility of spirit emanate, what are the effects of the cyborgization of soldiers on the concept of heroic ethos. As the most contemporary example, the TALOS project suggests three areas on which to speculate: the ability of heroic courage to shine without the risk of death, the potential for gaining honor with such a huge tactical advantage that creates an uneven contest, and effect that displacing all or part of the heroic ethos into technology will have on the perception of the soldier by the military and society. While these points of engagement are speculative in their present nature, they do suggest conversations about potential problems that the TALOS soldier, as a military cyborg, should demand be initiated. While this chapter offers speculative questions and areas that demand future discussion, one suggestion that emerges strongly is that official and popular discourses of war articulate that victory is the definitive value criterion of heroism. The belief that technology wins wars, the desire for a considerable tactical advantage, and the stripping of (at least) part of the heroic ethos from the body of the soldier and relocating it within the metal body of the weapons of war all argue that the United States cannot conceive of heroism without victory.

More disturbingly, this linkage of victory to heroism should call into question the overarching morality of military tactics. If the end (victory) is all that determines heroism, then achieving that end at all costs is what matters. If the soldier is viewed as a literal machine, a piece of technology, then any heroism the soldier possesses is intimately tied to his utility in achieving that end. The nobility of spirit that lead soldiers to run *toward* the sound of gunfire in and risk death in the service of a cause greater than themselves becomes replaced by an HUD that gathers sensory information from the world around the soldier, interprets the scene, and suggests the proper course of action. The suit becomes the acting subject; the soldier's body

becomes the object acted upon. The discursive lines of masculinity, violence, nationalism, militarism, and patriarchal capitalism that converge at the body of the soldier become strings that control the puppet. The result of this “upgrading” to the cybernetic man-machine, a piece of technology believed to have a finite lifespan based upon utility, is the collapse of the multitude of meanings that emanate from the toned, trained, disciplined, and decorated body of the soldier. No longer meaningful, the soldier becomes a means to an end.

This is not to say that the TALOS suit is an iron coffin in which the corpse of the heroic ethos rests and decays. As a piece of speculative criticism, this chapter recognizes the limitations imposed by the subjunctive mood that permeates this text. As a result, the goal of this chapter is to illuminate aspects of the traditional construction of warrior heroism, which the United States continue to assent to being a meaningful cultural construction around which to situate value and meaning. The aspects illuminated are conversations that must occur if the idea of warrior heroism is to remain generative and meaningful for inspiring citizens to risk their lives in pursuit of a higher, nobler purpose. Otherwise, the soldiers do become monkeys and puppets, trotted out for parades and propaganda in a manner that circumscribes the rhetorical utility of the heroic ideal to being rhetorically proximate to manipulating the citizenry to capitulate their wills to the greed and glory of the military-industrial complex alone.

The TALOS project is one way the U.S. military has chosen to respond to this multifaceted crisis, but building the perfect, indestructible soldier is not the only way to slay a multi-headed dragon. One would rightly ask what good is soldier with a perfect body if that soldier has no ethical core? That said, the frailty of the human mind and body to thrive in the stressful and dangerous theatre of war has always been a concern for military units and societies. The next chapter, which addresses a plan to rename Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as Post-



Traumatic Stress Injury presents another plan of attack, a plan that hopes that something as simple as a name change can transform military culture in significant ways – ways that will tear down the barriers that the hypermasculine warrior ethos and the need for extreme discipline has erected that cause soldiers to, at best, hesitate and reconsider their decision to seek help for mental illnesses caused by combat stress – if they seek treatment beyond self-medication.

CHAPTER III:  
THE ARMY DOESN'T WANT THE D:  
SYMBOLIC EXPIATION IN THE BATTLE OVER NAMING PTSD

*"I betcha if we'd still been calling it Shell-Shock, some of those Vietnam veterans might have gotten the attention they needed at the time." - George Carlin.*

On Wednesday, April 2, 2014, U.S. Army soldier Ivan Lopez opened fire with a .45 caliber pistol on a crowd at Fort Hood in Texas<sup>293</sup>. Described as a “deranged shooter,” Lopez shot soldiers and passersby from his car, filling the air with over thirty-five bullets in eight minutes. This attack left four dead – including Lopez – and sixteen wounded. Lopez had been treated for numerous mental illnesses, but the U.S. Army remained skeptical that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, for which Lopez was undergoing evaluation, could have been behind this horrific event due to Lopez only serving four months in a combat zone.<sup>294</sup> This event has reawakened temporary public acknowledgement of the psychological challenges that soldiers face in combat and after returning home. Many call for greater restrictions on gun access to those diagnosed with PTSD; others call for changes in military culture that stigmatize the mentally ill as being morally deficient and weak; still others, including some recent veterans, call for a renaming of the condition as Post-Traumatic Stress *Injury*, believing that it is the name that creates the stigma.<sup>295</sup> Such a debate is not new to the Fort Hood incident, because prior to the 2013 publication of the *DSM-V*, the U.S. Armed Forces and the psychiatric community engaged in debate over the naming and classification of post-traumatic stress and its effects on soldiers.

---

<sup>293</sup> Shapiro and O'Connor, “Fort Hood Shooter’s Spree Lasted 8 Minutes, filled with more than 35 Shots: Army.”

<sup>294</sup> “Fort Hood Shooter Snapped over Denial of Request for Leave, Army Confirms.”

<sup>295</sup> Goldberg, Eleanor, “Vets Respond to Fort Hood Shooting: Let’s End the Stigma Around Mental Health Issues,” *huffingtonpost.com*, 3 April 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd\\_n\\_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpimg00000063](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd_n_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpimg00000063) Accessed 29 May 2015.

While some may choose to dismiss this discussion as mere semantic bickering, it has long been postulated that know the name of a thing is to have power over it. Rhetorically speaking, the inventive power of definition articulates the power to control, if nothing else, the terms of the debate. Broadly speaking, the authority to name confers the power to determine how a larger populace responds to the thing named. As an example of the power that naming holds over reaction, the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood where Major Nidal Hassan, an avowed jihadist with ties to Al Qaeda, killed thirteen and wounded thirty-two was declared to be “workplace violence,” which has resulted in few benefits being paid to the wounded and families of survivors, because of military regulations. “Under military rules, soldiers wounded in combat or terrorist attacks are supposed to receive a raft of benefits....So are the families of those killed in action. But the Army doesn't consider either of the Fort Hood shootings to be combat or terrorism related.”<sup>296</sup>

This begs the question of how renaming PTSD as PTSI will affect diagnosis and, consequently, the determination of benefits. Given the current military perception that a diagnosis of psychological disorder “makes the person seem weak”<sup>297</sup> and the military’s use of PTSD diagnoses to determine trustworthiness, career prospects, symbols of honor (specific medals and types of discharge), and veteran benefits.<sup>298</sup> Grounding post-traumatic stress in the world of physical injury has the potential to misdiagnose those who cannot prove an injurious event caused their suffering, which could lead to self-medication through alcohol and drugs or

---

<sup>296</sup> Mariah Blake, “The White House Broke its Promise to the Victims of the First Fort Hood Shooting. Will History Repeat Itself?” huffingtonpost.com, 10 April 2014, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/04/how-white-house-military-failed-fort-hood-victims> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>297</sup> Daniel Sagalyn, “Army General Calls for Changing Name of PTSD,” *PBS.org*, 4 November 2011, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec11-stress\\_11-04/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec11-stress_11-04/) Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>298</sup> Michael P. Fischer and Terry L. Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” *Rand.org* (2013), [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND\\_OP389.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND_OP389.pdf): 10. Accessed 29 May 2015.

aggressive or violent episodes that could potentially result in a Dishonorable Discharge and the resultant denial of veterans benefits should the discharge process be initiated after one or more behavioral conduct violations that include aggressive behavior, insubordination, and/or alcohol and drug abuse – all of which are very real possibilities for someone suffering from PTSD.<sup>299</sup> Additionally, one must consider the psychological implications of the renaming for those unfit to qualify under the injury model. The economic disadvantages resulting from a Dishonorable Discharge, or even an Other-Than-Honorable Discharge, provide reason enough to critique the proposed renaming, but the branding of a suffering soldier as insubordinate and deviant enough from the ideal to warrant a discharge that is not Honorable also has the probability to deny the soldier “the right to identify with the ideal of military masculinity and to enjoy citizenship privileges that follow from that identification”.<sup>300</sup> While the “citizenship privileges” may seem to be the economic potential that one earns from military service and training, one cannot ignore the psychological impact of being seen as “dishonorable” in a society for whom the military body is the ideal body and the potential for the “dishonorable” body of the suffering-but-undiagnosed/misdiagnosed soldier to be read as weak, as a failure, and as un-American and to be treated as such.

This chapter critiques a letter that psychiatrists Frank Ochberg and Jonathan Shay sent to Dr. John Oldham, President of the American Psychiatric Association, on 7 April 2012 articulating why the APA should rename and reclassify PTSD as PTSI in the, then, upcoming *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness Fifth Edition*. Ochberg served on the committee that in 1980 first defined and classified PTSD, and Shay’s work with veterans and

---

<sup>299</sup> Melissa Pearrow and Lisa Cosgrove, “The Aftermath of Combat-Related PTSD: Toward an Understanding of Transgenerational Trauma,” *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 30 no. 2 (2009): 77-82; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 169.

<sup>300</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 63.

research on PTSD has earned him a MacArthur Genius Grant and a Salem Award for Human Rights and Social Justice. Though the argument failed at the time, the 2014 shooting at Fort Hood reopens the debate over the power of the valence associated with the name to persuade soldiers to either accept or reject the need for help. Ochberg and Shay's argument seeks to redefine PTSD as PTSI through a dialectical progression that states the thesis that PTSD is actually an injury, establish the antithesis through a negative analogy that separates PTSD from psychological disorders, and provide a synthesis through a series of four analogies likening PTSD to physical illnesses to demonstrate that replacing "disorder" with "injury" will demand no change in diagnosis but will transform the general perception of the severity of the condition that progress so as to make increasingly visible the invisible wounds of war. While this task is laudable, identifying PTSD as physical and not psychological reaffirms the military's denial of the severity of mental illness and offers military culture a symbolic expiation of guilt over both the role of war in causing the trauma and of the military's own role in the stigmatization of soldiers with mental illness through a scapegoating of PTSD itself.

Thus, this chapter argues that the push to rename Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury is more than scholars and professionals quibbling over nomenclature but is a repetition of a historical struggle for the power to diagnose and pronounce healed that has philosophical, social, political, and economic implications that incarnate in the body of the psychologically-wounded soldier. This assertion does not suggest some mystical supposition but relies on the demonstrated power of discourse to constrain and direct action in response to an accepted name for a person, thing, or situation. Or, more simply stated, how one names a thing conditions one's response to that thing. Given this history of diagnostic nomenclature for this serious condition, the current debate represents the U.S. military psychiatry's attempt to regain

the power of diagnostic definition that civilian psychiatry wrested from it after Vietnam. However, as this chapter shall discuss, the argument made to reclassify the condition as an injury ignores the true significance in the structure of the various names by which PTSD has been called in a manner that provides only a symbolic attempt at providing support for suffering soldiers at a moment in history when the VA hospital system's inefficiency and inefficacy are illuminated for the public and when the U.S. Congress seeks to defund the VA hospital system. Therefore, this chapter shall argue that while a name change could provide a reduction in the stigma against mental illness that prevents soldiers from seeking treatment, the current proposal is not such a name change. This chapter will then conclude by discussing why a potentially effective name change will not be implemented as such a change would force the United States government, the cultural aristocracy, to recognize its reciprocal obligation to provide care at its own expense to the returning warriors that its stated rhetoric names as heroes.

### **Body, Mind, and Post-Traumatic Stress**

Incidents such as the one at Fort Hood reopen the web of discourses surrounding the psychological stresses of combat, the perception of mental illness among the military as markers of weakness, and the general lack of open and honest discourse about mental health issues in the United States. As a “social construction defined by shared expectations and values,”<sup>301</sup> the military enforces a hypermasculine warrior ethos centered upon those physical excellencies and character traits that allow one to function in the violent context of war: strength, courage, discipline, obedience, and loyalty.<sup>302</sup> The locus of power for the soldier/warrior is the physical, the realm of the body, wherein injuries are the “damage or wound of trauma”<sup>303</sup> caused by an

---

<sup>301</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 4.

<sup>302</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122-123.

<sup>303</sup> Thomas Lathrop Stedman, *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins: Philadelphia, 2000), 903.

external agent that is – almost always – visible. A wound, similarly, requires “trauma to any of the tissues of the body – especially that caused by physical means and with interruption of continuity.”<sup>304</sup> Military philosophy conceives of the mind as an agent serving to discipline the body, and a mind that cannot discipline the body is deemed weak, thus marking the body – and the soldier – weak and unfit for service. Such a designation ignores the extraordinary nature of combat that forces both the body and mind beyond their limits for extended periods of time. This inevitability of combat stress causing psychological breakdown – often resulting in chaos and desertion – has caused military training to discipline the mind for the purpose of disciplining the body.<sup>305</sup>

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) results from either a traumatic event or a series of traumatic events that alter a person’s ability to respond to external stimuli in an appropriate manner through a disruption of normal mental control over perception, memory, and thought.<sup>306</sup> Gabriel articulates that from ancient Greece until after World War II, military philosophy assumed that any psychological breakdown in a soldier was due to poor moral character, a predisposition to madness, or a combination of both. While the modern military understands that predisposition and morality are not the root causes of psychological collapse, military culture continues acting as if they are, resulting in the stigmatization of those soldiers who suffer psychological issues during combat.<sup>307</sup> Historically known as “soldier’s heart” during the Civil

---

<sup>304</sup> Stedman, *Stedman’s Medical Dictionary*, 1990.

<sup>305</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 47; Knight, “Literature as Equipment for Killing”, 157-168.

<sup>306</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 170.

<sup>307</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*.

War, “shell shock” or “war neurosis” during World War I,<sup>308</sup> and “combat fatigue” during World War II,<sup>309</sup> the official identification and classification of PTSD occurs in 1980 as a result of lobbying by Vietnam veterans.

The APA first recognized the condition in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness Third Edition (DSM-III)*.<sup>310</sup> The manual’s current edition, the *DSM-V*, lists five essential diagnostic criteria: an etiological event/series of events such as “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” as well as the experiencing “repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)”, recurrent and intrusive memories of the event(s), persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the event(s), negative alterations in cognitions and moods begin worsening after the event(s), and resulting alterations in reactivity and arousal.<sup>311</sup> While all agree on the external etiology of the traumatic event(s), recent studies suggest that both environmental factors and genetic predisposition to vulnerability play significant roles in explaining why some individuals exposed to a certain traumatic event develop PTSD while others exposed to the same event do not.<sup>312</sup> Episodes, where the afflicted reads the external stimulus of a new situation as signifying the same generic type that inflicted trauma on his/her psyche, typically begin three months after the initial incident. Such episodes cause the person to respond in inappropriate ways that can range from paranoia to violence. For soldiers, a PTSD diagnosis often results in perceptions of weakness by fellow soldiers, early

---

<sup>308</sup> P.S. Ellis, “The Origins of the War Neuroses, Part I” *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* 70 no. 3 (1984): 168-177.

<sup>309</sup> Michael P. Fischer and Terry L. Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” *Rand.org* (2013), [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND\\_OP389.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND_OP389.pdf) Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>310</sup> Pasi Valiaho, “Affectivity, Biopolitics, and the Virtual Reality of War,” *Theory Culture Society* 29 no. 2 (2012): 63-83, 27.

<sup>311</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness Fifth Edition*, (Washington, D.C., American Psychiatric Association: 2014), 271-272.

<sup>312</sup> Divya Mehta and Elisabeth B. Binder, “Gene x Environment Vulnerability Factors for PTSD: the HPA-axis,” *Neuropharmacology* 62 no. 2 (2012): 654-662.



discharge/loss of military career advancement opportunities, difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, interpersonal relationship issues with spouses and family, substance abuse, and suicide.<sup>313</sup>

### **The Injury-Disorder Dialectic**

Ochberg and Shay build their case that the proposed name change is nothing more than that through a seemingly simple series of four analogies that liken PTSD to specific physical injuries. However, they structure their argument dialectally in a manner that allows them to synthesize the process of diagnosing PTSD with the process of identifying a physical injury, locating the condition firmly in the realm of the physical body, while separating the nature of post-traumatic stress from the realm of the mind. The analogies depict a double movement. The injuries to which post-traumatic stress is likened move from the least visible to the most visible, making visible this invisible wound of war. Additionally, the movement and analogical connection made parallels the order of the diagnostic criteria in the *DSM*, suggesting a continuance in diagnostic procedure and an entailment that no negative consequences will emerge regarding treatment of soldiers so diagnosed.

Ochberg and Shay begin by establishing their thesis and, in the same sentence, connecting it to its antithesis: Post-Traumatic Stress is a physical injury and is not a psychological disorder. “This request pertains only to the name, and expresses no opinion on the existing DSM-IV or proposed DSM-V criteria” and only “springs from the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces, which finds the label ‘Disorder’ to be stigmatizing, compared to the term ‘Injury,’ which is not.”<sup>314</sup> Their opening salvo establishes the argument that their proposed name

---

<sup>313</sup> Hillary S. Burke, Marjorie F. Olney, and Charles E. Degeneffe, “A New Disability for Rehabilitation Counselors: Iraq War Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” *Journal of Rehabilitation* 75 no. 3 (2009): 5-14; Melissa Pearrow and Lisa Cosgrove, “The Aftermath of Combat-Related PTSD: Toward an Understanding of Transgenerational Trauma,” *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 30 no. 2 (2009): 77-82.

<sup>314</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

change will reduce and/or remove the stigma against mental illness that prevents soldiers from seeking treatment by aligning the new classification “Injury” with the concept “term,” implying a designation that arises from the nature of the thing itself and that exists in an external, empirically-discernable reality. They align “disorder,” the antithesis of “injury, with the concept “label,” implying something arbitrarily and subjectively affixed by another that marks the affixed as being “of a certain [different – in this case, weak and unfit] kind.” This alignment of post-traumatic stress with the term “injury” implies through this initial antithesis that this designation arises naturally from the nature of its environment, which, in this case, is combat. That which is natural to combat, to the military, is the physical. Therefore, Ochberg and Shay begin their argument by establishing that post-traumatic is a physical injury that is an equal wound of war as the “amputees, the burned, the blind, and the paralyzed” whose wounds are easily visible.<sup>315</sup>

Having established a generalized antithesis that separates post-traumatic stress from psychological disorders, Ochberg and Shay then rearticulate the antithesis in a manner that separates post-traumatic stress from the anxiety disorders with which the condition was initially classified and that articulates the important similarity between post-traumatic stress and physical injury: traumatic contact with an external force. “To change PTSD to PTSI would mean we physicians believe that brain physiology has been injured by exposure to some external force, not that we are just anxious or depressed by tragic and traumatic reality.” They continue to articulate this antithesis through a historical account of the impetus for the condition’s original designation in 1980.

From the earliest conversations about creating a new diagnosis, back in the late 1970s, we sought a concept that would capture the experience we had with survivors of catastrophic events – war, fires, floods, killing, rape. We didn’t want the new syndrome to apply only to sensitive people or to people with pre-existing conditions. We knew that in mass disaster, some emerged with flashbacks and years of disabling symptoms, while others

---

<sup>315</sup> Shay, *Achilles in America*: 4.

emerged sadder and affected, but not with the pattern we eventually called PTSD. We knew that some traumas were more traumatic than others – surviving forcible rape had, on average, more intense and prolonged symptoms than surviving a car crash. But we also knew that one could have a “clean bill of health” prior to the trauma, and then, afterward, there was a profound difference.

They conclude their antithesis by stating, “That difference wasn’t just being nervous or inhibited, it featured an altered form of memory: a traumatic memory. This is a core component of PTSD – it is more than remembering something terrible; it is a change in the brain’s pattern of memory.”<sup>316</sup> The differentiation of Post-Traumatic Stress from psychological disorders rests upon the following assumptions: (1) exposure to an external force causes trauma, (2) the condition is not pre-existing or genetic as the anxiety disorders with which it had been classified often are, and (3) it alters neurological processes that fundamentally change and impair the way the brain functions.

While this may seem to be a simple, straightforward progression from thesis to antithesis, the linguistic turns made during this movement reaffirm the U.S. Armed Forces’ devaluation of the severity of mental illness that reaffirms the stigma attached to mental illness. They articulate that what differentiates PTSD is the physical injury resulting from the traumatic force, “not that we are just anxious or depressed by tragic and traumatic reality”. The use of the adverb “just” in the sense of “merely” suggests a separation of PTSD, through its identification with physiological change, from the anxiety disorders with which it was previously classed. They later repeat this adverbial division when they state, “That difference wasn’t just being nervous or inhibited, it featured an altered form of memory.”<sup>317</sup> In these statements, the adverb “just” functions to differentiate PTSD from psychological disorders by diminishing the significance of the common essence shared between PTSD and anxiety disorders – the psychological

---

<sup>316</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>317</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

disturbance – so that the common essence shared between PTSD and physical injury – the physiological alteration resulting from external force – can be magnified in significance. By magnifying the significance of the physiological alteration that PTSD shares with physical injury – as opposed to psychological disorders – Ochberg and Shay imply that what occurs in PTSD is a “real” condition as opposed to “just” being “merely” a psychological condition – PTSD is *real* whereas being anxious or depressed by tragedy and trauma are *just in the mind*.

The military, and by extension the U.S. government and the rest of the civilian population, are more familiar with the vocabularies and implications of physical injuries than they are with the vocabularies and implications of psychological disorders. As such, Ochberg and Shay seek the reclassification to render in a more plainspoken and concrete – in the sense of being grounded in bodily reality – vocabulary the abstract and incomprehensible experience of the soldier suffering from PTSD. Each analogy likens traumatic stress to a physical injury through contact with an external object that damages the tissue of the body, causing a wound that impairs normal functionality. These analogies are grounded in bodily experience, providing common referents that place the experience of the body at the forefront<sup>318</sup> and through which civilians can interpret the experiences of combat veterans. Through illumination of the shared similarity,<sup>319</sup> which is an external etiology, the civilian audience can “meet such new situations” with techniques, vocabularies, and processes with which one is familiar, extending their utility and meaning to this new situation.<sup>320</sup> To that end, the movement from one analogy to the next mirrors the movement in Diagnostic Criteria from B through E so as to render the unfamiliar

---

<sup>318</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, “The Body’s Insistence on Meaning: Metaphor as Presentation and Representation in Illness Experience,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly, New Series* 6 no. 4 (1992): 323-346, 324.

<sup>319</sup> Alan Gross, *Starring the Text: the Place of Rhetoric in Science Studies* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>320</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 104.

diagnosis of physical injury familiar to the psychiatric community so as to argue that the only change for which they argue is the name itself.

Through declaring PTSD a physical injury that is antithetical to psychological disorders in a manner that argues that PTSD is “real” and in the body as opposed to anxiety and depression which are “just” in the mind, Ochberg and Shay reaffirm the stigma against mental illness that pervades military culture in particular and the United States population in general. From the opening of the letter, Ochberg and Shay articulate that their primary concern is the stigma associated with mental illness by stating that their request “springs from the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces, which finds the label ‘Disorder’ to be stigmatizing, compared to the term ‘Injury,’ which is not.”<sup>321</sup> They either state or imply that the term “disorder” stigmatizes the suffers six more times before they present their argument that PTSD fits an injury model by marshalling such statements as “changing the name of PTSD to PTSI will reduce barriers to care,” “‘disorder’ perpetuates a bias against the mental health illness...makes the person seem weak,” “calling it an injury instead of a disorder ‘would have a huge impact,’ encouraging soldiers suffering from the condition to seek help,” and “have reason to resent a stigmatizing label.” This aspect of division, when paired with their statements that some may be “*just* anxious or depressed” about the traumatic experience (emphasis mine)<sup>322</sup> suggests a hierarchical organization that elevates the status of physical injury to that of “real injury” above that of psychological injury, which is “just in the mind”. The latter is something that one should be able to “shake off” if one is strong enough, but the former is something that can become a source of chronic pain and hardship.

---

<sup>321</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>322</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

While such stigmatization is a common complaint about U.S. culture in general, the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces cannot state that it is free of stigmatization, given that it routinely uses mental health diagnoses to determine if individuals are potential threats or security risks, trustworthy, promotable, or deployable.<sup>323</sup> Additionally, soldiers physically injured in combat can receive the Purple Heart, but soldiers psychologically injured cannot receive this honor. Additionally, as Ochberg stated in *Military Review*, the Pentagon will not consider awarding either a Purple Heart or something akin to the Canadian Medal of Sacrifice to those suffering from PTSD until the name is changed to PTSI.<sup>324</sup> Through their strategic use of division as part of their argument for why PTSD should be identified as an injury and not a disorder, Ochberg and Shay reaffirm the bias against mental illnesses that permeates the hypermasculine warrior ethos of US military culture that views physical injuries as “real” and “worthy” scars of war but sees psychological injuries as marks of “weakness.”<sup>325</sup>

In seeking to persuade Dr. Oldham, and by extension the American Psychiatric Association, to identify PTSD with physical injury, Ochberg and Shay magnify the significance of physiological change that results from exposure to the traumatic experience while diminishing the significance of the psychological and behavioral symptoms that serve diagnostic purposes. While such division can function to highlight the identification between PTSD and physical injury, given the seven-fold repetition of their desire to destigmatize veterans afflicted with this condition, the well-known bias against mental illness in the U.S. Armed Forces and federal government, and the Pentagon’s refusal to grant the Purple Heart, which is awarded to those physically wounded by an instrument of war, to those psychologically wounded by instruments

---

<sup>323</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” 7.

<sup>324</sup> Ochberg, “An Injury, Not a Disorder,” 98.

<sup>325</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 4-5.

of war until the name is changed demonstrates a reaffirmation of the bias against mental illness in the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces that devalues the psychological injuries of war, interpreting them as marks of weakness and untrustworthiness. This reaffirmation of the anti-mental illness bias in military culture suggests that Ochberg and Shay argue for the name change as a symbolic solution that would remove the stigma without demanding any changes in military policy and culture. Through a series of linguistic terms that minimize the connection between post-traumatic stress and psychological disorder, Ochberg and Shay highlight the embodied experience of the sufferer who was wounded and injured through physical contact with an externally-originating event within the environment of combat.

Having argued that post-traumatic stress is antithetical to psychological disorders, Ochberg and Shay then move to synthesize the diagnostic criteria of PTSD with a generalized definition of physical injury as the wound/damage resulting from trauma. They begin with the most internal of the four physical injuries, epilepsy, which permanently alters neurophysiology and functionality. “It resembles epilepsy. There are episodes, sometimes triggered and sometimes spontaneous, in which smells, or sensations, or garbled or clear pieces of the past come back. This happens during sleep, while awake, and in twilight states.”<sup>326</sup> Such a depiction of epilepsy is meant to align with the “recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s)” that can arise from stressful situations (flashbacks) and/or dreams wherein the individual “feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring”.<sup>327</sup> The emphasis on beginning with the episodic nature suggests a desire to argue that the episodes, which distress both the afflicted and those witnessing the episodes, may recur, they are caused by

---

<sup>326</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>327</sup> *DSM-V*, 271.

physical contact with an external object that damages the brain. The external etiology separates PTSD from anxiety disorders, which, while potentially triggered by trauma, arise from internal and genetic predispositions.

Ochberg and Shay continue with two analogies that move from the interior of the head (the brain) to two external sensory organs connected to the brain whose functionality combat stress impairs (the ear and the eye), arguing that combat stress overloads the sensory organ, the brain, so as to impair normal functionality through analogies to noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) and to eclipse-blindness.

Think of it this way: in some survivors, but not all, exposure to extremely high amplitude signals of traumatic stress causes a change in brain physiology. This is analogous to altered hearing after a loud noise or altered vision after viewing an eclipse. The stimulus exceeds the capacity of an organ (in the case of PTSD, the capacity of the relevant parts of the brain) to receive that stimulus and retain resiliency – their normal homeostatic capability.<sup>328</sup>

The connection evoked here is that the force of the traumatic experience overwhelms the sensory organ resulting in permanent damage. This primary commonality entails a permanent alteration to the physiology of the sensory organ: the ear in the case of NIHL, the eye in the case of eclipse blindness, and the brain in the case of PTSD. While the altered hearing and vision to which PTSD is compared are either partial or total loss, the language invoked is that of the “negative alterations in cognitions and mood” resulting from the traumatic events that lead to “persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs” about oneself and “feelings of detachment and estrangement from others”<sup>329</sup> that impair the individual’s brain to function in a social setting through properly responding to social stimuli.<sup>330</sup>

---

<sup>328</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>329</sup> *DSM-V*, 271-272.

<sup>330</sup> Harper, “PTSD: A Situated Look at the Semiotic Process and Role of Individual Umwelts in Human Existence/Function,” 385.



Ochberg and Shay's first three analogies argue for an injury model through an interior to exterior movement that parallels the movement from Diagnostic Criteria B (the recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories) to Diagnostic Criteria D (negative alterations in cognition and mood) to demonstrate that changing the name and classification from disorder to injury will not demand a change in diagnostic criteria. Their final injury analogy makes fully visible the invisible nature of the wound in a manner that directly connects traumatic stress to the combat-experience of the soldier by likening traumatic stress to traumatic amputation. "It [PTSD] came from something that *happened* like a traumatic amputation. No military surgeon diagnoses a Soldier or a Marine whose foot has been taken off by a mine as suffering from 'Missing Foot Disorder.'" Ochberg and Shay conclude their argument by stating, "Like the mine that takes off the service member's foot, the primary psychological injury usually is not what kills or disables the survivor, but the complications do."<sup>331</sup> This analogy continues the alignment of traumatic stress with Diagnostic Criteria D by arguing that, like the amputation that cuts off an extremity and thus prevents normal physical functionality, traumatic stress cuts the sufferer off from normal social functionality through "diminished interest or participation in significant activities" that result from the "feelings of detachment or estrangement from others" and introduces the dangerous and potentially fatal complications suggested in Diagnostic Criteria E, which include "irritable behavior and angry outbursts" and "reckless or self-destructive behavior".<sup>332</sup> Such behaviors include suicide and violent outbursts such as that of Ivan Lopez at Fort Hood.

---

<sup>331</sup> Ochberg and Shay, "Change Now."

<sup>332</sup> *DSM-V*, 272.

While this analogy to a traumatic amputation resulting from a landmine blast, like the definition of PTSD, exposes the individual to “actual or threatened death” or “serious injury,”<sup>333</sup> this analogy’s graphic focus on the external etiology and extreme visuality demands problematizing on the grounds that it extends the metonymic reduction of the abstract concept of psychological trauma to the physical concept of injury beyond the point where the analogy proves meaningful. A landmine injury requires direct contact with either the initial blast, the shrapnel, or the shockwave from the blast in a radius close enough to the epicenter for injury to occur, and all within a similar radius from the epicenter will have similar, if not identical, injuries.<sup>334</sup> The same cannot be said for PTSD, as research suggests that only 10-25% of those exposed to a specific traumatic event will ultimately develop PTSD.<sup>335</sup> If the analogy were to hold, then all soldiers exposed to the landmine – either as one injured or as a witness to a platoon-mate being injured – should develop PTSD symptoms and not approximately one-quarter of that same platoon. While it is likely that all survivors will be shaken, the likelihood is that the majority will not develop PTSD.

Similarly, the delayed onset of symptoms for traumatic stress presents diagnostic problems for combat medics that are not present in landmine-induced injuries. Although individuals may not know the exact nature and severity of the injury, unless there is a tangible manifestation such as a lost extremity, bleeding, or pain, they know they have been hit. This allows unit medics to take immediate action to either treat minor injuries or to request movement of the most injured to field hospitals. The onset of PTSD symptoms is not as immediate. As the *DSM* articulates, symptoms normally emerge after three months and may lie dormant for several

---

<sup>333</sup> *DSM-V*, 271.

<sup>334</sup> Burke, Olney, and Degeneffe, “A New Disability for Rehabilitation Counsellors,” 6.

<sup>335</sup> Zoldaz and Diamond, “Current Status on Behavioral and Biological Markers of PTSD,” 861.

years.<sup>336</sup> For the purposes of military medical treatment, this delayed onset entails that responsible care would remove the entire unit from action and place them under psychiatric observation and treatment for an indeterminate period of time to ensure that the soldiers are psychologically healthy enough to return to the combat zone. Given that in wartime all soldiers not physically incapacitated need to be ready to engage and complete current and future missions, it is unlikely that the military will implement this level of immediate preventative treatment as it will remove too many “healthy” soldiers from the battlefield.

Ochberg and Shay’s series of analogies move in parallel lines from invisible wound to visible wound and from Diagnostic Criterion B to Diagnostic Criterion E in their effort to demonstrate that the only change proposed is to the name of the condition itself. As such, they conclude their argument by collapsing the diagnostic criteria into the category of “adaptation” through language that mirrors that of evolutionary biology. They argue that the diagnostic criteria B-E should be read as normal adaptations.

We see the injury as the *persistence of valid adaptations* to the real situation of surviving mortal danger, into the time after the danger has passed. These adaptations, generically, fall into three groups corresponding to the DSM three headings for PTSD...Like the mine that takes off the service member’s foot, the primary psychological injury usually is not what kills or disables the survivor, but the complications do. It’s the cascading complications and consequences that do most harm.

By stating that the diagnostic criteria are “valid adaptations to the real situation of surviving mortal danger,”<sup>337</sup> Ochberg and Shay argue that these adaptations be read as evolutionary process that allow an organism to better live in its environment,<sup>338</sup> articulating that these response patterns are normal and do not mark the afflicted as disordered. Any individual who

---

<sup>336</sup> DSM-V, 276.

<sup>337</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>338</sup> Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Genetics of the Evolutionary Process* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 4-5.

experiences the same trauma would adapt in the same way. By concluding this discussion with the reminder that it is the “complications” that cause the most harm to the survivor Ochberg and Shay reduce the psychologically-driven episodes used as essential diagnostic criteria to complications that arise as a result of the traumatic force that injures brain physiology.

By collapsing the diagnostic criteria into the category of evolutionary adaptation, Ochberg and Shay seek to reduce the stigma surrounding PTSD by arguing that such responses are both normal and rational. The argument that the responses are normal and valid adaptations to such a dangerous environment as war is an attempt at communalization of the sufferer with “*socially connected others* who do not let the survivor go through it alone” (emphasis original).<sup>339</sup> By articulating the normality of PTSD’s response patterns, Ochberg and Shay seek to increase the understanding among soldiers that each of them could suffer in this way as a result of experiences in combat. Similarly, by likening the response patterns to evolutionary adaptations, Ochberg and Shay articulate the “ordered” nature of the sufferer’s responses as being rational in light of the environment. As a result of being normal and rational, the soldier is not *disordered*; something happened that injured the primordial sense organ – the brain.

Ochberg and Shay argue that their injury model for PTSD, which would demand a renaming of the condition as PTSI, arises from the similarity of the symptoms to those of physical injuries caused by contact with an external force. This con substantiation with physical injury marks the condition of post-traumatic stress as antithetical to the nomenclature of psychiatric disorder while articulating that the proposed realignment will not demand a new set of diagnostic criteria. The argument’s surface suggests exactly what Ochberg and Shay

---

<sup>339</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 39; Christopher E. Beaudoin, “Evaluating a Media Campaign that Targeted PTSD after Hurricane Katrina,” *Health Communication* 24 no. 6 (2009): 515-523.

articulate: “This request pertains only to the name”.<sup>340</sup> However, the narrow focus on the etiology that arises from external traumatic force places the physical and psychological realms in a hierarchy that reaffirms the dominance of the physical in the military world. While they state their ultimate goal as reducing the stigma that prevents soldiers from seeking help, “The time has come to listen to the labeled and to do what we can do to lessen the stigma and shame that inhibits our patients from receiving our help,”<sup>341</sup> the argument accomplishes a reduction of the *significance* of the psychological aspects of combat stress. This reaffirms the military’s devaluation of psychological suffering, wherein one is “just anxious or depressed” by reality<sup>342</sup> when one should be able to soldier on in the absence of the stressor (war) instead of the stressor being a “living ghost in the bedroom, at the lunch counter, on the highway”. Redefining post-traumatic stress as an injury emphasizes the *post*, the wound and pain that arise after a single and discrete event, whereas the current definition emphasizes the *trauma*, which is “acutely present” in the invisibly wounded veterans continuously living the war within their souls.<sup>343</sup>

By placing emphasis on a single discrete event, which each of the analogies does – especially the analogy to traumatic amputation following a landmine blast, Ochberg and Shay link post-traumatic stress to other traumatic and profoundly devastating “catastrophic events – war, fire, floods, killing, rape”.<sup>344</sup> This linkage argues that the discrete and finite nature of these events is analogous and provides an equally powerful traumatic force that injures the brain, resulting in the adaptations (Diagnostic Criteria) that mark Post-Traumatic Stress as an injury. While all suffering is suffering, the tautological argument invoked here overshadows the

---

<sup>340</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>341</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>342</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>343</sup> James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>344</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

extraordinary nature of this class of trauma-inducing events in general and of the non-discrete, non-singular nature of combat-induced trauma in particular. Fires, floods, killings, and rapes are, more often than not, single occurrences that traumatize the survivor. While such a single event can happen in war, assuming that a single wartime event functions as “some external force” to injure brain physiology<sup>345</sup> presents a naïve and damaging understanding of the extraordinary stresses of combat wherein psychological collapse is inevitable for all soldiers who serve long enough<sup>346</sup> and produce, as Jonathan Shay previously argued, “the damaging personality changes that frequently follow prolonged, severe trauma” where “prolonged combat can wreck the personality”.<sup>347</sup> What Gabriel and Shay each argue is that combat-induced post-traumatic stress arises from the culmination of experiences that occur during the war theatre over a period of time. The length of time is never specified, as it would clearly vary with each soldier, but the general assumption of both the military and civilian worlds is that soldiers must engage in combat for extended periods of time. The Fort Hood incident where Ivan Lopez killed four and injured sixteen evokes this assumption, because “Although he had reportedly been treated for mental issues including depression, military officials had expressed skepticism that his four-month tour in Iraq as that war wound down could have caused PTSD.”<sup>348</sup> The assumption underlying the skepticism rests on the belief that either nothing specific happened to him<sup>349</sup> or that he had not seen enough of the horrors of war to warrant a PTSD diagnosis but was “just depressed” about his reality.

---

<sup>345</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>346</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*: 72.

<sup>347</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*: 169.

<sup>348</sup> “Fort Hood Shooter Snapped over Denial of Request for Leave, Army Confirms,” *foxnews.com*, April 2014

<sup>349</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD”: 8.

As a result of this narrow focus on a specific, discrete, external traumatic force that injures brain physiology, the campaign to reclassify PTSD as an injury presents the possibility for a misdiagnosis of soldiers whose psyches have been wounded by war but have not had anything specific happen to them. Fischer and Schell warn that “individuals with delayed-onset symptoms may be misled by an ‘injury’ diagnosis because their symptoms do not coincide temporally with an incident they recognize as an injury.”<sup>350</sup> The immediacy with which one knows that one has been physically injured, even if one does not know the type and severity, does not coincide with the delayed onset of PTSD, which is often three months or longer after the triggering experience.<sup>351</sup> The lack of immediate connection between the triggering experience and the onset of symptoms and specific episodes – if one does not meet the criteria for the injury diagnosis, which could prove a probable outcome given the delayed onset of symptoms and the emergence of the condition as a result of prolonged trauma in the war theatre – could lead to soldiers following the traditional model of self-medication with drugs and alcohol or to the occurrence of one or more verbal or violent acts of aggression and/or insubordination, which would either result in a Dishonorable Discharge and a forfeiture of all rights to veteran’s benefits and assistance or a Bad Conduct or Misconduct Discharge and a possible reduction or forfeiture of all rights to veteran’s benefits and assistance if the military deems the offense(s) egregious enough to warrant such a punishment.<sup>352</sup> While the stigma of mental illness resulting from a PTSD diagnosis can negatively impact a soldier’s military and post-military career,<sup>353</sup> the

---

<sup>350</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” 8.

<sup>351</sup> *DSM-V*, 271-272.

<sup>352</sup> “Misconduct Discharge,” *girightshotline.com* accessed 10 April 2014, <http://girightshotline.org/en/military-knowledge-base/topic/misconduct> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>353</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” 7.

stigma of a Misconduct, Bad Conduct, or Dishonorable Discharge – all of which can involve the possibility of a court-martial – would have far greater impact on the soldier’s post-military life due to the potential denial of veteran’s benefits.

### **Mythic Monsters and the Powerful Politics of Naming**

Recall from Chapter I how the original narrative of the Shell-Shocked Soldier articulates a belief that the trauma such a soldier experiences results from his a moral deficiency (cowardice), best exemplified by the scene where General Patton declares Pvt. Bennett to be a “God-damned coward”. As stated then, and throughout this text, military attitudes linking psychological collapse from trauma to moral failure date back to classical Greece. As Gabriel articulates, “The Greeks believed that performance in battle was a function of the character of the soldier. Greek military literature emphasized the connection between moral character and military training and heroism in battle.”<sup>354</sup> Little has changed in modern warfare where, even with the advent of military psychiatry, those suffering from shell shock during the First World War were assumed to have an inborn predisposition to “emotivity”, thus making some soldiers susceptible to fear-reactions (cowardice) from the horrors of war while others could “soldier on”.<sup>355</sup> That such an equation of psychological collapse with a flawed moral character (cowardice) continues underscores military policy that deny security clearances, advancement, and, potentially, veteran benefits to those diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the knowledge of those policies make soldiers less likely to seek treatment, feeling that they are different than those they called “brothers” and are thus unable to communalize their suffering and find healing.<sup>356</sup>

---

<sup>354</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 101.

<sup>355</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 23-24; Shepherd, *A War of Nerves*, 18.

<sup>356</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” 10; Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 39.



Court martial records during the First World War repeatedly link diagnoses of shell shock to acts of cowardice and desertion,<sup>357</sup> a linkage that is both as old as military thought and as old as mythic depictions of heroic exploits. In *Beowulf*, the desertion of the twelve veterans, the *duguð*, during the fight against the dragon provide an example of fear, induced by the stressors of combat, interpreted as cowardice and moral failure. To briefly summarize the event, Beowulf takes twelve of his most trusted veterans and one young warrior named Wiglaf to fight the dragon. For Wiglaf, this is his first battle. Beowulf instructed them to wait on the shore by the cave, ordering them to intervene only if he needed help. However, as the battle grew fierce, “*ac hy on holt bugon*” [then they fled to the forest] where Wiglaf condemns their moral failing.<sup>358</sup> Discussing this example is not to suggest that the twelve acted “properly” for their station but to illuminate the fact that how a culture names a condition determines how it responds to that condition.

Seeing his lord assaulted by the dragon, Wiglaf scolds the veterans, demanding that they recall their oaths and then condemning them through a warning of what will befall the Geatish people due to their cowardice. He begins by recalling a time in the mead hall “*þonne wē gehēton ūssum hlāford...þæt wē him ðā gūðgetawa gylðann woldon / gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe*”. [“when we promised our lord...that we for the war-gear wished to repay if for him such a need arose”]<sup>359</sup> Wiglaf concludes that it seems better to him to die alongside his lord than to live while watching him die. After Beowulf dies defeating the dragon, a mournful Wiglaf addresses the twelve again, reminding them first that they wear tokens of their fallen king’s honor:

---

<sup>357</sup> Shepherd, *A War of Nerves*, 69.

<sup>358</sup> *Beowulf*, 2598b.

<sup>359</sup> *Beowulf*, 2634-2637.

“*ēoredġeatwe þē ġē þaēr on standað*” [war-gear in which you there stand].<sup>360</sup> He then concludes that their cowardice will bring ruin upon the Geats.

<i>Hū sceal sinċþego</i>	<i>ond swyrdġifu</i>
<i>eall ēðelwyn</i>	<i>ēowrum cynne</i>
<i>lufen ālicgean!</i>	<i>Londrihtes mōt</i>
<i>þāere mǣġburge</i>	<i>monna āġhwylċ</i>
<i>īdel hweorfan</i>	<i>syððan æðelingas</i>
<i>feorran ġefricgean</i>	<i>flēam ēowerne</i>
<i>dōmlēasan dād:</i>	<i>dēað bið sēlla</i>
<i>eorla ġehwylcum</i>	<i>þonne edwītliġ.</i>

How must treasure-receipt and sword-giving  
all native joy for your kin,  
delight cease! Of land-rights must  
of your clan every man  
become deprived, when nobles  
from afar learn of your flight,  
gloryless dead: death is better  
for all men than a life of dishonor.<sup>361</sup>

Wiglaf scolds the twelve, warning them that their cowardice, which cost Beowulf his life, will now cost the Geatish people joy, land, and honor. In the last lines of his condemnation, he explicitly blames their cowardice – a moral failing – for bringing shame upon the people, because foreign nobles will learn that they are without a king to protect and lead them, thus making them an easy target for raiding.

Wiglaf’s words set up an antithesis between the heroic ideal of the courageous warrior, as morally strong as he is physically strong, and the “weakling” whose moral degeneration reveals itself at the moment when courage and honor are needed most. Lee says of the language of myth, “here at the moment of crisis the thane is either loyal or treacherous. There is no middle ground.”<sup>362</sup> Gwara, who seeks to convict Beowulf of hubris, postulates, “If Beowulf’s *best*

---

<sup>360</sup> *Beowulf*, 2866.

<sup>361</sup> *Beowulf*, 2884-2891.

<sup>362</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 129.

retainers, his most ‘heroic’ companions, are too terrified to face his foe, Beowulf arguably expects far too much for whatever honors he once bestowed. His men, I would argue, are no more ‘cowardly’ than American GIs who recently balked at reconnoitering the Baghdad Airport road without armored vehicles.”<sup>363</sup> The charge of Beowulf’s hubris is beyond the scope of this discussion, but what proves significant for this discussion is that Gwara links the flight of twelve *duguð* to that of contemporary soldiers through accusations against their moral character by those in command. And, as has been previously discussed, WWI military records indicate a correlation between shell-shock and those court martialed for desertion. And while no one can definitively diagnose the *duguð* with PTSD, their actions are consistent with ancient depictions of psychological collapse in soldiers. Hastings recounts a tale by Heroditus who recorded that the famed Spartan leader Leonidas “dismissed them [soldiers] when he realized that they had no heart for the fight and were unwilling to take their share of the danger”.<sup>364</sup> Leonidas, like modern commanders, recognized that the stress of combat would eventually cause even experienced soldiers to break psychologically, and, in ancient battles, psychological breakdown often resulted in battle panic that caused them to flee.<sup>365</sup> That it was not Wiglaf, who has never ventured into battle before this fight, but the experienced soldiers who suffered from psychological collapse during a battle against a dragon, the ultimate mythic representation of chaos, is suggestive that the dragon could function as a metaphor for that final experience in combat that breaks through the training and indoctrination that allow soldiers to function in the chaotic world of combat.

---

<sup>363</sup>Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 275.

<sup>364</sup> Max Hastings, *Military Anecdotes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 18.

<sup>365</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 47.

While the discussion of dragons as metaphors for the psychological stress of combat would be interesting and potentially meaningful, what proves more meaningful is that Wiglaf's condemnation demonstrates one way in which contemporary military discourses do parallel those of the heroic myth in a manner that suggests the use of the heroic is done without thought of the implications. After all, if contemporary military thought and policy treat the result of war-induced psychological collapse in a manner identical to the way ancient society treated it, then one would logically conclude that contemporary society should expect the same results, which it gets in soldiers not seeking treatment for psychological trauma and mental illness. Wiglaf would likely agree with Patton, calling those who psychologically break due to the stresses of battle nothing more than "God-damned cowards" who "stink up this place of honor".<sup>366</sup> If the effects of psychological stress and collapse from the horrors of war are named a moral failing – however one defines that morality – then the military culture will respond to those who suffer as if they are failures, as Wiglaf's words, Patton's words, and military policies that deem those diagnosed with PTSD as being untrustworthy demonstrate. If the same effects are named a legitimate condition caused by the lived experience of war, then the military culture will respond to those who suffer as if they are wounded brothers, allowing them to communalize their suffering, find support, and begin the process of healing.<sup>367</sup> Ochberg and Shay articulate this early in their letter by stating "This request pertains only to the name".<sup>368</sup> The name by which a society defines, in this instance, a transformation of the stress-response pattern brought about by the traumas and stressors of combat service, determines how that society responds to those who suffer from the condition now termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

---

<sup>366</sup> Patton.

<sup>367</sup> Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 2430-244.

<sup>368</sup> Ochberg and Shay, "Change Now".

While the temptation to simply dismiss the power of a name change to facilitate the desired reduction of stigma is great, the power of naming holds the promise for such a transformation. To name something is to have power over it – whether it be the mythic true name of a god or a demon to mundane illnesses such as a cold or influenza. To know the name of a thing is to know its essence – that *sine qua non* that differentiates a thing from all that it is not – and directs one’s response toward that thing. The meaning attached to a particular name occurs arises from the nexus of power relations surrounding denotation, connotation, and “other semiotic processes of signification that are characteristic of linguistic signs more generally”.<sup>369</sup> Through naming, one then establishes categories based upon types. All things classed according to the named type are predicted to behave in a similar, if not identical, manner, thus allowing for the formation of a knowable and definable response schema.<sup>370</sup> In simple terms, if two individuals meet each other while walking in the forest, they will respond differently if each names the other “friend” than they would respond if each names the other “enemy”. Ochberg and Shay articulate that “This request pertains only to the name,” and that changing the name will not affect the diagnostic criteria in any fashion but will reduce the stigma associated with the condition of post-traumatic stress.<sup>371</sup> Regardless of their belief, their words provide a smokescreen that shadows issues of power at play: the power to name the condition, the power to define essential diagnostic symptoms, and the power to pronounce healing. This last power signals the true struggle underlying the military’s proposal to rename PTSD as PTSI: the ability to not be accountable – financially *and* morally – for the treatment and care of soldiers wounded in combat.

---

<sup>369</sup> Benjamin Bailey and Sunny Lie, “The Politics of Names among Chinese Indonesians in Java,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 23 no. 1 (2013): 21-40, 23.

<sup>370</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 86.

<sup>371</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now”.

While a transformation of military culture that recognizes psychological trauma as a legitimate wound resulting from combat and not a marker of individual weakness would be the most significant way to remove the stigma that prevents soldiers from seeking help, one must not forget that the request from retired General Chiarelli arises at a moment of crisis for the entire VA hospital system. While the next chapter will discuss aspects of that exigence in greater detail, the following PTSD and mental health issues will provide sufficient context for this discussion. Veterans report (1) having to wait upwards of thirteen months for a mental health appointment, (2) not being informed if the VA mental health professional with whom they regularly meet is retiring or leaving the system, (3) being told that an antidepressant that helps cannot be obtained because there is no generic brand available, and (4) being refused future service at a VA hospital should they suffer a flashback while in the lobby.<sup>372</sup> Additionally, while a bill that would allocate emergency funding to open and staff twenty-six new VA clinics passed the U.S. House of Representatives with bipartisan support, Republicans in the U.S. Senate blocked its passage, because, as Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions said, such funding would create a “blank check, an unlimited entitlement program”.<sup>373</sup> One should not find it surprising that in this political climate where providing adequate and timely physical and mental health care for veterans proves to be difficult and “too expensive”, that a Department of Defense funded study found no direct link between combat service and suicide, but suicide arose from either mental illness that went undiagnosed during the enlistment process or from drug or alcohol addiction.<sup>374</sup>

---

<sup>372</sup> Melinda Henneberger, “Parents Tell Congress how VA Failed their Children: Veterans who Committed Suicide,” *washingtonpost.com*, 10 July 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html) Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>373</sup> Ryan Denson, “GOP Senator Calls Veteran’s Care ‘Entitlement’ We ‘Can’t Afford,” *addictinginfo.org* 14 June 2014, <http://www.addictinginfo.org/2014/06/14/veterans-entitlement/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>374</sup> Cynthia A. LeardMann, Teresa M. Bowell, Tyler C. Smith, Michael R. Bell, Besa Smith, Edward J. Boyko, Tomoko I. Hooper, Gary D. Gackstetter, Mark Ghamsary, and Charles W. Hoge, “Risk Factors Associated With Suicide in Current and Former US Military Personnel,” *JAMA* 310 no. 5 (2013):496-506, 502.

It is in this socio-political scene where the military continues to read war-induced psychological distress as a mark of individual weakness, where the government agency tasked with providing health care to veterans is both inefficient and ineffective, and where the aristocracy who benefits most from warfare views funding veteran health care as an entitlement that is too expensive and not as a cost of war that this push to rename PTSD as PTSI arises. The political and economic aspects demand addressing, because Frank Ochberg has stated in a piece he wrote for *Military Review* that “Some believe that we who advocate a name change are motivated by a desire to reduce benefits because we are associated with the military or the government. This is a red herring.”<sup>375</sup> While Ochberg and Shay likely have honorable intentions, their argument for changing PTSD to PTSI offers a symbolic solution that both fails to address the needed shift in military culture’s reading of combat-induced psychological distress and symbolically expiates the military-industrial complex and, by extension, the entire U.S. government of any culpability for sending soldiers to war at a time when Congress seeks to defund and privatize the VA hospital system, denying an obligation to provide health care for veterans wounded – physically and psychologically – by wars waged to enrich the most powerful members of the U.S. government and their colleagues.

Names, like all words, are powerful. They convey both meaning and social power relations. They have histories. They can both facilitate and hinder identification and healing. This chapter’s critique is not with the idea that changing the name could facilitate the communalization of suffering and encourage soldiers to seek treatment for mental health issues such as PTSD. However, this chapter critiques the proposed name change on two fronts: the absence of a push to transform military culture in a meaningful way that both recognizes and

---

<sup>375</sup> Ochberg, “An Injury, not a Disorder,” 99.

respects war-induced psychological suffering and the proposed change affords only a symbolic solution that expiates the military, the military-industrial complex, and the U.S. government of culpability for the psychological suffering of those sent to war and of any reciprocal obligation to provide care upon their return. This is not to deny the transformative power that a name change could offer, but this chapter argues that changing *disorder* to *injury* ignores the specific aspect of the current name that functions as a barrier to the communalization of suffering for afflicted soldiers: the vagueness of etiology articulated by the phrase “Post-Traumatic Stress” that, in an effort to generalize the condition in a manner that would include numerous etiologies that cause psychological distress, became a clean, clinical abstraction removed from the bloody, messy lived experience of war.

PTSD has had many names over the past two centuries (see Table I). Military doctors during the Civil War termed the condition “Soldier’s Heart”. The same condition bore the name “Shell Shock” during World War I, “Combat Fatigue” during World War II, and “Operational Exhaustion” during Korea. Each of these names is constructed as follows [Etiological Referent + Description of Observed Condition]. The commonalities arise primarily in the first phrase, the Etiological Referent, which connects the Observed Condition directly to a soldier’s experience in war. Jones and Wessely quote Dr. Paul Jacoby, physician-in-charge of the Provincial Asylum of Orel during the Russo-Japanese War, who argued that the “privations and fatigues of active service, the nervous tension caused by ever-present danger, the frequent mental shocks, alcoholism, and wounds, all predispose to madness”. Jacoby concluded that “the conditions under which modern warfare is conducted adds greatly to the strain on the nervous system of the combatants” that produce “new forms of neuroses and mental disorder”.<sup>376</sup> Jacoby’s argument

---

<sup>376</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 16.



is that modern warfare is the ultimate cause of the psychological distress that military psychiatrists saw (and continue to see) in increasing numbers.

Another commonality of the entries in the pre-Vietnam nomenclature is that military psychiatry named, diagnosed, and treated the condition. In contrast, PTSD was named by a civilian committee and bore political implications. Its rapid validation in the *DSM-III*

Table I: Historical Structure of Diagnostic Names

War	Etiological Referent	Description of Observed Condition
Civil War	Soldier's	Heart
World War I	Shell	Shock
World War II	Combat	Fatigue
Korean War	Operational	Exhaustion
Vietnam War	Post-Traumatic	Stress Disorder

represented a “further way of undermining the government’s pursuit of the war” through a demonstration that “the conflict caused long-term and widespread psychological injury to US servicemen”.<sup>377</sup> This political conflict manifested in differing professional interpretations of Vietnam’s, and by extension war’s, significance as an etiology. VA hospitals, who saw psychiatric suffering that appeared as if it would approach the 30% of all servicemen that occurred in the U.S Civil War and the Crimean War argued that Vietnam marked a significant change in war that warranted special scholarly and clinical attention. However, civilian psychiatry argued that the experience of the Vietnam soldier during combat and upon returning home was no different than of any previous war. Eric Dean stated, “Popular culture, without any

<sup>377</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 131.

reference to historical context began to regard the Vietnam veteran as alone in American history as allegedly being unappreciated, troubled, rejected and blamed for the war”.<sup>378</sup> The VA-funded National Vietnam Veterans’ Readjustment Study found that, while the majority of Vietnam veterans successfully readjusted to civilian life, the likelihood of a Vietnam veteran suffering from PTSD at some point in his or her life neared 39% and that the onset of PTSD symptoms often occurred one to two years after discharge, making a direct connection to a combat-induced traumatic event difficult.<sup>379</sup> In this political climate, the battle for control over providing a new, clinical name for the condition known now as PTSD arose not from scientific objectivism but from anti-war sentiment and a battle for the power to diagnose a condition and to determine its treatment.

This is not to say that nothing good came from the more generalized Etiological Referent of “Post-Traumatic,” but shifting the power to diagnose from the military who directly observed the soldiers in and after combat to the civilian world who denied that the experiences of Vietnam veterans in and after combat were any different than those of other soldiers in other wars, manifested in a new name: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD, as a clinical description, presents a generalized etiology that covers a myriad of conditions from combat to violence to rape to natural disaster, all of which can lead to similar stress-reaction patterns in those who suffer. In an effort to make the diagnostic nomenclature more general, the Etiological Referent became the generalized term “Post-Traumatic”. The Observed Condition “Stress Disorder” continues to demonstrate a connection to the psychological suffering – the person’s reaction to stressful situations became “disordered” compared to what is deemed culturally and statistically

---

<sup>378</sup> Eric T. Dean, *Shook over Hell, Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>379</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 133-134.

normal. However, the Observed Condition is now caused by an abstracted descriptor of the myriad of potential etiologies. Unfortunately for soldiers, scientific generalizability removed the Etiological Referent from the concrete, physical world of human life (the experience of war) and situated it in an abstract world of civilian clinical and academic discourses. The abstract character of the Etiological Referent, when compounded by the delayed onset of symptoms, made directly connecting the psychological suffering of the soldier to his or her experiences in war difficult. Such difficulties provided further impediments to the communalization of suffering necessary for healing in a community that already views psychological distress as a marker of difference and weakness.

The significance of the history of PTSD's nomenclature proves meaningful for this current discussion by illuminating both how this battle over the power to diagnose this condition has happened before with detrimental effects on soldiers and to establish why the push to change the name could be beneficial. That said, the proposal to rename PTSD as PTSI has a fundamental flaw that arises from the focus on the wrong half of the name's formula: the description of the Observed Condition. While an injury connects the suffering to the lived experience more directly than a disorder, a problem arises from ignoring the significance of the Etiological Referent. One may become injured post-trauma from a hurricane, a fire, a rape, an automobile accident, or an assault in the streets of Manhattan. While the symptoms of post-traumatic stress may be similar and/or identical, such a generalized Etiological Referent provides more meaning as a category of conditions than it does as a single, generalized condition. Thus, Ochberg and Shay's argument, and by extension that of the U.S. military, ignores the crucial element that a name changed to something more directly connected to the lifeworld of the soldier could provide

meaningful, positive change. As a result, one must read the proposal to rename PTSD as PTSI a symbolic action rather than a push for meaningful change.

### **Scapegoating “Disorder” and Symbolic Expiation**

While the psychological disorder model for PTSD has its limitations that arise from the stigma associated with mental illness, the injury model as articulated by Ochberg and Shay not only fails to articulate how changing the classification will remove the stigma associated with mental illness but also creates new dangers for misdiagnoses with the potential to negatively impact the post-military life – not just the career – of suffering soldiers. Ultimately, this narrow focus on etiology that links post-traumatic stress to the realm of physical injury excludes the larger network of social factors that converge in the military and lead soldiers to be averse to seeking treatment for PTSD, most notably the hypermasculine warrior ethos of military culture that stigmatizes mental illness by dismissing psychological breakdown as the “isolated acts of cowards or the weak”.<sup>380</sup> Given that Ochberg and Shay articulate no desire to change the cultural norms within the US Armed Forces that both create and perpetuate this stigmatization, one must inquire if the desire for the name change functions as a symbolic expiation of guilt that articulates healing through a scapegoating of the concept of psychological disorder, rendering the body of the military whole and healthy and the theatre of war free from blame for the psychological suffering of soldiers.

Scapegoating is the rituatlistic drama of naming an individual or a group as the etiology of social suffering and hardship with the entailing argument that if this element is removed from society, then all will be well. Burke identifies a three-phase structure to scapegoating: (1) an identification between the community and the victim, (2) a polarization phase wherein the victim

---

<sup>380</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*: 70.

is ritualistically separated from the community so it may be driven out without fear of reciprocal violence, and (3) a symbolic rebirth wherein the community achieves purification through dialectical opposition to the victim.<sup>381</sup> Girard places this drama on the social plane by arguing that the crimes attributed to the scapegoat are those which threaten the social order.<sup>382</sup> Communities often scapegoat an individual or a group in times of great disaster or when there is fear that disaster will befall them if the community is not purified. The victim must be part of the community so they can psychologically connect the suffering of the one for its evil to their potential to suffer for their own evil, but the victim must be distinct enough so as to be acceptable as a mitigating sacrifice and able to forestall reciprocal violence.<sup>383</sup> Belkin argues that scapegoating, the “stigmatization and purging of outcasts,” “has been a central if not required military strategy for disavowing abjection”. Such disavowal allows the military to remove any contaminating elements that do not fit the model of the “normatively masculine warrior”.<sup>384</sup>

The structure of Ochberg and Shay’s argument follows the steps of scapegoating that Burke outlines. They begin by identifying that the other-to-be-demonized, “disorder,” is a part of the community but causing problems when they argue that “General Chiarelli’s request springs from the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces, which finds the label ‘Disorder’ to be stigmatizing”.<sup>385</sup> The series of antitheses and analogies function to separate the “disorder” from “injury,” which is a known and accepted hazard of combat service. They conclude with a final plea that does not articulate the culmination of the rite but promises a more utopian vision where

---

<sup>381</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 406.

<sup>382</sup> Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat*, translated by Yvonne Freccero. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 14-15.

<sup>383</sup> Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 22.

<sup>384</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 63.

<sup>385</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

soldiers no longer suffer in silence. “The time has come to listen to the labeled and to do what we can do to lessen the stigma and shame that inhibits our patients from receiving our help.”<sup>386</sup>

While argued for laudable reasons, the injury model of PTSD has the potential to inflict more suffering upon soldiers whose combat-induced psychological collapse cannot be directly linked to a single event where the soldier made contact with an external traumatic force.

The injury model of PTSD seeks to polarize the community against the *disorder* aspect of the condition by magnifying the significance of the external etiology of the stressor that instigates a transformation of neurophysiology through contact by experience. This identification of PTSD with a model of physiological injury locates the damage in the realm of the physical that facilitates a division of post-traumatic stress as a condition from the realm of psychological disorder. By dividing post-traumatic stress from psychological disorders – even when such stress arises from combat experience – Ochberg and Shay reaffirm the long-held belief common to military cultures that psychological collapse during war is either a result of moral weakness or a predisposition<sup>387</sup> – not something brought into being by the extreme stresses of war and the hypermasculine warrior ethos of military culture that stigmatizes and punishes weakness. By locating post-traumatic stress in the physical realm, a realm with which the military is comfortable and familiar, the psychological aspects of the condition become diminished in significance and separated from that which connects the condition to the soldier’s experience. The division that separates (combat-induced) post-traumatic stress from the model of psychological disorder alienates the shared elements between the condition and the community (the experiences of combat) in a way that reaffirms the military stigma against mental illness and transforms the construct of psychological disorder into a representation of all the iniquities of

---

<sup>386</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>387</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now;” Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 70-73.

military culture.<sup>388</sup> Thus, through this polarization, the stigmatization of mental illness ceases to be a product of the warrior ethos of military culture but a product of the naming of what is “by its nature” a physical, combat-induced injury as a psychological disorder. Stigmatization becomes a symptom of a problem and not a contributing factor that exasperates a condition.

By driving the “psychological disorder” from the community, Ochberg and Shay hope to drive out the iniquity of stigmatization that arose *because* of the application of the construct to soldiers who are not disordered but whose “brain function is injured”.<sup>389</sup> While in the traditional ritual drama, the community achieves purification and psychological healing through the act of driving out the scapegoat,<sup>390</sup> what Ochberg and Shay describe is the promise of healing that will occur once the scapegoat – the construct of psychological disorder – is exiled. This desire is evident from the opening salvo, where Ochberg and Shay articulate that “This request pertains only to the name,” which the U.S. Armed Forces finds “to be stigmatizing, compared to the term ‘Injury,’ which is not”. Ochberg and Say articulate that the name change itself will “reduce barriers to care”. They articulate that having the term disorder evokes in soldiers feelings that create an “aversion to intervention,” which they suggest the term injury will not. It is the label “disorder” that causes the stigma that limits the career prospects of soldiers, creates doubt in their abilities and moral character among those in (military and/or political) power, and makes them averse to seek treatment;<sup>391</sup> therefore, if the label “disorder” is removed, it will remove the stigma and create in the soldiers a desire to seek treatment. The implied argument follows the popular connotative uses of these words, granting a negative valence to “label” due to its

---

<sup>388</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 406.

<sup>389</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”

<sup>390</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 406; Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 50-51.

<sup>391</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” 7.

arbitrary, subjective, and externality of its application while granting a positive valence to “term” due to its association with empirical and objective reality.

Therefore, the scapegoating of the label “disorder” becomes a symbolic expiation of guilt for the role military culture has played in perpetuating the bias against those soldiers with psychiatric distress. While no statement of guilt is uttered, as Burke states, “the terms in which we conceive of redemption can help shape the terms in which we conceive the guilt that is to be redeemed”.<sup>392</sup> That the request to change the name “springs from the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces, which finds the label ‘Disorder’ to be stigmatizing, compared to the term ‘Injury,’ which is not”<sup>393</sup> suggests a recognition that a problem within the culture exists that stigmatizes mental illness. A closer analysis of this statement reveals a subtle bias articulated through the designation of “disorder” as a “label” and of “injury” as a “term.” While label and term are often used synonymously by the general populace, their differing connotations reveal a belief that a “label” is a designation given as part of a heuristic system (an arbitrary designation) while a “term” is a designation that identifies a thing (an empirical designation). The move toward redemption begins with a semantic distinction made between an empirical term and an arbitrary term, wherein stigma arises not merely from a generalized cultural perception but cultural perception and organizational usage within the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces. From there it moves toward a ritualistic purification of the culture group through a proposed scapegoating rite wherein the sins of the culture are symbolically inscribed upon the body of a communicative symbol – the word “disorder” as locus of belief clusters of “weakness,” “untrustworthiness,” and

---

<sup>392</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 218.

<sup>393</sup> Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now.”



“unfitness,”<sup>394</sup> – and then driven from the vocabulary and, by extension the ideology, of the community.

To be effective both in reducing stigma and in encouraging soldiers to seek treatment, a significant change in the ideology of military culture that reinforces the communality among soldiers both horizontally as brothers-in arms and vertically along the entire chain of command must precede the proposal to rename PTSD as PTSI. In previous work, Shay articulates that breaching the barricade of institutionalized stigma requires communalization of suffering and feel connected to one’s social group.<sup>395</sup> Without this change in cultural ideology that recognizes the psychological dangers – the invisible wounds – of war, the name change will itself be a meaningless, arbitrarily-imposed label with the potential to impose greater feelings of isolation in those suffering from the psychological stress of war but who cannot pinpoint a single, discrete event that caused their suffering. The campaign for renaming and reclassifying PTSD becomes little more than an attempt to symbolically expiate the U.S. Armed Forces of the guilt it believes itself to bear for the psychological wounds inflicted both through combat and through institutionalized stigmatization of those who suffer from those psychological wounds. This institutionalized stigmatization erects a barricade between suffering soldiers and those who are best able to help communalize their suffering. Therefore, the campaign to rename Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as Post-Traumatic Stress Injury, when read through as a social drama of scapegoating, provides healing to the social body of the U.S. Armed Forces through a symbolic expiation of the guilt that removes the contagion of “psychological disorder” – and by extension those parts of the social body, soldiers, afflicted by the contagion – in a manner that

---

<sup>394</sup> Fischer and Schell, “The Role and Importance of the ‘D’ in PTSD,” 7; Ochberg and Shay, “Change Now;” Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 70-73.

<sup>395</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 39.

narrows the definition of acceptable combat-induced stress so as to limit both the responsibility and liability the U.S. Armed Forces incurs for practices that place soldiers at risk for psychological collapse and for ideologies that create and sustain the belief that psychological suffering and mental illness as marks of weakness, untrustworthiness, unfitness, and of unmanliness.

To provide an example of a name change that could be effective through returning the Etiological Referent to the lived experiences of the soldiers, consider the epigraph that began this chapter, which references a routine by the late comedian George Carlin. During his mockery of the political use of language to hide meaning, Carlin argued that the name “Shell Shock” “almost sounds like the guns themselves” and that as each new war emerged, the name for this combat-induced condition became progressively more sanitized to the point where “the humanity’s been completely squeezed out of the phrase”. Carlin concludes, to thunderous applause, by stating, "I betcha if we'd still been calling it Shell-Shock, some of those Vietnam veterans might have gotten the attention they needed at the time".<sup>396</sup> Comedy, as Burke articulates, warns against danger through a shift from “*crime to stupidity* (emphasis original)” by illuminating through ridicule the errors that those in the midst of the play cannot see.<sup>397</sup> Through humor, Carlin sought to ridicule the scientific search for precision that removes both any trace of humanity from the condition that would allow for communalization and any trace of culpability that would arise from the true etiology: war. By renaming PTSD “Shell Shock,” the diagnostic nomenclature would identify the condition’s etiology as the culmination of the extra-ordinary lived experiences during combat situations of a soldier that alter response patterns to stressful situations. “Shell” connects to the physicality of the battlefield while “Shock” connects to the

---

<sup>396</sup> George Carlin, *George Carlin: Doin’ It Again*, Dir. Rocco Urbisci (HBO: 1990).

<sup>397</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 41.

psychological alterations. This specific name change, or one similar, could facilitate the normalization of the condition and communalization with other soldiers, which as Shay has previously argued in *Achilles in Vietnam*, is the only way to facilitate healing.

Post-Traumatic Stress Injury, like the label it seeks to replace, continues the dehumanizing process by separating the condition from the suite of experiences that instigated its onset and obscures the responsibility that the hypermasculine culture of the U.S. Armed Forces bears for promoting an ideal based around physical perfection that treats psychiatric distress as a mark of weakness. To be an effective name change, the new designation must connect directly to the life-world of the community. In the case of combat-induced psychological conditions, the new name must reflect, through an Etiological Referent, that it was the soldier's experience(s) *in war* that brought about the transformation of his or her stress reaction. Though the reclassification of the condition as an injury and not a disorder moves the appellation closer to the physical world, to facilitate the necessary communalization of suffering, the name itself must leave no room for doubt that war either caused, hastened, or triggered the condition in the individual soldier, and the referent "Post-Traumatic" continues to be clinically accurate but disconnected from the direct, physical life-world of the soldiers who suffer. Therefore, the proposal to rename PTSD as PTSI is a symbolic expiation of guilt that seeks to purify U.S. military culture of the responsibility it bears to those whose psyches war irreparably wounds in a manner that demands no significant and meaningful transformation of those aspects of the culture that stigmatize mental suffering and ostracize those who suffer. And as the military functions as agents of the United States government, this proposal further distances the government, military-industrial complex, and the nation's aristocracy from the ethical obligation to care for soldiers that arises from the rhetorical choice to name soldiers as heroes.

## Conclusions

Frank Ochberg and Jonathan Shay are both well-known and well-respected psychiatrists and advocates for those afflicted by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Their support for retired General Peter Chiarelli's campaign to rename the condition Post-Traumatic Stress Injury arises from honest and heartfelt desires to reduce the stigma associated with PTSD that creates a barrier preventing those afflicted from seeking care. However, the model they present has several flaws. The psychiatric community faults the model for imprecision and lack of empirical support for the claim that changing the name will reduce stigma.<sup>398</sup> The analysis in this chapter explores the argument Ochberg and Shay make that analogically compares PTSD to four physical injuries: epilepsy, noise-induced hearing loss, eclipse blindness, and traumatic amputation. While the movement presented laudably makes visible the invisible wounds of war through a rhetorical progression that moves from invisible damage to visible damage, the metonymic reduction that seeks to locate the more abstract, metaphorical conception of psychological injury within the realm of a concrete, physical injury overextends the analogical comparison beyond the point where it functions to construct meaning and enters the zone where the comparison is taken for identification. Through their identification of a shared essence between PTSD and physical injury, Ochberg and Shay magnify the external etiology of PTSD that instigates an irreversible change in neurophysiology that inhibits normal brain functionality. Concurrent with this PTSD-physical injury identification is the use of antithesis that divides PTSD from psychological disorder by diminishing the significance of the psychological symptoms and social functionality caused by the condition. Through this division, they symbolically inscribes the sins of U.S. Armed Forces ideology that stigmatizes mental illness and empower the label of "disorder" to

---

<sup>398</sup> APA, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder."

function as a scapegoat – a linguistic vessel of symbolic expiation whose exile will bring about redemption and healing for the military community afflicted by the plague of soldiers suffering in silence.

While Jones and Wessely critique the depiction of PTSD in historical literature as unscientific and imprecise,<sup>399</sup> they are remiss to not clarify that their suggestion applies to the specific condition diagnosed in contemporary psychiatry as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Psychiatric suffering and collapse is as old as war itself. Regardless of what one names its manifestation: breaking of ranks, fear, cowardice, oath-breaking, depression, or PTSD, the fact remains that this manifestation, this psychological collapse, becomes more inevitable the longer a soldier remains in combat, and since antiquity, military philosophy and heroic myths, such as *Beowulf*, treat psychological collapse as a result of moral weakness and/or a predisposition to mental illness. Though modern psychology and psychiatry have made great advances in understanding the causes, the neurophysiological transformations, and the methods of treatment for PTSD and other trauma-related mental illnesses, the U.S. Armed Forces continues to operate on the assumption that such collapses can be avoided through preventative screening of potential recruits and that those afflicted by such conditions are “weak” – which results in the afflicted being viewed as untrustworthy and unfit for service and unworthy of rewards such as the Purple Heart, which is awarded to those *physically* wounded in the line of combat and not to those *psychologically* wounded. As long as humans wage war, soldiers will experience and perpetrate events that push them beyond the limits of their psychological endurance. However, until the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces recognizes the roles that its operational uses of mental health diagnoses and its own ideology toward psychological distress play in creating and perpetuating

---

<sup>399</sup> Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD*, 173-174.

the barriers to seeking care, soldiers afflicted with PTSD and other mental illnesses will continue to be averse to seeking treatment.

That the current military (and generalized cultural) interpretation of psychological collapse as a marker of weakness parallels that of heroic myth, as evidenced from *Beowulf* where psychological collapse, as depicted by the flight of the twelve *duguð*, is depicted as a sign of cowardice appears to contradict the rest of this dissertation where the heroic offers a corrective that directs contemporary society to a proper response to the return of soldiers who are physically, psychologically, or socially “dead” as a result of their combat service. However, recalling the central question of this dissertation, it proves telling that one major point of alignment between current discourses and the heroic is one that glorifies perfection to the point of ascribing a negative valence to the results of psychological collapse that results from the horrors of war. That there has been little, if any, meaningful change in military culture’s evaluation of psychological distress, collapse, and mental illness since the ancient world underscores Ochberg and Shay’s letter to the APA. After all, Shay wrote two books comparing the psychological experiences of Vietnam soldiers and veterans to the ancient heroes Achilles and Odysseus. As a result, they call for a change in evaluation that will transform the response of those in the military. And while changing the name should be a part of that transformative process, changing the name alone will not be enough.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other psychological conditions are dangerous, invisible wounds of war. Recent figures suggest that one-third of all soldiers treated at VA hospitals seek treatment for war-related PTSD.<sup>400</sup> Current conflicts in the Middle East have seen

---

<sup>400</sup> Gregg Zoroya, “Flood of PTSD Cases Coming, Scientists Warn,” *usatoday.com*, 20 June 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/06/20/ptsd-va-pentagon-scientists-institute-medicine/10764991/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

the rise of PTSD to near-Vietnam levels and the co-occurrence of PTSD with Traumatic Brain Injury.<sup>401</sup> These claims often prevents veterans from obtaining gainful employment either due to a disability diagnosis, which often provides financial compensation, or due to the fear resulting from the stigma associated with mental illness in general and with combat-induced PTSD in particular. U.S. society needs to have frank and honest conversations about mental health issues if the nation is to combat the stigma. More germane to the focus of this dissertation, the nation must address the significant impact of war-related injuries, both physiological and psychological, on the post-discharge employment potential of veterans. While the next chapter will more fully discuss the economic significance, what must be remembered is that, these issues are both practical from an economic perspective and moral from a mythic perspective. Since time immemorial, the actions of the warrior have served to defend the political and economic interests of the aristocracy and, through that action, to legitimate the rule of said aristocracy. The failure of a nation's aristocracy, in this case, the United States government, to provide adequate care for those who defend its interests and legitimate its rule through warfare, is a violation of the reciprocal relationship that becomes real through the mythic power called into being with the rhetorical invocation of the name "Hero" for those who serve.

Symbolic expiation that avoids responsibility is a serious problem, even if those who make the scapegoating argument do so out of an honest desire to help, because it lends credence to erroneous beliefs that those who suffer from psychological wounds of war might be, in some way at least, responsible for their own suffering. Additionally, if the sufferers are at fault and the military and its wars are not, then it becomes easier for governmental agencies to deny claims for disability and health care. In a time when the VA hospital system faces a crisis over

---

<sup>401</sup> Burke, Olney, Degeneffe, "A New Disability for Rehabilitation Counselors".

mismanagement of care that has caused many in Congress to contemplate turning veteran health care over to the private sector. This would drastically impact the care that veterans with PTSD receive, because the majority of the specialists in that area work at the VA hospital system, and should that care be privatized, the costs would likely increase and veterans would face increased competition for appointments with the inclusion of civilians. The next chapter shall discuss how the move to privatize veteran health care not only violates the obligations that a society's aristocracy owes to the soldiers it sends to war but also reorients the heroic narrative in a manner that strips agency from veterans while making a shallow, surface argument that such a move would provide them with greater choice in health care options.



CHAPTER IV:  
CLASH OF THE GOD TERMS:  
CONFLICTING IDEOLOGICAL METAPHORS REGARDING VETERAN HEALTH CARE

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." Matthew 25:41-43*

“These are our American heroes. They deserve to be taken care of.”<sup>402</sup> “But one thing that we do not want to do, Madam President, is politicize the well-being of America’s heroes.”<sup>403</sup> Representative Ann Wagner (R-MO) and Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) uttered each of those statements, respectively, as the United States Congress debated a series of bills put forward in response to the national uproar over the inability of veterans to access healthcare services from the Veterans Affairs system in a timely manner. Mismanagement at the higher administrative levels leads to an average waiting time of 115 days for appointments and where appointments for serious war-related injuries like PTSD or TBI near one year.<sup>404</sup> Veterans are often not told that an appointment has been scheduled for them until twenty-four hours before the appointment, making travel difficult for many. There are numerous factors influencing the wait-times for patients, not the least of which is that there are 1,400 unfilled primary care physician positions within the 150-hospital system at the VA,<sup>405</sup> which is symptomatic of the national shortage of

---

<sup>402</sup> Tim Mak, “It’s a Miracle! Congress Compromises on VA Reform Bill,” *thedailybeast.com*, 29 July 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/29/it-s-a-miracle-congress-compromises-on-va-reform-bill.html> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>403</sup> Richard Rowe, “Bernie Sanders Slams Tea Party Idiot Marc Rubio for Voting Against Veterans’ Benefits (Video),” *atlasleft.org*, 23 May 2014, <http://atlasleft.org/bernie-sanders-slams-tea-party-idiot-marco-rubio-for-voting-against-veterans-benefits-video/> Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>404</sup> “Watchdog: Veterans Waited 115 Days on Average for Care at Phoenix Hospital,” *huffingtonpost.com*, 28 May 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/28/veterans-affairs-phoenix\\_n\\_5405419.html?ncid=fbklnkushpimg00000063](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/28/veterans-affairs-phoenix_n_5405419.html?ncid=fbklnkushpimg00000063) Accessed 29 May 2015.

<sup>405</sup> American Board of Physician Specialties, “VA Physician Shortage Exasperated by Physician Board Certification Politics,” *abpsus.org*, Accessed 26 July 2014, <http://www.abpsus.org/va-physician-shortage-and-abps> Accessed 29 May 2015.

16,000 primary care physicians.<sup>406</sup> This shortage requires that VA physicians work thirteen-hour days and see upwards of 2,000 patients per year.<sup>407</sup> A CNN report uncovered that as many as 7,000 veterans were on a backlog list for routine procedures such as colonoscopies and endoscopies in Columbia, South Carolina, and in Atlanta, Georgia facilities.<sup>408</sup> Nationally, it is estimated that as many as 1,000 veterans have died due to the inability to receive timely care from the VA hospital system.<sup>409</sup> And the Phoenix, Arizona VA hospital, as with many others in the nation, has been accused of falsifying appointment records in a manner that underreports both wait times and the number of veterans who have died while waiting for care.<sup>410</sup>

In addition to the complications of scheduling appointments, there have been numerous issues surrounding the treatment, specifically, the use of pharmaceutical treatments for physical and mental illness. In the past few years, the VA hospital system has come under scrutiny for over-prescribing medications, leading to addiction, blackouts, violent episodes, and death.<sup>411</sup> If Veterans also learn that should they be prescribed an antidepressant that helps their condition, the VA may order that the patient change drugs if a generic version is unavailable. Additionally, should a veteran move, he or she will be unable to obtain a prescription refill at a different VA hospital until after scheduling an appointment to be reevaluated. Such veterans must start over in

---

<sup>406</sup> Marsha Mercer, "How to Beat the Doctor Shortage," *aarp.org*, , <http://www.aarp.org/health/medicare-insurance/info-03-2013/how-to-beat-doctor-shortage.html> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>407</sup> Richard A. Oppel, Jr. and Abby Goodnough, "Doctor Shortage is Cited in Delays at V.A. Hospitals," *nytimes.com*, 29 May 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/us/doctor-shortages-cited-in-va-hospital-waits.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/us/doctor-shortages-cited-in-va-hospital-waits.html?_r=0); Kate Randall, "Bipartisan Deal on US Veterans' Health Care Includes Step Toward Privatization," *wsws.org*, 6 June 2014, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/06/06/vete-j06.html> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>408</sup> Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black, and Drew Griffin, "Hospital Delays are Killing America's War Veterans," *cnn.com*, 20 November 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/19/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>409</sup> Curt Devine, "Bad VA Care May Have Killed More than 1,000 Veterans, Senator's Report Says," *cnn.com*, 24 June 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/24/us/senator-va-report/> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>410</sup> Scott Bronstein, Drew Griffin, and Nelli Black, "VA Deaths Covered up to Make Statistics Look Better, Whistle-Blower Says," *cnn.com*, 24 June 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/23/us/phoenix-va-deaths-new-allegations/> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>411</sup> Charley Keyes, "After Decade of War, Concerns about Over-Medicated Military," *cnn.com*, 3 June 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/06/03/military.over.medication/> Accessed 26 July 2014.

the system, because of either poor or nonexistent communication between hospitals.<sup>412</sup> But not all veterans receive the medications prescribed to them. As Valerie Riviello, a former VA nurse, reports, 2013 saw over 5,000 recorded instances of VA hospice nurses diverting morphine away from patients and replacing it with water or other substances. As she articulates, “This means our hospice patients were not getting their pain medication. The veterans were dying in pain.”<sup>413</sup> Mismanagement, misdiagnosis, and misappropriation of resources are hallmarks of the current crisis in the Veterans Administration hospital system.

This crisis is troubling and warrants both critique and systematic reform, because the implications of veteran health care extend beyond the bodies of the veterans and the walls of the hospital and into the economic and social dimensions of society. Military service is believed to correlate with improved socioeconomic advancement through the attainment of skills, of access to health care through the VA hospital system and to education through the G.I. Bill, and through the honor that comes from serving in the military in a nation that valorizes military service. Often, as both Belkin and Gibson discuss, ethnic and religious minorities capitalize on the positive social valence of veteran status to help overcome the negative valence associated with ethnic or religious minority status and obtain higher levels of socioeconomic stability<sup>414</sup> Numerous sociological studies conclude that, often, military service “can be a positive turning

---

<sup>412</sup> Melinda Henneberger, “Parents Tell Congress how VA Failed their Children: Veterans who Committed Suicide,” *washingtonpost.com*, 10 July 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html) Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>413</sup> Valerie Riviello, “Nurse Exposes VA Hospital: Stolen Drugs, Tortured Veterans,” *nypost.com*, 7 July 2014, <http://nypost.com/2014/07/12/nurse-exposes-va-hospital-stolen-drugs-tortured-veterans/> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>414</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 63-65; Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*, 71.

point for men (and perhaps women) from disadvantaged backgrounds because it ‘knives off’ prior negative influences and creates a ‘bridging environment’ that provides access to educational, training, and health care resources”.<sup>415</sup>

However, the possibility and promise of improved socioeconomic conditions does not materialize for all veterans. Humensky and her colleagues note that while veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, when employed, have higher education and income levels than non-veterans in their demographics, they do have higher odds of unemployment, often resulting from disability.<sup>416</sup> As Burke, Olney, and Degeneffe discuss, the two most common injuries from these wars are Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. These two conditions often occur together due to the guerilla and skirmish tactics necessary for survival in these wars. And as these scholars, and note, physical and mental health play an essential role in successful reintegration into civilian society on both personal and economic fronts.<sup>417</sup> As MacLean states in his literature review of sociological studies focusing on the link between military service in combat zones and socioeconomic and employment status upon return to civilian life, “these findings suggest that veterans experience wars as traumatic events that may lead to unemployment and lower earnings”.<sup>418</sup> MacLean’s findings demonstrate that as wars become longer, the likelihood of a soldier becoming disabled and unemployed increases significantly, especially for those between the ages of 25 and 55, the prime working years.<sup>419</sup> And while the difficulty of veterans to find work is nothing new, as severe physical and

---

<sup>415</sup> Andrew S. London, Colleen M. Heflin, and Janet M. Wilmoth, “Work-Related Disability, Veteran Status, and Poverty: Implications for Family Well-Being,” *Journal of Poverty* 15 no. 3 (2011): 330-349, 334.

<sup>416</sup> Jennifer L. Humensky, Neil Jordan, Kevin T. Stroupe, and Denise M. Hynes, “How are Iraq/Afghanistan-Era Veterans Faring in the Labor Market?” *Armed Forces & Society* 39 no. 1 (2013): 158-183.

<sup>417</sup> Burke, Olney, Degeneffe, “A New Disability for Rehabilitation Counselors,” 7.

<sup>418</sup> Alair MacLean, “The Things They Carry: Combat, Disability, and Unemployment among U.S. Men,” *American Sociological Review* 75 no. 4 (2010): 563-585, 565.

<sup>419</sup> MacLean, “The Things They Carry,” 573.

psychological injury percentages among veterans rise, as the recovery of the domestic economy continues to be slow and uncertain, and as the current military involvement in the Middle East transitions into a state of perpetual war, the interconnectedness of all problems that stem from soldiers being wounded in combat will become a more visible, rancid, festering wound that remains open for all to see.

The public and media outcry that resulted from the current VA health system scandal has led to numerous firings within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The most notable of these has been the resignation of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki on 30 May 2014.<sup>420</sup> The shocking revelations illuminated by this crisis of health care for discharged United States soldiers emerges at a historical moment when, amidst a fifteen-year long war on terrorist forces in the Middle East, suicide rates among veterans have increased to an average of twenty-two per day. Currently the United States Congress debates a bill put forward by Senators Bernie Sanders and John McCain that seeks to end the stalemate arising from the propositions put forward by two broadly defined ideological camps: those who argue for expanded public funding for the VA hospital system and those who argue that veteran health care should be handled by the private sector. This bill (S.2450), according to press releases, would improve VA accountability, authorize the construction of 27 new VA facilities, earmark \$500 million in already authorized funding for the purposes of hiring new physicians and nurses, and offer veterans the ability to seek care at a non-VA facility, pending VA review and approval, should they not receive care at a timely fashion and/or live more than forty miles from a VA facility. This distance exemption is proposed as part of a three-year trial basis.

---

<sup>420</sup> Jake Miller, "VA Secretary Eric Shinseki Resigns," *cbsnews.com*, 30 May 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/va-secretary-eric-shinseki-resigns/> Accessed 26 July 2014.

As many Veterans' groups and media outlets praise the compromise as a positive step forward, CATO Institute senior fellow Michael Tanner, in a piece written for *National Review Online*, condemns the bipartisan effort as business as usual for big government. He states that, "neither the House nor the Senate bill would fundamentally change the way that government provides health care to our veterans". Furthermore, "the VA would continue to operate one of the world's largest health-care systems, building and owning hospitals, hiring doctors, and providing care directly to millions of veterans".<sup>421</sup> This piece, "Congress Doubles Down on VA Failures," is Tanner's second piece on the issue, following his earlier piece for *National Review Online*, "A Better Way than the VA," and in both pieces, Tanner argues that veteran health care should be turned over to the private sector.<sup>422</sup> Tanner's pieces represent a larger discourse, wherein libertarians see every failure of a government agency are evidence for dismantling the bloated monstrosity that is "Big Government." Both sides of the debate state a desire to help soldiers but disagree on how to accomplish the goal of providing veterans with the necessary health care. Like those who seek to privatize other publically-funded programs such as Social Security and Medicaid, the movement to privatize veteran health emerges from beliefs that personal freedom – in terms of freedom to choose – and unregulated market competition will grant veterans the best care possible.

While the stated end goal of both sides is identical, the two solutions, unsurprisingly, arise from different ideological frames and have different implications for veteran care, for the relationship between the soldier and the U.S. government, and for social discourses surrounding

---

<sup>421</sup> Michael Tanner, "Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures," *nationalreview.com*, 2 July 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/381729/congress-wants-double-down-va-failures-michael-tanner> Accessed 26 July 2014.

<sup>422</sup> Michael Tanner, "A Better Way than the VA?", *nationalreview.com*, 20 Oct. 2010, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/250327/better-way-va-michael-tanner> Accessed 26 July 2014.

war and those sent to fight. The two solutions arise from the ethical imperatives of the complex metaphors that offer their perspectives on how to read the crisis surrounding veteran health care. These metaphors arise from the guiding first principles of each side in the debate over what should be done. The guiding principles and their associated metaphors connect directly to how we should respond to the soldiers who fight, who have fought, and who will fight in future wars. The push to expand coverage within the VA hospital system relies upon the metaphor of “soldier-is-hero,” which arises from a guiding principle of obligation. The move to reduce government expenditures and investment through privatization relies upon the metaphor of “soldier-is-captive,” which arises from a guiding principle of freedom. The former draws upon the language and rhetoric of myth, while the latter invokes an image of a monstrous, bloated, capricious government from whom the weak and wounded veterans must be saved.

This chapter will more fully explore the latter of these guiding principles and their associated metaphors through a critique of two articles in *National Review* CATO Institute columnist Michael Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA?” and “Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures.” Through these two pieces, this chapter will demonstrate that the move to privatize the VA is not one of providing better care for soldiers but a political move to divest the United States’ aristocracy of the ethical obligations placed upon the aristocracy as result of the reciprocal relationship invoked through the use of heroic rhetoric – rhetoric that politicians continue to employ to stir feelings of patriotism that move citizens to venture into the dangerous wasteland of war. Taken in the context of the discourses surrounding this scandal, these two texts exemplify how the underlying metaphor of soldier-is-a-captive both animates the argument for privatization and restructures the heroic myth to make the private sector the great warrior hero who intervenes to save the wounded, weak soldiers from the dragon that is “Big Government” in

a manner that presents an overt narrative of heroic action on the part of the Republican Party as a party that “supports our troops” while covertly denying their aristocratic obligations to the warriors who fought for their benefit invoked through the use of heroic rhetoric.

### **Heremod and Health Care: Aristocratic Obligation**

Connecting the current scandal and crisis in health care at the Veterans Administration Hospital to ancient heroic myth appears, on the surface, to be laughable. One would likely, and logically, argue that ancient myths offer no guidance in properly interpreting and responding to this exigence, because the concept of a government-sponsored hospital and health care system specifically for veterans did not exist in ancient times. And were one to focus solely on the specifics of this exigence, one would be correct. However, as shall be demonstrated in this chapter, the issue at hand is not the care received at the VA hospital, which is superior to that of the private sector, but whether or not the government should continue to fund the entire system. As this chapter shall further demonstrate, the underlying motives reflect differing answers to the question of obligation: what, *if anything*, does Congress owe to those it sends to fight war. And that issue – economic obligation – is an issue often discussed in heroic myths. While it would prove easy to demonstrate through example how heroic myth provides the idealized model for the obligations between a society’s aristocracy (Congress) and its warrior heroes (soldiers), such a simplistic path would ignore the power of myth to present episodes where violation of one’s obligations results in suffering. For those familiar with the classical tradition, the obvious example of the latter occurs in the *Iliad* when Agamemnon retracts his gift of the slave girl Briseis from Achilles, resulting in the angered hero storming off the battlefield and entreating his divine mother to convince Zeus to turn the battle against his lord. However, the importance of economic generosity on the part of kings is a recurrent theme of *Beowulf*, being discussed from



the opening scene of Scyld Scefing's funeral through the famous section dubbed Hroðgar's sermon to the titular character's death and funeral episodes that conclude the poem. Before discussing Tanner's argument for privatizing veteran health care, this chapter shall briefly discuss the underlying issue of economic obligation as depicted in *Beowulf* through the discursive techniques used to link praise-worthy kingship to economic obligation and through the negative example of King Heremod presented in Hroðgar's sermon.

The act of gift-exchange, repeated numerous times throughout *Beowulf*, calls attention to the "contractual importance of accepting royal generosity". By accepting a gift, a warrior becomes a thane to a lord, and acknowledges the bonds of fealty. By giving a gift, a king acknowledges his obligation to provide his thanes with additional economic and symbolic support, (symbolized through gift-giving, in exchange for the performance of war-deeds of loyalty until the thane died.<sup>423</sup> On the most basic poetic level, the significance of kingly generosity occurs throughout the poem through the use of kennings (synecdoches) for both the king and the king's hall. Kings, such as Hroðgar, are referred to as *goldwine gumena* ["gold-friend of men"] three times, *bēaggyfan* ["ring-giver"], and *synces bryttan* ["giver of treasures"] twice.<sup>424</sup> King Hygelac is named *goldwine Gēata* ["gold-friend of the Geats"] twice.<sup>425</sup> Heorot is repeatedly named the *gifheal* ["gift-hall"] where Hroðgar sits upon a throne called the *gifstōl* ["gift-seat"] from whence he dispenses treasure to his warband.<sup>426</sup> Through poetic language and repetition of scenes of kingly generosity, the poet explicitly and elegantly links gift-giving, a symbol of aristocratic obligation to the moral character of a king. A *good* king exhibits the trait

---

<sup>423</sup><sup>423</sup> Fred G. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 75; Nicholas Brooks, "Arms, Status, and Warfare in Late-Saxon England," in *Ethelred the Unready*, ed. David Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978): 81-103, 91-92.

<sup>424</sup> For examples see: *Beowulf*, 1171a, 1102b, 1922b.

<sup>425</sup> For examples see: *Beowulf*, 2419a.

<sup>426</sup> For examples see: *Beowulf*, 838, 2327.

of generosity through the performance of gift-giving to his loyal warriors. Kingly generosity that provides economic stability *after battle* (Anglo-Saxon and other Germanic kings dispensed treasure in their halls after completing a campaign) proves so essential and intimately connected to proper aristocratic behavior in the mind of the *Beowulf* poet that he chose generosity as his primary trait for synecdochal representation of proper kingship.

As metaphoric equipment for living, it proves unsurprising that mythic discussions of reciprocal economic obligations between Anglo-Saxon kings and the warriors who serve them would be depicted through the symbolic representation of that reciprocity: the giving and receiving of gifts.<sup>427</sup> Scott Gwara states that the relationship between a king and his warband is one of reciprocity “in which retainers in the warband owed service to a king who rewarded them for loyalty” with glory “embodied in status and wealth”.<sup>428</sup> *Beowulf* begins with the death of the founder of the Scylding dynasty: Scyld Scefing, whom we are told was a good king. The poet then describes how just as God dispenses gifts of honor to those who serve Him, so too must a good king dispense gifts of honor to his warrior band.

<i>Swā sceal ge(ong) guma</i>	<i>gōde gewyrcean,</i>
<i>Fromum feohgiftum</i>	<i>on fæder (bea)rme,</i>
<i>Þæt hine on ylde</i>	<i>eft gewunigen</i>
<i>Wilgesīþas,</i>	<i>þonne wiġ cume,</i>
<i>Lēode ġelæsten;</i>	<i>lofdædum sceal</i>
<i>In mægþa ġehwære</i>	<i>man ġeþeon.</i>

So ought a young man	by good works
By the giving of fine gifts	while in his father’s keeping,
That to him in his old age	shall again stand by (him),
Willing companions,	when war comes,
People serve him,	by glorious deeds must,
Amongst his people, everywhere, one prosper. <sup>429</sup>	

<sup>427</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 46.

<sup>428</sup> Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 43.

<sup>429</sup> *Beowulf*, 20-25.

Deeds of daring and courage earn one honor and glory, but the poet reminds the audience that a king is judged not only on such deeds that he performs for his people but also on how (and how well) he rewards those warriors who perform such deeds under his command.<sup>430</sup> At the poem's conclusion, the same statement is made by the Geats about their fallen king, Beowulf, who, in his final words directed the young warrior Wiglaf to distribute the dragon's hoard to his people so that their needs might be met. As the poem concludes, the poet declares of the Geats, "*cwædon þæt hē wære wyruldcuning[a] / manna mildest ond mon(ðw)ærust, / lēodum līðost ond lofgeornost.*" ["they said that he, of all the world's kinds, was the most generous of men and the most gracious, the most protective of his people, and the most eager for glory."]<sup>431</sup> While all scholars agree that Beowulf's funeral is meant to evoke memories of Scyld's in the audience's mind, Lee notes that there is a sense of tragic irony in the mourning of Beowulf's warriors, because twelve of his most decorated and most honored deserted him during the dragon fight that ultimately claimed Beowulf's life. This sense of tragic irony suggests that the poet intends to comment on "the rarity of its [the ideal of mutual loyalty between lord and warrior] embodiment or actualization".<sup>432</sup>

The *Beowulf* poet argues that to be a good king, one must be generous in gift-giving. In a brief narrative, he presents the current Scylding king, Hroðgar embodying this practice in the ideal. After building his large hall named Heorot, the poet says of the king, "*ond þær on innan eall gedælan / geongum ond ealdum swylc him God sealde, / būton folcscare ond feorum gumena.*" ["and there within, he shared with all, young and old, as God gave to him, save for the ancestral lands and the lives of men."]<sup>433</sup> Two things emerge from this example of Hroðgar's

---

<sup>430</sup> Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 211-212.

<sup>431</sup> *Beowulf*, 3180-3182.

<sup>432</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 32.

<sup>433</sup> *Beowulf*, 71-73.

generosity: (1) that his generosity is limited by law and custom and (2) that the generosity of the earthly king to his retainers is to ideally mirror that of the Heavenly King to His worshippers.<sup>434</sup> The latter is clearly articulated in the text, but the former requires some explanation. The term *folcscaru* [“ancestral lands”] refers to land that was subject to the traditional rules of inheritance, thus making ownership of the *folcscaru* a confirmation of someone’s rights as part of a family. While this may seem an obscure limit, bear in mind the entire phrase of the limitation: *būton folcscare ond feorum gumena* [“save for the ancestral lands *and* the lives of men”]. Anglo-Saxon kings did have the power to grant land to their warriors, as shall be discussed shortly, and that gift of land also included those who lived on the land.<sup>435</sup> Land designated as *folcscaru* was, legally and traditionally, required to remain within families.<sup>436</sup> While some may scoff at this depiction of a king who perfectly follows all custom in sharing all that is allotted to him to share as idealistic, such an idealization illuminates myth’s function as equipment for living. Heorot becomes a utopia: a metaphorical place where “the bonds of family and dryht relations [king to warband]...are shown to be potentially strong and good, capable of bringing harmony and great happiness in a hall world”.<sup>437</sup> In an ideal world, there is happiness and joy when warriors serve their king loyally and when the king rewards his warriors generously.

*Beowulf* does depict the ideal relationship between the aristocracy and the warriors, but it also depicts violations in that relationship. Of particular interest to this dissertation is the tale of King Heremod, a selfish and stingy king. Heremod “*nallas bēagas ġeaf / Denum æfter dome; drēamlēas ġebād / þæt hē þæs ġewinnes weorc þrōwade, / lēodbealo longsum.*” [“never did (he)

---

<sup>434</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth Dragon*, 165-166.

<sup>435</sup><sup>435</sup> Stefan Jurasinski, *Ancient Privileges: Beowulf, Law, and the Making of Germanic Antiquity* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 52-53.

<sup>436</sup> Jurasinski, *Ancient Privileges*, 67.

<sup>437</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 245.

give rings / to the Danes for glory; he lived joylessly / so that he the strife's pain suffered, / he was a great evil to his people for a long time.”<sup>438</sup> Beowulf has just returned from his fight against Grendel's mother, and Hroðgar tells him this tale as a warning against kingly greed embodied through a king who refused his obligations and, as a result, when strife befell him, no one stood by his side in battle.<sup>439</sup> While traditional interpretations of this passage suggest that Heremod's greed caused warriors to refuse to fight when he was attacked, responding in a manner similar to Achilles' storming off the battlefield, Gwara suggests that this passage warns of one of the great failings that may befall an Anglo-Saxon king: subordinating the national good to the attainment of personal glory, wherein such kings “become tyrants subjecting their people to ruinous warfare”.<sup>440</sup> Whether the warriors refuse to fight due to a king's greed or the king's greed leads his people into unnecessary and ruinous wars, the meaning of the passage is clear: a king who is greedy and does not reward those who fight for him brings disaster and suffering on his people.

As shall be demonstrated throughout this chapter, the underlying question of Tanner's arguments, and by extension those of the libertarians and right wing, is what do they, as the nation's aristocracy, owe to the soldiers they sent to fight their wars. The answer from the heroic myth is clear: the aristocracy is obligated to provide economic support to those who fought for them. When the aristocracy refuses to perform its obligations, or when it retracts that which it has given to loyal warriors, it violates the moral and contractual agreement that binds the warriors to the aristocracy, which can cause warriors to refuse to fight for the leader, as evidenced by the fates of Heremod in *Beowulf* and Agamemnon in the *Iliad*.<sup>441</sup> David Graeber

---

<sup>438</sup> *Beowulf*, 1719b-1722a.

<sup>439</sup> Lee, *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon*, 64-65.

<sup>440</sup> Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 35.

<sup>441</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 3-7.

argues that markets, and by extension market economies, came into existence as a side effect of kings needing to provision and reward their warriors. “On the other hand, if one simply hands out coins to soldiers and then demands that every family in the kingdom was obliged to pay one of those coins back to you, one would, in one blow, turn one’s entire national economy into a vast machine for the provisioning of soldiers”.<sup>442</sup> Economies rest on the ability of a king to provide for those who defend his lands, and, as has been previously stated, disability is the number one predictor in economic misfortune among veterans, providing health care for veterans is both an economic issue and an obligation of the aristocracy of any society – an obligation that some recognize and some deny.

### **God Terms: One Concept to Rule Them All**

The oppositional solutions for the VA healthcare crisis arise from distinct ideologies, each with a distinct metaphorical image describing the relationship of the soldier/veteran to the government of the United States. These metaphors, more than mere figures of speech, are distinct images of reality that produce a motive for action with “which the intended audience is invited to identify”.<sup>443</sup> Metaphor, Burke states, “tells us something about one character as considered from the point of view of another character. And to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as a *perspective* upon A.”<sup>444</sup> While Aristotle viewed metaphor as a special poetic gift bestowed only on a few,<sup>445</sup> modern theorists, such as Richards, have argued that “metaphor is the omnipresent principle of language”.<sup>446</sup> All communication among humans is symbolic and, on some level, metaphoric. Richards later identified two types of metaphoric

---

<sup>442</sup> Graeber, *Debt*, 49-50.

<sup>443</sup> Robert L. Ivie, “Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War ‘Idealists,’” *Communication Monographs* 54 no. 3 (1987), 165-182, 166.

<sup>444</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 503-504.

<sup>445</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), chap. 22.

<sup>446</sup> I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 92.

linkages: resemblance and attitudinal.<sup>447</sup> The former invokes a specific imagistic similarity, and the latter invokes a suite of social relations connected to how the audience interacts with the vehicle and, therefore, ought to interact with the tenor. This chapter focuses on the latter class of metaphors, which guide and dictate responses to situations by providing a vocabulary of “functions and relationships” that, once the similarity is accepted, suggest an appropriate manner of responding to the person, thing, or situation.<sup>448</sup> For example, to accept that Gregor Samsa *is* a bug, demands that one respond to both his actions and his very presence in the same manner that one would respond to the actions and presence of a bug. Such responses would theoretically range from mild annoyance to murderous violence.

Primary metaphors, like the one drawn from Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” mentioned above, are drawn from the realm of sensory experience wherein humans directly interact with the world around them, and the resemblance, which is taken “as evidence of an *identity*,” directs action through analogical reasoning.<sup>449</sup> Primary metaphors become organized in a hierarchy of meaning based upon the single, guiding principle through which a group interprets and responds to the world around them. Richard Weaver termed these great organizing principles by two names: God Terms and Ultimate Terms. The god term is an expression “about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers”. These single names “set up expectancies of propositional embodiment”<sup>450</sup> Weaver labeled these terms as being “charismatic,” because they “have a power that is not derived but which is in some mysterious way given” to them.<sup>451</sup> As charismatic discursive entities, god terms are denotatively

---

<sup>447</sup> Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 118.

<sup>448</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 4.

<sup>449</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 97.

<sup>450</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 211-212.

<sup>451</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 227.

empty, relying instead on the connotations an audience supplies when the term is rhetorically deployed. One may liken the organizing function of the god term to that of a pious schema, providing a culturally-meaningful hierarchy of “what properly goes with what”.<sup>452</sup> Brown and Morrow argue that the misuse of metaphor, specifically applying metaphors linked to one specific god term (Christianity) to another god term (politics) undermine the persuasive power of public address.<sup>453</sup> Their work demonstrates the important linkage between god terms and metaphors, because it is through the associated metaphors that the audience understands what their god term expects of them and that the critic gains access to the ultimate name that guides a person or a people’s ideological movements.

Recognizing the god terms and their linked metaphors that struggle for transcendence in this debate would be easy if the two metaphors were consistently expressed directly. Lakoff and Johnson term the metaphors with which most people are familiar as primary metaphors. Such metaphors allow “conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains to be used for domains of subjective experience”.<sup>454</sup> Primary metaphors draw *directly* on the experience of interactions between the human body and the external world, and they function to relate those familiar, grounded experiences to unfamiliar situations by providing a known interpretive frame. The argument over how best to resolve the crisis within the VA hospital system employs unstated, complex metaphors. A complex metaphor is composed of numerous primary metaphors, which often find verbal expression, and from images evoked and ways of speaking about a particular topic.<sup>455</sup> For example, were one to tell a colleague, “You scored a touchdown

---

<sup>452</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 74-76.

<sup>453</sup> Daniel S. Brown and Matthew A. Morrow, “Margaret Thatcher’s Sermon on the Mound: ‘Christianity and Wealth,’ *Journal of Communication & Religion* 33 no. 1 (2010): 33-55.

<sup>454</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 45.

<sup>455</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 63.



with that presentation,” “You were sacked by that blitz of inquiries,” and “That question was offside,” each of these utterances would contain a *primary metaphor* that suggests the more complex *implicit metaphor* that presentations are football games. The utterances in this example then suggest that the “god term” would be competition, because the use of football metaphors in discourse suggests a struggle for victory over others, implying that one should go into conference seeking to win. This implies a different orientation to and mode of being in the academic world than a series of metaphors that originate from the “god term” of collaboration would imply. The god terms that clash in the debate over how to solve the VA health care crisis and scandal are *obligation* (metaphor: “soldier-is-a-hero”) and *freedom* (metaphor: “soldier-is-a-captive”). While this chapter focuses on the latter god term and metaphor, understanding the significance of the implications that arise from proposals arising from this ideology demands a description of the god term it seeks to supplant and the implications that arise from that ideology.

### **Clash of the God Terms: Metaphors in Conflict**

Currently, both Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees have reached a compromise on the issue. CBS reports that the bill allows veterans who have waited for “more than 30 days for treatment or who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility to seek treatment from a private physician”, provides the VA with “\$10 billion in emergency funds” to help cover the cost of veterans seeking treatment at private care centers additional long-term funds for the VA, enable service members on the GI bill to receive free college tuition at in-state rates from public universities, authorizes funding for twenty-seven new VA facilities, mostly clinics, and give the VA managers more authority to fire employees.<sup>456</sup> Numerous veterans’ advocacy groups hail this process as positive forward motion, because such groups have long been against

---

<sup>456</sup> Nancy Cordes, “Congressional Negotiators Agree on VA Reform: What will They Fix?”, *cbsnews.com*, 28 July 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/congress-agrees-on-va-reform-what-will-they-fix/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

privatizing the VA.<sup>457</sup> Given the crisis and scandal, this may seem surprising, but, as the RAND Corporation reported in 2005, for all of its flaws, provides significantly more and superior care compared to the private sector. As the report states, “The VA also performed consistently better across the spectrum of care, including screening, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.”<sup>458</sup> As reports of this compromise permeate the media, sound bites from politicians and political commentators express that disagreement stems not from an understanding *that* something must be done to provide veterans with access to health care but from *how* best to respond to the exigence. The competing discourses present the complex metaphors and concepts that provide access to the conflicting god terms and the social implications arising from each. The two political god terms in conflict are Obligation (expand access and coverage out of obligation) and Freedom (privatize the system to bring salvation).

The metaphor “The Soldier is a Hero” is the most pervasive metaphor for the soldier in the United States today, animating popular culture and national discourses.<sup>459</sup> President Reagan, the great mythic high priest of the modern Right, in his first inaugural address, stated of U.S. soldiers:

Beyond those monuments to heroism is the Potomac River, and on the far shore the sloping hills of Arlington National Cemetery, with its row upon row of simple white markers bearing crosses or Stars of David. They add up to only a tiny fraction of the price that has been paid for our freedom.

Each one of those markers is a monument to the kind of hero I spoke of earlier. Their lives ended in places called Belleau Wood, The Argonne, Omaha Beach, Salerno, and halfway around the world on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Pork Chop Hill, the Chosin Reservoir, and in a hundred rice paddies and jungles of a place called Vietnam.<sup>460</sup>

---

<sup>457</sup> Froma Harrop, “Don’t Privatize the Veterans Hospitals,” *seattletimes.com*, 21 May 2014, [http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2023663982\\_fromaharropcolumnveteranshospitalsxxxml.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2023663982_fromaharropcolumnveteranshospitalsxxxml.html); Accessed 25 May 2015. Mak, “It’s a Miracle!”

<sup>458</sup> RAND Corp., “Improving Quality of Care: How the VA Outpaces Other Systems in Delivering Patient Care,” *rand.org*, (2005), 2.

<sup>459</sup> Gibson, *Warrior Dreams*; Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, Gabriel, *No More Heroes*.

<sup>460</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” *The American Presidency Project*, 20 January 1981, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130> Accessed 25 May 2015.

Reagan then argued that the heroic character traits embodied by these fallen soldiers should serve as a guide to the entire nation on how to proceed in times of crisis. More recently, President Obama uttered similar sentiments when he spoke to the troops at Fort Bliss. Marking the anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, Obama stated, “On this anniversary, we honor the memory of all who gave their lives there -- nearly 4,500 American patriots, including 198 fallen heroes from Fort Bliss and the 1st Armored Division. And we salute all who served there.”<sup>461</sup> More germane to the topic of this chapter, when Senate Republicans blocked passage of his original VA reform bill, Senator Bernie Sanders took to the floor to harangue them by publicly declaring, “But one thing that we do not want to do, Madam President, is politicize the well-being of America’s heroes.”<sup>462</sup> While Sanders’ desire to not politicize issues surrounding veterans and the military is laudable, the fact remains that United States politicians have a demonstrated history of identification with military masculinity and with the ideals expressed through the slogan “Support our Troops” with the sole purpose of communicating their own aristocratic legitimacy<sup>463</sup> through second-hand heroism-by-association, a shallow rhetoric that has the aromatic qualities of second-hand smoke.

That the United States has a tradition of referring to soldiers as heroes is neither novel nor unsurprising, because the conceptual linkage between the actions of soldiers in war against those deemed enemies of the nation and the actions of mythic heroes in battle against evil humans, monstrous humanoids, and monsters such as the dragons requires a cognitive leap of minimal distance. That heroic myths provide soldiers in battle with “*strategies* for dealing with

---

<sup>461</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President to the Troops at Fort Bliss, TX,” *whitehouse.gov*, 31 August 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2012/08/31/president-obama-speaks-troops-fort-bliss#transcript> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>462</sup> Richard Rowe, “Bernie Sanders Slams Tea Party Idiot Marc Rubio for Voting Against Veterans’ Benefits (Video),” *atlasleft.org*, 23 May 2014, <http://atlasleft.org/bernie-sanders-slams-tea-party-idiot-marco-rubio-for-voting-against-veterans-benefits-video/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>463</sup> Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 2-3.

*situations*” that are “typical and recurrent”<sup>464</sup> surprises no one, but what most either forget, do not know, or actively ignore, is that the same heroic myths present strategies for dealing with situations arising when warriors return home. Simply stated, the heroic myths detail what types of attitudes and actions are expected of warriors during war and what types of attitudes and actions are expected in response to the warriors’ return. The primary relationship discussed in myth is the relationship of reciprocal obligation that exists between the warrior and the aristocracy, because the warrior/soldier is either part of or attached to society’s elite through bonds of kinship or contract.<sup>465</sup> Heroic warriors and modern soldiers, acting as agents for their respective aristocracies, receive – or should expect to receive – a suite of economic benefits and cultural capital, often directly from the spoils of war they themselves fought to win, in exchange for their service that supports the economic interests of the aristocracy and legitimates its rule.<sup>466</sup>

By focusing on the heroic connections, the move to expand veteran health care at the government’s expense invokes a god term of Obligation – an action which someone is morally required to perform in a particular instance.<sup>467</sup> As a god term, Obligation, evokes connotations of reciprocity arising from a recognition of the interconnectedness of humans in social life. While the notion of obligation implies that an entire society is obligated to care for each other, the most direct and prominent obligation invoked through the metaphor of “The Soldier is a Hero” is that of aristocracy to provide tangible rewards for the warriors whose struggles and sacrifices have increased the economic and political holdings of those who commanded them to fight. Representative Wagner evoked this sense of reciprocity directly regarding the compromise

---

<sup>464</sup> Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 296-297.

<sup>465</sup> Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, 2-3.

<sup>466</sup> Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, 37.

<sup>467</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the etymology as arising from the Latin verb *obligare*, a pledge, oath, promise, bind.

VA reform bill when she stated, “These are our American heroes, they deserve to be taken care of.”<sup>468</sup> While some may critique the use of passive voice as an avoidance of taking direct responsibility, that Rep. Wagner spoke these words in support for a measure that would obligate the federal government to increase spending allocated for the VA hospital system, when preceded by the utterance that soldiers *are* heroes, the connection of her words to aristocratic obligation becomes clear. Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) offered a slightly less direct linkage when he stated, “I don’t have a problem spending money on veterans. These veterans have sacrificed everything. We’re going to step up and spend what it takes to take care of them.” These quotes exemplify an understanding, likely subconscious, of the reciprocal obligation that the aristocracy owes to the warriors who earn honor through valorous combat actions that ultimately benefit the aristocracy. Out of the spoils of war, both literal and metaphoric, the aristocracy then provides the warriors with “goods and services” in recognition of the “social ties and social obligations which are owed to the holder of the honor”.<sup>469</sup>

To link both economic rewards and health care for veterans to rhetorical deployments of discourses drawing, consciously or unconsciously, upon the ideals and principles of heroic myths is neither the product of a fanciful imagination nor unheard of in United States history. As has been previously discussed in this chapter, the idea that soldiers *are* heroes is the traditional reading of the actions members of the United States military perform during wartime. As a result, the United States Congress has, since the founding of the nation, assumed responsibility to provide economic compensation for those who have served – especially for those wounded in war. From the Continental Congress onward, the United States federal government has

---

<sup>468</sup> Mak, “It’s a Miracle!”

<sup>469</sup> Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, 37.

maintained this reciprocal relationship. In 1789, the first Congress established a pension law that guaranteed soldiers injured in the Revolutionary War payment of half what they would have earned per annum had they not enlisted. In 1818, Congress introduced the 1818 Service Pension Law that provided pensions for all service members – even those who were not injured. Even the VA hospital system itself, which began in response to poor health conditions among WWI veterans protesting the withholding of the “bonuses” they earned during service, is an example of Congress’ recognition that the warrior and the aristocracy exist in a relationship defined by mutual obligation and reciprocity.<sup>470</sup> And as scholarship has demonstrated, disability is a primary factor in limiting or even preventing veteran participation in the civilian economy post-discharge.<sup>471</sup> Whether or not Congress consciously recognizes the connection between economic reciprocity and the metaphor of soldier-is-a-hero, it has traditionally acted as if providing such benefits for soldiers, especially those injured in war, are obligations owed to those who fight the wars of the United States’ aristocracy. The proposal to expand veteran health care at the government’s expense is a recognition of the obligation implied by the belief in the heroic character of the soldiers. The use of the heroic metaphor, which is both traditional to United States military discourses and mythic in origin, implies that Congress is obligated to provide for the social and economic well-being out of the spoils of war, which increase the economic and political capital of the aristocracy, that the soldiers have won through warfare.

That the current bill before Congress is a compromise demonstrates that not every member of the United States aristocracy shares this reading of their relationship to the soldiers they send to war. The Right assaulted MSNBC host Chris Hayes when he stated his discomfort with calling fallen soldiers heroes because:

---

<sup>470</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, “VA History in Brief.”

<sup>471</sup> Humensky, et al, “How are Iraq/Afghanistan-Era Veterans Faring in the Labor Market?”

it is so rhetorically proximate to justifications for more war. Um, and, I don't want to obviously desecrate or disrespect memory of anyone that's fallen, and obviously there are individual circumstances in which there is genuine, tremendous heroism: hail of gunfire, rescuing fellow soldiers and things like that. But it seems to me that we marshal this word in a way that is problematic. But maybe I'm wrong about that.

As conservative blogger Mark Finkelstein states, “Even so, what does it say about the liberal chattering class, which Hayes epitomizes, that it chokes on calling America's fallen what they rightly and surely are: heroes?”<sup>472</sup> While Finkelstein clearly agrees that the soldier should be read as a hero, he and the other *Newsbusters* bloggers who dedicate themselves to “documenting, exposing, and neutralizing liberal media bias,”<sup>473</sup> read the VA scandal as representative not of the failure of the aristocracy to fulfil its obligations to the warriors who sacrifice for and serve its interests but as a representation of the evils of “Big Government.” As Kyle Drennen states, “the VA scandal demonstrates the failure of government-run health care”.<sup>474</sup> Former presidential candidate Mitt Romney mused, “Sometimes you wonder if there would be some way to introduce some private-sector competition, somebody else could come in and say, you know, that each soldier gets X thousand dollars attributed to them, and then they can choose whether they want to go in the government system or in a private system with the money that follows them.”<sup>475</sup> Senator John McCain, who put forth a bill that would privatize the VA, stated, “Veterans have earned the right to choose where and when they get medical care, and it is our

---

<sup>472</sup> Mark Finkelstein, “Chris Hayes: I’m ‘Uncomfortable’ Calling Fallen Military ‘Heroes’,” *newsbusters.org*, 27 May 2012, <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/mark-finkelstein/2012/05/27/chris-hayes-im-uncomfortable-calling-fallen-military-heroes> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>473</sup> Newsbusters.org, “About Newsbusters.org” (n.d.), <http://newsbusters.org/about> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>474</sup> Kyle Drennen, “Andrea Mitchell: VA Scandal ‘Far More Serious’ Than Obama’s Other So-Called Scandals,” *newsbusters.org*, 30 May 2014, <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/kyle-drennen/2014/05/30/andrea-mitchell-va-scandal-far-more-serious-obamas-other-so-called-sca> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>475</sup> Jon Perr, “Privatizing VA Health Care would be the Greatest Tragedy of All,” *dailykos.com*, 20 May 2014, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/05/20/1300760/-Privatizing-VA-health-care-would-be-the-greatest-tragedy-of-all#> Accessed 25 May 2015.

responsibility to afford them this option.”<sup>476</sup> These examples suggest that the far right publicly asserts a belief in the metaphor, “The Soldier is a Hero,” while another metaphor emerges that is drawn from the right’s glorification of the private sector as the cure for all societal ills.<sup>477</sup> This discursive dissonance between public profession of belief and actions taken demonstrates a desire to deploy the positive ethical and cultural valence that comes from public declarations of support for the troops while covertly denying the reciprocal obligations incurred from the actions of those allegedly supported troops.

It is in this context and from this mentality that CATO Institute senior fellow Michael Tanner told *The Daily Beast* that the current compromise legislation was fundamentally flawed.

It doesn’t fundamentally reform the system. It keeps the same system in place, with minor steps in the right direction at an increased cost. It’s still an attempt to provide unlimited veteran care. All they’ve done is take the existing system and make it slightly more expensive. It’s good for the beneficiaries but bad for the budget deficit.<sup>478</sup>

For Tanner, “minor steps in the right direction” are those that reduce the expenses of the government, which limit the economic obligations of the aristocracy. Such a desire is obvious from his critique of the “increased cost” and the “attempt to provide unlimited veteran care” that is “bad for the budget deficit” as opposed to proposals by those such as Romney or McCain who would limit the maximum amount of investment in veteran care the government would provide. As his two pieces, “A Better Way than the VA” and “Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures,” shall demonstrate, Tanner believes that the “right direction” is one of privatized care wherein the veterans pay an unspecified portion of the cost for health care, much like an

---

<sup>476</sup> Ed Morrissey, “McCain: Time to Privatize Ordinary Health Care at the VA,” *hotair.com*, 27 May 2014, <http://hotair.com/archives/2014/05/27/mccain-time-to-privatize-ordinary-health-care-at-the-va/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>477</sup> James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>478</sup> Mak, “It’s a Miracle!”



employee copay for health insurance, as opposed to care provided at the aristocracy' expense arising from a recognition of the obligations incurred through the reciprocal relationship between warrior/soldier and aristocracy that arise from the invocation of heroic rhetoric.

In his opening foray into arguing that privatization is the proper way to reform the VA hospital system, "A Better Way than the VA," Tanner establishes the existence of the scandal as an uncontested exigence in a manner suggestive of an aristocrat recognizing his reciprocal obligations to the warriors from whose actions he and his allies benefitted economically and politically. "And everyone agrees that we owe our veterans the best health care we can provide, especially those who have been injured because our government put them in harm's way. But is a government-run system really the only — or the best — way to provide that care?" He continues to invoke the obligation to provide for the nation's veterans when he states, "Giving injured and sick veterans more choices and allowing them to seek treatment from the best doctors and facilities available hardly seems like a bad thing." He even concludes with a declaration that the veterans receiving care should be the priority and not the method of providing care when he states, "What matters is not 'the system,' but providing our veterans with the best health care available."<sup>479</sup> From these statements, which are roughly equidistant from each other, Tanner clearly invokes the metaphor of "The Soldier is a Hero" to argue for the moral rightness of turning veteran health care over to the private sector.

In light of the current crisis and scandal, this is a logical question to ask and supports, on the surface, his claim to ethical action resulting from a recognition of the reciprocal relationship that arises from a belief in the "Soldier is a Hero" metaphor. However, Tanner is either ignorant of or willfully ignoring the numerous studies that demonstrate that VA hospital care routinely

---

<sup>479</sup> Tanner, "A Better Way than the VA".

outperforms private sector and other government-run health care services. Numerous studies demonstrate that the VA health care system is not only on par with other health care systems in the United States but also surpasses them in numerous areas of patient care. In a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2003, Jha, Perlin, Kizer, and Dudley found that the VA hospital system significantly outperformed pay-for-service Medicare facilities in eleven out of eleven measures of care.<sup>480</sup> A study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* comparing VA health care and commercial managed care of diabetes patients found the VA to provide better processes of care and have better outcomes in 2 of 3 measured results. The one result where the VA did not outperform the private sector was in blood pressure control, where both systems were found lacking.<sup>481</sup> In 2011, Trivedi, Matula, Glassman, Shekelle, and Asch performed a systematic review of 175 studies from 1990-2000 comparing the quality of care between the VA system and the private sector, and they concluded that with regard to processes of care, the VA routinely outperformed the private sector and with regard to risk-adjusted mortality, the results were similar between the two groups.<sup>482</sup> A RAND Corporation Capstone Report found that the VA hospital system is superior to other health care options in providing holistic, integrated care for the complex suite of physical and mental conditions combat veterans often suffer.<sup>483</sup>

If the VA health care system has demonstrated its superiority over the past twenty years and is specially equipped to treat the complex suites of conditions that arise from combat service

---

<sup>480</sup> Ashish K. Jha, et al, "Effect of the Transformation of the Veterans Affairs Health Care System on the Quality of Care," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 348 (2003): 2218-2227.

<sup>481</sup> E.A. Kerr, et al, "Diabetes Care Quality in the Veterans Affairs Health Care System and Commercial Managed Care: the TRIAD Study," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 141 no. 4 (2004): 272-281.

<sup>482</sup> A.N. Trivedi, et al, "Systematic Review: Comparison of the Quality of Medical Care in Veterans Affairs and non-Veterans Affairs Settings," *Medical Care* 49 no. 1 (2011): 76-88.

<sup>483</sup> Katherine E. Watkins, et al, "Veterans Health Administration Mental Health Program Evaluation," (2011). [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR956.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR956.html) Accessed 25 May 2015.

and if all agree that providing those who have sacrificed and served in combat with the best care available is the morally correct action to take, then one should next ask why veterans are not receiving this care. And Tanner provides an answer: the capricious nature of “Big Government.” This capricious beast offers funding for veteran health care that “varies according to the whims of Congress”. To Tanner, it is not logic but irrational and unexplainable mental swings that determine how much money the government allocates for veterans’ health care. This whimsical allocation of resources becomes even more insidious, because “When resources can’t meet demand in a given year, the VA does what all other single-payer systems do: it rations.” Of course, resources “are determined through the political process rather than by patient preference,” because of which, Tanner claims, “the money is often misallocated”. And ultimately, veterans suffer for this capriciousness, because “When problems are uncovered, no one takes responsibility for fixing them.”<sup>484</sup> Such capriciousness seems fitting with Nestor’s critique of Agamemnon after the taking of Briseis or with Hroðgar’s depiction of Heremod, but whereas Nestor argued for a reconciliation that would restore the broken relationship and allow both to maintain their honor and whereas Hroðgar admonished Beowulf to learn from the mistakes of the past so that should he become king, he would not repeat them,<sup>485</sup> Tanner calls for privatization as the solution to this problem.

Tanner’s presentation of the exigence and of “Big Government” as a capricious monster evoke the god term that those who argue for privatization of any and all governmental agencies would rather not have illuminated: Freedom. The god term reveals itself through the subtle metaphor of captivity, wherein the noble soldier is a captive, chained to a bloated and failing system by a capricious “Big Government” that is so disconnected from the daily life of those

---

<sup>484</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA.”

<sup>485</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004), I.326-335; *Beowulf*, 1722b.

who labor under it that its attempts to provide support range from the comical failure to disastrous negligence. Given this picture of “Big Government” as a bloated, corrupt aristocracy, the soldier becomes a mistreated servant, injured because the government “put them in harm’s way.” And like the captive of a capricious monster, the sick and suffering veteran can only have the treatment deemed necessary and appropriate by the captors and their agents. Tanner describes this corrupt, inadequate treatment as follows:

When resources can’t meet demand in a given year, the VA does what other single-payer systems do: it rations. For example, it maintains a very restrictive pharmaceutical formulary that often denies veterans access to the newest and most effective drugs. A separate analysis by Alain Enthoven and Kyna Fong of Stanford University estimates that less than one-third of the drugs available to Medicare beneficiaries are on the VA formulary. According to a study by Prof. Frank Lichtenberg of Columbia University, the restricted availability of drugs has reduced the average survival of veterans under VA care by as much as two months.

Rationing is also beginning to delay or deny care to some veterans altogether, particularly in specialized areas like mental health. The average veteran with psychiatric troubles gets almost one-third fewer visits with specialists than he would have received a decade ago, and several have been turned away from VA hospitals entirely, which helps to explain the recent rash of suicides of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. Several lawsuits are now pending, charging that the VA fails to provide necessary services.

Furthermore, Tanner argues that, “funding decisions are determined through the political process rather than by patient preference”.<sup>486</sup> Thus, as Tanner accuses, it is not the needs and desires of the patients that drive treatment but treatment cost and political capital. Through this depiction of the U.S. Government as a bloated, irrational, capricious behemoth that makes decisions for those under its care based upon the cost and political posturing, the soldier can no longer be read as a warrior hero who exists in a relationship of reciprocal obligation to the nation’s aristocracy. The soldier clearly becomes a captive of this irrational, capricious monster, his labor and resources exploited by a monstrous captor that forces its captives to labor for its personal gain only to discard them when they cease to be useful.

---

<sup>486</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA.”

Not only are these captives denied needed care due to the capricious and disconnected nature of Big Government, but as Tanner and others who support privatization argue, they are denied a fundamental right of United States citizenship: the freedom to choose. As has previously been described, their choice of medications is limited by cost, availability of generic options, and political posturing. Additionally, the servant-soldier cannot choose where he or she receives treatment. This should not be the case, Tanner argues.

Giving injured and sick veterans more choices and allowing them to seek treatment from the best doctors and facilities available hardly seems like a bad thing. Shouldn't veterans with cancer stemming from exposure to Agent Orange, for example, be free to seek treatment at Sloan-Kettering or the Mayo Clinic, if they want to?<sup>487</sup>

Similarly, Mitt Romney argued for a voucher system for veterans.

When you work in the private sector and you have a competitor, you know if I don't treat this customer right, they're going to leave me and go somewhere else, so I'd better treat them right. Whereas if you're the government, they know there's nowhere else you guys can go. You're stuck. Sometimes you wonder if there would be some way to introduce some private-sector competition, somebody else that could come in and say, you know, that each soldier gets X thousand dollars attributed to them, and then they can choose whether they want to go in the government system or in a private system with the money that follows them.<sup>488</sup>

Sen. John McCain argued, “Veterans have earned the right to choose where and when they get their medical care, and it is our responsibility to afford them this option”.<sup>489</sup> The arguments favoring privatization of veterans health care, like those to privatize social security, purport to respect “individual freedom, choice, and control” that would enable veterans “to pursue their individual desires and plan their lives as they saw fit”.<sup>490</sup> Connecting the argument to privatize the VA hospital system debate to that of privatizing social security is more than merely noting

---

<sup>487</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA.”

<sup>488</sup> Michael McAuliff, “Mitt Romney: Maybe Veterans Health Care should be Privatized,” *huffingtonpost.com*, 11 Nov. 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/11/mitt-romney-veterans-health-care-privatization\\_n\\_1089061.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/11/mitt-romney-veterans-health-care-privatization_n_1089061.html) Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>489</sup> Morrissey, “McCain: Time to Privatize Ordinary Health Care at the VA.”

<sup>490</sup> Asen, *Invoking the Invisible Hand*, 77.

the repetition of vocabulary, for as Tanner himself asserts, “the dust-up over privatizing VA services is a microcosm of the political debate today... You see it on issues ranging from education to Social Security”.<sup>491</sup> These disparate issues that affect different, but often overlapping, constituencies are connected in the clash of god terms: are we obligated to care for others in our society or do we promote Freedom and let each fare as he or she will?

The repetition of choice in what treatment veterans receive and where they receive that treatment evokes the god term of Freedom. This divine ideal, always couched in terms of what is “truly American,” is the libertarian concept of freedom from governmental regulation wherein the invisible hand of “The Market” acts as it will without being shackled by regulation or obligation. Such libertarians maintain that “government has a role to play in cases of ‘market failure,’ but ultimately maintain a fundamentalist belief that market solutions exist for all social problems and that government and its influence on the lives of citizens should be as small and as minimally invasive as possible.<sup>492</sup> One sees the glorification of market solutions over those of a heavily-regulated “Big Government” from the onset of Tanner’s initial piece, when he asks “But is a government-run system really the only – or the best – way to provide that care?” He then discusses the lack of choice in health care from a clearly economic perspective when he discusses how in a single-payer health system the budget varies “according to the whims of Congress” and not “according to what consumers want or are willing to spend”. Tanner continues to argue that the choice offered in the market of the private sector is the desirable model when he asks, “Shouldn’t veterans with cancer stemming from exposure to Agent Orange, for example, be free to seek treatment at Sloan-Kettering or the Mayo Clinic, if they want to?”<sup>493</sup>

---

<sup>491</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA?”

<sup>492</sup> Aune, *Selling the Free Market*, 101-102.

<sup>493</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA?”

Such arguments rest on one of the great metaphors of libertarian thought: the rational choice model, wherein a “rational actor” seeking to “maximize utility” will produce optimal results through rational economic action, supply and demand as these “resources gravitate toward their most valuable uses if voluntary exchange is permitted”.<sup>494</sup>

This model of freedom argues that voluntary exchange, the free market, moves the best resources to the best places. With regard to health care, this argument rests on the belief that the best doctors, and consequently the best care, must exist in the free market, because it is rational for resources (quality doctors) to go where their most valuable uses (where they make the most money) exist. To many in the United States, for whom market capitalism has a quasi-mythological truthfulness, this appears logical. However, as the findings of Woolhandler and Himmelstein attest, the VA “has recently emerged as a widely recognised leader in quality improvement and information technology. At present, the Veterans Health Administration offers more equitable care, of higher quality, at comparable or lower cost than private sector alternatives”.<sup>495</sup> As Longman states, the VA has become “a world leader in safe, high-quality, and innovative health care.”<sup>496</sup> These findings parallel those cited previously in this chapter that suggest that providing veterans with a higher quality of health care is not the actual end goal of those who seek privatization, even though they drape their desires in such language.

Woolhandler and Himmelstein allude to the underlying motivation to “give” veterans choice of health care providers when they state that the VA has been “long derided as an US example of failed, Soviet-style central planning”.<sup>497</sup> The attack on the “socialized” nature of VA

---

<sup>494</sup> Arjo Klamer and Donald N. McCloskey, “Economics and the Human Conversation,” in *Consequences of Economic Rhetoric*, eds. Arjo Klamer, Donald N. McCloskey, and Robert M. Solow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 3-20, 14; Aune, *Selling the Free Market*, 20-21.

<sup>495</sup> Steffie Woolhandler and David U. Himmelstein, “Competition in a Publicly Funded Healthcare System,” *British Medical Journal* 335 (2007): 1126-1129, 1127.

<sup>496</sup> Longman, *Best Care Anywhere*, 21.

<sup>497</sup> Woolhandler and Himmelstein, “Competition in a Publicly Funded Healthcare System,” 1127.

health care is not unique, but representative of the crusade those serving the god term Freedom must fight for the soul of the nation. As Jarret Wollstein said of then President Clinton's proposal for universal healthcare for U.S. citizens, "To see the future of health care in America for you and your children under Clinton's plan, just visit any Veterans Administration hospital. You'll find filthy conditions, shortages of everything, and treatment bordering on barbarism."<sup>498</sup> And as Tanner states of the current VA system, "The idea of giving people a private choice rather than keeping them confined to a government system is regarded as 'radical' and 'extreme.' You see it on issues ranging from education to Social Security. Apparently, the VA system has now become another such sacred cow."<sup>499</sup> For Tanner, and other libertarians as well, the idea of any governmental regulation over people's lives is an example of captivity through its limitation of freedom (choice). Tanner's argument rests upon the quasi-mythological place that market capitalism holds in contemporary U.S. popular ideology, revealed both through a fundamentalist zeal that ignores the facts pointing to the inferiority of the market to handle veteran health care and through the metaphoric labeling of the VA and other social programs as being "sacred cows"<sup>500</sup> – a connection that places these programs as religiously oppositional to Christianity, which makes them oppositional to the United States, which libertarians often claim to be a "Christian nation". To be *American* is to be *capitalist and Christian*, and to be *un-American* is to be *socialist and non-Christian*. Therefore any move that appears to be socialist or non-Christian is equated with being un-American and must be opposed.

This idea of opposing all things that appear to be socialist and, consequently, "un-American," also arises from glorification of the god term Freedom. As libertarians contended

---

<sup>498</sup> Jarret B. Wollstein, "Clinton's Health-Care Plan for You: Cradle-to-Grave Slavery, Part 1," *fff.org*, 1 Jan. 1994, <http://fff.org/explore-freedom/article/clintons-healthcare-plan-cradletograve-slavery-part-1/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>499</sup> Tanner, "A Better Way than the VA?"

<sup>500</sup> Tanner, "A Better Way than the VA?"



during the debates to privatize social security, the freedom of choice offered in the market is a source of wealth creation *if* the market is left unregulated. As Asen argued, libertarians contended that “Privatization constituted an expression of faith in an ever-expanding economy that would create wealth for all”.<sup>501</sup> That an unregulated, competitive free market will produce the best health care (“wealth for all”) rests on what “the perversity thesis,” which argues that any attempt to move society in a certain direction will have the opposite effect.<sup>502</sup> Regarding health care, any attempt to control, or “ration,” care in a manner that does not offer patients complete freedom of results in poor quality care at best or patient death at worst. Tanner alludes to this:

Rationing is also beginning to delay or deny care to some veterans altogether, particularly in specialized areas like mental health. The average veteran with psychiatric troubles gets almost one-third fewer visits with specialists than he would have received a decade ago, and several have been turned away from VA hospitals entirely, which helps to explain the recent rash of suicides of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>503</sup>

While no one disputes that such mistreatment should not occur, what Tanner seems reluctant to admit is that much of the problem stemming from reduced access to care – both in terms of appointments and prescription drugs – is not a new problem. During his first term, President George W. Bush enacted legislation designed to reduce the federal budget commitment to the VA health care system by establishing an eight-tier priority ranking for treatment, denying enrollment in the VA system to those who did not have service-related conditions, charging a \$250 enrollment fee, and doubling veteran copayment for visits and prescription drugs.<sup>504</sup> What proves most intriguing about these restrictions on the VA system that occurred in 2003, is that in a more recent piece, “Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures,” Tanner argues in favor

---

<sup>501</sup> Asen, *Invoking the Invisible Hand*, 78.

<sup>502</sup> Aune, *Selling the Free Market*, 25.

<sup>503</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA?”

<sup>504</sup> United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform, Minority Staff, Special Investigations Division, *Proposed Restrictions on Access to VA Health Care in the Pittsburgh Area*, May 2003, <http://oversight-archive.waxman.house.gov/documents/20040607131602-21618.pdf> Accessed 25 May 2015.

of such a system wherein, “every veteran with a service-connected injury should be given the opportunity to seek care from the doctor or facility of his or her choice.” He further states that, “The decision should be made by the veterans themselves, not VA bureaucrats. And even more fundamentally, VA benefits should be limited to injuries or illnesses contracted in the service of our country. The VA should not be Obamacare for veterans.”<sup>505</sup> This ahistorical, willful denial of the quality of care and the history of the current crisis afflicting the VA health care system, which Tanner explicitly links to socialized medicine through the invocation of “Obamacare for veterans,” demonstrates that while such universal health care systems may be seen as sacred cows of the left, the fundamentalist faith in the rightness of the unregulated free market, the socio-economic embodiment of the term of Freedom, is the libertarian’s golden calf.

### **Reorienting the Heroic Perspective**

Metaphors, both primary and complex, function rhetorically by providing a perspective that orients an audience to a new object through an imperfect likening of the new and strange to something that is familiar and known. This linkage is never politically neutral, because any form of analogical linkage carries at least some portion of the moral valence of the familiar and attaches it to the unfamiliar, directing the audience to view, to interpret, and to respond to the new person, object, or situation as they would view, interpret, and respond to the familiar to which it is likened. This orientation calls into being a suite of attitudes that the audience should feel toward or against the object and of relationships that the audience should recognize exist between them and the object and between each other as members of a social group. Through the moral valence that connects the novel to the known and from the evocation of attitudes and relationships, the god term and its associated metaphor(s) direct an audience’s response

---

<sup>505</sup> Tanner, “Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures.”

following the formula: “If you believe *X-metaphor* to be real and true, then in all situations connected to *X*, you must perform the actions associated with *X*.”

Just as primary metaphors, drawn directly from sensory experiences of the social world, suggest deeper complex metaphors that organize the primary metaphors into an orientation frame, so too do complex metaphors suggest an ultimate frame of orientation. This single concept that drafts all other concepts into its service is the god term of an individual or of a social group. God terms not only provide an overarching orientation toward the social world but also suggest certain guiding virtues of social life. With particular regard to the current VA crisis and scandal, the two god terms selected for this analysis, Obligation and Freedom, suggest the guiding virtues of interconnectivity and independence, respectively. To be obligated to another is to recognize that success does not occur in a social vacuum and that when one person’s actions provide another with some benefit, then that other person owes an ethical debt to the provider. Such a notion arises when a citizen or a politician states something along the lines of, “These soldiers sacrificed for us, so we owe this to them.” Obligation arises from the ancient heroic myths and social rituals of gift exchange in collectivist societies where guests and hosts, warriors and kings, and even Pharisees and Samaritans found themselves bound by moral bonds of reciprocal interconnectivity. Obligation argues that a society works toward the “greater good” through selfless action that benefits others, thus implying that heroic action is a selfless willingness to venture into danger to confront and slay the monstrous tyrant who selfishly hoards the “general benefit,” a resource that sustains social life (water, food, gold, health, etc.), so as to restore the order that has been thrown into chaos (an exigence) by the monster’s selfish actions.<sup>506</sup>

---

<sup>506</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 15-18, Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 300.

It would appear, therefore, that discourses arising from the god term of Freedom and its associated metaphors would be anti-heroic. Such discourses do not deny the existence and necessity of heroic rhetoric, but they do, however, reposition the frame so that the object of focus changes. Recall that god terms and metaphors function rhetorically through orienting the audience's perspective on an issue.<sup>507</sup> Regarding public policy, the metaphors that arise from the conflicting god terms exemplify "notions of perspective and entailment," situating "specific proposals in wider contexts by associating policy purposes with underlying values and commitments".<sup>508</sup> The repetition of the concepts of choice and of the right to choose invoke notions of individualism, agency, and control, all attitudes closely linked with the idea of what it means to be American, expressed best by the ideal of independence imparted by the god term of Freedom.<sup>509</sup> By aligning a plan to divest government funds from supporting those who fought for the government, under the auspices of fighting to bring freedom to others or to ensure the continuance of American freedom, with the ideals of what it means to be "American," libertarians then align anything that can be classed as "socialism" with all that is un-American: coercion, captivity, and collectivism. And to libertarians who glorify the "freedom" that the market offers as being true freedom, anything that reeks of socialism must be dismantled. And as Tanner states of the compromise bill before Congress, "neither the House nor the Senate bill would fundamentally change the way that government provides health care to our veterans".<sup>510</sup>

Appropriating the ideals of the heroic in a subtle way in his second piece, Tanner argues against the VA health care system as if the system itself were oppositional to the meritorious economy where the aristocracy awards spoils of war *in proportion to* the honor each warrior has

---

<sup>507</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 212-213; Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 503-504.

<sup>508</sup> Asen, *Invoking the Invisible Hand*, 100.

<sup>509</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 220; Asen, *Invoking the Invisible Hand*, 101.

<sup>510</sup> Tanner, "Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures."

earned. “It’s past time to recognize that not all veterans are the same. I served for a couple of years in the 1970s, shuffling papers outside of Boston. Why should I be entitled to the same lifetime care as someone who lost his leg to an IED in Afghanistan?”<sup>511</sup> On the surface, this statement appeals to the ethics of the meritocracy idealized by heroic myth: the warriors who perform the greatest deeds are awarded the greatest honor and, consequently, the greatest rewards. However, as Tanner seems to forget, access to the VA health care system is not an automatic entitlement. As Longman states, “access to VA care is limited to vets who can establish that are “deserving” according to convoluted, arcane, and often impossible-to-prove sets of ever evolving metrics and standards.”<sup>512</sup> For example, it was only in 1991 that the VA ceased demanding that Vietnam veterans offer proof of direct exposure to Agent Orange in order to receive treatment for conditions like diabetes and certain rare forms of cancer linked to Agent Orange exposure.<sup>513</sup> Under the current system, veterans seeking access to the VA health care system must either meet a strict test of financial means “or prove that they suffer from specific disabilities directly resulting from their military service”.<sup>514</sup> Pair that with the eight-tier priority ranking established under President George W. Bush,<sup>515</sup> and the current system reveals itself to be less of a program of socialist “entitlement,” an “Obamacare for veterans” as Tanner names it,<sup>516</sup> and more of a meritocracy mired in complex bureaucratic regulations designed to limit aristocratic obligation and expenditure.

---

<sup>511</sup> Tanner, “Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures.”

<sup>512</sup> Phillip Longman, “VA Care: Still the Best Care Anywhere? Part II,” *washingtonmonthly.com*, 5 June 2014, [http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/political-animal-a/2014\\_06/va\\_care\\_still\\_the\\_best\\_care\\_an\\_1050629.php](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/political-animal-a/2014_06/va_care_still_the_best_care_an_1050629.php)

<sup>513</sup> Longman, *Best Care Anywhere*, 18. Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>514</sup> Longman, “VA Care: Still the Best Care Anywhere? Part II.”

<sup>515</sup> United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform, Minority Staff, Special Investigations Division, *Proposed Restrictions on Access to VA Health Care in the Pittsburgh Area*.

<sup>516</sup> Tanner, “Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures.”

Therefore, one must read beneath the surface of the argument that the VA system should only treat those who are proven worthy through combat experience alone as having a classist undertone wherein the aristocracy desires to define “worthiness” and “honor” along the lines of economic achievement. Under the current voluntary enlistment model, the majority of enlistees are those seeking socioeconomic advancement, because that is the promise offered by recruitment. However, research demonstrates that service in the United States Armed Forces alone does not correlate to greater economic attainment as a general rule. Those serving in the enlisted ranks consistently have lower lifetime earnings than those who do not serve; however, those who serve in the officer ranks often earn between ten and twelve percent higher than those who do not serve, but this has more to do with reproducing pre-service socioeconomic status and networking conditions than with military benefits – including the GI Bill. These results hold for those serving during both peacetime and wartime.<sup>517</sup> What this research suggests is that those who benefit economically from military service are, more often than not, those with a greater chance to avoid combat, which implies a lower chance to be disabled from a combat-related injury, such as an IED. As a result, those veterans who “shuffled papers” as Tanner did are more likely to have higher paying private sector jobs as well as health insurance than those who did see combat, making them less likely to make use of VA health care services.

By defunding the VA health care system, those impacted most will not be the “paper shufflers,” who likely have access to private sector insurance but those who enlisted for the promise of socioeconomic advancement offered through military service and who most likely will need the health care. This may seem counterintuitive, because if veterans without service-related injuries are not seeking treatment within the VA system, then those with service related

---

<sup>517</sup> MacLean, “The Privileges of Rank,” 704-705.

injuries will receive needed treatment in a timely fashion. As Longman told the *Washington Monthly*, “a shrinking population of vets threatens to force the closure of many VA hospitals for lack of patients”. Further reducing the number of patients by restricting access solely to service-related injuries will exasperate the problem. Consider the analogy of a road. The less traffic a road sees, the less resources a municipality invests in its upkeep, and the worse the road will become. With fewer patients, a VA care facility will need fewer doctors and nurses on staff, which will lead to staff being released, which will increase patient load for doctors and wait times for patients, and which will ultimately lead to the closure of the facility. What libertarians like Tanner claim to oppose is a socialistic “equality of outcome,” but the system provides an “equality of access” that provides for veterans should they need it. Thus, his argument to privatize the VA possesses classist undertones wherein those of the aristocracy do not invoke the ideal of the meritocracy established by the mythic frame to suggest that their ultimate goal is solely to ensure that only the truly worthy (those of their own socioeconomic class) receive the economic benefits of the spoils of war.

The problem is not *that* health care is provided for veterans but *who* is providing that health care. Libertarians argue that for veterans to receive the best care, they must acquire that care from the market and not from the government – even if the available evidence strongly suggests that the government-run VA health care system provides care far superior to that of the free market. As Romney proposed during his campaign for the presidency, “When you work in the private sector and you have a competitor, you know if I don’t treat this customer right, they’re going to leave me and go somewhere else, so I’d better treat them right.”<sup>518</sup> Tanner indirectly articulates a similar belief when he states, “Giving injured and sick veterans more choices and

---

<sup>518</sup> McAuliff, “Mitt Romney: Maybe Veterans’ Health Care should be Privatized.”

allowing them to seek treatment from the best doctors and facilities available hardly seems like a bad thing.” The allusion Tanner makes to the superiority of the free market as a health care provider becomes more apparent as he concludes his initial argument that Democrats are more concerned with preserving “the system” than with providing care and that “what matters is not ‘the system,’ but providing our veterans with the best health care available.”<sup>519</sup> For libertarians, the solution to the VA crisis is the same as with all other social crises: scapegoat the government as the orchestrator of society’s ills so that “the market assumes the role of hero in vanquishing government”.<sup>520</sup>

This is the dramatic image that Tanner evokes in his argument. The United States veteran is weak and wounded, having been put in harm’s way *by the government*. The irrational “whims of Congress” determine the global budget for veteran care instead of the rational market of “what consumers want or are willing to spend” on care. As the current wars continue into their fourteenth straight year, the disparity between resources and need increases, causing the VA to do “what other single-payer systems do: it rations” care through a “very restrictive pharmaceutical formulary that often denies veterans access to the newest and most effective drugs” and through the insidious “political” decisions to either delay or deny care due to the fact that “the system remains buried under the bureaucracy common to all government programs”.<sup>521</sup> Of course, this critique ignores the reality of private sector rationing through cost-restrictive services – those who cannot afford the care often do not receive the care – for the rhetorical purpose of transforming a superior health care system, though one that is grossly mismanaged, into a ravenous monster akin to those found in myth. Like the Scyldings besieged by the

---

<sup>519</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA?”

<sup>520</sup> Aune, *Invoking the Invisible Hand*, 9.

<sup>521</sup> Tanner, “A Better Way than the VA?”



ravenous, capricious Grendel, the weak and wounded veterans need a hero, external to “the system,” to arise and deliver them from their captivity. This hero, the only hero who can save a people besieged and shackled by a bloated and capricious government, is the Invisible Hand of the Free Market.

This scapegoating of the government becomes significant in this specific argument because by assigning a heroic character to the mythic figure of the Invisible Hand, this scapegoating replaces those whom traditional, political, and popular United States discourses label as heroes (veterans and soldiers) with this newer, younger mythic figure of the Invisible Hand. As the Invisible Hand ascends to assume the power and honor afforded to the one in the role of hero, then the veteran, who has been and still is traditionally called a hero throughout numerous U.S. discourse genres, descends and weakens to the role of captive. As the libertarian storyteller presents the veteran as becoming progressively weaker due his or her captivity by government, the decrease in strength parallels a decrease in agency, which is an ironic necessity of the argument that privatization will give the veterans choice. The best choice for health care providers, according to veterans, is the VA health care system. Numerous veterans groups from the Veterans of Foreign Wars to the Disabled Veterans Association to the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Joe Davis, national spokesman for the VFW states that, “We’re against privatizing the VA system. To privatize the VA puts us on the waiting list with everyone else out in the United States.”<sup>522</sup> Carl Blake of Paralyzed Veterans of America illuminates the fact that the typical VA patient “might have a spinal cord injury, plus an orthopedic issue, plus a mental health issue” and that “The VA is a system constructed to provide holistic care for the life of that patient. The private system is not constructed with those ideas in mind.”<sup>523</sup> Given the right’s focus on

---

<sup>522</sup> Harrop, “Don’t Privatize the Veterans Hospitals.”

<sup>523</sup> Lopez, “Republicans Want to Privatize the VA. Veteran Groups Disagree.”

freedom to choose from McCain to Romney to Tanner, that veterans overwhelmingly choose the VA system over that of the private sector must suggest to libertarians that the Invisible Hand must arrive soon to rescue these veterans not only weakened and wounded by war and the bloated and monstrous government but also afflicted by a political Stockholm Syndrome that prevents them from making the “correct” choice.

By assuming the place of hero traditionally reserved for veterans in the canon of real heroes in United States discourses, the Invisible Hand also gains access to the economic benefits that are the rewards of the honor earned for heroic action in war. Whatever form these economic benefits earned from military service take, they serve as symbols that establish, affirm, maintain, and repair the social relationships based upon reciprocal obligation between the warrior and the aristocracy. The aristocracy recognizes that the warrior, who acts as an agent of the aristocracy, serves its political and economic interests and function to legitimate its rule. As a result, the economic benefits represented by the gifts of rings, of slaves, of land, of horses, of education and skill training, and of currency form symbolic utterances wherein the aristocracy recognizes the relationship it has with the warrior(s) and accepts the obligations placed upon it as a participant in relationship.<sup>524</sup> Therefore, by transferring the role of hero to the Invisible Hand, the libertarian argument denies any such relationship between the aristocracy (them) and the soldiers who fight their wars. The spoils of war, which are now more abstract in the form of government contracts and oil drilling rights, would go to the Invisible Hand, represented by the corporations in the private sector. This would alienate the soldiers from the products of their labor, making them nothing more than a resource to be deployed at the location of its most valuable usage.

---

<sup>524</sup> Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*, 51.

The move to privatize veteran health care grants heroic honor and its economic benefits to the Invisible Hand and the private sector while denying the aristocratic obligation to provide such benefits to veterans finds its way into Tanner's argument. In his initial commentary, he states that "McCain's proposal is one option. Another might be to simply ensure that veterans have access to private health insurance, perhaps with the government picking up part of the cost." While he does not declare outright that the government is not obligated to pay for veteran care, his concession to the argument arising from obligation is hedged with a recognition that "perhaps" the government could pay for "part of the cost". His argument that the VA hospital system is analogous to education, Social Security, and other "sacred cows" of "the system," both of which Tanner has previously argued should be privatized, demonstrate his desire to divest government funding, and by extension responsibility, from such "un-American" "socialist" programs.<sup>525</sup> His rant over the compromise bill demonstrates his desire to deny any form of economic benefit to soldiers from most health care services – even those contracted with private sector care facilities – to access to higher education if the government has to pay for it. "The outpatient-treatment option is also expected to increase costs. And, in the great tradition of never letting a crisis go to waste, the legislation would include spending for things that have nothing to do with health care, such as guaranteeing in-state tuition at public colleges and universities to all veterans." He concludes by stating, "And even more fundamentally, VA benefits should be limited to injuries or illnesses contracted in the service of our country. The VA should not be Obamacare for veterans. Our wounded warriors deserve better than what they are getting today. So do taxpayers."<sup>526</sup> For Tanner, and other libertarians, any public money spent toward anything

---

<sup>525</sup> Tanner, "A Better Way than the VA;" Asen, *Invoking the Invisible Hand*, 78-79.

<sup>526</sup> Tanner, "Congress Wants to Double Down on VA Failures."

that appears socialist must be stopped. And regardless of the evidence, privatizing social services such as education and health care provides superior treatment than a socialized model.

## **Conclusions**

Tanner's final words, "So do taxpayers," provide the key to interpreting his final argument: those who benefit from the services performed by soldiers whether directly (Congress and the corporate world) or indirectly (the U.S. taxpayers) should not be seen as responsible for caring for the soldiers after their time of service, an obligation that since the founding of this nation Congress has accepted as its own and has acted upon. Therefore, the move to privatize veteran health care has nothing to do with its stated objectives of providing the best care available, because numerous studies have demonstrated that the VA health care system, for all of its management flaws, outpaces the private sector in patient management information systems, providing needed and holistic care, overall patient satisfaction with the care given, and in providing quality care at more affordable prices. While this is the only overt argument that libertarians can make without violating the dictum of "Support our Troops" they publicly espouse, this argument provides surface cover for their primary purpose: to slay what they see as a bloated, capricious, monstrous "Big Government" by dismantling any and all programs that appear socialist, which makes them "un-American," and replacing those programs with an unregulated free market that they have mythologized as a great hero for social problems. Such a divestment of public funds (tax dollars) is equivalent to refusing to provide economic gifts to warriors out of the spoils of war, thus communicating that the United States aristocracy does not exist in a relationship marked by reciprocal obligation to the warriors whose service, as agents of the aristocracy, functions to both legitimize governance and to expand the political and economic clout possessed by the aristocracy. As a god term, Freedom – though couched in terms of

freedom to choose – ultimately is freedom from obligation to others. As such, by divesting public funds from the VA system and placing them in private care, the libertarian argument argues that wars can be measured solely in dollars, denying that the true costs of war are broken bodies, fractured minds, and shattered futures for those who fight.

While no ancient society had a Veteran Affairs hospital system, the issue that underscores the congressional debates surrounding the crisis and scandal of veteran health care is one of economic obligation, an issue well-known and frequently discussed in the heroic myths of ancient societies. While the economic aspect of Agamemnon's retraction of the gift of Briseis underscores Achilles' anger, the moral rightness of providing economic, and the associated symbolic, capital to warriors who have served loyally finds direct statement throughout *Beowulf*. The poet unequivocally declares that economic generosity – especially toward those who serve in the king's warband – is a necessary trait of good kingship. Given that these gifts are given within the hall *after* service and that the custom of heriot provides for the warrior until his death, the heroic tradition directs attention to the fact that the aristocracy's obligation to its warriors does not end when the war it sends them to fight ends but instead continues throughout their lives. This is not to suggest that all soldiers be granted lives of leisure, but it does remind the aristocracy of the United States, Congress, that it cannot simply treat funding the Veterans Affairs hospital system as it treats any other budget item. Given that disability is a prime predictor of veteran unemployment – whether that disability be from a physical or psychological war wound – funding the VA hospital system is an economic issue that stems from ancient obligations to provide and reward those who have faithfully served the aristocracy. The challenge then becomes how to fix system and not to transfer responsibility to another entity, in this case, the private sector. Such a transference is a breach of the contract signed by use of

heroic rhetoric. If Congress claims that soldiers are heroes, which it does, then it is obligated to treat them as the heroic tradition directs aristocracies to treat its warrior heroes. The libertarian argument to privatize the VA health care system, exemplified through the writing of Michael Tanner, does not deny the belief that soldiers are to be treated as heroes. However, this argues suggests either an ignorance of the aristocratic obligation to the heroes who wage wars for aristocratic benefit or a selfish desire to gain the benefits of heroic rhetoric while avoiding the responsibility and obligation that those who deploy heroic rhetoric owe to those who perform the deeds consistent with heroic character. Ultimately, the mythic tradition declares that economic benefits (which stem from veterans being physically and psychologically “fit” enough to find work) are not an entitlement given but a debt to be paid. Privatizing the VA health care system, then, becomes analogous to defaulting on a loan – a loan that has been paid in the suffering, sweat, blood, and death of soldiers.

Soldiers and veterans like Daniel Somers who found himself trapped by the wars in which he served, wounded by PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, fibromyalgia, Gulf War Syndrome, and other interconnected conditions. A victim of the VA hospital scandal, Somers chose a different form of self-medication than many in the civilian world would anticipate: suicide. Recent statistics demonstrate that twenty-two veterans per day, on average, choose this path – a path that many believe to be antithetical to that of the soldier, because suicide, as many believe, is the path of cowardice. As the final chapter of this dissertation shall argue, Somers did not believe his choice was a coward’s choice but was, instead, a final mission to free a captured soldier. Therefore, Somers believed that his choice arose from the seven values instilled in him by the United States Army, making his act one of honor, of a soldier’s piety. The warrior ethos that arises from within the soldier during training and that is crystalized in battle now rises again

for what Somers believed was his final act of heroism: a personal sacrifice for the good of his family. This rereading suggests a polysemy and polyvalence to suicide that helps to explain the rhetorical significance of his action – an action that led his family to campaign for better mental health care for soldiers both during and after service.

CHAPTER V:  
THE FINAL MISSION:  
SUICIDE AS AN ACT OF PIETY

*“Now that the war is through with me / I’m waking up I cannot see / That there’s not much left of me / Nothing is real but pain now” – Metallica, “One”*

In 2013, an average of twenty-two United States veterans from all wars committed suicide per day.<sup>527</sup> Even though popular culture from *Full Metal Jacket* to *The Deer Hunter* to *Rambo* to *Homeland*, has made a pervasive trope of US soldiers and veterans suffering from mental illness, the actual prevalence of these issues against which this trope inoculates society remains largely unknown to the general public. Recent studies demonstrate that, for the first time in US history, a significantly larger number of US veterans commit suicide annually than their civilian counterparts.<sup>528</sup> Recent statistics approximate that 2,810 active duty soldiers and 2,000 veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom have committed suicide, a number that threatens to eclipse the official combined casualty rate of both conflicts (6,653) before the end of 2014. Those who have served in a combat zone appear to be at an increased risk compared to those who remained stateside during their tour(s) of duty.<sup>529</sup>

Unlike most veteran suicides, the death of former U.S. Army sergeant Daniel Somers did not remain unnoticed by the national news. A Humvee machine gunner for Task Force Lightning, Somers, ran over four hundred combat missions, interviewed numerous Iraqi citizens, and interrogated insurgents and terrorist suspects. In his second deployment (2006-2007), he ran the Northern Iraq Intelligence Center in Mosul as senior analyst for the Levant. Sgt. Somers

---

<sup>527</sup> Hecht, “To Live is an Act of Courage,” 41-49, 42.

<sup>528</sup> Mark S. Kaplan, Bentson H. McFarland, Nathalie Huguet, and Marcia Valenstein, “Suicide Risk and Precipitating Circumstances Among Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Male Veterans,” *American Journal of Public Health* 102 no. S1 (2012): 131-137, 133.

<sup>529</sup> Lindsay I. McCarl, “To Have No Yesterday: the Rise of Suicide Rates in the Military and Among Veterans,” *Creighton Law Review* 46 no. 3 (2013): 393-432, 403-404.



suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, traumatic brain injury, fibromyalgia, and numerous other war-related conditions.<sup>530</sup> After over a decade of physical pain, psychological torment, and the frustrations that arose from the lack of treatment he, like many other veterans, received from VA hospitals, Daniel Somers ended his own life. After his suicide on 10 June 2013, his wife, following the instructions to share as she saw fit, shared the news of his death and his suicide note first with family, then with the local media in Phoenix, and then with the world through *Gawker.com* where it went viral.<sup>531</sup> Somers' note both describes his mental state and calls attention to frustrations common to many veterans: scheduling appointments with Veteran Affairs hospitals and receiving the necessary treatment. His family publicized his suicide note and met with VA officials and congressional staffers in an effort to prevent this tragedy from befalling others.<sup>532</sup> Their campaign has garnered enough media attention to elicit a formal, public response from TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors) offering sympathy but asking that news media refrain from publishing Sgt. Somers' suicide note for fear that it "may encourage other vulnerable individuals to take steps that cannot be reversed".<sup>533</sup>

A rhetorical analysis of suicide appears impossible given that suicide as a phenomenon is ephemeral, unrepeatable, and intensely private in its performance. Reading suicide rhetorically complicates the binary between public and private actions, because it argues that what most see to be a personal, private action brought about solely by internal psychological forces may, in

---

<sup>530</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This: A Soldier's Last Words," *Gawker.com*, 22 June 2013, <http://gawker.com/i-am-sorry-that-it-has-come-to-this-a-soldiers-last-534538357> Accessed 2 May 2015.

<sup>531</sup> Vogel, Steve, "After Veteran Daniel Somers' Suicide, his Family has a New Mission: Improve VA Services," *WashingtonPost.com*, 22 August 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-veteran-daniel-somerss-suicide-his-family-has-a-new-mission-improve-va-services/2013/08/23/ae67b2c2-0526-11e3-9259-e2aafe5a5f84\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-veteran-daniel-somerss-suicide-his-family-has-a-new-mission-improve-va-services/2013/08/23/ae67b2c2-0526-11e3-9259-e2aafe5a5f84_story.html). Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>532</sup> Chelsea C. Cook, "Soldiers Suicide Note Goes Viral; Family Demands Better for Veterans," *cnn.com*, 6 July 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/06/us/soldier-suicide-note/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>533</sup> "TAPS Issues Statement to Media on Ways to Approach Covering Suicide," *TAPS.org*, 27 June 2013, <http://www.taps.org/media/press.aspx?id=9792> Accessed 25 May 2015.

fact, be a social, public action motivated by larger, external discourses whose combined forces converge upon the body of an individual. As further evidence of suicide's rhetorical nature, those who choose to end their lives by their own hands often leave final communiqués behind that seek to persuade the bereaved that this singular death restores order through two forms of rhetorical proof: that a logic exists to justify the death and that the bereaved should be happy for the decedent. Daniel Somers clarifies the former throughout his note and the latter through his final plea to his family, "It is perhaps the best break I could have hoped for. Please accept this and be glad for me."<sup>534</sup> Beyond that, suicide notes articulate a desire to restore order in a chaotic life.

Following Messner and Burkrop, this chapter contends that suicide notes, by their very existence, are rhetorical documents that function to maintain a connection to others, thus contributing to Burke's concept of the unending conversation.<sup>535</sup> Furthermore, it argues that reading Daniel Somers' suicide note through Kenneth Burke's interconnected concepts of the epic frame and secular piety illuminate Somers' reading of the scene around him, thus revealing his argument for the rightness of suicide, the emotional conflict that besieges the grieving survivors, and the exigence that gives the survivors cause to respond to the situation that led to the suicide. To accomplish this, this chapter will demonstrate that Daniel Somers, embodying the Army values of personal courage, loyalty, duty, respect selfless service, integrity, and honor, accepted suicide as the only ethical response to his physical and psychological suffering as evidenced through the metaphor of suicide as a "final mission" to free an imprisoned soldier. This suggests a partially heroic character to the act of suicide, which provides a counter reading

---

<sup>534</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This."

<sup>535</sup> Beth A. Messner and Jacquelyn J. Buckrop, "Restoring Order: Interpreting Suicide through a Burkean Lens," *Communication Quarterly* 48 no. 1 (2000): 1-18, 14.

to the more culturally dominant understanding of suicide as a tragedy arising out of an individual's desire for redemption. The tension created by the interplay of this polysemy and polyvalence mirrors the emotional turmoil that presents the survivors with the opportunity to respond through anger, acceptance, or action.

Additionally, that Somers' suicide note went viral suggests a level of *kairos* on a larger scale than is common to suicide notes. To describe a suicide note as demonstrating rhetorical timeliness initially suggests an impoverished understanding of *kairos*' significance. However, the unexpected viral dissemination that emerged from Somers' widow sharing the note with the public and the resulting campaign for change launched by the bereaved suggest that the note possesses one or more qualities that connect to the socio-historical context of its writing on a scale larger than the immediate event of Somers' suicide, supporting a claim that a suicide note can be a rhetorical document due to its inherent *kairotic* potential. As previously stated, suicide notes normally do not go viral, but the emotional impact of Daniel Somers' suicide note captured the imagination of the nation at the moment of its release to Gawker.com, making it anomalous among suicide notes. Viral media, a term primarily applied to online content made popular through repeated sharing, primarily includes diverse genres such as "funniest home video" style failures that ignite *schadenfreude*, cat videos/pictures with captions, or other entertaining or humorous content.<sup>536</sup> Dafonte-Gomez argues that viral content, regardless of genre, suggests a "symbolic link between the content shared, the personality of the user sharing it, and the perception of the community it is shared with".<sup>537</sup> Viral content captures the imagination of

---

<sup>536</sup> Metaweb, "Viral Video," *freebase.com*, 23 October 2006, <http://www.freebase.com/m/0c261k>, Accessed 3 January 2015.

<sup>537</sup> Alberto Dafonte-Gomez, "The Key Elements of Viral Advertising. From Motivation to Emotion in Shared Videos," *Comunicar* 43 no. 22 (2014): 199-206, 200.

those who share it, using strong and often positive emotional appeals.<sup>538</sup> Through the repeated act of sharing across social media, the private act of consuming media becomes an utterance in the public discourse, compounding the rhetorical power inherent in the original content.<sup>539</sup> Emerging at a point when support for what appeared to be perpetual war in the Middle East began to plummet, Somers' description of the "culture of fear" created by the DEA and compounded by lack of treatment from the VA medical system, of a war brought about by "Bush's religious lunacy" and by "Cheney's ever growing fortune and that of his corporate friends," and of a political and military philosophy that enshrines a "regime built upon the idea that suffering is noble and relief is just for the weak," gave a single, human face to the growing anger at the regime whose economic and international policies had left many U.S. citizens asking the same question that Somers asked for his own suffering: "And for what?"<sup>540</sup>

The frustration and anger at the lengthy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that became incarnated in the corpse of Daniel Somers further suggests a tragic reading, according to tragedy's popular definition, of one who struggled against a corrupt system but ultimately failed to defeat the corrupt powers and bring about a "happy ending." This focus on a Disneyfied narrative ignores both the reality of combat service and the ancient mythic heritage of contemporary heroic discourses. That contemporary narratives and understanding of heroism ascribe both necessity and positive valence to the successful homecoming after the war implies a linkage between failure and tragedy, a linkage that suicide magnifies in both popular and professional discourses on the subject and suggests an internal focus on the failures of the

---

<sup>538</sup> "The History of Viral Video," *tuscaloosaneews.com*, 6 July 2007, <http://www.tuscaloosaneews.com/article/20070706/TUSK04/70706001/-1/NEWS09>, Accessed 3 January 2015.

<sup>539</sup> Dafonte-Gomez, "The Key Elements of Viral Advertising," 201.

<sup>540</sup> "I am Sorry It has Come to This."

decendent as the cause of both the death and the failure.<sup>541</sup> As previously discussed in Chapter III, the discourses suicide and mental illness that intersect with military fitness and heroic character converge to make soldiers hesitant to seek treatment, suggesting that the dominant reading of mental illness is a major contributing factor in the contemporary rise of soldier and veteran suicide. Similarly, the dominant reading of suicide functions to exonerate the military-industrial complex of responsibility for its role in creating and perpetuating the system that Somers terms a “regime built on the idea that suffering is noble”.<sup>542</sup> The intersection of these discourse sets creates a feedback loop that supports the dominant tragic reading that this chapter challenges through Somers’ metaphor of suicide as a successful final mission to free an imprisoned soldier. Somers’ own argument for his suicide suggests the counter reading of suicide as a product of a soldier’s heroic piety - of living, killing, and dying by the U.S. Army values. This chapter argues that a soldier’s suicide be read through the epic frame. Through this analysis that this chapter hopes to offer assistance to clinicians treating soldiers at risk for suicide and their families.

### **Heroic Piety as Equipment for Dying**

In *On Suicide*, Durkheim defines suicide as all cases “of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result”.<sup>543</sup> Durkheim’s definition of suicide includes all intentional acts where death is inevitable even if the individual did not intend to die, thus broadening the definition of suicide to include self-sacrificial acts such as a soldier falling on a grenade to save his unit or someone martyred for religious and/or political causes. Durkheim contradicts the more common definition that

---

<sup>541</sup> Ian Marsh, “The Uses of History in the Unmaking of Modern Suicide,” *Journal of Social History* 46 no. 3 (2013): 744-756, 747-748.

<sup>542</sup> “I am Sorry it has Come to This.”

<sup>543</sup> Emile Durkheim, *On Suicide*, translated by Robin Ross (London: Penguin, 2006), 44.

distinguishes suicide from sacrifice through attribution of a negative moral valence to the former and a positive moral valence to the latter.<sup>544</sup> The most significant aspect of Durkheim's research for this study is his redefinition of suicide as a social action instead of as a solitary, individual action, describing the suicide as "the outcome and extension of a social state to which they give external form." The import of this redefinition arises from its illumination of the social structures that both cause and intersect at the act of suicide – however hidden they might be.<sup>545</sup> Since Durkheim, several scholars have examined and critiqued the social structures that intersect at suicide in both historical<sup>546</sup> and contemporary societies.<sup>547</sup>

Of Durkheim's four classifications of suicide, altruistic suicide, which results from being "too firmly integrated in society"<sup>548</sup> and arises from the obligations of honor, duty, or loyalty, connects most directly to a soldier's death. Durkheim identifies this suicidal act, which arises from one's obligations, as the primary class of suicides among those in the military who "have been most moulded to its demands and who are best protected from the trials and tribulations that it may involve".<sup>549</sup> That a soldier's suicide may arise from a sense of honor and duty from his being remade in the image of the warrior ideal, then Durkheim's definition of altruistic suicide intersects with Kenneth Burke's notions of piety and the epic frame to create an equipment for dying. Piety is the schema of orientation that integrates life experiences into a coherent whole and that demands certain symbolic rituals through which an individual aligns with the ideals and forces society deems good by removing the taint of taboo through symbolic expiation.<sup>550</sup> For the

---

<sup>544</sup> Suzanne Stern-Gillet, "The Rhetoric of Suicide," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20 no. 3 (1987): 160-170, 168.

<sup>545</sup> Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 331.

<sup>546</sup> Michael MacDonald, "The Medicalization of Suicide in England: Laymen, Physicians, and Cultural Change, 1500-1870," *The Milbank Quarterly* 67. Supplement 1 (1989): 69-91, 84.

<sup>547</sup> David M. Clarke, "Autonomy, Rationality, and the Wish to Die," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25 no. 6 (1999): 457-462; Marsh, "The Uses of History in the Unmaking of Modern Suicide."

<sup>548</sup> Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 234.

<sup>549</sup> Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 253.

<sup>550</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 74-77.

soldier, this schema entails embodying, performing, and identifying with the heroic virtues of character and regimentation of life valued by the military to which the soldier belongs.<sup>551</sup>

Trained in a “bodily rhetoric of honour,” that seeks to align them, either consciously or subconsciously with the mythic warrior hero who ventures outward to confront the evil that threatens the safety of his society.<sup>552</sup> Trained and indoctrinated to align with the mythic warrior archetype, the soldier becomes pious when he (or she), prepared to accept the “rigors of war”.<sup>553</sup> This entails accepting the probability that the soldier will die during his or her tour of duty.<sup>554</sup> Thus, when trained and prepared to accept death in heroic action for what he or she believes to be for the greater good, a death in combat fully aligns with Durkheim’s concept of altruistic suicide – the soldier who ventures to war willingly makes the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the people.

Few would argue with reading a soldier’s death as heroic, epic, and pious should the soldier die in battle performing a noble action, such as falling on a grenade to protect his or her unit or rescuing noncombatant children from a burning building. As shall be discussed in detail throughout this chapter, reading a soldier’s post-discharge suicide through this lens proves problematic. Contemporary discourses in U.S. society read suicide as a selfish, egotistical act that arises from the melancholy, anxiety, and depression caused from a lack of social integration.<sup>555</sup> This motive is often attributed to what has now become an all-too-common trope in popular culture: the suicide of a homeless, mentally-ill (often Vietnam) veteran. To read a post-discharge suicide through the epic frame denaturalizes the culturally-constructed moral

---

<sup>551</sup> Knight, “Literature as Equipment for Killing,” 157-168.

<sup>552</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 135; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 29.

<sup>553</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 63-65.

<sup>554</sup> Junger, *On Pain*, 16-17.

<sup>555</sup> Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 224-225.

valances attributed to death in battle, self-inflicted death, and directional violence.

Contemporary society reads the ultimate sacrifice as heroic, selfless, and epic if one wills oneself to act *during* wartime, but it reads the same will to act as cowardly, selfish, and tragic if carried out *after* wartime. The same can be said of directional violence. If a warrior directs his violent actions against an external enemy (enemy combatant, monster, etc.), the violent act is seen as heroic. However, if the same warrior directs the same action against an internal foe (a fellow soldier, a citizen of his own nation, himself), then the violent act is seen as unheroic. This change in moral valance afforded to the scene of death and the direction of violence in a post-discharge suicide shifts the locus of responsibility for the self-willed death from heroic virtue (courage against an external threat) to tragic vice (selfishness and moral weakness).

Overweening pride replaces heroic courage, anointing the death with “the connotations of crime” that brings suffering upon the survivors.<sup>556</sup>

This chapter argues that the suicide of a soldier – either veteran or active duty – may arise from a soldier’s sense of piety instilled during training and crystalized in combat, marking the death as arising from integration into the epic frame. This reading is oppositional to the more traditional Western view that suicide arises from some internal flaw for which the decedent feels guilty and seeks redemption through self-inflicted death.<sup>557</sup> This common-sense reading is shared by mainstream Judeo-Christian philosophy as well as Burkean scholarship, which has demonstrated a preference for reading suicide through the lens of the guilt-redemption cycle.<sup>558</sup> Burkean suicide scholarship, as with rhetorical suicide scholarship in general, focuses on civilian suicide. While both civilians and soldiers share membership in the overarching national culture,

---

<sup>556</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 39.

<sup>557</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 39.

<sup>558</sup> Messner and Buckrop, “Restoring Order”.



the scholar must remember that the purpose of military training is to replace the attitudes and values of civilian life with those suited to the rigorous hierarchy of military culture and for the potential dangers of life in a combat zone.<sup>559</sup> If one is to truly move toward an understanding of the current crises of rampant and rising suicide rates among active duty soldiers and combat veterans, one must recognize that military culture is markedly different from its civilian counterpoint, making an adequate interpretation of civilian suicide inadequate to understand the decedent's motives and ineffective in offering aid to those seeking to reduce suicide rates among U.S. soldiery. Additionally, a guilt-redemption reading of suicide has an inherent tendency to inscribe the crime and to locate the blame squarely on the body of the decedent in a way that depoliticizes the act of suicide. Another aim of this chapter is the repoliticizing of suicide so that the scene includes the social and political forces that converge upon the body of the decedent and to a large extent delimit the available actions the individual sees as being available.

### **Heroic Suicide: Judging Death by the Values of Life**

Those arguing that heroic myth does not frequently depict the suicide of the hero would be technically correct. Those who argue that *Beowulf* depicts death in battle and not suicide would also be correct. Beowulf dies fighting a dragon in order to protect his – and other – people from its threat. While such a death seems antithetical to suicide, recall how Durkheim clarified the act of suicide as an act brought upon by the decedent and “which he knows will produce this result [his death]”.<sup>560</sup> Beowulf, who has fought many men and monsters before this dragon, knows that every time he enters battle, death is a possibility. Yet still, this old king who has ruled the Geats for fifty winters, willingly risks (and sacrifices) his life for the greater good. The significance of the comparison between the deaths of Beowulf and of Daniel Somers is not whether both should

---

<sup>559</sup> Knight, “Literature as Equipment for Killing,” 157-168.

<sup>560</sup> Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 44.

be defined as “suicide” in general or “altruistic suicide” in particular. The significance of the comparison rests in the manner in which a warrior’s death is to be interpreted, and following Durkheim’s definition of altruistic suicide, that interpretation must stem from the ideals of training and a career of soldiering to which the warrior has “been moulded”.<sup>561</sup> And while Beowulf leaves no suicide note proper, he does, through the famous Unferð flyting episode, establish an argument for heroic action that, like Somers’ note, demonstrates that his death arose from the values of his warrior training.

Flyting is a genre of verbal duel where opponents (primarily male) debate who better exemplifies the warrior ideal through a series of boasts and insults, providing entertainment and education for the audience(s) who witness these contests of verbal dexterity and who, through them, learn proper behavior. Truth is assumed by each party involved, as deception is dishonorable and marks one as unworthy to enter into this arena of verbal contestation.<sup>562</sup> While the structure of each individual duel exhibits cultural and artistic creativity and innovation, all boast contests are highly structured speech acts.<sup>563</sup> While thoroughly discussed in the literature, it bears stating here that during these contests the participants debate interpretation of events and not the factual nature of the events’ occurrence. The significance of the debate focusing on the power to interpret actions and define them as being heroic or unheroic shall be attended to in detail shortly.

What underscores this episode, like all heroic boast contests, is an argument from principle. As Richard Weaver states, “the argument has a single postulate. The postulate is that

---

<sup>561</sup> Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 44.

<sup>562</sup> Carol Clover, “The Germanic Context of the Unferð Episode,” *Speculum* 55.3 (1983): 444-468.

<sup>563</sup> Karen Swenson, *Performing Definitions: Two Genres of Insult in Old Norse Literature* (Columbia: Camden House, 1991); Andreas Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, “Diachronic Speech Act Analysis: Insults from Flyting to Flaming,” *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 1.1 (2000): 67-95.

there exist classes which are determinate and therefore predictable.”<sup>564</sup> What Weaver means by this is that while each species possesses peculiarities that differentiate it from other species in its group, all species of a particular genus exhibit the traits of that genus. The traits of the genus are fixed, and it is by knowing those traits that we can know something about each species. One arguing from definition, therefore, seeks to demonstrate that some specific thing, person, event, or action (species) meets the criteria marking it as a member of the broader category of things (genus). As a result of this definition, if “honor” demands a certain action in a certain type of situation, on principle, to be deemed honorable, one must perform that action in all situations that meet the criteria of the archetypal situation. According to Weaver, making the argument from principle is a heroic act, because, as he says, “it is of first importance whether a leader has the courage to define.”<sup>565</sup> This heroic act of definition links both genus and species together in a teleological framework that demands ethical action, because it is only through courageously defining the principle from which one acts, can one march onward, win the assent of men, and lead people from crisis to glory.

Upon entering Heorot and declaring his intention to fight Grendel, Beowulf must answer a challenge to his heroic nature from Unferð, and his response to this challenge establishes a principle of behaviour that guides his career from the beginning through to his death. After Beowulf declares his intentions to help Hroðgar by defeating Grendel, Unferð initiates the flyting by asking if this newcomer to the hall is "*se Beowulf*" ["that Beowulf"] who lost a swimming contest against Breca during the winter.<sup>566</sup> Before the assembled crowd at Heorot, Unferð describes Beowulf's actions in this contest to be dishonourable and arrogant through his framing

---

<sup>564</sup> Richard Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 86.

<sup>565</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 114.

<sup>566</sup> *Beowulf*, 506a.

of the contest as “*wlence*” [for pride] and “*for dolgilpe*” [for a foolish bet].<sup>567</sup> He then further cements his interpretation of the event as proof of Beowulf's arrogance by stating that “*Ne inc ænig mon, / nē lēof nē lāð, belēan mihte / sorhfullne sīð, þā git on sund reon.*” [not any man, neither dear nor hateful, might dissuade you from that sorrowful journey of rowing out to swim]<sup>568</sup> Unferð argues that Beowulf wilfully violates the principles that mark one as an honorable, heroic warrior, thus declaring that Beowulf has neither the right to fight Grendel nor the hope of defeating the monster.

After Unferð concludes his argument, Beowulf responds with his own argument, reframing the event so as to argue that Beowulf's actions arose out of honorable principles. He does not deny that the contest occurred, but he begins by stating that he and Breca made that bet when they were boys. Beowulf then provides details that show that these young men did take precautions against the obstacles they might face when he says, “*Hæfdon swurd nacod, þā wit on sund reon, / heard on handa; wit unc wið hronfixas / werian þōhton.*” [We had naked swords, as we swam, hard in our hand; against the whale-fishes / with hope to protect us]<sup>569</sup> Given that they swam with unsheathed swords in hand to protect them against attacks from whales. This evidence adds a level of complexity to the situation, providing further context for the audience (both in Heorot and either listening to or reading the tale) to incorporate into their judgment of Beowulf's character and worthiness by demonstrating forethought and preparedness as opposed to Unferð's claim that Beowulf is rash and unheeding of counsel regarding the dangers of this action. Beowulf continues narrating this contest and concludes with a much more powerful

---

<sup>567</sup> *Beowulf*, 508a; 509a.

<sup>568</sup> *Beowulf*, 510b-512.

<sup>569</sup> *Beowulf*, 539-541a.

piece of evidence that supports his claim of honorable, heroic, worthy action when he narrates that something unknown dragged him to the bottom of the sea.

*fah feondscada, fæste hæfde  
grim on grāpe; hwæpre mē gyfepe wearð,  
þæt ic āglæcan orde geræhte,  
hildebille; heaporæs fornam  
mihtig meredeor þurh mine hand.*

The hostile fiend-scather, held fast  
Grim in its grasp; however, it was granted me,  
That I might reach the monster with my point,  
The battle-sword; in the battle rush I destroyed  
The mighty sea-beast through my hand.<sup>570</sup>

Beowulf continues to narrate how more of this beast, the nicor, attacked him, how he slew them, and how their corpses floated to the surface where they would no longer hinder seafarers.<sup>571</sup> In conceding that Breca reached shore first, Beowulf narrates the swimming contest as consisting of an event that demanded ethical action - a sea monster attack. While we know little of the specifics of these sea monsters beyond their ancestral relation to the Sussex sea-dragon the *knucker*, Beowulf tells us that they had apparently been problematic for sea travellers.<sup>572</sup> That the nicor is a serpentine monster similar to the oldest of the Indo-European dragons – the Hittite Illuyankas, which as Joshua Katz demonstrates is precisely an “eel-snake,” or a “water serpent, proves significant in that it opens the frame of Beowulf’s dragon slaying career.<sup>573</sup> Through his refutation of Unferð’s charge, Beowulf reframed the incident as arising out of a choice to help others at the expense of personal glory. Given that ethical, heroic action, while individual in nature and rewarding individual glory to the hero, is action that requires a willingness to make

---

<sup>570</sup> *Beowulf*, 554-558.

<sup>571</sup> *Beowulf*, 566-569a.

<sup>572</sup> Jacqueline Simpson, “Sussex Local Legends,” *Folklore* 84.3 (1991): 206-223, 216.

<sup>573</sup> Joshua T. Katz, “How to Be a Dragon in Indo-European: Hittite Illuyankas and its Cultural Congeners in Greek, Latin, and Germanic,” in Jay Jasanoff, H. Craig Melchert, and Lisi Oliver, eds. *Mir Curad: Studies in Honor of Calvert Watkins* (Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft, 1998): 317-335, 320.

personal sacrifice for the benefit of the social group as a whole,<sup>574</sup> Beowulf argues that through his defeat (a willing sacrifice of personal glory against Breca and a willingness to potentially sacrifice his life), he performed an action (defeating nine nicor) that benefited a larger group than himself through providing protection for seafarers. Thus, if we return to the abstracted utterance form presented earlier, we can see that Beowulf completes the formula as follows:

When I encountered (nicor while swimming in the North Sea), I recognized that it was a specific incident belonging to the class of {Dragons who inhabit aquatic areas and who threaten humans}; therefore, because [being worthy of remembrance] demands that I perform {a selfless action to protect others}, I performed this specific (protective act by descending into the depths with a sword to slay the nicor and protect sea-farers), which makes me heroic and, thus, worthy of remembrance.

This argument should be unsurprising, given that the nicor episode in *Beowulf*, as an Indo-European dragon slaying myth, conforms to the formula first presented by Calvert Watkins as: Hero {slays} Serpent {with Weapon} and later elaborated to the following: Hero {slays/is slain by} Serpent {with/out weapon and/or companions}.<sup>575</sup> This heroic act protects the hero's people, makes him worthy of remembrance, and earns him undying fame. Thus, Beowulf argues that his actions in this contest demonstrate adherence to the guiding principle that a warrior's strength and skill must be channelled into actions that benefit and protect the group (here, protecting sailors from sea-serpents). As a result of his actions, he should be deemed honorable and heroic. Thus, as Conquergood argues, the boast is forward-looking, transforming past

---

<sup>574</sup> Rushing and Frenz, *Projecting the Shadow*: 56.

<sup>575</sup> Calvert Watkins, "How to Slay a Dragon in Indo-European," in Calvert Watkins, ed. *Studies in Memory of Warren Cowgill (1929-1985) Papers from the Fourth East Coast Indo-European Conference Cornell University, June 6-9, 1985* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1987): 270-299, 277; Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon*, 302.

heroism into future exploits by presenting the defining characteristics that mark the specific situation as an example of a more generic situation-type and the underlying ethical principle that governs his actions.<sup>576</sup>

Were this a singular incident, this would be of little significance, but as shall be demonstrated, the formula Beowulf establishes during his response reoccurs during his final fight against the dragon. Beowulf, an old king who has ruled for fifty winters, must decide whether or not to fight the dragon that has attacked his people. Recalling the argument Beowulf established in the flyting reveals that this episode possesses all the appropriate signs that he continues to live – and now die – by this principle. The dragon clearly belongs to the class of Dragons.

Additionally, the dragon lives in a cave by the sea, so while Beowulf did not descend into the water to fight this serpent, he still ventured outside the boundaries of civilization and descended beneath the surface (by the sea) to fight the dragon. Like his other forays into serpent territory, he carried a sword, not because he wanted to do so, but because he had no other alternative. As he himself states, “*Nolde ic sweord beran / waēpen tō wyrme gif ic wiste hū / wið ðām āglaēcean elles mehte / gylpe wiðgrīpan.*” [I would not carry a sword / a weapon against the wyrm if I knew how / through any other means I might / grapple for glory]<sup>577</sup> While this statement seems painfully obvious, as fighting a dragon without a weapon is foolish, the implication is that no other course of action but violence exists to rectify this situation. This, of course, is one of the signs of the abstracted argument and an element of the mythic formula: in all situations against serpentine monsters, Beowulf must fight the serpent with a sword. And while the dangerous and violent act of slaying the serpent seems itself to demonstrate the hero’s

---

<sup>576</sup> Dwight Conquergood, “Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England: Performance and the Heroic Ethos,” *Literature in Performance* 1.2 (1981): 24-35, 27.

<sup>577</sup> *Beowulf*: 2518b-2521a.

willingness to sacrifice himself for the good of his people, as Rushing and Frenz articulate, the true benefit arises from the hero returning to his people with a boon.<sup>578</sup> To this end, Beowulf provides three boons for his people: safety from the dragon, the treasure of its hoard, and a lighthouse on the sea-cliff. The first is obvious: with the dragon dead, it can no longer attack his people. Though he articulates a desire that the treasure be given to his people, his people placed the dragon's hoard in Beowulf's barrow even though his intent was that this treasure should be given to his people for their benefit.<sup>579</sup> His final benefit returns full circle to the flying: he wanted to see to the needs of sailors. This time, his method was instructing his men to erect what is essentially a lighthouse on the cliff.

*hātað heaðomaēre hlaēw gewyrcean  
 beorhtne æfter baēle æt brimes nōsan  
 sē scel tō gemyndum mīnum lēodum  
 hēah hlīfian on hrones næsse  
 þæt hit saēlīðend syððan hātan  
 Bīowulfes Biorh ðā ðe brentingas  
 ofer flōda genipu feorran drīfað.*

Command war-famed men to construct a mound  
 Bright after the fire at the sea's cape.  
 It shall remind my people  
 Tower high on the whale's land  
 So that it sea-farers shall thus name  
 Beowulf's Barrow that they who ships  
 Over the sea's mists from afar drive.<sup>580</sup>

In his final thoughts, Beowulf demonstrates concern for the safety of sea-farers. In slaying the dragons as a young man, he provided direct protection for sailors through the removal of a threat

---

<sup>578</sup> Rushing and, *Projecting the Shadow*, 56.

<sup>579</sup> *Beowulf*: 2797-.

<sup>580</sup> *Beowulf*: 2803-2808.



that lurked under the water's surface. In slaying the dragon as an aged king, he provides direct protection for his people through the elimination of a direct threat, and he also provides indirect protection for sea-farers by establishing a light to guide them safely toward the shore.

While many modern readers and critics may see this line of argumentation as superfluous. Beowulf died killing a dragon; therefore, calling his death heroic should be obvious. However, there exists a polysemy and polyvalence in Beowulf's final fight that has led many modern scholars from Tolkien onward, to suggest that Beowulf is guilty of *ofermod*, overweening, tragic pride that, in the view of these scholars, consequently causes his death at the dragon's bite. Scott Gwara, after tracing the arguments for and against Beowulf's hubris, concludes that the dragon fight poses but never answers its own riddle: Is Beowulf arrogant.<sup>581</sup> However, by reading the dragon fight through principle established by his response to Unferð at the beginning of the poem, when Beowulf was but a young warrior, the answer to the riddle emerges: Beowulf is not guilty of *ofermod*, because he acted according the principle that he established at the beginning of his heroic career. Beowulf's heroic career ends as it began: wielding a sword in a fight against a serpentine monster in a selfless action that benefits his people as well as others he does not know. Beowulf is a hero, because he demonstrates his willingness to sacrifice his own safety and life in order to protect other people by descending into the depths, sword in hand, to slay serpentine monsters. To understand how the poet provides an answer to his own "riddle," as Gwara labels it, one must read Beowulf's death through the warrior values that guided his life. Similarly, to understand Daniel Somers' reasoning for choosing to end his own life, one must read his suicide note through the values that shaped his life and vocation: the values of the United States Army.

---

<sup>581</sup> Gwara, *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, 365.

## **Polysemy, Polyvalence, and Piety in a Soldier's Suicide**

To read suicide rhetorically assumes that suicide is a public act, an interpretation that creates tension with the more common reading of suicide as a private act, based largely on the isolated location of the act's often secretive performance. The tension between these two readings intersects with the tension that arises from reading a soldier's suicide as either heroic or tragic, creating an emotionally-chaotic polysmous and polyvalent event that becomes ordered through an interpretation of the death as either arising from psychological interiority (mental illness or a desire to expiate one's guilty conscience) or from a soldier's sense of piety. This dramatic tension locates the act of suicide on the boundary between heroic epic and tragic drama in a manner that suggests that the line between the two forms is more permeable than society desires it to be. Both the piety that heralds epic heroism and the hubris that foreshadows tragic guilt begin with a recognition of "the problem of evil"<sup>582</sup> – an exigence, a moment of crisis where the best course of action is not immediately known. For Somers, the most immediate evil is his own physical and psychological torment.

All day, every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending in my body. It is nothing short of torture. My mind is a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety, even with all of the medications the doctors dare give. Simple things that everyone else takes for granted are nearly impossible for me.<sup>583</sup>

The language in this passage demonstrates the diagnostic aspect of acceptance and piety, where an individual "defines the 'human situation'" and then formulates strategies for proper action.<sup>584</sup> In this passage, Somers draws upon the language of psychology to diagnose his condition as one of "unceasing depression" and of "crippling anxiety". Through the incorporation of clinical

---

<sup>582</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3.

<sup>583</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This."

<sup>584</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3.

terminology, Somers describes his mental suffering in a manner suggesting the process of psychological diagnosis that describes an internal etiology to his suffering, suggesting his suicide to be a private action.

Reading Somers' suicide as an individual, private action committed in secret suggests an application of the common wisdom that suicide is a tragic event that results from a personal weakness. Military philosophy from Xenophon to the present parallels this line of thought, arguing that those who suffer psychological breakdowns from combat stress are either morally weak or predisposed to such conditions.<sup>585</sup> Taken together, common wisdom and traditional military philosophy would argue that Somers' suicide from an internal etiology, a tragic flaw that he recognizes and then "resigns himself to a sense of his limitations,"<sup>586</sup> depicting a fatalistic movement toward the fall that argues that the decedent bears responsibility for his or her death.<sup>587</sup> Somers expresses an unshakable remorse arising from his first tour of duty. "During my first deployment, I was made to participate in things, the enormity of which is hard to describe. War crimes, crimes against humanity....there are some things that a person simply can not come back from." He magnifies this expression later in his note when he discusses the futility of his attempt at using musical creation as a diversion. "How could I possibly go around like everyone else while the widows and orphans I created continue to struggle? If they could see me sitting here in suburbia, in my comfortable home working on some music project they would be outraged, and rightfully so."

This remorse transforms into a sense of shame at his weakness and inability to act, finding himself with only "constant pain, misery, and dishonor" remaining in his future.<sup>588</sup>

---

<sup>585</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 70-73.

<sup>586</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 39.

<sup>587</sup> Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 40.

<sup>588</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This".

Reading Somers' suicide as arising from the guilt that arose over his actions during his first tour of duty imbues his suicide note with the character of mortification arising from the shame he felt for his weakness and inability to act.<sup>589</sup> Recognizing the guilt that one bears for a sin against the social order, the tragic figure accepts exile from the community – either in the form of banishment or death. As a purgative action, this exile can only occur after the tragic figure accepts his or her limitations and recognizes that he or she bears the responsibility for the community's suffering. Somers accepts his limitations when he declares, "Thus, I am left with basically nothing. Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war." By accepting the limitations on his future imposed by his physical and psychological limitations, Somers recognizes that peace and freedom will only come from the "best break" he could have hoped for – "to sleep forever".<sup>590</sup> Reading Somers' suicide note as tragic locates the blame for his death on himself, wherein his actions become read as the cause of the suffering that leads to the death. This focus of blame on the decedent obscures – and in some ways absolves – the larger societal web whose threads met at the nexus of the suicidal act. Suicide-as-tragedy functions to expiate society of the guilt it may bear for the individual's death by narrowing the boundaries within one may search for the contributing factors that led the death. This reading declares, "This one who took his own life was flawed from the start. It ended in the only way it could, and we bear no further responsibility than to look inward so that we do not sin in the same manner."

Being infused with forensic materials, a tragic reading focuses on issues of guilt and justification, or, as Burke articulated, "the workings of the criminal and expiatory processes implicit in human relationships".<sup>591</sup> Tragedy's focus is the assignment of guilt and the

---

<sup>589</sup> Messner and Buckrop, "Restoring Order," 10.

<sup>590</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This".

<sup>591</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 195.

demanding of penance in order to expiate a suffering community. Reading Somers' suicide through this frame places his death as the suffering visited upon the community, and, as a result, the party responsible ("guilty") for his death must be found and punished. Given that Somers' death is self-inflicted, he becomes the guilty party, and his exile (burial) from the community allows the grieving and healing processes to commence, allowing the community to work through the trauma of his chaos-causing death.<sup>592</sup> Assigning blame to Somers, the standard response to suicide in the contemporary United States, fulfills the needs of tragedy to find and assign blame.<sup>593</sup> His "selfish action" cast the community into chaos; therefore, the blame must rest with some moral failing within him. Such a reading of Somers' suicide would likely find agreement with LeardMann and her colleagues, who, in their Department-of-Defense-funded study, argued that it is not combat trauma and battlefield experience but undiagnosed mental illness and substance abuse problems that increase the likelihood of soldiers and veterans committing suicide.<sup>594</sup> As discussed in Chapter III, if blame for combat-induced PTSD, and a suicide that at least partially results from that condition, can be fully assigned to the decedent or suicidal soldier, then the politicians who both call for war and cut funding for the VA hospital system, the U.S. military-industrial complex that both idealizes and demands superhuman physical and psychological toughness of its soldiers, and civilian society that, for numerous reasons, shuns open and honest discussions of mental health issues need not introspect to see to what degree each and all have been accomplices and accessories in the commission of this act.

But focusing on the assignment of blame should be of less importance than seeking an understanding of motive in a suicide, a motive that begins to emerge when Somers broadens the

---

<sup>592</sup> Smith and Hollihan, "Out of Chaos Breathes Creation," 606.

<sup>593</sup> See the discussions in Marsh, "The Uses of History in the Unmaking of Modern Suicide" and Messner and Buckrop, "Restoring Order: Interpreting Suicide through a Burkean Lens".

<sup>594</sup> LeardMann, et al., "Risk Factors Associated With Suicide in Current and Former US Military Personnel," 502

scene from his own physiological and psychological state to the state of affairs facing soldiers, veterans, and the contemporary United States. While the most immediate causes of his physical and psychological suffering are his war-induced conditions, that suffering increased from a lack of treatment he, like many other veterans, received at VA hospitals, and what treatment he received was limited due to, as he states, “corrupt agents at the DEA” who have “managed to create such a culture of fear in the medical community that doctors are too scared to even take the necessary steps to control the symptoms” through a “manufactured ‘overprescribing epidemic’”. Additionally, the VA refused to treat Somers due to a technicality in his paperwork: though he had been discharged, his unit was still in “ready reserve status,” which marked his status as technically “active duty” instead of “discharged”.<sup>595</sup> Somers extends the evil to a regime that sent him to fight “for what? Bush’s religious lunacy? Cheney’s ever growing fortune and that of his corporate friends”.<sup>596</sup> All of these issues converged at his body, defining the evil that Somers must confront as arising from the inefficiency and corruption of “a regime built upon the idea that suffering is noble and relief is just for the weak”.

By defining the essential relationships as resulting from the external threat of a corrupt government, who sent him to fight “for what? Bush’s religious lunacy? Cheney’s ever growing fortune and that of his corporate friends”,<sup>597</sup> Somers formulates a policy of action to oppose the monstrous enemy that oppresses all within the confines of society, in this case his own body, in a manner akin to how his Army training directed him to respond to external hostile combatants and in alignment with the mythic model of the warrior hero: he took up arms, ventured outside the

---

<sup>595</sup> Howard Somers and Jean Somers, “On Losing a Veteran Son to a Broken System,” *newyorktimes.com*, 11 November 2013, <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/11/on-losing-a-veteran-son-to-a-broken-system/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>596</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>597</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

safety of civilization, and, through the application of violent force, defeated the enemy whose presence brought suffering upon the people. As a result, his suicide note articulates the logic of his death through the piety born of the values of the United States Army: personal courage, loyalty, duty, selfless service, respect, integrity, and honor.<sup>598</sup> These words, while meaningful to all, have specialized meanings for those serving in the US Army, and living – and dying – by those meanings are what make a soldier pious.

Although prime in traditional listings of the mental and emotional virtues of the heroic society from Homer onward, personal courage is listed last among the Army Values. Courage, as MacIntyre argues, is “the quality necessary to sustain a household and a community”.<sup>599</sup> Aristotle states that all other heroic virtues are derived from courage and end with the production of what society deems to be honor, which is the end of virtue.<sup>600</sup> Thus, if Somers’ suicide is to be read through the epic frame, then his actions must begin with the courage to first define the external threat as an enemy and then to venture forth beyond the zone of safety to confront it; through such courageous acts performed in the shadow of death that provide protection and benefit for the community, the soldier earns honor. Therefore, this chapter begins with a discussion of how Daniel Somers’ suicide arises from his embodiment of personal courage, which the US Army defines as:

Personal courage has long been associated with our Army. With physical courage, it is a matter of enduring physical duress and at times risking personal safety. Facing moral fear or adversity may be a long, slow process of continuing forward on the right path, especially if taking those actions is not popular with others.<sup>601</sup>

---

<sup>598</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values,” *GoArmy.com*, <http://www.goarmy.com/soldier-life/being-a-soldier/living-the-army-values.html> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>599</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122-123.

<sup>600</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.7.

<sup>601</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

Throughout and after his deployments, Somers embodied all aspects of the Army's definition of personal courage, marking even his suicide as a courageous and ethical action.

Physical courage demands enduring physical hardship and risking one's safety. As a combat veteran of over four hundred missions, Daniel Somers' physical courage during his deployment is evident. He continues to exemplify physical courage after his deployment by continuing to live so as to be there for his family during his physical suffering of numerous conditions including post-traumatic brain injury and fibromyalgia. He begins his note by stating, "The fact is, for as long as I can remember my motivation for getting up every day has been so that you would not have to bury me." He later repeats this sentiment. "I really have been trying to hang on, for more than a decade now. Each day has been a testament to the extent to which I cared, suffering unspeakable horror as quietly as possible so that you could feel as though I was still here for you."<sup>602</sup> Given that the U.S. Army defines physical courage as "a matter of enduring physical duress and at times risking personal safety," Somers demonstrates his personal courage through enduring the physical and psychological pain so as to continue to be there for his family.<sup>603</sup>

Somers' moral courage, which the Army defines as a "long, slow process of continuing forward on the right path, especially if taking those actions is not popular with others"<sup>604</sup> surfaces during his deployment and culminates with his suicide. Somers states that, "I was made to participate in things, the enormity of which is hard to describe. War crimes, crimes against humanity. Though I did not participate willingly, and made what I thought was my best effort to stop these events, there are some things that a person simply can not come back from." While

---

<sup>602</sup> "I am Sorry it has Come to This."

<sup>603</sup> United States Army, "Living the Army Values."

<sup>604</sup> United States Army, "Living the Army Values."



the specifics of these events are unknown, and are likely still classified, he demonstrates the courage to attempt, though unsuccessful, and likely unpopular with his superiors, to stop these events from transpiring. He continues being morally courageous during his second deployment as he tries “to move into a position of greater power and influence to try and right some of the wrongs.” After his deployment, he considers two other paths through which he demonstrates his moral courage. The first is a film project wherein he would attempt “directly appealing to those I had wronged and exposing a greater truth”. That never materializes. The second option he considers is “some kind of final mission” in order to do “some good with my skills, experience, and killer instinct”. All of these attempts prove futile, however, for reasons ranging from “involvement of people who can not understand by virtue of never having been there” to being “too sick to be effective in the field anymore”. That he repeatedly persevered in his attempted to stop and prevent what he described as “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity” – even though such actions were his orders – demonstrates the “long, slow road” of moral courage.

The repeated failure of his attempts at righting these wrongs leaves Somers “with basically nothing. Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war.”<sup>605</sup> As a result, he embarks on his final courageous act, his final mission, his suicide. While the events of his first deployment tempt one to read Somers’ suicide as arising from mortification, it should be noted that one essential aspect of mortification is absent from his rationale: the desire to make oneself suffer because of sin.<sup>606</sup> On the contrary, Somers’ equation of suicide with an “actual final mission” and a “mercy killing” designed to use the skills he learned in the Army demonstrates how his suicide arises from a soldier’s piety. “I know how to kill, and I know how

---

<sup>605</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>606</sup> Messner and Buckrop, “Restoring Order,” 10.

to do it so that there is no pain whatsoever...<sup>607</sup> Daniel Somers responds to the pain that oppressed his body and mind in a manner similar to that of a soldier responding to the oppression of a people by a tyrant: a quick, decisive designed to neutralize the oppressor. He responds to this situation that left him “too trapped in a war to be at peace” by applying the directive that George W. Bush, Commander-in-Chief at the time of his deployment, articulated to justify the use of military force: “to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.”<sup>608</sup> For this mission, the threat that needs removal to restore control to the people (his family) is Somers’ own body. As such, he calculates that this decisive act of force with the temporary hardship of its aftermath would be better than to “inflict my growing misery upon you for years and decades to come, dragging you down with me”.<sup>609</sup> By acting with decisive force taught to him by the US Army, Daniel Somers’ suicide should be seen as a calculated response to a hostile body that demonstrated the personal courage to act decisively to neutralize the threat and mitigate the suffering of others.

Connected directly to personal courage is a soldier’s sense of loyalty to his superiors, his people, and to the ideals he espouses. The US Army defines loyalty as bearing “true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit and other Soldiers” and “believing in and devoting yourself to something or someone”.<sup>610</sup> And it is the meaning of loyalty as devotion to his family in the face of its antithesis that led Somers to end his own life. Somers begins his suicide note through a declaration of his devotion to the emotional care of his family. “The fact is, for as long as I can remember my motivation for getting up every day has been so that you

---

<sup>607</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>608</sup> “George W. Bush: Operation Iraqi Freedom Address to the Nation,” *AmericanRhetoric.com*, 19 March 2003, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wariniraq/gwbushiraq31903.htm>. Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>609</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>610</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

would not have to bury me.” He later intensifies his devotion to them by stating, “I really have been trying to hang on, for more than a decade now. Each day has been a testament to the extent to which I cared, suffering unspeakable horror as quietly as possible so that you could feel as though I was still here for you.” After his discharge, Somers continues to live the Army definition of loyalty by devoting himself to his family.

Somers views his suicide as a demonstration of that loyalty, wherein he considers their emotional needs by declaring that “it is better to simply end things quickly and let any repercussions from that play out in the short term than to drag things out into the long term”. As he nears the end of his note, he declares loyalty to the source of the soldier’s being, a quick and efficient kill that neutralizes an enemy target – even if that target is the soldier’s own body. “This is what brought me to my actual final mission. Not suicide, but a mercy killing. I know how to kill, and I know how to do it so that there is no pain whatsoever. It was quick, and I did not suffer.” That Somers interprets his suicide as a “final mission” to bring about peace, a “mercy killing,” that neutralizes a target hostile to a peaceful, happy, free life – even if that target is his own body wracked with physical and psychological illness – demonstrates the loyalty of a pious soldier by devoting himself to the emotional needs of his family first by “trying to hang on” for over a decade and ultimately through his final mission that neutralized a target hostile to their happiness and ultimate freedom by reasoning that the short-term sadness of his passing is ultimately preferable than to inflict his “growing misery” upon them for “years and decades to come”.<sup>611</sup>

However, the importance of loyalty does not end with descriptions of his actions and a partial rationale of his suicide, because Somers’ argument contrasts his enactment of loyalty with

---

<sup>611</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

its antithesis: the disloyalty shown to him – and other soldiers – by the United States government. “To force me to do these things and then participate in the ensuing coverup is more than any government has the right to demand. Then, the same government has turned around and abandoned me. They offer no help, and actively block the pursuit of gaining outside help via their corrupt agents at the DEA.” The DEA, he accuses of creating “such a culture of fear in the medical community that doctors are too scared to even take the necessary steps to control the symptoms”. Somers labels this culture of fear a “completely manufactured ‘overprescribing epidemic’”<sup>612</sup> that has caused doctors to shy away from prescribing pain medication.<sup>613</sup> Additionally, he blames the VA hospital staff for their lack of attention to his conditions. “What is known is that each of these should have been cause enough for immediate medical attention, which was not rendered.”<sup>614</sup> This complaint resonates with the experiences of many veterans who have found that an antiquated scheduling system has created a six month backlog of appointments and that misdiagnoses are often common and deadly. As an example of the latter, CNN reported that, “The problem has been especially dire at the Williams Jennings Bryan Dorn Veterans Medical Center in Columbia, South Carolina. There, veterans waiting months for simple gastrointestinal procedures -- such as a colonoscopy or endoscopy -- have been dying because their cancers aren't caught in time.”<sup>615</sup> From Daniel Somers’ suicide note, it seems clear that if loyalty involves “devoting yourself to something or someone,”<sup>616</sup> then Somers rhetorically highlights his own demonstration of loyalty through its antithesis: the disloyalty of the government who taught him what loyalty means and demanded loyalty of him. This depiction of

---

<sup>612</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>613</sup> Radley Balko, “The War Over Prescription Painkillers,” *huffingtonpost.com*, 29 January 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/prescription-painkillers\\_b\\_1240722.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/prescription-painkillers_b_1240722.html) Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>614</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>615</sup> Bronstein, Black, and Griffin, “Hospital Delays are Killing America’s War Veterans.”

<sup>616</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

the US government as disloyal to its soldiers proves more damning in light of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the warrior/soldier and the aristocracy/government that has been recounted as essential to the heroic frame since the earliest of the heroic myths.<sup>617</sup>

As a dutiful soldier, Somers fulfilled his obligations and resisted the temptation to take shortcuts that would “undermine the integrity of the final product”.<sup>618</sup> While this seems a counterintuitive reading of a suicide, one should remember that Somers’ note narrates a path through which all other options were denied him. Suicide and thoughts of suicide are “common symptoms of combat PTSD”,<sup>619</sup> and while suicide is not always the end result, psychiatric collapse is an inevitability that results from the nature of war and the actions soldiers are expected to perform.<sup>620</sup> That said, Somers’ suicide itself does not demonstrate duty, but his process of exploring all available avenues to either prevent, mitigate, or correct the wrongs that were inflicted upon him and that he was ordered to inflict upon others demonstrates his commitment to duty. When he confesses to the “crimes against humanity” he was ordered to perform during his first deployment, Somers then states, “Though I did not participate willingly, and made what I thought was my best effort to stop these events, there are some things that a person simply can not come back from.” When he could not prevent these unconscionable actions that clearly damaged his psyche, he attempted to correct his mistakes with a second deployment. “I tried to move into a position of greater power and influence to try and right some of the wrongs. I deployed again, where I put a huge emphasis on saving lives.” After returning home, he attempted a film project to expose a “greater truth,” but that did not come to fruition.

---

<sup>617</sup> Andrew Sanders, “Anthropology of Warriors,” in *Stress of War, Conflict, and Disaster*, edited by George Fink (Oxford: Academic Press, 2010), 137-145.

<sup>618</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

<sup>619</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 179.

<sup>620</sup> Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 73.

And though his attempts met with failure, his persistent exploration of legal and socially-accepted paths to either prevent, to mitigate, and to correct the impact that his in-combat actions had on others and on his own psyche demonstrate a soldier's commitment to duty through a persistence that avoided shortcuts so as to maintain the integrity of his goal.<sup>621</sup>

Additionally, Somers demonstrates his commitment to duty through his attempts to care for his family's needs as he suffered physically and psychologically after receiving his discharge. He begins his note by articulating this desire when he states that, "for as long as I can remember my motivation for getting up every day has been so that you would not have to bury me" and that "Each day has been a testament to the extent to which I cared". He attempted to heal and mitigate his psychic and physical suffering in multiple ways – none of which came to fruition.

There might be some progress by now if they had not spent nearly twenty years denying the illness that I and so many others were exposed to. Further complicating matters is the repeated and severe brain injuries to which I was subjected, which they also seem to be expending no effort into understanding. What is known is that each of these should have been cause enough for immediate medical attention, which was not rendered.

The government's actions and inactions frustrated his attempts at gaining physical healing, and the guilt over his actions prevented his attempts at psychological healing.

Then, I pursued replacing destruction with creation. For a time this provided a distraction, but it could not last. The fact is that any kind of ordinary life is an insult to those who died at my hand. How can I possibly go around like everyone else while the widows and orphans I created continue to struggle? If they could see me sitting here in suburbia, in my comfortable home working on some music project they would be outraged, and rightfully so.

Through these actions, Somers demonstrates a pattern of seeking multiple avenues through

---

<sup>621</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This."

which to obtain assistance and healing for his conditions so that his family would not need to watch his slow decline into being “nothing more than a prop,” which he already believed he had become.

With all of these avenues exhausted, only one avenue lay open through which Daniel Somers could end his suffering and prevent further suffering for his family: a final mission that would allow him to accomplish something “worthwhile on the scale of life and death”.<sup>622</sup> Suicide became that final mission that would free the prisoner trapped by his wartime service and relieve his family of suffering. He exhausted all avenues available, and his decade-long suffering as he explored his options demonstrates his dutiful refusal to take shortcuts as he sought to fulfil his obligations so as to not undermine his final outcome. Therefore, Somers’ suicide arises from a soldier’s sense of duty.

Soldiers dutifully perform their obligations out of a sense of respect, which the Army defines as treating “others with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same”, “trusting that all people have performed their jobs and fulfilled their duties”, and the self-respect that arises from putting forth one’s “best effort”.<sup>623</sup> Current popular interpretation of suicide in the U.S. suggests that committing suicide results from a lack of respect for oneself and for others. However, incorporating the relationship between oneself and others as presented in the U.S. Army’s definition of respect, then any lack of respect that led to Daniel Somers’ suicide arose not from the decedent but from the government in charge of the war who failed to show respect to Somers and the soldiers. As Somers states:

To force me to do these things and then participate in the ensuing coverup is more than any government has the right to demand. Then, the same government has turned around and abandoned me. They offer no help, and actively block the pursuit of gaining outside help via their corrupt agents at the DEA. Any blame rests with them.

---

<sup>622</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>623</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

He continues to relate the lack of respect shown by those from whom he sought care.

There might be some progress by now if they had not spent nearly twenty years denying the illness that I and so many others were exposed to. Further complicating matters is the repeated and severe brain injuries to which I was subjected, which they also seem to be expending no effort into understanding. What is known is that each of these should have been cause enough for immediate medical attention, which was not rendered.

Thus, the lack of respect that conventional wisdom argues is inherent in suicide is present in Somers' suicide through the actions of those in power over him during the war and over his treatment after his discharge.

Throughout his note, Somers presents his actions and his decision to commit suicide as being antithetical to the actions and decisions of those in power. Therefore, it may be argued that his decision to end his life resulted from his adherence to the U.S. Army's definition of respect, primarily through the importance of self-respect. As this chapter has repeatedly demonstrated, most recently in the discussion of the virtue of duty, Somers' repeated attempts to prevent, mitigate, and/or correct the physical, mental, and social traumas resulting from his actions and service in Iraq demonstrate a respectful commitment to put forth his "best effort" in the course of fulfilling his duties to his unit, the US Army, the United States, and to his family. That Somers would put such an effort into seeking corrective measures for actions he describes as being both "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity," actions that he believes violate the values instilled in him by the U.S. Army.

To further contrast his suicide with the actions of those in power, Somers' suicide can be read as arising from a reciprocal respect where he demonstrates a trustworthiness to be one who fulfils his duties. He regards his suicide as arising out of his desire to fulfil his duties as a family member: to care for the emotional needs of his family. As such, he begins his note by stating, "Far better that than to inflict my growing misery upon you for years and decades to come,



dragging you down with me.” He concludes with the metaphor of a “final mission” to free a soldier trapped in a cage – the cage of his own body – in a manner that demonstrates the fulfilment of the duties outlined in the Soldier’s Creed where the soldier swears to be the “guardian of freedom”.<sup>624</sup> Thus, one can read Somers’ suicide as arising out of the fulfilment of his duties – both as a soldier who brings freedom to the oppressed and as one who cares enough for his family to do whatever will ensure their happiness. This dutiful fulfilment marks his suicide as arising from the value of respect, which the U.S. Army instilled in him.

Conventional reading interprets suicide as a selfish action where the decedent places his or her desire to end what others view as temporary pain over the emotional well-being and the needs of loved ones. This reading privileges the vantage point of the survivors, expressing their anger during the grieving process, but in providing some level of consolation and emotional buffering for survivors, this reading diminishes the suffering of the decedent in a manner that prevents meaningful understanding of the pain that colored the decedent’s perceptions in a manner that led to the decision to end his or her own life. If the goal of suicide is to end suffering, then it may be argued that the decedent perceives his or her loved ones as suffering as a result of his or her suffering. This consideration would suggest that on some level, the decedent is thinking selflessly, believing that a quick, decisive end to his or her own suffering will release his or her loved ones from the suffering that results from watching a loved one suffer.

That Daniel Somers’ suicide can be read as selfless becomes possible when we consider that the U.S. Army defines selfless service as putting “the welfare of the Nation, the Army and your subordinates before your own”.<sup>625</sup> Somers’ suicide exemplifies this type of selflessness

---

<sup>624</sup> “The Soldier’s Creed,” *army.mil*, <http://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html> Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>625</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

through his desire for a quick, decisive resolution that will not inflict his “growing misery” on his family. Somers begins his note with a recognition of the conventional reading, which he alludes to by stating, “for as long as I can remember my motivation for getting up every day has been so that you would not have to bury me”. Somers begins with a recognition that his loved ones want him to live, and satisfying that desire has been his motivation – even has he continued to both suffer and to deteriorate. This willingness to suffer so that his family’s desire for him to continue to be alive exemplifies selfless service. He reiterates this point in his note when he says, “Each day has been a testament to the extent to which I cared, suffering unspeakable horror as quietly as possible so that you could feel as though I was still here for you.” And ultimately, he recognizes the conventional reading when he states, “You will perhaps be sad for a time, but over time you will forget and begin to carry on. Far better that than to inflict my growing misery upon you for years and decades to come, dragging you down with me. It is because I love you that I can not do this to you.”<sup>626</sup> Somers understands that his death will cause some pain and sorrow in the immediate aftermath, but his belief that such pain will be less severe and more bearable than the pain that would arise from watching his steady decline over an indeterminate period of months or years and his willingness to act upon what he believes will put their welfare above his own demonstrates how he reads the act of suicide as arising from the definition of selfless service that the U.S. Army instilled in him.

If the U.S. Army defines integrity as being a quality developed through “adhering to moral principles” so that one does and says “nothing that deceives others”,<sup>627</sup> then it becomes clear that through his actions during his tours of duty and through his suicide, that Daniel Somers’ suicide arose from an Army-defined sense of integrity. While the conventional

---

<sup>626</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>627</sup> United States Army, “Living the Army Values.”

reading of suicide-as-tragedy would object to this reading on the grounds that Somers admits to participating in acts that he describes as being “War crimes, crimes against humanity”,<sup>628</sup> in the world of the military, his actions gain a positive moral valence, because he adhered to the moral imperative to follow orders given by one’s superiors. This statement seems difficult to rationalize to those who have never served, but all must remember that morality is neither universal nor unchanging but is a social construct, as Nietzsche argued in *Genealogy of Morals*, is rooted in the aristocratic values of a given society at a given point in history.<sup>629</sup> And while Somers’ recognized that these actions violated civilian morality, he also demonstrated an adherence to civilian moral principles through making what he describes as his “best effort to stop these events”. In attempting to stop these events, though unsuccessful, Somers demonstrates morality that civilians would recognize, and in opposing the direct orders of his superiors, his struggle to stop these events demands that such actions be read in the epic frame of the valiant hero resisting a situation “deemed unfriendly”.<sup>630</sup> He continues to articulate the integrity of his actions overseas by stating of his second tour that he, “tried to move into a position of greater power and influence to try and right some of the wrongs”. He cements both his integrity and the epic quality of his actions through a contrast with those of his superiors. “To force me to do these things and then participate in the ensuing coverup is more than any government has the right to demand. Then, the same government has turned around and abandoned me. They offer no help, and actively block the pursuit of gaining outside help via their corrupt agents at the DEA.” The scene depicted here is one of failure to adhere to any sense of morality, because the actions

---

<sup>628</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>629</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, 27-28.

<sup>630</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 4.

ordered violated normal moral codes and the “ensuing coverup” depicts an attempt to deceive others, which directly violates the U.S. Army’s definition of integrity.<sup>631</sup>

As the scene worsens upon his return home, Somers struggles for over a decade before ending his own life. Again, a conventional reading of suicide would articulate that this action violates all moral principles; however, his full articulation of both this action and his reasons for doing so demonstrate his integrity through an intent to avoid deception by being honest in his intent and plan. However, this surface level demonstration of integrity pales in comparison to the deeper reading of suicide as arising from integrity that occurs through his metaphor of the “final mission” that is not a suicide, “but a mercy killing” designed to free a prisoner of war from the pain and suffering that shackles and oppresses him.<sup>632</sup> Liberating the oppressed, bringing freedom to others, is a moral imperative that both U.S. soldiers and civilians rally behind. That moral imperative forms the final utterance of former President George W. Bush to justify Operation Iraqi Freedom. “We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail.”<sup>633</sup> Similarly, Daniel Somers concludes his note with the simple sentence, “I am free.” By framing his suicide in terms of a final mission to liberate an oppressed people, Daniel Somers articulates that this act arises from a moral imperative that all U.S citizens, both soldier and civilian, would state has a positive moral valence: freeing the oppressed. Such a reading of military action proves easier to see if the liberator and the oppressed are distinct individuals, but the discomfort produced by this reading of suicide forces the scholar to denaturalize the contemporary understanding of suicide as arising from a flaw in the individual for which self-inflicted death becomes redemptive. Denaturalizing this guilt-redemption reading forces an

---

<sup>631</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>632</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>633</sup> Bush, “Operation Iraqi Freedom Address to the Nation.”

analysis that accounts for the immediate and historical scene as well as the cultural mindset that frames an individual's interpretation of that scene.

In deciding to act courageously to neutralize a hostile entity that threatened the happiness of his family, Daniel Somers' suicide demonstrates his commitment to the US Army's definition of the ultimate heroic virtue: honor. Honor, as Aristotle states, is the end result of courage – the warrior's virtue.<sup>634</sup> According to the US Army, "Honor is a matter of carrying out, acting, and living the values of respect, duty, loyalty, selfless service, integrity and personal courage in everything you do."<sup>635</sup> Personal courage to act in the face of danger and loyalty to one's community that demonstrates a commitment to act for their greater benefit, when they become continuing traits of the soldier's life, provide evidence to support the soldier's claim to being honorable. Through the selfless devotion of himself to the emotional care of his family and through his personal courage that manifested in his decision to attempt to stop the war crimes he states he was ordered to perpetuate, in his enduring a decade of physical and psychic trauma, and finally in his decisive use of his military training to end the threat his deteriorating body posed to his family's ultimate happiness, Daniel Somers lived and died by the US Army's definition of honor. That Somers' suicide can be attributed to honor suggests a reading that he acted not out of a desire to either purify or transcend guilt but out of a soldier's piety.

Reading a soldier's suicide through the combined lens of a soldier's piety locates the self-inflicted death within the epic frame, a placement that functions to infuse a sense of agency in death that the tragic frame has the potential to deny to the decedent. The tragic frame, as Smith and Hollihan note, "is relatively fatalistic" where "the human drama [is] playing out in the shadow of the *'deus ex machina'* and where redemption is "generally out of our hands as we play

---

<sup>634</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.7.

<sup>635</sup> United States Army, "Living the Army Values."

out the roles assigned to us”.<sup>636</sup> Treat notes that the tragic adheres to strict binaries of right and wrong where “good triumphs and evil is punished via scapegoating or mortification”.<sup>637</sup> This fatalistic determinism figures largely into the contemporary mindset on suicide, which argues that suicidal individuals are mentally unwell and are (at least partially) not responsible for their actions.<sup>638</sup> Such figures are (believed to) have no agency; they are objects upon which the world acts instead of individuals who act upon the world. When Somers acknowledges, “The fact is, I am not getting any better, I am not going to get better, and I will most certainly deteriorate further as time goes on”, that he was “nothing more than a prop, filling up space,” and is unable to “laugh or cry,” to “barely leave the house,” or to derive “pleasure from any activity”, he demonstrates a recognition that he is losing his agency, his ability to act upon the world.<sup>639</sup> By contrast, reading a soldier’s suicide through the epic frame and the lens of piety imparts both dignity and heroic agency to the action by “advertising courage and individual sacrifice for group benefit”,<sup>640</sup> a sentiment Somers evokes when he states, “Far better that than to inflict my growing misery upon you for years and decades to come, dragging you down with me. It is because I love you that I can not do this to you.”<sup>641</sup>

Death before dishonor has been a part of the warrior ethos since ancient times, in both the Occident and the Orient, a historical fact often forgotten in the contemporary West.<sup>642</sup> The courage and independence to *choose* to die rather than to *allow* death to come grants a sense of heroic agency to the soldier’s death, a sense of agency most easily seen when the soldier chooses

---

<sup>636</sup> Smith and Hollihan, “Out of Chaos Breathes Creation”, 589.

<sup>637</sup> Shaun Treat, “Scapegoating the Big (Un)Easy: Melodramatic Individualism as Trained Incapacity in K-VILLE,” *KB Journal* 5 no. 1 (2008), [http://kbjournal.org/shaun\\_treat](http://kbjournal.org/shaun_treat) Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>638</sup> Marsh, “The Uses of History in the Unmaking of Modern Suicide,” 749.

<sup>639</sup> “I’m Sorry it has Come to This”.

<sup>640</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 35.

<sup>641</sup> “I am Sorry It has Come to This”.

<sup>642</sup> Stephen Morillo, “Cultures of Death: Warrior Suicide in Medieval Europe and Japan,” *The Medieval History Journal* 4 no. 2 (2001): 241-257.

to “die with his boots on” in battle or by sacrificing himself/herself for a larger group. Reading a soldier’s suicide through the virtues of courage and individual choice seems counterintuitive to contemporary mores, but its logic becomes more understandable when one considers both the mythic and ancient antecedents of the modern warrior and contemporary debates over physician-assisted suicide enter the frame.<sup>643</sup> Through the infusion of heroic agency, one asks what led the soldier to choose to end his/her life instead of declaring that the soldier had no other choice but to end his/her life. Suicide becomes the last chance to perform agency for someone to whom all other paths of agency have been (or are believed to be) denied, and Somers rhetorically performs this agency through the animating metaphor of suicide as a final mission.

### **Defining the Final Mission**

Exploring Daniel Somers’ suicide through the lens provided by the seven values instilled in him by the training he received in the United States Army does much to demonstrate how suicide can arise out of an epic sense of piety and not a tragic sense of guilt demanding redemption, thus his suicide note can be read as offering the same argument as Beowulf’s response to Unferð. To fully grasp the rhetorical nature of the suicide note demands special attention be paid to the metaphor of the “Final Mission”. This metaphor runs throughout the entire note, animating each aspect of the rhetorical situation, and thus serves as both the underlying framework and the conclusion of Somers’ argument. Therefore, analysis of this metaphor reveals how Somers reads the scene around him as arising from the same generic model of scenes for which the U.S. Army trained him to respond with quick, decisive violence. The metaphor of the final mission, therefore, presents a definition of suicide that arises out of a soldier’s piety.

---

<sup>643</sup> Michael J. Hyde and Kenneth Rufo, “The Call of Conscience, Rhetorical Interruptions, and the Euthanasia Controversy,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 28 no. 1 (2000): 1-23.

To understand this, one must first consider the interplay of metaphor, definitional argument, and heroic piety. One of the four master tropes, a metaphor offers a new perspective by directing the audience to see “something *in terms of* something else” so as to evoke the “thisness of that, or the thatness of this”.<sup>644</sup> This discursive linking of two entities traditionally believed to be wholly separate illuminates the shared quality and, at the very least, suggests that the audience respond to the newer entity in a manner akin to how the audience responds to the older entity. A metaphor’s success rests upon the audience’s ability to quickly grasp the shared quality between the two entities and upon the recognition that said quality is essential in identifying both entities. Thus, if the shared quality is essential for identifying both entities, the entities are of the same class, or genus, of things. This essential and definable nature argues that knowledge of how to respond to the more familiar entity allows the audience to predict how it should respond to the unfamiliar entity.<sup>645</sup> It is through the shared essence between two entities illuminated through metaphor that provides an intersection with piety’s desire to “round things out, to fit experiences together into a unified whole”.<sup>646</sup> Metaphor, definitional arguments, and piety together form an orienting schema that unifies seemingly separate entities and situations through a shared essence that provides a grounds for predictable action. Each entity is a species belonging to a broader genus. To be pious requires that one perform a specific action in all situations belonging to the genus;<sup>647</sup> therefore, by arguing that one situation/entity belongs to the genus of Situation/Entity wherein one must perform a specific Action, one imparts a positive moral valence to the performance of the action in this specific situation.

---

<sup>644</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 503.

<sup>645</sup> Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 86.

<sup>646</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 74.

<sup>647</sup> Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 75.



For Daniel Somers, the metaphor of the “final mission” articulates a reading of the scene in a manner that he, because of his military training and combat experience, read as a hostile territory wherein a soldier is imprisoned and tortured. Aligning with the previous discussion of heroic piety, the metaphor of the final mission illuminates the master narrative that underscores the rhetoric of military training and pro-war sentiment: the heroic epic. The heroic epic, as Campbell and others have repeatedly noted, is structured according to the following formula:

A once-happy people are assaulted by an external threat. The assault from this threat causes the people to suffer. A hero rises, is trained by an elder in the ways of the hero and is given a magical amulet that both marks him as one granted authority to act and protects him from the dangers ahead. He then leaves the safety of society and enters the road of trials where he overcomes a series of obstacles, the most popular and famous of which is combat against a great monster that threatens society. The hero, overcomes the monster and returns to his people either alive or dead. Through the completion of this combat, order and safety are restored.<sup>648</sup>

This narrative, presented through the metaphor of the final mission, underscores and structures Somers’ suicide note. Somers’ person is the people who were once happy but now suffer from the attacks of the monstrous complex of physical and psychological conditions afflicting him. These conditions, though traditionally thought of as interior to the person, arose from a complex suite of social forces: his duties during his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the difficulty receiving adequate treatment from the VA hospital system, and the corrupt politicians who sent soldiers to die for selfish reasons. Ultimately, the suffering of the people arises from what Somers describes as “a regime built upon the idea that suffering is noble and relief is just for the weak” that has established a system of “dehumanization, neglect, and indifference” regarding the suffering of its soldiers.<sup>649</sup> As was described previously, Somers recognized this evil and formulated a plan to combat it. This plan, which he refers to as his “actual final mission,” has

---

<sup>648</sup> Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 30-39.

<sup>649</sup> “I am Sorry It has Come to This.”

him venture out of the safety of society, taking with him the magical amulet, and ventured into the wilderness to face the trial against the monster. “Somers took a handgun from his home and walked to a street several blocks away.”<sup>650</sup> There, he stood firm against the enemy who oppressed the people by using the skills he learned before he was presented with the magical amulet (his weapon). “I know how to kill, and I know how to do it so that there is no pain whatsoever. It was quick, and I did not suffer.”<sup>651</sup> Daniel Somers shot himself in the head, ending the threat caused by the monster.<sup>652</sup> Somers paid the ultimate price in this action, but his sacrifice restored the order that was shattered by the oppressing enemy. “And above all, now I am free. I feel no more pain. I have no more nightmares or flashbacks or hallucinations. I am no longer constantly depressed or afraid or worried. I am free.”<sup>653</sup> The oppressed people are now free, because the warrior sacrificed his own life to defeat the enemy that brought about their suffering. No ticker tape parade – but six pall bearers – brought the successful mission to a close.

The final mission to free a soldier imprisoned and tortured as a result of actions taken during war was successful, but it is the internal direction of this mission – the POW camp is Somers’ own body (“too trapped in a war to be at peace”) – that makes it difficult for observers to read his suicide through the same heroic courage that Somers’ argued underpins his plan of action.<sup>654</sup> The interiority of the quest and the inverted directionality of the violence used to liberate the suffering people intersect with contemporary discourses that place a negative moral valence on self-harm and self-inflicted death to preclude acceptance of Somers’ reading as

---

<sup>650</sup> Vogel, “After Veteran Daniel Somers’s Suicide.”

<sup>651</sup> “I am Sorry It has Come to This.”

<sup>652</sup> Vogel, “After Veteran Daniel Somers’s Suicide.”

<sup>653</sup> “I am Sorry It has Come to This.”

<sup>654</sup> “I am Sorry It has Come to This.”

logical and understandable. Centuries of traditional and popular discourses have naturalized the directionality of heroic violence as being against a foreign other. Violence against a foreign/external/alien threat to the order/purity of a people has a positive moral valence, as such violent penetrations violate culturally-defined notions of order, sanctity, and purity. Self-directed violence transgresses the culturally-proscribed boundaries between numerous binaries such as us/them, human/animal, good/bad, and living/dead, denaturalizing the socially constructed palisades that transform continua into discrete categories.<sup>655</sup>

Few, if any, would contest the courage and heroic piety of such an action if Somers died during a successful rescue mission externally against a corrupt *foreign* regime, if the mission took place in a *foreign* land, and if the prisoner were *another* soldier. It is the internal direction of the violence, a directionality that violates the “sanctity” of the dominant narrative of what makes martial violence heroic, which conditions a tragic, guilt-redemption reading of Somers’ suicide. Tension, therefore, arises when one recognizes that this regime that has created a system of “dehumanization, neglect, and indifference” and a “culture of fear” that prevents suffering soldiers from receiving adequate treatment is not a hostile, greedy, amoral, fanatical *foreign* power but the government of the United States. Somers names three corrupt leaders - George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Barack Obama – and argues that their attitudes and actions/inactions have contributed to the hostility of the situation that led to the imprisonment of soldiers within their own bodies and to the rise of suicide in the military.

Where are the huge policy initiatives? Why isn’t the president standing with those families at the state of the union? Perhaps because we were not killed by a single lunatic, but rather by his own system of dehumanization, neglect, and indifference. It leaves us to where all we have to look forward to is constant pain, misery, poverty, and dishonor. I assure you that, when the numbers do finally drop, it will merely be because those who were pushed the farthest are all already dead.

---

<sup>655</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 153-156.

And for what? Bush's religious lunacy? Cheney's ever growing fortune and that of his corporate friends? Is this what we destroy lives for?<sup>656</sup>

The agents who have created this "culture of fear" among physicians are the DEA who accuse the medical community of overprescribing painkillers to soldiers, an accusation that has led to overcautious under-prescription.<sup>657</sup> A power that imposes a "system of dehumanization, neglect, and indifference" upon any of its own citizens that places them in a state of "constant pain, misery, poverty, and dishonor" due to "religious lunacy" or the "ever growing fortune" born of selfish greed would be a power that the United States would wholeheartedly oppose. Such a regime violates the general understanding of how U.S. citizens believe a government should treat its citizens. The emergent tension of this recognition complicates an audience's acceptance of Somers' reading of the scene, because this callous, greedy, amoral, fanatical, and clearly un-American regime is not a foreign power but the United States government that is failing to live by its own ideals and by the reciprocal care for its soldiers demanded by invoking the suite of discourses in the heroic mythic tradition.

This amoral power imprisons the soldier that Daniel Somers seeks to rescue, and, again, were this a foreign power, the target location that Somers proposes to assault would be readily accepted by his audience. The imprisoned soldier Somers seeks to rescue suffers "pain and constant problems" where "every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending" in his body wracks him with torture. Additionally, his mind "is a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety". This description reads as if the prisoner is tortured by an external force that causes him unceasing physical and psychological trauma. No U.S. citizen would deny that if the possibility of rescuing this soldier is possible that it should be

---

<sup>656</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This".

<sup>657</sup> Radley Balko, "The War over Prescription Painkillers," *huffingtonpost.com*, 29 Jan. 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/prescription-painkillers\\_b\\_1240722.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/prescription-painkillers_b_1240722.html) Accessed 25 May 2015.

attempted. However, the scene becomes more complex and tense when one recognizes that the prison in which this soldier is tortured is his own body.

My body has become nothing but a cage, a source of pain and constant problems. The illness I have has caused me pain that not even the strongest medicines could dull, and there is no cure. All day, every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending in my body. It is nothing short of torture. My mind is a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety, even with all of the medications the doctors dare give.<sup>658</sup>

The reading of the scene that Somers puts forth would meet with no opposition from an audience were Somers alerting the U.S. audience to war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated against U.S. soldiers by a *foreign* power. Were the soldier imprisoned and tortured in a prison facility by Al Qaeda, the Viet Cong, or the Third Reich, none would disagree that a rescue mission was a worthy course of action. However, tension between the polysemous readings of Somers' suicide as either epic or tragic arise from the recognition that Somers metaphorically likens the U.S. government and its treatment of active duty soldiers and veterans to that of an amoral, fanatical regime and the suffering soldier's own body to a prison camp where he is tortured daily.

Daniel Somers' reading of the scene as one dominated by a hostile regime that has imprisoned and tortured a soldier is one that demands a rescue mission, because, as Burke argues, "the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene".<sup>659</sup> Having accepted this reading of the scene, Somers deems certain relationships as being unfriendly, the government to the soldiers and his body to his life, "weighs objective resistances against his own resources" and decides "how far he can effectively go in combating them".<sup>660</sup>

---

<sup>658</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This".

<sup>659</sup> Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 3.

<sup>660</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 3-4.

Defining the scene as a hostile territory wherein a corrupt regime imprisons and tortures soldiers, Somers likely recalls the “Soldier’s Creed” of the U.S. Army, which includes the following lines

I serve the people of the United States, and live by the Army Values.  
I will always place the mission first.  
I will never accept defeat.  
I will never quit.  
I will never leave a fallen comrade.<sup>661</sup>

Knowing that he has sworn to never leave a fallen comrade, Somers acts according to his reading of the scene and embarks on his final mission, which he describes as not being “suicide, but a mercy killing”. Reading the scene according to his own definition, Somers acted in the only way he knew to not leave a fallen, imprisoned, and tortured soldier behind enemy lines. “I know how to kill, and I know how to do it so that there is no pain whatsoever. It was quick, and I did not suffer. And above all, now I am free. I feel no more pain. I have no more nightmares or flashbacks or hallucinations. I am no longer constantly depressed or afraid or worried. I am free.”<sup>662</sup> His decisive action incorporating deadly force made use of his military training, and through that decisive action, he ended the captivity and brought freedom to a tortured and imprisoned soldier.

Daniel Somers died on a final mission to free an imprisoned soldier whom a fanatical, dehumanizing regime left to suffer physical and psychological torture. As has been discussed previously in this chapter, had Somers crossed a recognized line into hostile territory controlled by a *foreign* fanatical regime to rescue *another* imprisoned soldier, few, if any, would deny that his action should be read according to the epic frame, which is designed to make men accept the “rigors of war” by lending “dignity to the necessities of existence, ‘advertising’ personal courage and individual sacrifice for group advantage” in a way that would allow the audience to be

---

<sup>661</sup> “Soldier’s Creed”

<sup>662</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

“vicariously heroic” and “share the worth of a hero by a process of ‘identification’”.<sup>663</sup>

However, the directional violence that allows the heroic myth to function uncritically proves absent from Somers’ final mission. He neither directed his action against foreign power nor did he free *another* soldier. He directed his action, his violence, against himself, and he performed that action within the borders of the United States. To complicate matters in a manner that further prohibits the audience from accepting the essential connection that the metaphor of the final mission implies, Somers literally internalizes his violence, directing his force upon himself. The internalization of the violence of Somers’ death evokes in the minds of most citizens more similarity to the self-caused ends of tragic figures such as Oedipus, Antigone, Hamlet, and Faustus than it does to the heroes of great epics whose ends arose fighting external, monstrous threats as did Beowulf and Thor.

Somers’ internalization of violence facilitates a tragic reading of suicide, which is the dominant view held in the United States. As Marsh discusses, the contemporary view of suicide is one that internalizes and depoliticizes the action, marking it as being “ultimately tragic” that marks alternative readings of “acts of self-accomplished death” as “marginalized or foreclosed”.<sup>664</sup> The individualized, internalized, and pathological reading of suicide in the contemporary United States bears similarity to the end of a tragedy where an internal flaw, traditionally overweening pride or *hubris*, surrounding the actions of the hero in the scene with the “connotations of crime”.<sup>665</sup> As such, the hero, who has performed an action that brings suffering to the scene, seeks redemption for this guilt he or she feels for having brought suffering upon others through mortification of the flesh, physical exile, or death/damnation. Given that

---

<sup>663</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 35-36.

<sup>664</sup> Marsh, “The Uses of History in the Unmaking of Modern Suicide,” 748.

<sup>665</sup> Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 39.

Somers admits participating in what he describes as both “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity,”<sup>666</sup> reading his self-accomplished death through the traditional, tragic lens of the guilt-redemption cycle becomes a rote exercise. However, following the traditional reading ignores the intent of military training to break down the civilian mode of being with one more suited for the stresses and rigors of combat and minimizes the betrayal of the warrior by the aristocracy whose fanaticism and greed led to institutional corruption, dehumanization of the soldiers, and systematic failures to provide adequate health care in a timely fashion.

Conversely, those same aspects of the scene that are external to Somers’ body become magnified through a reading of his death as arising out of the epic frame and through a soldier’s piety. While the corruption the DEA, the systematic mishandling of veterans’ health care claims by the VA hospital system, and the fanaticism and greed of politicians that created a “system of dehumanization, neglect, and indifference” prove difficult to miss in even a casual reading of Somers’ note, it is only through a reading of death within the epic frame that arises from a soldier’s piety that these events gain an externalization that marks them as a monster demanding confrontation.<sup>667</sup> It is this reading of suicide through the epic frame and through a soldier’s piety that removes the isolation implicit in the tragic and guilt-redemption reading dominant in the contemporary United States. Removing this isolation locates Somers’ death in the socio-political landscape in which it occurred, repoliticizing an action that many would see as being apolitical. And Somers’ death is a political statement whose polysemous reading created an exigence from which his family acted to not only seek surcease for their own sorrow but to campaign for change and reform of the VA hospital system. This campaign reached Congressional attention on 10 July 2014 when the House Committee on Veterans Affairs held a panel on soldier suicide,

---

<sup>666</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.

<sup>667</sup> “I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.



vowing to find ways to offer more care to soldiers who need it through the introduction of a bill to financially reward mental health professionals who remain in the VA hospital system.<sup>668</sup>

While the effect of the proposed bill remains to be seen should it become law, given that its only reported aim is to keep mental health professionals from leaving the VA system, its impact on soldier suicide will likely be limited at best due to the refusal of this symbolic gesture to address the significant issues that prevent soldiers from getting the care they need.

### **An Exigence Born of Polysemy**

While both the epic and the tragic provide frames through which to understand why Daniel Somers committed suicide, the polysemy attached to the act suggests that his suicide partakes of part of the essence of epic and of tragedy but can be located wholly in neither. Given that the form of epic and tragedy each suggest proper responses from the audience when the hero dies, suicide's polysemy provides an insight into the turbulent emotions that fill survivors who face the loss of a loved one paired with an uncertainty on the proper response. Research suggests that the grieving process after a suicide also includes fear of stigmatization by the community, anger at the decedent, guilt over a perceived failure to see the signs, and self-blame.<sup>669</sup> Beyond a tool for understanding the emergence of turbulent emotions in the bereaved, understanding the polysemy of suicide helps to further expand the rhetorical potential of a suicide note as a rhetorical text with the power to enact change.

The chaotic emotional state instigated by the polysemous nature of Daniel Somers' suicide evokes an exigence to which the suicide note invites the bereaved, and others, to respond.

---

<sup>668</sup> Melinda Henneberger, "Parents Tell Congress How VA Failed their Children: Veterans who Committed Suicide," *washingtonpost.com* 10 July 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html) Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>669</sup> Keith Hawton and Sue Simkin, "Helping People Bereaved by Suicide: Their Needs may Require Special Attention," *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 327 no. 7408 (2003): 177-178.

Somers' note explicates the situation that led to his decision to end his life: the physical and psychological pain resulting from his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the "war crimes" and the subsequent cover up his superiors required of him, the bullying of physicians by the DEA, his mistreatment by the VA hospital system, and the government that "turned around and abandoned" him after his service.<sup>670</sup> As Bitzer famously argues, rhetorical works "obtain their character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur" that functions to produce action in the world.<sup>671</sup> The historic context of Somers' note is one marked by inefficiency and corruption in government that leads to misdiagnosis, mistreatment, and non-treatment of veterans by the VA hospital system during a perpetual war against terrorism. This situation evokes in Somers, and thousands of other veterans, an emotional turmoil suggesting suicide as the only corrective to end the physical and mental torment that resulted from their combat service. As a rhetorical document, Somers' suicide note not only identifies the exigence but also articulates the need for changes to the system.

Is it any wonder then that the latest figures show 22 veterans killing themselves each day? That is more veterans than children killed at Sandy Hook, every single day. Where are the huge policy initiatives? Why isn't the president standing with those families at the state of the union? Perhaps because we were not killed by a single lunatic, but rather by his own system of dehumanization, neglect, and indifference.<sup>672</sup>

As Somers articulates, policy changes are needed. The misdiagnosis, mistreatment, and/or non-treatment of veterans by the VA hospital system should not continue. This is both an ethical issue of what a nation owes to those who serve in its armed forces – regardless of an individual's politics regarding the particular war – and a practical issue relating to economics and to the well-being of society as PTSD and other combat-related injuries, illnesses, and disorders leave

---

<sup>670</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This."

<sup>671</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1 no. 1 (1968): 1-14, 3-4.

<sup>672</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This."

veterans at greater risk than civilians in their demographics for unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence, and substance abuse.<sup>673</sup>

Daniel Somers responds to this exigence through a manner in keeping with a soldier's piety: decisive, violent action. The chaotic emotions evoked by his suicide illuminate a second exigence – an exigence to which his family chooses to respond. While his directions for his wife to share the note as she saw fit likely meant for her to share the note with the family, she chooses to share the note with the local media. From there, the note reached the internet and went viral. Somers' family's continues to respond to the exigence illuminates by launching a campaign demanding reform.<sup>674</sup> While change has yet to transpire in the world, Daniel Somers' suicide note plants the seeds that begin the process of bringing about a positive change. Given that the discourse articulating the situation that led to this particular suicide instigated action toward change in the world, this chapter concludes that Daniel Somers' suicide note is a rhetorical document worthy of analysis and suggests that such rhetorical potential may exist in other suicide notes when read in the broader context of the historical situation of the suicide.

## **Conclusions**

Suicide elicits powerful emotional reactions both from those connected to the act and from the larger community. It is both an individual and a social act. As an individual act, suicide functions as a response to a reading of one's situation as turbulent and chaotic. As a social act, suicide provides a dark, focal nexus at which numerous discourses and belief clusters intersect; strains, breaks, and at times fortifies social bonds among the bereaved and the community; and

---

<sup>673</sup> Stephen Metraux, Limin X. Clegg, John D. Daigh, Dennis P. Culhane, and Vincent Kane, "Risk Factors for Becoming Homeless Among a Cohort of Veterans who Served in the Era of the Iraq and Afghanistan Conflicts," *American Journal of Public Health* 103 no. S2 (2013): S255-S261.

<sup>674</sup> Chelsea C. Cook, "Soldiers Suicide Note Goes Viral; Family Demands Better for Veterans, *cnn.com*, 6 July 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/06/us/soldier-suicide-note/> Accessed 25 May 2015.

evokes strong emotional responses that have the potential to affect change in the social world. This rhetorical potential begins, and often ends, with the writing of a suicide note that seeks to explain the logical process that led the decedent to end his or her life and to persuade the bereaved to be happy for the departed. Often, the rhetorical potential of the suicide note fails to achieve its desired result. Other times, the turbulent emotions give rise to an exigence that causes the bereaved to seek changes in the social world so that others may be spared their pain.

While many, if not all, suicide notes give rise to an exigence, not all suicide notes describe an exigence that both suggests a reading of the situation that provides a logic for suicide and articulates a need for social change. Daniel Somers' suicide note does that through his narration of the abandonment he felt at the hands of the US government after his two tours of duty that left him suffering from PTSD, post-traumatic brain injury, Gulf War syndrome, and fibromyalgia; from the intimidation of doctors by DEA agents; and from the lack of appropriate and timely treatment he received from the VA hospital system. The inefficient and limited treatment at VA hospitals is a widely-reported experience of veterans, and he argues that the convergence of these issues in his own life experience left him a metaphorical prisoner of war, caged and tortured in his own body. As a result, he suggests that his self-inflicted death be read through the metaphor of a final mission to free a POW. Through this action designed to not leave a fallen comrade behind, Somers followed the dictates of his training and rescued a prisoner from his cage – even if that cage was the soldier's own body. This animating metaphor suggests that the entire note be read through the values instilled in him by his training in the United States Army, suggesting that his suicide note serves a function similar to that of Beowulf's response to Unferð. That function is to allow the individual whose ethos is challenged by what may be a hegemonic reading of his action(s) to articulate why that reading is

incorrect and to offer a corrective based upon the shared values of the community. Out of a soldier's sense of loyalty to his comrades, Somers extends his anger beyond what the situation did to him individually by asking why there are no policy initiatives to counteract veteran suicides, which in 2013 occurred at an average of twenty-two per day.

If one reads the suicide note as arising from the honorable heroic values instilled in the soldier through military training, then Daniel Somers' suicide must be read through the same lens. It is through the honor that arose from his choice to live and to die by the values instilled in him by the U.S. Army that led Daniel Somers to act decisively after he defined the situation and accepted the only policy that remained viable that demonstrate how his suicide arose out of a soldier's sense of piety. Understanding how piety underscores the argument for why he must end his own life suggests that his self-inflicted death be read through the lens of the epic – a poetic category that seeks to persuade individuals to accept their role in the rigors of war. Reading his suicide through the frame of the epic wherein a soldier recognized and neutralized a hostile target provides a counter reading to US culture's dominant reading of suicide as a tragedy arising from an internal recognition of guilt that inscribes blame on the body of the decedent. In contrast, the epic locates blame for the hero's death on one or more external enemies, which Somers named as the government that abandoned him, the corrupt agents of the DEA, and the inefficient and ineffective care from the VA hospitals, of which he states, "Any blame rests with them".<sup>675</sup> Just as Beowulf's death in the fight against the dragon served a greater purpose of providing protection for his people and a guiding light for sea-farers, so too did Daniel Somers' death provide a boon for his people, U.S. veterans, by providing an incarnation of the

---

<sup>675</sup> "I am Sorry It Has Come to This".

psychological struggle that seriously wounded veterans face upon returning home and spurring in his family and in others a desire to push for positive change to reduce soldier suicide.

These two counter readings, which articulate different loci of blame for Somers' death and suggest different emotional responses from the audience of his note, illuminate the polysemy inherent in suicide. This polysemy that prevents Somers' suicide from being read definitively as either epic or tragic, when paired with his note's description of suffering and the external locus of its blame, give rise to the second exigence that he illuminates through his frustrated inquiry into the lack of policy initiatives to combat veteran suicide. Through his illumination of this second exigence, Somers provides a direction for the conflicting, turbulent, and powerful emotions that his self-inflicted death elicit in his family that functioned as a call to action, directing them to lobby the VA and congress for changes in the handling of veteran medical care.

Suicide continues to be both a public health concern and a social act. As a public health concern, one must remember that suicide is the tenth most common reason for death in the United States. The growing rate of suicide among veterans of US conflicts presents the public with an exigence that exists regardless of any citizen's politics regarding warfare and that will persist so long as the issues giving rise to this exigence remain unrecognized and unaddressed. While other rhetorical analyses have suggested a universal common denominator to all suicide, this chapter recognizes that the application of Burke's notions of piety and acceptance is potentially limited to combat veterans and active duty service members. Therefore, this chapter argues that reading Daniel Somers' suicide through the Burkean notions of piety and heroic acceptance illuminates meaningful aspects of Somers' life history and situational context that

explain his rationale for ending his own life. Through this illumination, this chapter hopes to provide resources to assist those treating soldiers and veterans at risk for suicide and their families.

To explore suicide as a social act, one must repoliticize the self-accomplished death through an attempt to read the socio-political scene in the manner in which the decedent read the scene. One great danger of the tragic guilt-redemption reading of suicide is that it locates the full blame for the act on the decedent, and locating blame fully on the individual has the dangerous potential to exonerate the larger social forces that constricted the individual's options. The proposed reading of Somers' suicide through the epic frame arising out of a soldier's piety broadens the frame in which the act occurs, reading the decedent's body as a nexus in which numerous social and political discourses converge. This reading also recognizes how the decedent reads this convergence as a series of constraints through a specific lens that is different from that of those around him or her. Following the work of Ian Marsh, this chapter seeks to illuminate how reading suicide as tragic focuses on an internalized pathology that marks the decedent as "guilty" of something for which the mortification of death is seen as the only means of redemption. While not denying the internal psychological dimension of suicide, this reading has the potential to both ignore and exonerate the institutions and individuals whose discourses and actions constrained the decedent's range of actions. This runs the danger of scapegoating the decedent, whereas reading the death through the epic frame as arising out of piety affords the decedent a death with honor that a guilty individual punished for a crime cannot possess.

Death with honor, with dignity, is what every individual desires. For the warrior that death has been traditionally read as a death in battle – a death that is meaningful to the larger social group. Daniel Somers makes this desire clear when he states, "I tried to move into a

position of greater power and influence to try and right some of the wrongs. I deployed again, where I put a huge emphasis on saving lives”, “I thought perhaps I could make some headway with this film project, maybe even directly appealing to those I had wronged and exposing a greater truth, but that is also now being taken away from me”, and “The last thought that has occurred to me is one of some kind of final mission. It is true that I have found that I am capable of finding some kind of reprieve by doing things that are worthwhile on the scale of life and death”.<sup>676</sup> Too wounded to be effective, he found himself unable to focus his actions in a direction that would have negated the polysemy inherent in the action he chose. Reading his suicide note through the epic frame as an act that arises from a soldier’s piety – living and dying by the U.S. Army Values – illuminates the emotional turmoil that forms the rhetorical exigence inherent in the polysemous nature of suicide as a social act. This reading illuminates the failures of the system – from the White House’s greed, fanaticism, and indifference, to the VA hospital system’s inefficiency, to Somers’ combat-induced physical and psychological conditions – that so constrained Somers’ range of actions available to him in the scene. Recognizing that Somers’ death could have been prevented with changes to the social and political world exterior to his body, his survivors launched their campaign for VA hospital reform. While none believe that any reform will “bring Daniel Somers back,” meaningful reform to the VA hospital system that helps others in his situation before they reach the point of suicide affords an altruistic meaningfulness to his death akin to that of a soldier falling on a grenade to save his platoon. While the ultimate results of the Somers’ campaign have yet to be realized, the rhetorical potential that reading Daniel Somers’ death through a soldier’s piety and through the epic frame

---

<sup>676</sup> I am Sorry It Has Come to This”.



illuminates an altruistic character that arises from one soldier's desire to not leave any fallen comrades behind, marking his death as that of a warrior who died with honor.

## CONCLUSIONS

*“War. War never changes.” - Fallout 3*

This dissertation has explored the following question: “Do – and, if so, to what extent – U.S. discourses surrounding warrior heroism negatively impact our soldiers and our ability to recognize and to help them when they return home from war in less-than-perfect physical and mental health”. This question arose from the diverse but interconnected crises that have assaulted veterans of the United States Armed Forces in recent years, including a rise in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnoses that has surpassed Vietnam levels, a suicide rate of 23 per day, and a complex and multifaceted scandal at the VA hospital system that has made getting treatment for war-related conditions, injuries, and illnesses difficult for many veterans. To explore these crises, this dissertation has chosen multiple discourses that, while diverse in nature, interconnect at the body of the soldier in both representation and reality. The central argument made by this dissertation has been that, while the particulars of the situations faced are “new” to the United States, they are, in fact, contemporary iterations of a series of types of situations that all societies have faced regarding how to respond to wounded and dead soldiers upon their return from war. As this dissertation has demonstrated, the heroic myth, which is rhetorically invoked as a frame of reference when soldiers are called heroes, provides guidelines for responding to those types of situations, and by either ignoring or devaluing these guidelines, society finds itself unprepared to respond as it should. Thus, this dissertation argued that the heroic myth provides not only equipment for living (within the rigors and dangers of war) but also equipment for dying: guidelines for responding to the physical, psychological, and economic “death” of those sent to fight a nation’s wars.

While there appears to be a distinct rhetorical question for each of these exigencies (“What are we to do about suicide/PTSD diagnoses/problems at the VA/etc.?”), ultimately, these exigencies spring from a single meta-question of how are the people of a nation to respond to returning soldiers whose reality does not align with the dominant narrative of the victorious “Johnny” who comes marching home to cheers of men, women, and children. As a theoretical contribution, this dissertation has extended Burke’s concept of literature as equipment for living, arguing that the heroic myth also provides equipment for *dying* – strategies for responding to the returning warrior when he (and now she) is physically or psychologically wounded, socially broken, or physically dead. As has been demonstrated, in many cases, the heroic myth, the dramatic structure that underscores contemporary U.S. discourses surrounding soldiers, provides a corrective to the crises that currently assault U.S. soldiers. While critics and commentators may debate whether or not soldiers *are* heroes, the fact remains that in many political and popular discourses, soldiers are *named* “heroes,” thus subconsciously invoking the mythic tradition of heroic warriors such as Beowulf, Siegfried, Achilles, Aeneas, Cu Chulainn, or Roland. If United States society is to call soldiers by the name “Hero,” then it must recognize and accept the obligations placed upon it by the heroic frame. “Equipment for dying” demonstrates that the heroic epic provides soldiers with strategies for accepting the rigors of war, as Burke stated, and society with strategies for accepting the brutal, bloody, and broken reality of war as evidenced by returning soldiers who may be physically, psychologically, or socially “dead” – wounded by war and, potentially, unable to fully return to optimal functionality in civilian life.

As a corrective, the heroic frame illuminates proper responses to crises surrounding health care within the VA hospital administration and the rising rate of veteran suicide. While the VA crisis is something not faced in its materiality by ancient societies, the underlying question

being debated currently by Congress is not should veterans get health care but who is obligated to pay for that care. Given that disability is a primary cause of veteran unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide, the linkage between health care and economics finds parallel in the ancient forms of gift exchange between aristocracy and warrior: the former gave gifts to the latter who promised service in battle and then found reward (from kings judged honorable) upon return that provided the warriors with some level of economic stability. Thus, if Congress, the aristocracy of the United States, is to continue to call soldiers heroes, then Congress becomes obligated to see to their needs upon their return. Interestingly enough, the arguments made to privatize the VA, removing Congress of any obligation to care for those wounded by war, inverts the heroic formula through a discourse that weakens the warriors and strips them of agency while purporting to “strengthen” them by giving them choice in their health care coverage. The heroic also directs the audience to interpret the death of a warrior through the lens of the values instilled in him or her during training. And though this seems counterintuitive regarding suicide, as Daniel Somers’ suicide note makes clear through the metaphor of a “Final Mission,” he viewed the act of suicide as the only honorable and warrior-like path that remained available to him. This contrasts with contemporary views held by many in the United States that suicide is a marker of weakness and cowardice.

Reading the current discourses surrounding the warrior hero alongside the heroic frame illuminates areas where the mythic may still be alive and where it may need further transformation. The survey of the trope of the Shell-Shocked Soldier demonstrates how the fragmentation of the trope’s narrative after Vietnam afforded, in some instances, a depiction of psychological suffering that humanized the soldiers in a way that suggested that their suffering was the result of something horrible that happened to them and not the result of moral weakness.

As that discussion turned toward more contemporary films like *Captain America: The First Avenger*, it argued that a simple scene where the hero cannot get drunk and forget provided a strong statement, similar to that in *First Blood* when Trautman took responsibility for “making” Rambo, that it is that which allows one to be heroic in battle that prevents one from being able to not suffer. Similarly, the TALOS project demonstrates both military fears that the human mind-body is incapable of surviving in combat situations, and while its goal of a zero-casualty war is laudable, the advantages and protections offered by the suit, should it function as planned, would remove much of the danger and challenge from combat encounters that allow the warrior to gain honor and suggest that the heroic ethos of the warrior no longer resides within the body and character of the warrior but in the weapons and tools the warrior uses. While there is great temptation to denounce the changes that may arise from the TALOS project as destructive to the heroic myth, it must be remembered that for myth to continue to have meaning for a people, it must continue to change so as to reflect and comment upon the struggles and values of the people. When myth ceases to transform so as to be continually relevant and to provide equipment for living, myth dies. And a dead myth that is not discarded can be more devastating to a society than having no myth. Following the equipment for living offered by a dead myth provides rules and guidelines that are unconnected to the lived experiences of the people. Such a charge is often made against those who follow “literal interpretations” of religious texts. However, the transformation of the trope of the Shell-Shocked Soldier provides both an understanding of how a narrative can transform to be continually relevant and points of alteration where mythmakers in the modern world can focus their efforts in using the heroic drama to promote positive social change.

And then, sometimes the discourses surrounding warrior heroism in the contemporary United States align with those of the ancient myths, specifically with the negative moral valence ascribed to psychological collapse. In both myth and modernity, psychological collapse from combat stress is regarded as moral weakness – as a perceived violation of the heroic ethos. Regarding the argument made by Ochberg and Shay, this negative valence causes a stigmatization of soldiers who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. For mythmakers, this alignment suggests a node in the mythic structure that could be transformed either to call social activists to action or to reflect the results of social action. While Ochberg and Shay argue for social action (changing the condition's name to Post-Traumatic Stress Injury), a name change will have little effect without cultural changes in the United States in general and the U.S. Armed Forces in particular regarding how the culture(s) in question view and respond to those with psychological conditions – to those with the invisible wounds of war.

Yet, even this understanding of continuance reminds us that all discourses surrounding soldiers returning from war are inherently political. As Chapter III discussed, the history of naming the condition currently known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has been a history of power struggles between military and civilian psychiatry where each side has fought for the power to name, diagnose, and treat the resulting psychological trauma of war. Additionally, what has been spoken of as a renaming for the purpose of scientific generalizability had undertones of anti-war sentiment. The rhetoric of privatization of veteran health care services demonstrates political clashes over obligation and definition. If the soldier is a hero, then the government is obligated to provide care for the wounds they suffered during war. If the soldier is a captive of a bloated, monstrous government, then only the true hero – the Invisible Hand of the Free Market – can liberate them. This lionization of the Free Market that enshrines the

Invisible Hand as a great warrior hero is, of course, presented through a rhetoric of “freedom,” one of the great God Terms of the United States. As the family of Daniel Somers has demonstrated, the lack of care received by veterans that can lead them to see suicide as the only honorable end cannot be divorced from political discourses, and such actions can be the call to political action. And popular narratives of soldiers and wars, as discussed in Chapter I, find themselves at the intersection of political and social assumptions about heroism, honor, masculinity, mental health, and the wholeness of the body, and, as contemporary myths, the narratives offered by writers, directors, and other storytellers has the power to promote certain strategies for responding to the psychological suffering of war veterans – strategies that can locate responsibility for the suffering on the war or on the veteran – and as a result might promote or hinder social action, respectively.

### **Implications**

The research findings of this dissertation have implications beyond academic curiosity. Beginning with implications for further research, the body anxieties illuminated by the TALOS project could also include military fears that rising rates of obesity and physical inactivity will make recruitment and training difficult. Thus, more research should be done on the implications of rising obesity rates on military recruitment and training and the discourses surrounding them. As the majority of this dissertation focused on discourses surrounding combat-induced psychological trauma and its effects, this dissertation recommends that more research focus on how the United States Armed Forces communicate the significance of psychological stress and how soldiers should handle the stresses and traumas of combat – both from official and unofficial channels of communication. Popular discourses, with their subtle ability to condition an audience’s response to the real-world equivalent of the scenes depicted in the tales, demand

further investigation and scrutiny for their presentation of heroism, warfare, and combat-induced psychological trauma. Not to be limited to cinema and television, this investigation should include all forms of mediated discourse: comic books, video games, novels, and other forms of mediated storytelling.

Discussions of the impact of United States' political and popular discourses surrounding war and warrior heroism should not be circumscribed solely to actual wars when "war" is a common metaphor used to identify and define any type of struggle. One could easily ask how referring to weight loss as the "War on Obesity" where citizens fight the "Battle of the Bulge" impacts motivation to succeed and the mental and physical health of those who do not meet either the cultural ideals or their own goals in this area of life. Similarly, how does naming the struggle over the importation, sale, and usage of illegal drugs as a "War on Drugs" impact those most endangered by, to use a purposeful metaphor, life on the "front lines". Similar questions could be raised about the use of war metaphors in corporate business and of the "War on Christmas". And while many scholars have critiqued war metaphors in these and other discourse arenas, the impact of the war metaphor, as a shorthand for a specific and culturally salient narrative of conflict, ennobled suffering, and the promise of (hopefully) certain victory, has on those who participate in those activities demands further and continued research. What happens when one fights in the "War on Obesity" and fails. What equipment for dying does the mythic cycle of the heroic warrior offer this person? The powerful, terrible attraction that the United States, and human being in general, have for war makes it a perpetually salient and emotionally moving suite of tropes useful for both rhetorical invention and rhetorical critique. The latter of which must be performed each time the Red Rider is summoned before the throne.



The political nature of the discourses critiqued in this dissertation also suggest implications for social action. The obvious and naïve implication is that war should stop. However, as long as waging war is profitable for one or more groups, war will continue. Thus, the more important implications are how a society should respond to those who suffer from war wounds both visible and invisible. While there are many possible social actions possible, this dissertation wishes to focus its attention on a single, simple action: having open and honest conversations about mental health issues. While these discussions can – and in many cases should – intersect with conversations on gender, heroism, and economics, as a nation, the United States needs to openly, honestly, and continually address the reality of mental health issues, how the society views those who suffer from mental illness, and how it should treat those who suffer and need assistance. These conversations are continually necessary, because it is only through open and honest discourse surrounding mental health that an understanding can emerge to counter the current and ancient reading of mental illness/psychological suffering as “just in the head” and as a mark of weakness and social/moral violation. Those afflicted by such conditions are not weak or immoral; they have a real condition that needs treatment and management just like a visible illness. Though their conditions are not visible does not mean that these conditions are not “real.” Though they are termed “mental” illnesses, they are felt very strongly in the body and are not “just in the head”. Without such an understanding, the stigmatization of those afflicted with mental illness will continue to perpetuate negative evaluations of the afflicted. This stigmatization and stereotyping, as well as discourses surrounding heroism and masculinity, erect barriers that prevent soldiers from seeking help for the real and painful psychological wounds of war. After all, why would someone seek treatment for something that could lead to a

loss of employment, a denial of employment or living space, or a negative evaluation of one's character and trustworthiness by one's immediate peer group?

### **Final Thoughts**

War has been and shall be a continuous part of human political interaction. And while the identities of the combatants, the particulars of the battlefield tactics, the weapons used, and the symbols on the flags of opposing forces are always in a state of transformation and adaptation, War remains the same. Humans kill other humans. More often than not, those fighting are those of lower socio-economic status, taking up arms on the promise of upward mobility gained not “from killing” but from the honor, or cultural and (hopefully) economic capital, that the aristocracy confers upon returning warriors. Where does myth fit into this exchange of blood for resources? The answer is as simple as it is complex: The heroic myth is both the argument for war and the contract that binds the warriors and the aristocracy in a cycle of reciprocal obligation. Waging a particular war becomes a singular iteration where the great mythic tale of the monster-slayer incarnates, connecting those who fight to all who fought before them and all who will fight after they are gone: a brotherhood bound by bloodshed, characterized by courage, and strengthened through the endurance of suffering all, so they are told, for the greater good of their people. While it is easy to dismiss myth for this propagandistic function, as mythic scholars have long argued, the archetypal narratives of myths, like the great warrior heroes, function in part to ennoble the suffering of human life – the suffering one experiences in war is, due to the dramatic form of the heroic myth, meaningful, because the suffering, sacrifice, chaos, courage, and death are all for some cause bigger than their individual parts. One does not wage war for war's sake alone (or to solidify and enhance the economic and political power of the aristocracy), but instead one wages war to bring freedom to others, to protect the lives of loved ones, and to

defeat great evils before they destroy the world. Mythic narratives are the great dramas of human society, the psychological underpinnings of all human social interaction and desire, and the lived-experiences of individual lives written on the grand scale of cosmic import.

Thus, while myths can be manipulated for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, mythic rhetoric should not be discounted or dismissed as many iconoclasts would see happen to this “relic” of ancient times and premodern thought. Myth reminds humanity that for every Hroðgar who embodies aristocratic generosity, there is a Heremod who abuses the affective power to direct the attitudes and actions of warriors (and other citizens) that the properly timed invocation of mythic speech affords. The heroic drama does not end with the soldier fighting an endless war, circumscribing its rhetorical significance to persuading humans to accept the rigors of war. The heroic drama encourages and instructs warriors on how to behave properly on the battlefield, yes, but it also encourages society – the aristocracy in particular – how it is to respond to the soldiers upon their return whether they be healthy, physically or psychologically wounded, or dead. In addition, the heroic drama admonishes society when it fails to live up to the obligations and debts it incurs by naming those who fight its wars as “heroes”. As rhetorical theory has long argued: to call a class of people or things by a specific name demands that one respond to all individuals that belong to that class in the same manner. Therefore, if someone, particularly a member of the aristocracy, calls those who honorably fight its wars “heroes,” then it is obligated to respond to each soldier whose battlefield service meets the criteria of “fighting honorably” as a hero.

The concept of literature as equipment for dying invokes the dramatic form of the mythic warrior hero in an effort to evoke hope through the remembrance of continuity. Regardless of the vestments worn by the crises assaulting returning warriors, the situations they face, however

grim and grisly, are situations that societies have faced time and again. Given that these crises are recurrent situations, each society that sends its young to war has developed a series of strategies for responding to these situations that aligns with that society's values. Herein lies the hope of equipment for dying: given that the current crisis has been faced before, there is a blueprint for how to respond to its current incarnation. However, that blueprint is not a naïve cheerleader speaking of easy and certain victory. That blueprint is both a measured motivator that encourages the slaying of the dragon and a candid critic that brings low the powerful who violate their oaths and obligations, thus weakening, or breaking, the bonds that hold social groups together in collective action. Myth is life in all its triumph and tragedy. The heroic myth is life in the glorious struggle of combat and the grisly reality of the warriors' homecoming. Sometimes Johnny comes marching home. Sometimes Johnny is carried, wheeled, or borne home by others. The heroic equipped him for living the life of the soldier. The heroic equipped society for responding to his death – however it may come. It reminds society that how it talks about heroism – particularly that of the warrior – impacts the lives of those sent to war both during their service and after they return, demanding that society recognize that the true costs of war are not reckoned in monetary units but in broken bodies, in shattered minds, and in erased futures. Literature as equipment for dying ultimately seeks to persuade society to accept its obligations to those wounded by the physical actions that arise from social and political discourses – obligations society must continually accept and meet in order to continue to be regarded as legitimate by its own measures of evaluation.

## REFERENCES

1970. *Patton*. Directed by Franklin J. Schaffner. Produced by 20th Century Fox. Performed by George C. Scott, Karl Malden, Stephen Young, Michael Strong and Carey Loftin.
1978. *The Deer Hunter*. Directed by Michael Cimino. Produced by Universal Studios. Performed by Robert De Niro, Meryl Streep, Christopher Walken, John Cazale and John Savage.
1982. *First Blood*. Directed by Ted Kotcheff. Produced by Lion's Gate. Performed by Sylvester Stallone, Brian Dennehy, Richard Crenna, Bill McKinney and Jack Starrett.
1990. *George Carlin: Doin' It Again*. Directed by Rocco Urbisci. Produced by HBO. Performed by George Carlin.
2003. *George W. Bush: Operation Iraqi Freedom Address to the Nation*". March 19. Accessed February 11, 2014. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wariniraq/gwbushiraq31903.htm>. Web.
2011. *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Directed by Joe Johnston. Produced by Buena Vista Home Entertainment. Performed by Tommy Lee Jones, Hugo Weaving, Hayley Atwell, Sebastian Stan Chris Evans.
2013. *I am Sorry it has Come to This: A Soldier's Last Words*. June 22. Accessed February 8, 2014. <http://gawker.com/i-am-sorry-that-it-has-come-to-this-a-soldiers-last-534538357>. Web.
2013. *"TAPS Issues Statement to Media on Ways to Approach Covering Suicide*. June 27. Accessed February 8, 2014. <http://www.taps.org/media/press.aspx?id=9792>. Web.
2014. *Fort Hood Shooter Snapped Over Denial of Request for Leave, Army Confirms*. April 7. Accessed April 9, 2014. <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/04/07/fort-hood-shooter-snapped-over-denial-request-for-leave-army-confirms/>. Web.
2014. S. 2450. 113th Congress.
- n.d. *Misconduct Discharge*. Accessed April 10, 2014. <http://girightshotline.org/en/military-knowledge-base/topic/misconduct>. Web.
- n.d. *Shell-Shocked Veteran*. Accessed February 3, 2015. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ShellShockedVeteran>. Web.
- n.d. *Soldier's Creed*. Accessed May 27, 2014. <http://www.army.mil/values/soldiers.html>. Web.
- Adams, Herbert Baxter. 1888. *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

- Affairs, Department of Veterans. n.d. "VA History in Brief." *va.gov*. Accessed August 5, 2014. [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/archives/docs/history\\_in\\_brief.pdf](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/archives/docs/history_in_brief.pdf). Web.
- American Board of Physician Specialties. n.d. *VA Physician Shortage Exasperated by Physician Board Certification Politics*. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.abpsus.org/va-physician-shortage-and-abps>. Web.
- American Psychiatric Association. 2013. "Post-Traumatic Disorder." *dsm5.org*. Accessed February 27, 2014. <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/PTSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Web.
- Anders, Abram. 2011. "Pragmatism by Incongruity: 'Equipment for Living' from Kenneth Burke to Gilles Deleuze." *KB Journal* 7 (2) <http://kbjournal.org/anders> Web.
- Apel, Dora. 1997. "'Heroes' and 'Whores': The Politics of Gender in Weimar Antiwar Imagery." *The Art Bulletin* 79 (3): 366-384.
- Aragones, Enric, Judit Lopez-Muntaner, Santiago Ceruelo, and Josep Basoro. 2014. "Reinforcing Stigmatization: Coverage of Mental Illness in Spanish Newspapers." *Journal of Health Communication* 19 (11): 1248-1258.
- Aristotle. 2009. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by David Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1990. *Poetics*. Translated by Ingram Bywater. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Asen, Robert. 2009. *Invoking the Invisible Hand: Social Security and the Privatization Debates*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- Aune, James Arnt. 2001. *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Balko, Radley. 2012. *The War over Prescription Painkillers*. Jan. 29. Accessed July 10, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/prescription-painkillers\\_b\\_1240722.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/radley-balko/prescription-painkillers_b_1240722.html). Web.
- Beaudoin, Christopher E. 2009. "Evaluating a Media Campaign that Targeted PTSD after Hurricane Katrina." *Health Communication* 24 (6): 515-523.
- Belkin, Aaron. 2012. *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Facade of American Empire, 1898-2001*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Beutler, Brian. 2014. *The Republican Party Has a VA Problem, Too: Privatization isn't Popular*. May 22. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117862/republicans-veterans-affairs-privatization-plan-would-backfire>. Web.

- Bitzer, Lloyd F. 1968. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1 (1): 1-14.
- Blake, Mariah. 2014. *The White House Broke its Promise to the Victims of the First Fort Hood Shooting. Will History Repeat Itself?* April 10. Accessed April 11, 2014.  
<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/04/how-white-house-military-failed-fort-hood-victims>. Web.
- Boggs, Carl, and Tom Pollard. 2008. "The Imperial Warrior in Hollywood: Rambo and Beyond." *New Political Science* 30 (4): 565-578.
- Bronstein, Scott, Drew Griffin, and Nelli Black. 2014. *VA Deaths Covered up to Make Statistics Look Better, Whistle-Blower Says*. June 24. Accessed July 22, 2014.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/23/us/phoenix-va-deaths-new-allegations/>. Web.
- Bronstein, Scott, Nelli Black, and Drew Griffin. 2013. *Hospital Delays are Killing America's War Veterans*. November 20. Accessed February 9, 2014.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/19/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html>. Web.
- . 2013. *Veterans Dying Because of Health Care Delays*. November 30. Accessed July 22, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/30/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/index.html>. Web.
- Brooks, Nicholas. 1978. "Arms, Status, and Warfare in Late-Saxon England." In *Ethelred the Unready*, edited by David Hill, 81-103. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Broussard, Jonathan. 2009. "(Ad)Dressing Masculinity: Male Cosplay Performance at Fan Cons." *Southern Anthropologist* 34 (1/2): 19-31.
- Brown, Daniel S., and Matthew A. Morrow. 2010. "Margaret Thatcher's Sermon on the Mound: 'Christianity and Wealth'." *A Journal of Communication & Religion* 33 (1): 33-55.
- Budra, Paul. 1990. "Rambo in the Garden: The POW Film as Pastoral." *Literature Film Quarterly* 18 (3): 188-192.
- Burke, Frank. 1983. "In Defense of The Deer Hunter, or: The Knee Jerk is Quicker than the Eye." *Literature Film Quarterly* 11 (1): 22-27.
- . 1992. "Reading Michael Crimio's "The Deer Hunter": Interpretation as Melting Pot." *Literature Film Quarterly* 20 (3): 249-259.
- Burke, Hillary S., Marjorie F. Olney, and Charles E. Degeneffe. 2009. "A New Disability for Rehabilitation Counselors: Iraq War Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." *Journal of Rehabilitation* 75 (3): 5-14.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1969. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- . 1969. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1959. *Attitudes Toward History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1965. *Permanence and Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1973. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1979. *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burnell, Karen J., Nigel Hunt, and Peter G. Coleman. 2009. "Developing a Model of Narrative Analysis to Investigate the Role of Social Support in Coping with Traumatic War Memories." *Narrative Inquiry* 19 (1): 91-105.
- Butterworth, Michael L. 2008. "Purifying the Body Politic: Steroids, Rafael Palmeiro, and the Rhetorical Cleansing of Major League Baseball." *Western Journal of Communication* 72 (2): 146-161.
- Campbell, Joseph. 1991. *Creative Mythology: the Masks of God*. New York: Penguin Compass.
- . 1973. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Campbell, Joseph, and Bill Moyers. 1991. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Chang, Bernard S., and Daniel H. Lowenstein. 2003. "Epilepsy." *New England Journal of Medicine* 349 (13): 1257-1266.
- Clarke, David M. 1999. "Autonomy, Rationality, and the Wish to Die." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25 (6): 457-462.
- Clark-Hitt, Rose, Sandi W Smith, and Jordan S. Broderick. 2012. "Help a Buddy Take a Knee: Creating Persuasive Messages for Military Service Members to Encourage Others to Seek Mental Health Help." *Health Communication* 27 (5): 429-438.
- Clover, Carol. 1980. "The Germanic Context of the Unferth Episode." *Speculum* 55 (3) 444-468.
- Congressional Budget Office. 2012. "The Veterans Health Administration's Treatment of PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury Among Recent Combat Veterans." Congressional Budget Office, Congress of the United States, Washington, D.C.
- Conquerogod, Dwight. 1981. "Boasting In Anglo-Saxon England: Performance And The Heroic Ethos." *Literature in Performance* 1 (2): 24-35.



- Cook, Chelsea C. 2013. *Soldier's Suicide Note Goes Viral; Family Demands Better for Veterans*. July 6. Accessed February 14, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/06/us/soldier-suicide-note>.
- Cordes, Nancy. 2014. *Congressional Negotiators Agree on VA Reform: What will They Fix?* July 28. Accessed July 29, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/congress-agrees-on-va-reform-what-will-they-fix/>. Web.
- Cowan, Richard. 2014. *U.S. Senate Republicans Block Veterans' Health Bill on Budget Worry*. February 27. Accessed February 27, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/27/us-usa-veterans-congress-idUSBREA1Q26O20140227>. Web.
- Cowell, Andrew. 2007. *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred*. Cambridge: D.S Brewer.
- Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. 2012. *PTSD vs. PTSI: More Than a Name*. September 30. Accessed February 28, 2014. <http://dartcenter.org/content/ptsd-vs-ptsd-our-experts-weigh-in-on-debate#.UxFemvldWap>. Web.
- Dean, Eric T. 1997. *Shook over Hell, Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Devine, Curt. 2014. *Bad VA Care May Have Killed More than 1,000 Veterans, Senator's Report Says*. June 24. Accessed July 22, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/24/us/senator-va-report/>. Web.
- Dickson, Virgil. 2014. *Competing New VA Bills in Congress Clout Prospects for any Deal*. July 24. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20140724/NEWS/307249940#>. Web.
- Dobzhansky, Theodosius. 1970. *Genetics of the Evolutionary Process*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Donald, Ralph, and Karen MacDonald. 2011. *Reel Men at War: Masculinity and the American War Film*. Toronto: Scarecrow Press.
- Dowler, Jonathan. 1999. "Staying Safe During the Eclipse." *British Medical Journal* 319 (7206): 329-330.
- Drennen, Kyle. 2014. *Andrea Mitchell: VA Scandal 'Far More Serious' Than Obama's Other So-Called Scandals*. May 30. Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/kyle-drennen/2014/05/30/andrea-mitchell-va-scandal-far-more-serious-obamas-other-so-called-sca>. Web.
- . 2014. *Andrea Mitchell: VA Scandal 'Far More Serious' Than Obama's Other So-Called Scandals*. May 30. Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/kyle->

drennen/2014/05/30/andrea-mitchell-va-scandal-far-more-serious-obamas-other-so-called-sca.

Durkheim, Emile. 2006. *On Suicide*. Translated by Robin Ross. Londong: Penguin.

Ellis, P.S. 1984. "the origins of the War Neuroses, Part I." *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* 70 (3): 168-177.

Espen, Hal. 2015. *The Day Chris Kyle Died: Text Messages and Terror in the 'American Sniper's' Final Hours with Killer Eddie Ray Routh*. February 25. Accessed April 27, 2015. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/day-chris-kyle-died-text-777380>.

Finkelstein, Mark. 2012. *Chris Hayes: I'm 'Uncomfortable' Calling Fallen Military 'Heroes'*. May 27. Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/mark-finkelstein/2012/05/27/chris-hayes-im-uncomfortable-calling-fallen-military-heroes>.

Fischer, Michael P., and Terry L. Schell. 2013. "The Role and Importance of the 'D' in PTSD." *Rand.org*. Accessed February 27, 2014. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND\\_OP389.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/OP300/OP389/RAND_OP389.pdf). Web.

Flores, Lisa A. 2003. "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (4): 362-387.

Fry, Carol, and Christopher Kemp. 1996. "Rambo Agonistes." *Literature Film Quarterly* 24 (4): 367-375.

Fuertes, Al B. 2004. "In Their Own Words: Contextualizing the Discourse of (War) Trauma and Healing." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 21 (4): 491-501.

Fulk, R.D., Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, . 2008. *Klaeber's Beowulf, Fourth Edition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Gabrial, Richard A. 1987. *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Gates, Philippa. 2005. "Fighting the Good Fight: The Real and the Moral in the Contemporary Hollywood Combat Film." *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 22 (4): 297-310.

Gaudiano, Nicole. 2014. *Lawmaker Seeks Privatization of Some Veterans' Health Care*. May 29. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20140529/NEWS05/305290067/Lawmaker-seeks-privatization-some-veterans-health-care>. Web.

Gibson, James William, and Dennis K. Davis. 1989. "Paramilitary Culture." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (1): 90-94.

- Gilbert, Christopher J., and Jonathan P. Rossing. 2013. "Trumping Tropes with Joke(r)s: The Daily Show "Plays the Race Card"." *Western Journal of Communication* 77 (1): 92-111.
- Girard, Rene. 1989. *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Y onne Freccero. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Goldberg, Eleanor. 2014. *Vets Respond to Fort Hood Shooting: Let's End the Stigma Around Mental Health Issues*. April 3. Accessed April 9, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd\\_n\\_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpmsg00000063](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/03/fort-hood-shooting-ptsd_n_5086591.html?ncid=fbklnkushpmsg00000063). Web.
- Graeber, David. 2012. *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. Brooklyn: Melville Press.
- Grajeda, Tony. 2014. "Post-War Postponed: War without End, the Returning Soldier in American Cinema, and the Gendered Representation of Trauma." *Democratic Communique* 26 (2): 55-71.
- Green, Carlita P. 2009. "Early Disaster Cinema as Dysfunctional "Equipment for Living": or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Kenneth Burke." *KB Journal* 5 (2). [http://kbjournal.org/greene\\_greene](http://kbjournal.org/greene_greene) Web.
- Gross, Alan. 2006. *Starring the Text: the Place of Rhetoric in Science Studies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Gwara, Scott. 2008. *Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*. Leiden: Brill.
- Hanafi, Zakiya. 2000. *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Harper, Julie Rae. 2005. "PTSD: A Situated Look at the Semiotic Process and Role of Individual Umwelts in Human Existence/Function." *Semiotica* 157 (1/4): 377-385.
- Harrop, Froma. 2014. *Don't Privatize the Veterans Hospitals*. May 21. Accessed July 29, 2014. [http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2023663982\\_fromaharropcolumnveteranshospitalsxxml.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/opinion/2023663982_fromaharropcolumnveteranshospitalsxxml.html). Web.
- Hartnett, Stephen John, and Daniel Mark Larson. 2006. ""Tonight Another Man Will Die": Crime, Violence, and the Master Tropes of Contemporary Arguments about the Death Penalty." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Critique* 3 (4): 263-287.
- Hastings, Max. 1985. *Military Anecdotes*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hawton, Keith, and Sue Simkin. 2003. "Helping People Bereaved by Suicide: Their Needs May Require Special Attention." *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 327 (7408): 177-178.

- Hecht, Jenniver Michael. 2013. "To Live is an Act of Courage: the Crisis of Suicide Among our Soldiers and Veterans Must End. Here's How We can Stop it." *American Scholar* 82 (4): 41-49.
- Henneberger, Melinda. 2014. *Parents Tell Congress how VA Faile their Children: Veterans who Committed Suicide*. July 10. Accessed July 11, 2014.  
[http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/parents-tell-congress-how-va-failed-their-children-veterans-who-committed-suicide/2014/07/10/86838584-0849-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html). Web.
- Hillman, James. 2004. *A Terrible Love of War*. New York: The Penguin Press.
- Homer. 2004. *Iliad*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Humensky, Jennifer L., Neil Jordan, Kevin T. Stroupe, and Denise M. Hynes. 2013. "How are Iraq/Afghanistan-Ero Veterans Faring in the Labor Market?" *Armed Forces & Society* 39 (1): 158-183.
- Humphries, Mark. 2010. "War's Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914-1939." *The Canadian Historical Review* 91 (3): 503-531.
- Ismail, Ahmad Filza, Aziah Duad, Zaliha Ismail, and Baharudin Abdullah. 2013. "Noise-Induced Hearing Loss Among Quarry Workers in a North-Eastern State of Malaysia: a Study on Knowledge, Attitude and Practice." *Oman Medical Journal* 28 (5): 331-336.
- Ivie, Robert L. 1987. "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists'." *Communication Monographs* 54 (3): 165-182.
- Jack, Jordynn. 2004. "The Piety of Degradation: Kenneth Burke, the Bureau of Social Hygiene, and Permanence and Change." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (4): 446-468.
- Jeffords, Susan. 1986. "The New Vietnam Films: Is the Movie Over?" *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 13 (4): 186-194.
- Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Jha, Ashish K., Jonathan B. Perlin, Kenneth W. Kizer, and R. Adams Dudley. 2003. "Effect o the Transformation of the Veterans Affairs Health Care System on the Quality of Care." *The New England Journal of Medicine* 348: 2218-2227.
- Johnstone, Barbara. 2008. *Discourse Analysis*. New York: Blackwell Publishing.
- Jones, Edgar, and Simon Wessely. 2005. *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychology from 1900 to the Gulf War*. New York: Psychology Press.

- Jucker, Andreas, and Irma Taavitsainen. 2000. "Diachronic speech act analysis: Insults from flyting to flaming." *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 1 (1) 67-95.
- Jurasinski, Stefan. 2006. *Ancient Privileges: Beowulf, Law, and the Making of Germanic Antiquity*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press.
- Kaplan, Mark S., Bentson H McFarland, Nathalie Huguet, and Marcia Valenstein. 2012. "Suicide Risk and Precipitating Circumstances Among Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Male Veterans." *American Journal of Public Health* 102 (S1): 131-137.
- Katz, Joshua T. 1998. "How to Be a Dragon in Indo-European: Hittite Illayankas and its Cultural Congeners in Greek, Latin, and Germanic." In *Mir Curad: Studies in Honor of Calvert Watkins*, by H. Craig Melchert, and Lisi Oliver Jay Jasanoff, 317-335. Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Beitrage zur Sprachwissenschaft.
- Kerr, E.A., R. B. Gerzoff, S. L. Krein, J. V. Selby, J. D. Piette, J. D. Curb, W. H. Herman, et al. 2004. "Diabetes Care Quality in the Veterans Affairs Health Care System and Commercial Managed Care: the TRIAD Study." *Analys of Internal Medicine* 141 (4): 272-281.
- Keyes, Charlie. 2011. *After Decade of War, Concerns About Over-Medicated Military*. June 3. Accessed July 22, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/06/03/military.over.medication/>. Web.
- King, Claire, Sisco. 2012. *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Kirmayer, Laurence J. 1992. "The Body's Insistence on Meaning: Metaphor as Presentation and Representation in Illness Experience." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly, New Series* 6 (4): 323-346.
- Klamer, Arjo, and Donald N. McCloskey. 1988. "Economics in the Human Conversation." In *Consequences of Economic Rhetoric*, edited by Arjo Klamer, Donald N. McCloskey and Robert M. Solow, 3-20. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Knapp, Peggy A. 2010. "Beowulf and the Strange Necessity of Beauty." In *On the Aesthetics of Beowulf and other Old English Poems*, edited by John M. Hill, 81-100. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Knight, Jeff Parker. 1990. "Literature as Equipment for Killing: Performance as Rhetoric in Military Training Camps." *Text & Performance Quarterly* 10 (2): 157-168.
- Lacroix, Celeste C. 2011. "High Stakes Stereotypes: The Emergence of the "Casino Indian" Trope in Television Depictions of Contemporary Native Americans." *The Howard Journal of Communication* 22 (1): 1-23.

- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- . 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lee, Alvin. 1998. *Gold-Hall & Earth-Dragon: Beowulf as Metaphor*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- London, Andrew S., Colleen M. Heflin, and Janet M. Wilmoth. 2011. "Work-Related Disability, Veteran Status, and Poverty: Implications for Family Well-Being." *Journal of Poverty* 15 (3): 330-349.
- Longman, Phillip. 2010. *Best Care Anywhere: Why VA Health Care is Better than Yours*. Sausalito: PoliPointPress.
- . 2014. *VA Care: Still the Best Care Anywhere? Part II*. June 5. Accessed August 16, 2014. [http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/political-animal-a/2014\\_06/va\\_care\\_still\\_the\\_best\\_care\\_an\\_1050629.php](http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/political-animal-a/2014_06/va_care_still_the_best_care_an_1050629.php). Web.
- Lopez, German. 2014. *Republicans Want to Privatize the VA. Veteran Groups Disagree*. May 28. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.vox.com/2014/5/28/5755672/republicans-want-to-privatize-the-va-heres-the-counterargument/in/5488789>. Web.
- Lundberg, Christian. 2009. "Enjoying God's Death: The Passion of the Christ and the Practices of an Evangelical Public." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (4): 387-411.
- MacDonald, Michael. 1989. "The Medicalization of Suicide in England: Laymen, Physicians, and Cultural Change, 1500-1780." *The Milbank Quarterly* 67 (Supplement 1): 69-91.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2010. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mack, Tim. 2014. *It's a Miracle! Congress Compromises on VA Reform Bill*. July 29. Accessed July 29, 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/29/it-s-a-miracle-congress-compromises-on-va-reform-bill.html>. Web.
- Mackey-Kallis, Susan. 2001. *The Hero and the Perennial Journey Home in American Film*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- MacLean, Alair. 2008. "The Privileges of Rank: The Peacetime Draft and Later-life Attainment." *Armed Forces & Society* 34: 682-713.
- . 2010. "The Things They Carry: Combat, Disability, and Unemployment among U.S. Men." *American Sociological Review* 75 (4): 563-585.



- Marsh, Ian. 2013. "the Uses of History in the Unmaking of Modern Suicide." *Journal of Social History* 46 (3): 744-756.
- Matishak, Martin. 2014. *Sanders, McCain Reach Deal to Fix VA*. June 6. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/208396-sanders-mccain-reach-deal-on-va-bill>. Web.
- McAuliff, Michael. 2011. *Mitt Romney: Maybe Veterans Health Care should be Privatized*. November 11. Accessed August 2, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/11/mitt-romney-veterans-health-care-privatization\\_n\\_1089061.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/11/mitt-romney-veterans-health-care-privatization_n_1089061.html). Web.
- McCarl, Lindsay I. 2013. "To Have No Yesterday: the Rise of Suicide Rates in the Military and Among Veterans." *Creighton Law Review* 46 (3): 393-432.
- McClancy, Kathleen. 2014. "The Rehabilitation of Rambo: Trauma, Victimization, and the Vietnam Veteran." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47 (3): 503-519.
- Mehta, Divya, and Elisabeth B Binder. 2012. "Gene x Environment Vulnerability Factors for PTSD: The HPA-axis." *Neuropharmacology* 62 (2): 654-662.
- Mercer, Marsha. 2013. *How to Beat the Doctor Shortage*. March. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.aarp.org/health/medicare-insurance/info-03-2013/how-to-beat-doctor-shortage.html>. Web.
- Messner, Beth A., and Jacquelyn J. Buckrop. 2000. "Restoring Order: Interpreting Suicide through a Burkean Lens." *Communication Quarterly* 48 (1): 1-18.
- Metraux, Stephen, Limin X. Clegg, John D. Daigh, Dennis P. Culhane, and Vincent Kane. 2013. "Risk Factors for Becoming Homeless Among a Cohort of Veterans Who Served in the Era of the Iraq and Afghanistan Conflicts." *American Journal of Public Health* 103 (S2): S255-S261.
- Miller, Jake. 2014. *VA Secretary Eric Shinseki Resigns*. May 30. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/va-secretary-eric-shinseki-resigns/>. Web.
- Mizutari, Kunio, Masato Fujioka, Makoto Hosoya, Naomi Bramhall, Hirotaka James Okano, Hideyuki Okano, and Albert S.E. Edge. 2013. "Notch Inhibition Induces Cochlear Hair Cell Regeneration and Recovery of Hearing after Acoustic Trauma." *Neuron* 78 (2): 58-69.
- Morag, Raya. 2006. "Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of the Vietnam War." *Communication Review* 9 (3): 189-219.

- Morrissey, Ed. 2014. *McCain: Time to Privatize Ordinary Health Care at the VA*. May 27. Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://hotair.com/archives/2014/05/27/mccain-time-to-privatize-ordinary-health-care-at-the-va/>. Web.
- National Institute of Mental Health. 2013. *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. No. 08 6388, US Department of Health and Human Services, Bethesda: NIH Publication.
- Nelson, Elizabeth. 2007. "Victims of War: The First World War, Returned Soldiers, and Understandings of Domestic Violence in Australia." *Journal of Women's History* 19 (4): 83-106.
- Newsbusters.org. n.d. *About Newsbusters.org*. Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://newsbusters.org/about>. Web.
- Nichols, Mark. 2004. "Male Melancholia and Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*." *Film Quarterly* 58 (1): 25-35.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1989. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R J Hollingdale. New York: Vintage.
- Nordheimer, Jon. 1971. "From Dakto to Detroit: Death of a Troubled Hero." *New York Times*, May 26: A1, 16.
- Nourry, Daniel. 2005. "Body-Politic (National Imaginary): 'Lest We Forget...Mateship (Empire) Right or Wrong'." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 19 (3): 365-379.
- Obama, Barack. 2012. *Remarks by the President to the Troops at Fort Bliss, TX*. August 31. Accessed July 28, 2014. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2012/08/31/president-obama-speaks-troops-fort-bliss#transcript>. Web.
- Ochberg, Frank. 2013. "An Injury, not a Disorder." *Military Review*, March/April: 96-99.
- Ochberg, Frank, and Jonathan Shay. 2012. *Change Now*. April 7. Accessed March 1, 2014. <http://www.posttraumaticstressinjury.org/letters-endorsing-the-change-from-ptsd-to-pts/>. Web.
- Oppel, Richard, A., Jr., and Abby Goodnough. 2014. *Doctor Shortage is Cited in Delays at V.A. Hospitals*. May 29. Accessed July 26, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/us/doctor-shortages-cited-in-va-hospital-waits.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/us/doctor-shortages-cited-in-va-hospital-waits.html?_r=0). Web.
- Overington, Michael. 1977. "Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatis." *Theory and Society* 4: 131-156.



- PBS News Hour. 2013. *For Some Wounded Veterans, Strong Prescription Drugs can be Cause of More Pain*. December 7. Accessed February 9, 2014. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military-july-dec13-veteransrx\\_12-07/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military-july-dec13-veteransrx_12-07/). Web.
- Pearrow, Melissa, and Lisa Cosgrove. 2009. "The Aftermath of Combat-Related PTSD: Toward an Understanding of Transgenerational Trauma." *Communication Disorders Quarterly* 30 (2): 77-82.
- Perr, Jon. 2014. *Privatizing VA Health Care would be the Greatest Tragedy of All*. May 20. Accessed July 31, 2014. <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/05/20/1300760/-Privatizing-VA-health-care-would-be-the-greatest-tragedy-of-all#>. Web.
- RAND Health. 2005. "Improving Quality of Care." *rand.org*. Accessed July 29, 2014. [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_briefs/2005/RAND\\_RB9100.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/2005/RAND_RB9100.pdf). Web.
- Randall, Kate. 2014. *Bipartisan Deal on US Veterans' Health Care Includes Step Toward Privatization*. June 6. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/06/06/vete-j06.html>. Web.
- Rasmussen, Karen, and Sharon D. Downey. 1991. "Dialectical Disorientation in Vietnam War Films: Subversion of the Mythology of War." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (2): 176-195.
- Reagan, Ronald. 1981. *Inaugural Address*. January 20. Accessed July 28, 2014. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>. Web.
- Richards, I. A. 1936. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Riviello, Valerie. 2014. *Nurse Exposes VA Hospital: Stolen Drugs, Tortured Veterans*. July 12. Accessed July 22, 2014. <http://nypost.com/2014/07/12/nurse-exposes-va-hospital-stolen-drugs-tortured-veterans/>. Web.
- Robinson, Fred C. 1985. *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Rosteck, Thomas, and Michael Leff. 1989. "Piety, Propriety, and Perspective: An Interpretation and Application of Key Terms in Burke's Permanence and Change." *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53: 327-341.
- Rowe, Richard. 2014. *Bernie Sanders Slams Tea Party Idiot Marc Rubio for Voting Against Veterans' Benefits (Video)*. May 23. Accessed July 28, 2014. <http://atlasleft.org/bernie-sanders-slams-tea-party-idiot-marco-rubio-for-voting-against-veterans-benefits-video/>. Web.

- Rushing, Janice Hocker, and Thomas S. Frenz. 1980. "'The Deer Hunter': Rhetoric of the Warrior." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66: 392-406.
- Sagalyn, Daniel. 2011. *Army General Calls for Changing Name of PTSD*. November 4. Accessed February 27, 2014. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec11-stress\\_11-04/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec11-stress_11-04/). Web.
- . 2012. *Key Psychiatric Doctor Rejects Name Change for PTSD*. May 10. Accessed February 27, 2014. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/key-psychiatric-doctor-rejects-name-change-for-ptsd/>. Web.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Salyzyn, Amy. 2013. "John Rambo v Atticus Finch: Gender, Diversity and the Civility Movement." *Legal Ethics* 16 (1): 97-118.
- Sanders, Andrew. 2010. "Warriors, Anthropology of." In *Stress of War, Conflict and Disaster*, edited by George Fink, 137-145. Oxford: Academic Press.
- Schechter, Harold, and Jonna Semeiks. 1991. "Leatherstocking in 'Nam: Rambo, Platoon, and the American Frontier Myth." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 24 (4): 17-25.
- Shapiro, Rich, and Tim O'Connor. 2014. *Fort Hood Shooter's Spree Lasted 8 Minutes, filled with more than 35 shots: Army*. April 7. Accessed April 9, 2014. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/fort-hood-shooter-spree-8-minutes-35-shots-long-article-1.1748803>. Web.
- Shay, Jonathan. 1994. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Scribner.
- . 2002. *Odysseus in America*. New York: Scribner.
- Shepherd, Ben. 2001. *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Simpson, Jacqueline. 1973. "Sussex Local Legends." *Folklore* 84 (3) 206-223.
- Smith, Francesca Marie, and Thomas A Hollihan. 2014. "Out of Chaos Breathes Creation: Human Agency, Mental Illness, and Conservative Arguments Locating Responsibility for the Tuscon Massacre." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17 (4): 585-618.
- Somers, Howard, and Jean Somers. 2013. *On Losing a Veteran Son to a Broken System*. November 11. Accessed February 14, 2014. <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/11/on-losing-a-veteran-son-to-a-broken-system/>. Web.

- Spitzer, Robert L., Michael B. First, and Jerome C. Wakefield. 2007. "Saving PTSD from Itself in DSM-V." *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 21: 233-241.
- Stand For the Troops. 2012. *General Peter Chiarelli Speaks Out about PTSD*. November 14. Accessed March 3, 2014. <http://sftt.org/ptsd/general-peter-chiarelli-speaks-out-about-ptsd/>. Web.
- Stedman, Thomas Lathrop. 2000. *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*. New York: Lippincott, Williams, & Wilkins.
- Stern-Gillet, Suzanne. 1987. "The Rhetoric of Suicide." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 20 (3): 160-170.
- Swenson, Karen. 1991. *Performing Definitions: Two Genres of Insult in Old Norse Literature*. Columbia: Camden House.
- Tanner, Michael. 2010. *A Better Way than the VA?* October 20. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/250327/better-way-va-michael-tanner>. Web.
- . 2014. *Congres Wants to Double Down on VA Failures*. July 2. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/381729/congress-wants-double-down-va-failures-michael-tanner>. Web.
- The RAND Corporation. 2012. *Retired General Chiarelli Discusses Perceptions of Post-Traumatic Stress*. December 31. Accessed February 27, 2014. <http://www.rand.org/blog/2012/12/retired-general-chiarelli-discusses-perceptions-of-post-traumatic.html>. Web.
- Tonn, Mari Boor, Valerie A. Endress, and John N. Diamond. 1993. "Hunting and Heritage: A Dramatic Debate over Tragedy, Tradition, and Territory." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (2): 165-181.
- Trivedi, A. N., S. R. Matula, I. Miake-Lye, P. A. Glassman, P. Shekelle, and S. Asch. 2011. "Systematic Review: Comparison of the Quality of Medical Care in Veterans Affairs and non-Veterans Affairs Hospital." *Medical Care* 49 (1): 76-88.
- United States Army. n.d. *Living the Army Values*. Accessed February 9, 2014. <http://www.goarmy.com/soldier-life/being-a-soldier/living-the-army-values.html>. Web.
- United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform, Minority Staff. 2003. "Proposed Restrictions on Access to VA Health Care in the Pittsburgh Area." <http://oversight-archive.waxman.house.gov/documents/20040607131602-21618.pdf>. Web.
- Valiaho, Pasi. 2012. "Affectivity, Biopolitics, and the Virtual Reality of War." *Theory Culture Society* 29 (2): 63-83.

- Vinik, Danny. 2014. *The VA Reform Legislation is a 'Trojan Horse' for Privatization*. June 13. Accessed July 26, 2014. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118150/veterans-affairs-bill-congress-could-undermine-not-fix-va>. Web.
- Vogel, Steve. 2013. *After Veteran Daniel Somers' Suicide, his family has a New Mission: Improve VA Services*. August 23. Accessed February 8, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-veteran-daniel-somerss-suicide-his-family-has-a-new-mission-improve-va-services/2013/08/23/ae67b2c2-0526-11e3-9259-e2aafe5a5f84\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/after-veteran-daniel-somerss-suicide-his-family-has-a-new-mission-improve-va-services/2013/08/23/ae67b2c2-0526-11e3-9259-e2aafe5a5f84_story.html). Web.
- . 2013. *Veterans in Maryland Seeking Disability Benefits can Face a Perilous Wait*. February 3. Accessed February 2014, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/veterans-in-maryland-seeking-disability-benefits-can-face-a-perilous-wait/2013/02/03/720ca10a-5e6b-11e2-9940-6fc488f3fedc\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/veterans-in-maryland-seeking-disability-benefits-can-face-a-perilous-wait/2013/02/03/720ca10a-5e6b-11e2-9940-6fc488f3fedc_story.html). Web.
- Watkins, Calvert. 1995. *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watkins, Katherine E., Harold Alan Pincus, Brad Smith, Susan M. Paddock, Thomas E. Mannle, Abigail Woodroffe, Jake Solomon, et al. 2011. "Veterans Health Administration Mental Health Program Evaluation." *rand.org*. Accessed May 25, 2015. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR956.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR956.html). Web.
- Weaver, Richard. 1953. *The Ethics of Rhetoric*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company.
- Wirth, James H., and Galen V. Bodenhausen. n.d. "The Role of Gender in Mental-Illness Stigma: A National Experiment." *Psychological Science* 20 (2): 169-173.
- Wollstein, Jarret B. 1994. *Clinton's Health-Care Plan for You: Cradle-to-Grave Slavery, Part 1*. January 1. Accessed Aug 3, 2014. <http://fff.org/explore-freedom/article/clintons-healthcare-plan-cradletograve-slavery-part-1/>. Accessed May 25, 2015. Web.
- Woolhandler, Steffie, and David U Himmelstein. 2007. "Competition in a Publicly Funded Healthcare system." *British Medical Journal* 335: 1126-1129.
- Zoroya, Gregg. 2014. *Flood of PTSD Cases Coming, Scientists Warn*. June 20. Accessed July 19, 2014. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/06/20/ptsd-va-pentagon-scientists-institute-medicine/10764991/>. Web.
- . 2014. *Up to 48,000 Afghan, Iraq Vets at Risk for Homelessness*. January 17, 2014. Accessed May 29, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/01/16/veterans-homeless-afghanistan-iraq-wars/4526343/> Web.

## VITA

Jonathan Mark Broussard obtained a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts degree in English from McNeese State University. He worked as a stage magician for several years before returning to college to obtain a second Master of Arts degree in Anthropology with a focus on Old Norse language and culture from Louisiana State University. Regardless of the field in which he found himself, Mr. Broussard has always studied the stories that people tell and the meanings and implications those stories have on individual and collective lives in a particular society at a particular point in history. His interest in heroism and heroic narratives came at an early age when his father, a Vietnam veteran, chose *Beowulf* and *Gilgamesh* as bedtime stories. Additionally, numerous members of Mr. Broussard's family have fought in both World Wars and the Korean War, and, as a result, he has always been surrounded by the impacts that war has on those who have gone to fight. After graduation, he plans to obtain a faculty position at a university where he will continue his research and expand its breadth, exploring the political culture of war in other time periods.